

#008

the long good read

#guardiancoffee

Articles algorithmically picked by readers, writers & robots



Introduction

Welcome to the Long Good Read. This is an experimental, almost entirely automated newspaper that uses an algorithm to pick the week's best long-form journalism from the Guardian. The idea was started by developer Dan Catt, print-your own newspaper service Newspaper Club, the design team at Mohawk and the technology editorial team at the Guardian. We've put this together for you to read with your coffee. Enjoy! And please do tell us what you think - what else should we include in our experimental, automatic newspaper?

@thelonggoodread or
hello@thelonggoodread.com

Spend time listening to anyone in the media industry, you might think newspapers are dead. In fact it's just pulse of the big media businesses around the newspapers that is growing weaker, with readership and advertising revenues falling and increased competition from new technology just a part of that.

But newspapers themselves are a delightful, tactile, luxurious technology in their own right. The success of Newspaper Club, which lets anyone cheaply print their own newspaper, shows that newspapers have been reclaimed in a way.

Its success is partly down to our curiosity about being able to professionally print in a format that used to be hard for an individual to access, but it is also part of a wider craving for tangible, physical products to compensate for our digital dependency. Our screen lives make much of our life feel overwhelming, yet at the same time we have nothing physical to show for it. And there's a real human pleasure in being able to make and hold something in your hands.

Editorially, we get enormous satisfaction in exploring and playing with new projects. It's not about finding a future for paper, but a future for the stories that deserve telling. Where shall we go next?

Jemima Kiss

Head of technology - editorial

The Guardian

theguardian.com/tech

This newspaper is in beta. It's an experiment in combining the Guardian's readers, writers and robots with Newspaper Club's short-run printing tools, to produce a newspaper that's completely unlike the daily Guardian.

We're only printing 500 copies, and it's just for #guardiancoffee, so it needed to be quick and easy to produce. 'One person, one hour' was the goal, and achieving that required automating as much as possible, while still retaining an editorial eye.

First, the team at the Guardian wrote a small tool to sift through the most popular and interesting long form content, as driven by website analytics, comments and social media.

A selection of these are then imported into Newspaper Club's browser based tool, ARTHR, and they're quickly laid out into templates designed just for this project.

Then, it's onto one of Newspaper Club's printing presses, where it's printed, packed, and delivered straight to #guardiancoffee and into your hands.

Of course, this isn't designed to replace the daily Guardian paper. It's an experiment to see what's possible at the other end of the spectrum, using new technology and techniques to produce a newspaper as quickly as a webpage.

And if you like it, wait a little while and maybe we'll be able to generate one tailored just for you.

Tom Taylor

Co-founder and head of engineering

Newspaper Club

newspaperclub.com/longgoodread

This is all getting very "Letter From The Editor", which is good although it does make me wonder a little how it is I can write 400 words or so each week for a printed paper and yet find so little time to write on my own blog. Maybe I should just print all my blog posts in newspaper format and send them out to my RSS subscribers.

Anyway, I'm going to keep it short this week, the algorithms that pick the selection of stories that end up in this paper seem to have come over all cultural. There usually tends to be more UK politics and technology news but the last seven days have thrown up more music related articles than normal. At some point I'll dig into the data and figure out how that compares to this time last year. Hmmm, perhaps I should include a "This day in history" story each week so we can see just how much have or haven't changed.

So, that aside, welcome to this week's selection of stories, hand picked by robots based on what Guardian readers have been doing with our news, then filtered by me a little which generally involves getting rid of the football match reports that are always a) long, b) popular but (as far as I'm aware) irrelevant by the time this will go to press.

I was rushed this week which explains why we have a rather similar cover to last week. Last week was dots this week it's squares, but if you cared to count them you'd discover the Guardian published less stories this week, 2,586 compared to 2,625, a whole 39 fewer.

I'm just going to roll with the cover design though and say it's part of a theme. Next week I think I'll do something with wordcounts and see how that works out.

Right, stories, printing, onward.

Dan Catt

Developer

revdancatt.com

Fraudster paid government to help promote fake bomb detectors

Documents reveal ability of UK firms to hire top diplomats and serving soldiers without checks on products' authenticity

By Robert Booth

The government accepted thousands of pounds from a fraudster to assist a global trade in fake bomb detectors despite a Whitehall-wide warning that such devices were "no better than guessing" and could be deadly.

The Kent businessman Gary Bolton paid the government to enlist serving soldiers and a British ambassador in what turned out to be the fraudulent sale of bomb detectors based on novelty golf ball finders. Bolton, 48, was sentenced to seven years in jail last year for fraud after claims that use of his handheld devices cost lives and resulted in wrongful convictions.

The ability of UK firms to hire top diplomats to arrange introductions for as little as £250 a time, and serving soldiers to act as salesmen for £109 a day plus VAT, without checks on the authenticity of products, is revealed in Whitehall documents about Bolton's dealings with the UK government released to the Guardian under the Freedom of Information Act.

The government accepted more than £5,000 in payments from the fraudster to supply uniformed Royal Engineers to promote the bogus kit at international trade fairs in the Middle East and Europe, and to secure the backing of Giles Paxman, the brother of the BBC presenter Jeremy Paxman and then UK ambassador to Mexico, who set up sales meetings for Bolton's firm with senior Mexican officials engaged in the country's bloody drugs war.

The British embassy in Manila also helped, and Whitehall trade bodies took money to support Global Technical at least 13 times from 2003 to 2009 as Bolton made up to £3m a year. Sentencing Bolton last year, an Old Bailey judge said the scam "materially increased the risk of personal injury and death".

The government's role has caused diplomatic embarrassment and as recently as late last year British embassies were instructed to warn host governments that "these systems are not effective ... have either no working parts or no power source" and to "exercise extreme caution if these devices are in use to protect life".

The devices are known to have been sold in Thailand, Mexico, Lebanon, the Philippines and several African countries. Thomas Docherty MP, a Labour member of the defence select committee, has described the government's role as "a national embarrassment" and has sought assurances from ministers that it will not be repeated.

"What the government doesn't seem able to acknowledge is there was a catastrophic failure of governance within the Whitehall machine," said Docherty. "We need to be really careful that whilst we need to defray the costs of export promotion, the judgment of decision-makers is not clouded by

the need to hit financial targets."

In 2001 a warning was circulated across government by a senior Home Office scientist who tested an early version of Bolton's bomb detector. Tim Sheldon, of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, said the results were circulated to about 1,000 officials.

His warning concluded: "Although the idea of security forces forking out thousands of pounds for a useless lump of plastic seems incredible or even funny, a surprising number of people have been taken in. If they are relying on such devices to detect terrorist bombs, the implications are deadly serious."

The government has denied any knowledge that the equipment was useless and, despite its own trials, has argued it could not have known it was backing a scam.

"It is right that in some circumstances UK Trade & Investment will seek reimbursement for promotional and advisory services," a government spokesman said. "When UKTI becomes aware that a company has acted fraudulently it will withdraw its support and refer matters to the appropriate authorities."

"UKTI has an important job to do in supporting British business across the world and is aiming to help 50,000 businesses next year. UKTI cannot undertake a test or assessment of all products and services for every business it supports."

Giles Paxman, who is now retired, said there had been no reason "to suspect that [Bolton's] activities were in any way untoward", but questioned whether the government had the right procedures to alert embassies about dubious products. "I am

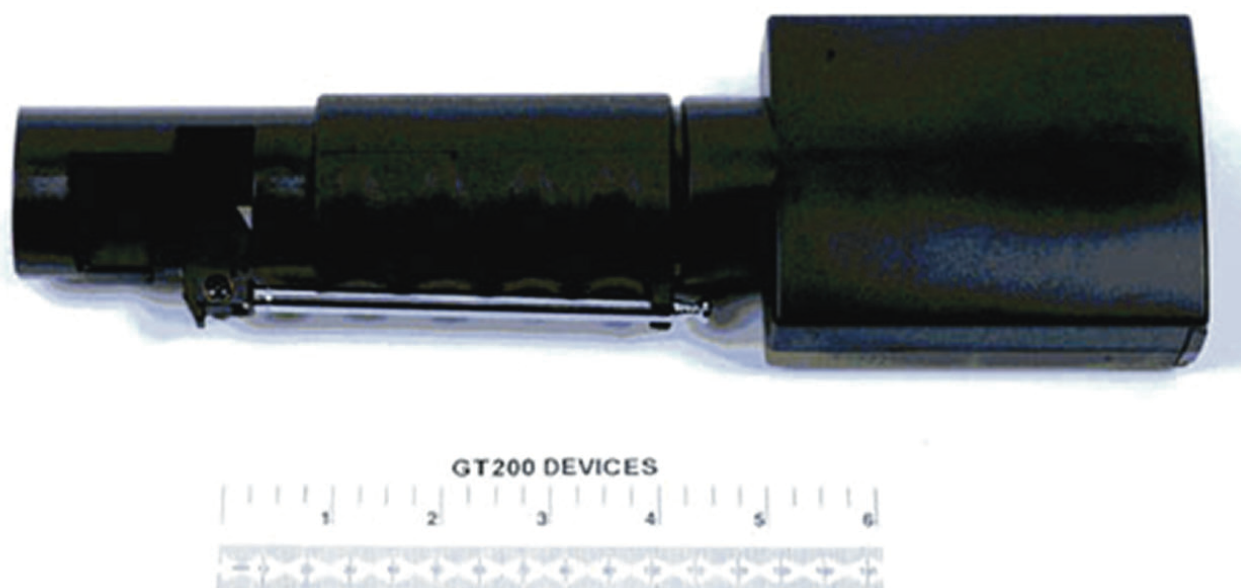
sure that I would have very carefully not to provide any specific endorsement of Mr Bolton's products," he said.

Campaigners against the trade have called for officials to be held responsible for their support for Bolton's equipment. "It is ludicrous that the Mole/GT200 [device] received UK government promotional support," said Peter Robinson, a campaigner. "Knowing that Gary Bolton paid government departments for their assistance makes their involvement even more shocking. The heads of those responsible in the relevant UK government departments should roll for their culpability in this scandal."

Human rights activists in Thailand have identified two bombings that killed four people after the device was used to check suspicious vehicles. In Mexico where an estimated 1,000 of the devices were sold, campaigners say they have resulted in convictions of innocent people.

In 2009, Bolton paid UKTI's Mexico branch to arrange for Paxman to send introductory letters on his behalf to officials in states fighting drug cartels. Diplomats set up sales meetings, offered to take officials out for lunch as part of Bolton's sales drive, and suggested using the imprimatur of the embassy for a public relations drive for Bolton's equipment.

At arms fairs in Kuwait and Bahrain, corporals in the Royal Engineers were hired by Bolton to promote the GT200 device, as well as at security and weapons shows in Europe. Bolton paid the Royal Engineers Export Support Team and UKTI £5,631.93, the trade minister Lord Green has admitted.



One of the devices sold by the fraudster Gary Bolton. Photograph: PA

Huge swath of GCHQ mass surveillance is illegal, says top lawyer

Legal advice given to MPs warns that British spy agency is 'using gaps in regulation to commit serious crime with impunity'

By Nick Hopkins

GCHQ's mass surveillance spying programmes are probably illegal and have been signed off by ministers in breach of human rights and surveillance laws, according to a hard-hitting legal opinion that has been provided to MPs.

The advice warns that Britain's principal surveillance law is too vague and is almost certainly being interpreted to allow the agency to conduct surveillance that flouts privacy safeguards set out in the European convention on human rights (ECHR).

The inadequacies, it says, have created a situation where GCHQ staff are potentially able to rely "on the gaps in the current statutory framework to commit serious crime with impunity".

At its most extreme, the advice raises issues about the possible vulnerability of staff at GCHQ if it could be proved that intelligence used for US drone strikes against "non-combatants" had been passed on or supplied by the British before being used in a missile attack.

"An individual involved in passing that information is likely to be an accessory to murder. It is well arguable, on a variety of different bases, that the government is obliged to take reasonable steps to investigate that possibility," the advice says.

The opinion suggests the UK should consider publishing a memorandum of understanding with any country with which it intends to share intelligence.

This would clarify what the intelligence can be used for under British law, and how the data will be stored and destroyed.

The legal advice has been sent to the 46 members of the all-party parliamentary group on drones, which is chaired by the Labour MP, Tom Watson.

Following disclosures over mass surveillance provided by the whistleblower Edward Snowden, the committee began looking at how intelligence is transferred from UK agencies to those in the US,

such as the National Security Agency and CIA.

In a 32-page opinion, the leading public law barrister Jemima Stratford QC raises a series of concerns about the legality and proportionality of GCHQ's work, and the lack of safeguards for protecting privacy.

It makes clear the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (Ripa), the British law used to sanction much of GCHQ's activity, has been left behind by advances in technology. The advice warns:

- Ripa does not allow mass interception of contents of communications between two people in the UK, even if messages are routed via a transatlantic cable.

- The interception of bulk metadata - such as phone numbers and email addresses - is a "disproportionate interference" with article 8 of the ECHR.

- The current framework for the retention, use and destruction of metadata is inadequate and likely to be unlawful.

- If the government knows it is transferring data that may be used for drone strikes against non-combatants in countries such as Yemen and Pakistan, that is probably unlawful.

- The power given to ministers to sanction GCHQ's interception of messages abroad "is very probably unlawful".

The advice says Ripa "provides too wide a discretion" to the foreign secretary, William Hague, and "provides almost no meaningful restraint on the exercise of executive discretion in respect of external communications".

Such surveillance may also be a breach of the ECHR, it adds.

"We consider the mass interception of external contents and communications data is unlawful. The indiscriminate interception of data, solely by reference to the request of the executive, is a disproportionate interference with the private life of the individuals concerned."

Last June, Snowden leaked thousands of files about the surveillance activities of GCHQ and its US

counterpart the NSA.

One of the key revelations focussed on Operation Tempora, a GCHQ programme that harvests vast amounts of information by tapping into the under-sea cables that carry internet and phone traffic passing in and out of the UK. GCHQ and Hague, have repeatedly insisted the agency acts in accordance with the law.

Last year, Hague told MPs: "It has been suggested GCHQ uses our partnership with the US to get around UK law, obtaining information that they cannot legally obtain in the UK. I wish to be absolutely clear that this accusation is baseless."

However, the legal advice poses awkward new questions about the framework GCHQ operates within, the role of ministers and the legality of transferring bulk data to other spy agencies.

The advice makes clear Ripa does not allow GCHQ to conduct mass surveillance on communications between people in the UK, even if the data has briefly left British shores because the call or email has travelled to an internet server overseas.

GCHQ can seek a warrant allowing it to spy on a named person or premises in the UK - but Ripa was not intended to permit untargeted fishing expeditions in the UK.

The advice also takes issue with Ripa's distinction between metadata and content of messages; when Ripa was passed this was analogous to the difference between the address on an envelope and the letter within it.

Under Ripa, GCHQ is allowed to gather and store metadata with few restrictions, but requires more exacting ministerial approval to read the content of messages.

However, the advice notes that "the significance of that boundary has been eroded by the realities of modern internet usage" because metadata can allow you to build up a much more complete picture of an individual's private life.

"The distinction between contents and communications data has become increasingly artificial.

Many of the most 'important' aspects of an individual's online 'private life' can be accessed via their communications data or 'metadata'."

The advice concludes: "In short, the rules concerning communications data are too uncertain and do not provide sufficient clarity to be in accordance with the law ... we consider the mass interception of communications via a transatlantic cable to be unlawful, and that these conclusions would apply even if some or all of the interception is taking place outside UK territorial waters."

Leaving decisions about whether data can be shared with agencies abroad to the "unfettered discretion" of ministers is also a probable breach of the convention, the advice warns.

"First, the transfer of private data is a significant interference with an individual's article 8 rights. That interference will only be lawful when proportionate.

"Secondly, the ECHR has held on more than one occasion that surveillance, and the use of surveillance data, is an area in which governments must conduct themselves in a transparent and 'predictable' manner. The current framework is uncertain: it relies on the discretion of one individual.

"Thirdly, on a pragmatic level, there is a real possibility that the NSA might function as GCHQ's unofficial 'backup' service. If GCHQ is not entitled to hold onto data itself, it might transfer it to the NSA. In time, and if relevant, that data might be transferred back to GCHQ. Without strong guidelines and scrutiny, the two services might support each other to (in effect) circumvent the requirements of their domestic legislation."

The opinion adds: "If GCHQ transfers communications data to other governments it does so without any statutory restrictions. Such transfers are a disproportionate interference with the article 8 rights of the individuals concerned. There are no restrictions, checks or restraints on the transfer of that data."

The opinion notes that the UK has not adopted

the doctrine of "anticipatory self-defence" in the same way as the US to provide legal cover for drone strikes in countries where it is not involved in an international armed conflict.

"Accordingly, in our view, if GCHQ transferred data to the NSA in the knowledge that it would or might be used for targeting drone strikes, that transfer is probably unlawful," the advice states.

"The transferor would be an accessory to murder for the purposes of domestic law ... We consider that, pursuant to the transfer, the agent is likely to become an accessory to murder."

Watson said he would be submitting the legal opinion to the parliamentary intelligence and security committee, which is undertaking an inquiry into mass surveillance.

"MPs now have strong independent advice questioning the legality of major UK intelligence programmes," he said.

"If ministers are prepared to allow GCHQ staff to be potential accessories to murder, they must be very clear that they are responsible for allowing it. We have seen a step change in mass covert surveillance and intelligence gathering, underpinned on dubious legal grounds and with virtually no parliamentary oversight.

"The leadership of all the main parties should stop turning a blind eye to a programme that has far-reaching consequences around the globe."



One of the devices sold by the fraudster Gary Bolton. Photograph: PA

How online gamers are solving science's biggest problems

A new generation of online games don't just provide entertainment - they help scientists solve puzzles involving genes, conservation and the universe

By Dara Mohammadi

For all their virtual accomplishments, gamers aren't feted for their real-world usefulness. But that perception might be about to change, thanks to a new wave of games that let players with little or no scientific knowledge tackle some of science's biggest problems. And gamers are already proving their worth.

In 2011, people playing *Foldit*, an online puzzle game about protein folding, resolved the structure of an enzyme that causes an Aids-like disease in monkeys. Researchers had been working on the problem for 13 years. The gamers solved it in three weeks.

A year later, people playing an astronomy game called *Planet Hunters* found a curious planet with four stars in its system, and to date, they've discovered 40 planets that could potentially support life, all of which had been previously missed by professional astronomers.

On paper, gamers and scientists make a bizarre union. But in reality, their two worlds aren't leagues apart: both involve solving problems within a given set of rules. Genetic analysis, for instance, is about finding sequences and patterns among seemingly random clusters of data. Frame the analysis as a pattern-spotting game that looks like *Candy Crush*, and, while aligning patterns and scoring points, players can also be hunting for mutations that cause cancer, Alzheimer's disease or diabetes.

"Our brains are geared up to recognise patterns," says Erinma Ochu, a neuroscientist and Wellcome Trust Engagement Fellow at the University of Manchester, explaining why scientists are turning to gamers for help, "and we do it better than computers. This is a new way of working for scientists, but as long as they learn how to trust games developers to do what they do best - make great games - then they can have thousands of people from all around the world working on their data."

The potential is huge. As a planet we spend 3bn

hours a week playing online games, and if even a fraction of that time can be harnessed for science, laboratories around the world would have access to some rather impressive cognitive machinery. The trick, though, is to make the games as playable and addictive as possible - the more plays a game gets, the larger the dataset generated and the more robust the findings.

Zoran Popovic is the director of the Centre for Game Science at the University of Washington and is the co-creator of *Foldit*. He explains that while successfully entertaining the masses, these games are meeting a very pressing need: science needs more people.

"No matter what academic process we go through," he says, "we end up whittling down a huge population of middle schoolers interested in science to some small percentage that actually survive the PhD process and end up doing science. Considering how many open scientific problems there are, and how few scientists there are, it's clear that we're stymied in the progress of science simply by the number of able and interested people out there."

Through *Foldit* alone he estimates that the number of people working on protein folding around the world has increased by four times in the past two and a half years. Zooniverse, a website that offers a wide range of online citizen-science projects including *Planet Hunters*, estimates that, together, their volunteers give them a virtual office block of 600 people working around the clock on scientific questions.

If you want to join in and become a fully fledged citizen scientist, or if you just want to contribute to science on your way to work, here are 10 of the best games around. But be careful, because they're all pretty addictive. But that shouldn't be a surprise... they've been designed, by scientists, to be so.

Make patterns and research diseases

It's tough to know what to like more about *Phylo*, the colourful puzzles or the jazzy music. Either way, their combination makes the complicated world of bioinformatics, or more specifically multiple sequence alignment optimisation, incredibly accessi-

ble. By pushing around coloured blocks into patterns, you're actually aligning DNA from different animal species, helping research into genetic diseases by identifying disease-associated or mutated genes. Beat algorithms and other players by aligning the patterns and minimising gaps as much as possible.

Make a shape and understand proteins

A bewitchingly addictive puzzle game. Use shakes, tweaks, wiggles and rubber bands to twist and contort your protein into its most stable and thus highest-scoring shape. Each puzzle is a bit like a Rubik's cube in that there is only one perfect solution to each structure, but there are various intermediate or less stable ones in between. Work your way up the high scores tables by joining groups and sharing puzzle solutions with other players. En route, you'll help researchers discover more about the rules that govern the shape, and therefore function, of proteins, helping the fight against cancer, Alzheimer's disease and HIV/Aids.

Study organisms to assess man's impact

If you loved *Monkey Island*, this game, a visually beautiful point-and-click adventure game with a compelling narrative, is for you. You're a scientist with a secret past, trapped on a mysterious island where an explosion has destroyed the biology lab. Photographs of organisms are strewn across the island. Collect and answer questions about the photos to earn game money, which you spend on tools to help you progress and hopefully get off the island. Your classification of these real-life photos from around the world will help biologists to study the effects of urban sprawl on local ecosystems or to detect evidence of regional or global climactic shifts.

Align patterns to save ash trees

Think *Candy Crush* but with coloured leaves. To play this Facebook game, align different patterns with a reference pattern: the better the alignment, the higher the score. Tussle for ownership of a given pattern by beating other players' scores. In sorting the patterns to increasingly higher accuracy, you'll actually be helping to detect genetic variants that can protect Europe's ash trees (*Fraxinus excelsior*)

from a deadly fungal disease. Each pattern represents actual DNA lengths from the trees and the fungus, from which scientists hope to identify genetic variants that either confer resistance or increase susceptibility.

Make shapes to understand genes

A similar concept to *Foldit* (it was made by some of the same people), but this time you're trying to get RNA into a target shape. RNAs, which have an important role in building proteins and regulating genes, are made up of four different types of nucleotide bases. Switch these to alter the RNA's configuration, increase its stability, and up your score. Target shapes get increasingly more complicated as you progress to becoming a puzzle architect or, in the lab mode, compete for the chance to have your own RNA designs synthesised and assessed by scientists at Stanford University.

Protect a forest... to help protect forests

Not released until later this year, but well worth

keeping an eye out for. You'll be charged with taking care of a plot of New Zealand forest and protecting it from ravenous Australian bush-tail possums. Set traps, create sanctuaries or fly aerial operations to sow toxic bait to save your pixelated forest. Researchers will then take the best strategies and apply them in real New Zealand forests, where native plants and animals are under threat from these invading possums. To help raise money for the game, Ora's developers have released *Possum Stomp*, a mini game app available on iOS or Android.

Classify galaxies to understand universe

Zooniverse's flagship project. Sift through pictures of millions of galaxies and help classify their shapes to unravel their history. A galaxy's shape tells you whether it's collided with another galaxy, if it's formed stars, and how it's interacted with its environment. Like all Zooniverse projects, *Galaxy Zoo* offers an authentic experience of science, so you'll not get points. However, if seeing far-flung

corners of the universe before any other human eye isn't enough for you, keep a look out for weird and wonderful objects and they might be named after you, such as Hanny's Voorwerp, a galaxy-sized gas cloud named after one player.

Untangle puzzle and unearth new neurons

Help scientists figure out how the brain is wired, starting with nerves in the back of the eye. You're given a cube of tangled nerves from which you have to tease out the shape of individual nerves and, slice by slice, build up their three-dimensional structure. It's little wonder this game is so pleasing: it taps into two things you probably forgot that you love - colouring in and treasure hunts. Score points by tracing well and unearthing new neurons. The timed events really ramp up the heat, and might have you sitting at your computer all night. Be warned.

Listen to whales, help marine biologists

Another authentic experience from Zooniverse. This time be a marine biologist (no scuba diving, sadly) and study whale song. Listen to recordings of killer whales and pilot whales from around the world and link them with a list of potential matches. Find a match and it'll be stored for further analysis. Your work will help biologists determine the size of these animals' repertoire and whether they have accents, indicators of intelligence or a culture. If you've noticed neither animal is a whale but instead a type of dolphin, this game is probably for you.

Identify arable land to feed the world

By 2050 there will be 10 billion of us on the planet. That's a lot of hungry mouths that we'll struggle to feed with the current agricultural setup. Trawl through satellite images of the Earth and look for arable land to help develop the first-ever global crop map, which will help plan for global food security, identify yield gaps and monitor crops affected by droughts. The more land you identify, the higher your score and the better your chances of winning great weekly prizes, such as an Amazon Kindle, a smartphone, or a tablet. But hurry: the competitions stop in April.



Zoran Popovic, director of the Centre for Game Science at the University of Washington, is the co-creator of Foldit.

Will Helen Clark be the first woman to run the UN?

As prime minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark brushed off criticism of her sex. Could she become the first woman to run the United Nations?

By Jane Martinson

In the course of a political career that has lasted over 30 years, Helen Clark only thought of quitting once. With a personal poll rating of just 2% soon after becoming party leader in 1993, she asked a few close friends whether there was any point continuing. "They said, 'You've just got to keep standing there', which was the best advice. If you keep standing, actually very few will come after you."

Clark went on to become New Zealand's first elected female prime minister in 1999 - leading for three consecutive terms - and is now the most powerful woman at the United Nations, working her second term as head of the UN development programme. She could well become the first woman to lead the organisation once the incumbent Ban Ki-Moon stands down in a few years.

En route to Davos, the alpine schmoozefest for powerbrokers, Clark was in London last week to deliver a lecture on leadership for the Women of the Year organisation. With so few female heads of state to act as a yardstick, she has been compared to Margaret Thatcher, despite her vastly different Labour party politics and incredibly impressive, no-nonsense support of other women.

On the advice from close friends to keep on as party leader, she persisted. "They said: 'Don't give in.' It's not in my nature to give in anyway." She lambasts organisers at Davos for failing to increase the number of women and, on panels, happily discusses female representation in the same breath as her views on Syria or other affairs of state.

By the end of her nine years as prime minister in 2008, New Zealand's governor general, cabinet secretary, attorney general and speaker were all women. Meanwhile, opponents in her last unsuccessful election urged voters to "ditch the bitch".

Now 63, there can be few women better qualified to talk about the treatment of women in power. Clark decided early on to ignore much of the criticism of her sex, she says. "There was a lot of very gender-based criticism. You know, 'Your voice is too low, your teeth are too crooked'. They don't like your hairstyle, they don't like your clothes. In fact, they don't really like anything about you, and maybe this all adds up to [the notion] that they don't really like a woman doing what you're doing."

"But, you know, if you found all that hurtful then you're probably not going to be able to survive these

jobs. You have to be able to dismiss it, and I seem to have developed a style, where [journalists] always knew that I'd get to a point and say 'move on', you know, 'get over it'."

But was she really not that bothered by patronising remarks? "Earlier on, it annoyed me, but then I got to the point in my career where I said: 'Look, who cares, it's irrelevant and if I comment on it, it's an issue, so let's move on.' I've got bigger things to do."

Given this attitude, her view of Julia Gillard, the former prime minister of Australia whose speech denouncing misogynists in parliament was a YouTube sensation, is less surprising. "Many women around the world saw this as incredible, but how did it play in Australia?" Clark asks. Gillard was, of course, subsequently ousted as leader of the Australian Labor party.

"I had no personal experience of it," Clark says of sexual harassment, "but, if there is one silver lining from all this, we need all these people coming forward ... Women are not prepared to suffer in silence.

she get married? "It was 1981. It wasn't that usual for people in public life [to be unmarried]. It still isn't." She doesn't seem to mind that this makes her marriage sound like political expediency - she is still happily married to the same man 34 years later.

She first became interested in politics because of international affairs - the death of JFK when she was a teenager, the war in Vietnam and the injustices of apartheid. Now her name is potentially in the frame for the top job at the UN, the first woman to lead the diverse group of 193 nations.

The election of a UN secretary-general is a process so complicated it takes years to go through, all of it behind closed doors. Clark has many points in her favour, not least her current job and the fact that New Zealand is part of the amusingly named Weog group (Western Europe and Other Group, but essentially it means the old developed countries). There hasn't been a secretary-general from Weog since Kurt Waldheim in the 1970s, which in the obtuse nature of UN affairs could mean it's about time another one got the job.



'You've just got to keep standing' ... Helen Clark. Photograph: Sarah Lee for the Guardian

The lid is off and that has to be healthy."

She is also well aware of the double standards that mark a woman in power, pointing out the fact that "strength" in men is described as "toughness" in women and judged accordingly. But pondering why men are more likely to push themselves forward, she suggests that more women than men "want to balance a range of factors" when getting to the top. One of the biggest factors is childbirth.

Elected to parliament at 31, she has remained childless by choice. "It just would have been totally impractical without a spouse who was prepared to completely give up a career," she says. Her husband, sociologist Peter Davis, was on a fast-track university career, so she felt that wasn't an option. Asked if she ever regretted the decision, she says: "No, definitely not ... It was absolutely right for me."

But women who want to combine motherhood with powerful positions should be able to, she says. "It really points to the need for a lot more discussion of families and of the role of boys and girls, women and men, so that the boys grow up with an expectation to be an equal in the household."

Clark was brought up on a farm in rural New Zealand, and her own mother gave up her career as a teacher as soon as she married. Clark, who kept her maiden name, never wanted to go down the same route. There's "some truth", she says, in the story that she cried on her wedding day. So why did

Asked if she wants the job, she reflects on how being a woman would play out in that role. "There will be interest in whether the UN will have a first woman because they're looking like the last bastions, as it were." But it could also be a massive "turn-off" to others, she admits. She loves her job, she says, and laughs when I point out she hasn't answered my question. "If there's enough support for the style of leadership that I have, it will be interesting."

Back in New Zealand, there are fewer women in government than there were when she was prime minister. At the recent Davos meeting, only 15% of delegates were women, an even smaller number than last year. "These battles never go away," she says. "It shouldn't just depend on a group of exceptionally ambitious women. We need it to be in the culture of our societies, institutionalising it in the normal scheme of things. [Then] there will be a lot of women at the top."

Forget crispy duck: regional Chinese food is taking over Britain

After decades of Cantonese food adapted to sweet western tastes, British diners can now try bold, spicy specialities from Sichuan, Hunan, Shanghai and Guizhou

By Fuchsia Dunlop

Kai Wang and her friends like to sniff out the latest regional Chinese restaurants: a tiny cafe in east London specialising in food from China's north-east, or one near London Bridge serving numbing and hot crayfish. Kai, 26, is a media professional who came to the UK from Beijing in 2008, first to study and then to work. "When I arrived in London I thought I was really going to miss Beijing food. I love traditional Beijing cuisine, but also the spicy regional cuisines that have become popular in recent years: Sichuan, Hunan and Hubei. When I came to the UK, the Chinese food here all seemed to be so sweet and westernised, with a focus on the Cantonese style, which is too light and delicate for Beijing tastes. But more and more authentic Chinese regional restaurants have opened in the past few years, not just in Chinatown but all over the city."

It is people like Kai who have been one of the driving forces in a revolution in Chinese cooking in London and Manchester, and increasingly all over the UK. Unlike the older generation of Cantonese immigrants who arrived decades ago, bringing with them Hong Kong flavours adapted to western tastes, Kai and her contemporaries want to eat bolder, spicier food, and the trendy dishes that remind them of home. "So many westerners order dishes such as sweet-and-sour pork, char siu buns and stir-fried rice noodles with beef, which I really don't like," she says.

In the mid-1990s, a restaurant called Baguo Buyi opened in the Sichuanese capital, Chengdu, giving a glamorous new spin to Sichuan folk cooking and setting off a nationwide craze for Sichuanese flavours that is only now beginning to cool. Since then, Hunanese food and the hearty cooking of the north-eastern or Dongbei region have also enjoyed their time in the limelight of Chinese culinary fashion. More recent Chinese arrivals to the UK, who in-

clude not only students but also businesspeople and tourists, are just as likely to come from Fujian, Shanghai or Liaoning as the Cantonese south of China, which means that Chinese restaurateurs no longer need to adapt their tastes to an old stereotype of Anglo-Cantonese food.

Many establishments, including Liao Wei Feng in Bethnal Green and Local Friends in Golders Green, have menus divided into two sections. They have one list of the usual Anglo-Canto suspects, including lemon chicken and crispy duck, and another offering some of the most authentic Hunanese food available in the capital, with dishes such as "stir-fried fragrant and hot fish" and "steamed belly pork, Chairman Mao-style".

North-eastern and Hunanese cuisines are not the only ones making gradual inroads into British restaurant culture. Large numbers of Fujianese immigrants have joined the catering trade, although they are often inconspicuous in the kitchens of Cantonese restaurants. Fujian province lies on the south-eastern Chinese coast, and is known for its delicate soups, appetising street snacks and gentle way with oysters and other seafood. A handful of Fujianese cafes have come and gone in London: only one remains, Fuzhou in Gerrard Street, which is the place to go for gorgeous fishballs stuffed with minced pork and cabbage-and-clam soup with slippery rice pasta.

Shanghainese food has traditionally been hard to find in Britain, although the city lies in one of China's richest gastronomic regions. The city itself is best known for the xiao long bao "soup dumpling" and for its sweet, soy-dark braises, but the wider region is the source of exquisite river delicacies such as crab, eel and shrimp, and famous dishes including beggar's chicken and dongpo pork. For a glimpse of Shanghainese cuisine, seek out the elegant dishes created by Shanghainese consultant chef Zhang Chichang at the Bright Courtyard Club in Baker Street, or the modest, homestyle stir-fries such as green soya beans with pork and pickled

greens at Red Sun in New Quebec Street.

Sichuan and Hunan are China's best-known spice regions, but chillies are also adored in Guizhou province. Maotai Kitchen in Soho, named after the famous local liquor, offers Guizhou food. The jovial chef, Zhu Shixiu, grew up in the beautiful hills near the Guizhou-Hunan border, and, after years working in Cantonese restaurants, has been given free rein with the menu. His wife makes the "villagers' pickled Chinese cabbage", a delicious salad laced with coriander, fermented black beans and chilli. Many of his rustic dishes share the sour-hot characteristic of Hunan cooking, but the intriguing lemongrass note in some of them comes from litsea oil (mu jiang you), a Chinese medicine used as a condiment in Guizhou and a few other regions. Maotai Kitchen is part of the same group as Leong's Legends, which serves Taiwanese specialities.

While there has been a flowering of regional cuisines in London, only Sichuanese cuisine has really broken out of the capital and begun its long march all over the country - a sign, perhaps, of its decade-long status as China's trendiest style of cooking. Red N Hot has branches in Manchester and Birmingham, while Red Chilli has expanded from its original Manchester HQ into Leeds and York: the spicy menu charmingly promises to look after "your pocket, stomach and soul". And in Oxford, My Sichuan has taken over the old school house at Gloucester Green, where chef Zhou Jun from Chengdu presides over a kitchen offering all the classic Sichuanese specialities.

As China's changing culinary fashions continue to cause ripples in the restaurant scene in London, the range of regional flavours is only likely to increase and spread across the country. In the meantime, Sichuanese cuisine has already radically changed the face of Chinese food in many parts of Britain. No one, it seems, need go for long without dry-fried beans or a bowlful of sliced sea bass in a sea of sizzling chilli oil.



Stir-fried preserved pork with dried radish at Local Friends. Photograph: Martin Godwin for the Guardian

A working-class hero is something to be ... but not in Britain's posh culture

British culture was once open to 'messy kids' from secondary moderns. But if you want to make it in 21st century Britain, you'd best have a cut-glass accent and public school pedigree

By Sean O'Hagan

Last week the actor Stephen McGann spoke out about how difficult it is for young people from working-class backgrounds to enter his profession. "Opportunities are closing down," he said in an interview with the *Independent*. "If you're a messy kid from a council estate today, I think the chances of you making it as a successful actor are a lot worse than they were."

McGann, 50, youngest of the family of acting brothers, grew up on the edge of Toxteth in Liverpool and was educated at a Catholic grammar school. "What counted for me and my brothers - and for mates of ours like David Morrissey and Ian Hart, all growing up in Dingle and Toxteth - was the real change in education," he said. "We had one shot and we made it: none of us would be actors if we hadn't gone to that school. That's where I fell in love with acting and that's why I'm here."

McGann was echoing opinions expressed by other prominent actors recently. Brian Cox told an interviewer: "I feel awful that young people don't have the opportunities that I had. It's like we've excluded a root element from cultural life, and I think that's very dangerous." And Julie Walters, in an interview with the *Sunday Times*, contrasted her youth with that of aspiring actors today. "Back then, it was still possible for a working-class kid like me to study drama because I got a grant, but the way things are now, there aren't going to be any working-class actors."

These sentiments resonate with me, not just because I come from a similar background and once made a similar trajectory - from grammar school to polytechnic to a job in the media - but because they also echo a view I have heard expressed lately in different ways by certain artists and musicians. It contends that popular culture is becoming increasingly gentrified, not just in the elitism that still holds sway in so-called highbrow forms like opera and classical music, but in the drift of society at large towards privilege and exclusion.

"I look at almost all the up-and-coming names and they're from the posh schools," said Walters. "Don't get me wrong ... they're wonderful. It's just a shame those working-class kids aren't coming through. When I started, 30 years ago, it was the complete opposite."

Artists have also noted this sea change in our culture. When I interviewed Peter Doig last year he recalled his formative years in London's now dramatically gentrified King's Cross. "It was a different city then - you could easily find cheap places to live and studios to work in. We took all those things for granted and now they are gone. It does feel like you have to be wealthy in London now to have that kind of freedom. It's a shame. I think young artists need the time and space to waste time until they find a voice."

Society itself has altered too, and with it the cultural dynamic of Britain. The access that smart, creative, messy kids from council estates once had to polytechnics, universities and art colleges has been eroded by prohibitive college fees. We live in a Britain where the so-called democratisation of culture though digital technology has gone hand in hand with the increasing exclusion and disempowerment of the young and talented. As writer and pop historian, Jon Savage, whose illuminating documentary, *Teenage*, is released this week, noted recently: "It is a cruel irony that, just as commercialised youth culture seems everywhere - appealing to all ages, and making untold millions for media corporations - the demographic on which this was once based is being excluded from society. Without financial power or overt political affiliations, young people are too often ignored in this costive age."

Consider, too, the words of another successful British artist, Gary Hume, perhaps the most thoughtful, least extrovert of the YBA generation. "When I was a student at art college," he told me in a recent interview, "it was full of kids from all kinds of backgrounds, mainly misfits and outsiders. That is exactly why they were at art college. Art has become a respectable career path now, another professional option for the young and affluent. But what do all the wrong people do now? Where do they go -

the misfits and the outsiders? If you can't do something meaningful through art because you can't afford to go to art college or even rent a studio, what happens to you?"

What is the cost, culturally, of their exclusion? Could it be that, for the first time since pop culture emerged in the 1950s, it too is being gentrified, even made elitist? You do not have to look far for the evidence - even the *Daily Mail* acknowledged it in 2010, citing an article in the now defunct music magazine, *The Word*, which calculated that more than 60% of that year's successful pop and rock acts were former public school pupils compared with just 1% 20 years ago.

The *Mail* followed up that feature with one headlined "From cricket to the catwalk to Westminster, public school accents are back: We reveal Britain's 50 most powerful posh people under 30." They included: actors Ben Barnes (educated at King's College School), Robert Pattinson (Harroddian School in west London) and Emma Watson (Oxford's Dragon School and Headington School); comedian Jack Whitehall (Marlborough College), model Poppy Delevingne ("Bedales-educated with royal connections"), playwright Polly Stenham (attended Wycombe Abbey and Rugby) and pop stars, Florence Welch (Alleyn's School in south-east London) and Marcus Mumford and Ben Lovett from Mumford & Sons (both educated at King's College School, Wimbledon).

To that privileged list you can now add successful young British actors including Harrow-schooled Benedict Cumberbatch and old Etonians Damian Lewis and Tom Hiddleston, pop singer Laura Marling and the newest supermodel, Cara Delevingne (Poppy's sister), all products of expensive public schools. Likewise, more established stars such as Chris Martin of Coldplay (Sherborne School, Dorset) and James Blunt - real name James Hillier Blount - Old Harrovian and former member of the Life Guards.

Pop culture has, of course, always had its share of often-credible posh performers, from the likes of Pink Floyd and Nick Drake in the late 60s to Radiohead in the 90s. But the dramatic increase suggests something has gone seriously askew. Pop music has

always been a prescient form – the Beatles signalled the coming of Harold Wilson’s Labour government, punk the rise of Thatcherism, and Britpop soundtracked the birth of New Labour – so it seems appropriate that the rise of posh in pop culture should chime with the ascendancy of the current Tory leadership. (David Cameron is an Old Etonian, George Osborne was educated at St Paul’s. Both were members of Oxford’s infamous Bullingdon Club alongside Eton-educated London mayor Boris Johnson.)

Pop culture, lest we forget, initially grew out of the postwar affluence that allowed working-class teenagers to express themselves through choice – the music they listened to, the clothes they wore, the styles and movements they spawned, whether mod, rocker or hippy – but it was also propelled by the progressive changes to educational access that began with the Education Act of 1944. The path from grammar school to art school, for instance, was one of the key determinants of great British pop music of the 60s and early 70s. It led to the meeting of minds that was John Lennon and Paul McCartney and spawned the proto-postmodern stylings of Roxy Music, one of the most adventurous and influential British art-rock groups ever. (Given Bryan Ferry’s embrace of all things gentrified, and the emergence of his son, Otis, as an unapologetically reactionary spokesperson of the New Posh, it is hard to believe that he comes from a working-class background in the industrial north-east and that one of his father’s jobs was looking after pit ponies at the local mine.) Neither the Beatles nor Roxy Music would have existed, never mind shaped pop culture, had there been prohibitive college fees.

When I worked for *NME* in the 80s and for style magazines like the *Face* and *Arena* in the early 90s, music and fashion were still the two places where smart and savvy working-class kids were given a chance to have a voice. Publishing and the media – including the liberal-left media – were run and staffed in the main by white public school or Oxbridge-educated men. (That has changed somewhat, but not nearly enough, in the interim.) Pop culture, to a degree, belonged to the chancers, the misfits, the outsiders, the feisty, often left-leaning mavericks and messy kids from housing estates

who, by and large, created, shaped and wrote about it. Likewise, many of the seismic British pop-cultural moments – from 60s pop and rock through mod, punk, 2-Tone and acid house.

The world of pop culture has changed dramatically since then, becoming more fractured, atomised

Instead, it often seems like the pre-pop values of showbiz have returned in the shape of *The X Factor* and *The Voice*, and in the almost masochist escapism of posh soaps like *Downton Abbey*. If today’s art, music and fashion often seem oddly estranged from any notion of political or social awareness,



Salt of the earth: Julie Walters has complained that the working class are being squeezed out of the acting profession. Photograph: Richard Saker

and less culturally important. If pop music is characterised by anything today it is a curious lack of meaning. “When I formed a rock group back in my teens,” says Primal Scream vocalist Bobby Gillespie, “it really was all or nothing. It was literally my one chance to express myself or to resign myself to a life of drudgery in a factory. I’d heard the Sex Pistols and recognised immediately that their music was born of essentially working-class anger and frustration, and that in itself was empowering. When was the last time you heard music like that, music that said something so strongly with so much genuine and justified rage?”

could it be because the kind of people who enter these arenas no longer have the kind of life experiences or desperate need to express themselves that Gillespie identified.

Where have all the *wrong* people gone – the working-class mavericks like Mark E Smith and John Lydon and Alexander McQueen? Where is the beautifully incandescent anger of the excluded that the Who or the Sex Pistols or the Specials once articulated? Does it still have a place in today’s pop culture? Does it still have a meaning? One thing is for certain: if it does, it won’t be voiced by Mumford & Sons.

Martin Creed at the Hayward: the faeces, the phallus and the Ford Focus

Focus

The Hayward's Martin Creed show is more like a glorious tour of his mind. Adrian Searle has the time of his life squeezing through balloons, ducking a steel beam – and watching an endless erection
By Adrian Searle

I duck as a huge rotating steel beam, bearing the word MOTHERS in neon, sweeps over my head. You can feel the draught as it goes by. Mothers ruffle your hair and make you cringe – this one could knock your head off. Actual physical harm isn't what you expect from Martin Creed: his neon signs can often be reassuring. "Everything is going to be alright," reads one, famously, with a cheery, upbeat fluorescence. "Don't worry," says another, its yellow light staining the wall around it.

Creed's new show at the Hayward in London is great – one of the best solo exhibitions I've seen in the gallery. Creed has stripped the Hayward of many of its walls, leaving it open, though anything but sparse and empty. Taking us from an early (and very accomplished) self-portrait, painted when he was 16, to Work No 1813 (the latest version of The Lights Going On and Off, which won him the 2001 Turner prize), the show doesn't so much chart his development as provide us with a tour of his mind. It is an exhibition of extremes and contrasts, from the very big to the very small, from the most off-hand gesture to the most laboriously executed. It feels as much portrait as exhibition – of conflicting appetites and contrary desires, of doubts and certainties, of whims and convictions.

"I like things," sings Creed in one of the songs and orchestral compositions that make up his new album Mind Trap, but he doesn't really. Creed has a thing about things. His art is a repeated exercise in object relations. There is no hierarchy of materials or genres. Everywhere there are things on top of other things: tables, chairs, diminishing lengths of I-beam steel, brushstrokes, cardboard boxes. Things lined up (a row of cacti, ordered by height), things next to each other (a cluster of balls from ping-pong, billiards, rugby, cricket, baseball and American football, like a sports solar system), things that stick out of the wall, and things that probably shouldn't be here at all.

There are paintings made with his eyes closed, and a portrait that was hung so high he had to jump every time he wanted to make a mark (and you have to jump, too, to see it properly). There is a sound work in the lift and a sniggering, stoned laugh haunting the space outside the toilets. In one gallery, an attendant plays up and down the scale on an upright piano, while a film plays of the artist shooin' dogs. Paintings – all kinds – hang on top of the rolled-on stripes of colour that decorate the walls, and a plaid of crisscrossing stripes fills the wall behind the stairs, and can never be seen in its entirety.

The variety of Creed's work makes it hard to talk about touch, manner or voice. But they're there all the same. His art is marked by lightness and a kind of bravery. It is all a matter of timing, placement and contrast. The show doesn't flag. Creed's art is filled with systems, rules and ways of paring things down to some kind of irreducible physical fact or activity:

counting, aligning, ordering, arranging. Like Bruce Nauman, he develops strategies for getting through the day, of making something from nothing and the near-to-hand. Working seems to be less a career than a way of being, a bulwark against creative emptiness. He can make a work from a scrunched-up sheet of paper, a pile of Lego, a roll of tape, every variety of lightbulb or size of nail he can find in a hardware store.

But the nearest thing anyone has to hand, of course, is their own body. From the first moment, when you blunder in, negotiating your way past a slightly rancid old sofa that partially blocks the entrance (Work No 142, A Large Piece of Furniture Partially Obstructing a Door), he makes you acutely aware of your own awkward, lumbering physical presence. Being in the gallery is like entering a silent comedy. As you enter Half the Air in a Given Space, which fills a large, walled area with white balloons, you slide through the slithering spheres with a kind of squealing, infant delight as your body displaces them. I feel like a bubble among bubbles, heading towards the snow-like brightness of a distant window, the light refracted through all those balloons. The experience is an unalloyed pleasure. It is also, oddly, a very sculptural one.

If you are going to think about bodies, you also need to think about what bodies do. At the entrance to a small and elegantly decorated video chamber, a sign warns that the installation includes works showing bodily functions. On the screen, a woman enters a blank white space, crouches, defecates and promptly exits, leaving her stool on the white floor. Two further vignettes show people noisily vomiting, spattering the floor. These theatricalised purges are the most basic, abject and universal human and animal activities. They're neither beyond the pale nor outside culture, but our reactions to them depend on the culture we inhabit. They are

also a rejoinder to accusations that Creed's work is shit, or that his paintings might look like puke. There is a base pleasure in the acts, too, and how they make us feel afterwards. It's all very complicated, but they belong among other acts, other gestures.

I found a strange link here to the car Creed has had winched up to one of the upper sculpture courts at the Hayward. Every few minutes the engine starts, the horn sounds and all the doors spring open, as does the bonnet. The radio comes on, the wipers start flapping and the windscreen-washer squirts. The car – a silver Ford Focus, the most generic, popular model Creed could find – is doing all it can do, except go anywhere.

On another sculpture deck, facing the Shell building, the London Eye and Westminster, an LED video screen shows a man's torso in profile. His penis grows erect, then droops, again and again, in an endlessly repeated performance of human engineering. Things go round and round. The body consumes, the body ejects. Lights go on and off. Things get bigger and they get smaller.

The show is called What's the Point of It? Which is as much as anyone can ask. In some of the artist's songs, and in his stage appearances and public talks, you encounter moments of embarrassment and shame, an acting-out of performance anxiety and the fear of failure. As a performer, Creed can make you smile and laugh, not least with his open-hearted ditherings and attenuated pauses, his moments of inarticulacy and the sense that he's surprised anyone would be at all interested in watching him. It's a good act, but it's also more than an act. Creed, a fan of country and western, is always walking the line, courting feebleness, abjection and disaster, and this is one of the most affecting things about what he does. Because Creed doesn't fail – or rather, like Samuel Beckett, he is always trying to fail



Martin Creed at the Hayward Gallery Photograph: guardian.co.uk

Featured Comments

By referendum - Monday 27 Jan 2014

I don't like Creed's stuff much, I can agree with NLumsden above when he calls it cheap, empty, art-less jokes (but I can see what Creed is doing, and i don't think he's conning people or being a used car salesman as you say. From day one everything he has done has been a deliberately slight, diffident, ineffectual gesture. Of course, that also means it is absurd to take them seriously, which is, as you say, the hipster ironists get out clause. It's not like he dresses serious either.

BUT

To try and understand WHY this guy might carry on doing these pointless irritating slight (etc) things - to try and see it from Creeds point of view -

I think he is motivated by the idea of making a series of one-offs, the point for him (it seems to me) is1) that his individual works are all intended to be different, never do the same thing twice, 2)they are all intended to be insignificant in themselves 3) they are all part of a series (now up to number 1000 and something) so therefore rather than being alot of individual works, they are all part of one big work, which he is constantly adding to, and will carry on adding to until he dies (or decides that the numbered series is complete).

So with that in mind , it doesn't matter that work 876 is any good or not or not, it doesn't even matter if it exists or not, (it could just as well be something else, it's all the same idea)) what matters to Creed is (it seems to me) that there are endless series of small things , and they are all different from each other, and taken in sum, they add up to - well, i guess, from his point of view, a kind of snapshot of the world, made up of tiny gestures. A nonsense taxonomy that he's kept (and will continue to keep up) for years, in which each element is neither more or less significant than the next.

At least - i think that's what he's up to.

By Harpstar - Tuesday 28 Jan 2014

Thanks for another great review Adrian - really makes me want to go and see the show when I'm next in London. And reading it - and thinking about Martin Creed's works - just make me smile. I also think back to the 'Everything is going to be alright' neon piece; it was outside a hospital in Clapton, if memory serves? And I also recall - perhaps only based anecdotal evidence - that this work actually served to cheer the hospital patients up no end. The power of art, perhaps? Regardless of what era it comes from.

But, regards the trite comments that many revert to on these comments boards, I don't think that'll ever stop really. But what I do object to, like you, is the constant criticism - based on hearsay and presumption - that contemporary artists such as Creed are only out to con and pull the wool over people's eyes.

I've worked as a curator for many years now; not one single artist - not one - I have worked with has set out to deceive or con people. Play games, yes; to provoke and challenge, yes. But never to con.

And the - frankly - silly comments that it's all about money are just pathetic attempts to reinforce the nature of the supposed con. Yes, Hirst is worth a fortune - but the many other equally genuine and sincere artists working today struggle, but do what

they do to add value to the world, and not to simply stand still in time.

By David Fox - Wednesday 29 Jan 2014

To MrMikeludo
copy :Harpstar and Referendum

Mike, I make comments on these blogs because I, like you, enjoy lively debate about issues surrounding contemporary art.

You obviously conduct a passionate defense of the grand traditions and also promulgate your own theories about art and music, fourth dimension, etc.

I understand that you, among many others here, might think that all modern art is a con, probably because it has ventured away from craft and skill into often, dodgy terrain. This has occurred for many reasons too lengthy to go into now, but primarily because the ever changing face of modern and contemporary art is part and parcel of it. Change and modern art are synonymous. They are inextricably wrapped up in each other. Modern art is constant change, a constant search for new ideas, new forms.

Now, there is no reason why some of the issues you raise cannot be a part of that discourse, but they can only be a part. You cannot dismiss all the other issues that people contribute as just worthless. Their concerns are as valid as yours or mine.

I don't believe the artists you mention, or any contemporary artists are out to con people. I mean I went to art school for seven years. I have an MFA. I didn't spend all that time and money figuring out a way to con people.

I've met many, many artists along the way and some very creative thinkers. The human mind is so powerful it can lead one into areas that might seem absurd to most, even the artists themselves. Don't you think they doubt what they do sometimes...most of the time? Maybe they are breaking all the rules. Maybe their work looks absurd, ridiculous... and yes, a con. But it's not. They are engaged in a real

and valid pursuit to push the envelope, stretch the boundaries and go somewhere they haven't been before. There's the story Philip Guston told about how he would paint through the wee hours of the morning before he finally shut the studio door and went to bed. He would creep back into the studio the next day and be astonished at what he had painted. He couldn't believe it was he, who had actually created that stuff. Sometimes he would completely paint over it and sometimes not. He did say that artists are not always ready to accept the things they do. That often they find themselves painting again images they had discarded five years before. So when you say, lights going on and off is a con, I say this. At an everyday level such an occurrence in one's home might mean nothing more than a faulty switch. But when one intentionally creates such an occurrence it can signal something else. Now some choose to call this Art. You may not. You call it a con. But that is your choice.

You, and a few others, also keep stating that there were no artists before Modernism that they were artisans and fairly low on the totem pole. You revere their traditions and skills and that's fine. But why do you then try to impose those same values on the new tradition of Modernism? That doesn't make sense. Modernism was a new movement away from the very traditions you so revere. So why do you judge all new art by a set of values Modernism doesn't want, need or value?

My last thought is this. I appreciate that you want to have your say here just like the rest of us. And you know me, I am the first person to encourage all opinions. I feel everyone has an equal voice. That said, I do feel that your posts are too repetitive inasmuch as you constantly use the same quotes. If you look back at some of them you will find you have quoted to me over and over, the same article or passage. Now that is not appropriate behavior because it smacks of brow beating. Use a quote by all means, but once is sufficient. I mean, I get it already.

Have a nice day.

Dark lands: the grim truth behind the 'Scandinavian miracle'

Television in Denmark is rubbish, Finnish men like a drink - and Sweden is not exactly a model of democracy. Why, asks one expert, does everybody think the Nordic region is a utopia?

By Michael Booth

Norway ... the nice side, at least. Norway ... the nice side, at least. Photograph: Alamy

For the past few years the world has been in thrall to all things Nordic (for which purpose we must of course add Iceland and Finland to the Viking nations of Denmark, Norway and Sweden). "The Sweet Danish Life: Copenhagen: Cool, Creative, Carefree," simpered National Geographic; "The Nordic Countries: The Next Supermodel", boomed the Economist; "Copenhagen really is wonderful for so many reasons," gushed the Guardian.

Whether it is Denmark's happiness, its restaurants, or TV dramas; Sweden's gender equality, crime novels and retail giants; Finland's schools; Norway's oil wealth and weird songs about foxes; or Iceland's bounce-back from the financial abyss, we have an insatiable appetite for positive Nordic news stories. After decades dreaming of life among olive trees and vineyards, these days for some reason, we Brits are now projecting our need for the existence of an earthly paradise northwards.

I have contributed to the relentless Tetris shower of print columns on the wonders of Scandinavia myself over the years but now I say: enough! *Nu er det nok!* Enough with foraging for dinner. Enough with the impractical minimalist interiors. Enough with the envious reports on the abolition of gender-specific pronouns. Enough of the unblinking idolatry of all things knitted, bearded, rye bread-based and licorice-laced. It is time to redress the imbalance, shed a little light Beyond the Wall.

Take the Danes, for instance. True, they claim to be the happiest people in the world, but why no mention of the fact they are second only to Iceland when it comes to consuming anti-depressants? And Sweden? If, as a headline in this paper once claimed, it is "the most successful society the world has ever seen", why aren't more of you dreaming of "a little place" in Umeå?

Actually, I have lived in Denmark - on and off - for about a decade, because my wife's work is here (and she's Danish). Life here is pretty comfortable, more so for indigenous families than for immigrants or ambitious go-getters (Google "*Jantelov*" for more on this), but as with all the Nordic nations, it remains largely free of armed conflict, extreme poverty, natural disasters and Jeremy Kyle.

So let's remove those rose-tinted ski goggles and take a closer look at the objects of our infatuation ...

DENMARK

Why do the Danes score so highly on international happiness surveys? Well, they do have high levels of trust and social cohesion, and do very nicely from industrial pork products, but according to the OECD they also work fewer hours per year than most of the rest of the world. As a result, productivity is worryingly sluggish. How can they afford all those

expensively foraged meals and hand-knitted woolens? Simple, the Danes also have the highest level of private debt in the world (four times as much as the Italians, to put it into context; enough to warrant a warning from the IMF), while more than half of them admit to using the black market to obtain goods and services.

Perhaps the Danes' dirtiest secret is that, according to a 2012 report from the Worldwide Fund for Nature, they have the fourth largest per capita ecological footprint in the world. Even ahead of the US. Those offshore windmills may look impressive as you land at Kastrup, but Denmark burns an awful lot of coal. Worth bearing that in mind the next time a Dane wags her finger at your patio heater.

I'm afraid I have to set you straight on Danish television too. Their big new drama series, *Arvingerne* (The Legacy, when it comes to BBC4 later this year) is stunning, but the reality of prime-time Danish TV is day-to-day, wall-to-wall reruns of 15-year-old episodes of *Midsomer Murders* and documentaries on pig welfare. The Danes of course also have highest taxes in the world (though only the sixth-highest wages - hence the debt, I guess). As a spokesperson I interviewed at the Danish centre-right think-tank Cepos put it, they effectively work until Thursday lunchtime for the state's coffers, and the other day and half for themselves.

Presumably the correlative of this is that Denmark has the best public services? According to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment rankings (Pisa), Denmark's schools lag behind even the UK's. Its health service is buckling too. (The other day, I turned up at my local A&E to be told that I had to make an appointment, which I can't help feeling rather misunderstands the nature of the service.) According to the World Cancer Research Fund, the Danes have the highest cancer rates on the planet. "But at least the trains run on time!" I hear you say. No, that was Italy under Mussolini. The Danish national rail company has skirted bankruptcy in recent years, and the trains most assuredly do not run on time. Somehow, though, the government still managed to find £2m to fund a two-year tax-scandal investigation largely concerned, as far as I can make out, with the sexual orientation of the prime minister's husband, Stephen Kinnock.

Most seriously of all, economic equality - which many believe is the foundation of societal success - is decreasing. According to a report in *Politiken* this month, the proportion of people below the poverty line has doubled over the last decade. Denmark is becoming a nation divided, essentially, between the places which have a branch of Sticks'n'Sushi (Copenhagen) and the rest. Denmark's provinces have become a social dumping ground for non-western immigrants, the elderly, the unemployed and the unemployable who live alongside Denmark's 22m intensively farmed pigs, raised 10 to a pen and pumped full of antibiotics (the pigs, that is).

Other awkward truths? There is more than a whiff of the police state about the fact that Danish policeman refuse to display ID numbers and can refuse to

give their names. The Danes are aggressively jingoistic, waving their red-and-white *dannebrog* at the slightest provocation. Like the Swedes, they embraced privatisation with great enthusiasm (even the ambulance service is privatised); and can seem spectacularly unsophisticated in their race relations (cartoon depictions of black people with big lips and bones through their noses are not uncommon in the national press). And if you think a move across the North Sea would help you escape the paedophiles, racists, crooks and tax-dodging corporations one reads about in the British media on a daily basis, I'm afraid I must disabuse you of that too. Got plenty of them.

Plus side? No one talks about cricket.

NORWAY

The dignity and resolve of the Norwegian people in the wake of the attacks by Anders Behring Breivik in July 2011 was deeply impressive, but in September the rightwing, anti-Islamist Progress party - of which Breivik had been an active member for many years - won 16.3% of the vote in the general election, enough to elevate it into coalition government for the first time in its history. There remains a disturbing Islamophobic sub-subculture in Norway. Ask the Danes, and they will tell you that the Norwegians are the most insular and xenophobic of all the Scandinavians, and it is true that since they came into a bit of money in the 1970s the Norwegians have become increasingly Scrooge-like, hoarding their gold, fearful of outsiders.

Though 2013 saw a record number of asylum applications to Norway, it granted asylum to fewer than half of them (around 5,000 people), a third of the number that less wealthy Sweden admits (Sweden accepted over 9,000 from Syria alone). In his book *Petromania*, journalist Simon Sætre warns that the powerful oil lobby is "isolating us and making the country asocial". According to him, his countrymen have been corrupted by their oil money, are working less, retiring earlier, and calling in sick more frequently. And while previous governments have controlled the spending of oil revenues, the new bunch are threatening a splurge which many warn could lead to full-blown Dutch disease.

Like the dealer who never touches his own supply, those dirty frackers the Norwegians boast of using only renewable energy sources, all the while amassing the world's largest sovereign wealth fund selling fossil fuels to the rest of us. As Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen put it to me when I visited his office in Oslo University: "We've always been used to thinking of ourselves as part of the solution, and with the oil we suddenly became part of the problem. Most people are really in denial."

ICELAND

We need not detain ourselves here too long. Only 320,000 - it would appear rather greedy and irre-

sponsible - people cling to this breathtaking, yet borderline uninhabitable rock in the North Atlantic. Further attention will only encourage them.

FINLAND

I am very fond of the Finns, a most pragmatic, redoubtable people with a Sahara-dry sense of humour. But would I want to live in Finland? In summer, you'll be plagued by mosquitos, in winter, you'll freeze - that's assuming no one shoots you, or you don't shoot yourself. Finland ranks third in global gun ownership behind only America and Yemen; has the highest murder rate in western Europe, double that of the UK; and by far the highest suicide rate in the Nordic countries.

The Finns are epic Friday-night bingers and alcohol is now the leading cause of death for Finnish men. "At some point in the evening around 11.30pm, people start behaving aggressively, throwing punches, wrestling," Heikki Aittokoski, foreign editor of Helsingin Sanomat, told me. "The next day, people laugh about it. In the US, they'd have an intervention."

With its tarnished crown jewel, Nokia, devoured by Microsoft, Finland's hitherto robust economy is more dependent than ever on selling paper - mostly I was told, to Russian porn barons. Luckily, judging by a recent journey I took with my eldest son the length of the country by train, the place appears to be 99% trees. The view was a bit samey.

The nation once dubbed "the west's reigning educational superpower" (the Atlantic) has slipped in the latest Pisa rankings. This follows some unfortunate incidents involving Finnish students - the burning of Porvoo cathedral by an 18-year-old in 2006; the Jokela shootings (another disgruntled 18-year-old) in 2007, and the shooting of 10 more students by a peer in 2008 - which led some to speculate whether Finnish schools were quite as wonderful as their reputation would have us believe.

If you do decide to move there, don't expect scintillating conversation. Finland's is a reactive, listening culture, burdened by taboos too many to mention (civil war, second world war and cold war-related, mostly). They're not big on chat. Look up the word "reticent" in the dictionary and you won't find a picture of an awkward Finn standing in a corner looking at his shoelaces, but you should.

"We would always prefer to be alone," a Finnish woman once admitted to me. She worked for the tourist board.

Sweden

Anything I say about the Swedes will pale in comparison to their own excoriating self-image. A few years ago, the Swedish Institute of Public Opinion Research asked young Swedes to describe their compatriots. The top eight adjectives they chose were: envious, stiff, industrious, nature loving, quiet, honest, dishonest, xenophobic.

I met with Åke Daun, Sweden's most venerable ethnologist. "Swedes seem not to 'feel as strongly' as certain other people", Daun writes in his excellent book, *Swedish Mentality*. "Swedish women try to moan as little as possible during childbirth and they often ask, when it is all over, whether they screamed very much. They are very pleased to be told they did not." Apparently, crying at funerals is frowned upon and "remembered long afterwards". The Swedes are, he says, "highly adept at insulating themselves from each other". They will do anything to avoid sharing a lift with a stranger, as I found out during a day-long experiment behaving as un-Swedishly as possible in Stockholm.

Effectively a one-party state - albeit supported by a couple of shadowy industrialist families - for much of the 20th century, "neutral" Sweden (one of the world largest arms exporters) continues to thrive economically thanks to its distinctive brand of totalitarian modernism, which curbs freedoms,

suppresses dissent in the name of consensus, and seems hell-bent on severing the bonds between wife and husband, children and parents, and elderly on their children. Think of it as the China of the north.

Youth unemployment is higher than the UK's and higher than the EU average; integration is an ongoing challenge; and as with Norway and Denmark, the Swedish right is on the rise. A spokesman for the Sweden Democrats (currently at an all-time high of close to 10% in the polls) insisted to me that immigrants were "more prone to violence". I pointed out that Sweden was one of the most bloodthirsty nations on earth for much of the last millennium. I was told we'd run out of time.

Ask the Finns and they will tell you that Swedish ultra-feminism has emasculated their men, but they will struggle to drown their sorrows. Their state-run alcohol monopoly stores, the dreaded Systembolaget, were described by Susan Sontag as "part funeral parlour, part back-room abortionist".

The myriad successes of the Nordic countries are no miracle, they were born of a combination of Lutheran modesty, peasant parsimony, geographical determinism and ruthless pragmatism ("The Russians are attacking? Join the Nazis! The Nazis are losing? Join the Allies!"). These societies function well for those who conform to the collective median, but they aren't much fun for tall poppies. Schools rein in higher achievers for the sake of the less gifted; "elite" is a dirty word; displays of success, ambition or wealth are frowned upon. If you can cope with this, and the cost, and the cold (both metaphorical and inter-personal), then by all means join me in my adopted *hyggelige* home. I've rustled up a sorrel salad and there's some expensive, weak beer in the fridge. Pull up an Egg. I hear Taggart's on again!

The Almost Nearly Perfect People - The Truth About the Nordic Miracle (Jonathan Cape), by Michael Booth, is published on 6 February. It will be BBC Radio 4's Book of the Week from 10 February.



Norway ... the nice side, at least. Photograph: Alamy

Louie Louie: the ultimate rock rebel anthem

Fifty years ago, the governor of Indiana banned the Kingsmen's Louie Louie for being obscene. The FBI then spent two years investigating its lyrics, cementing the song's reputation as rock's ultimate rebel anthem, recorded by everyone from the Stooges to the Clash

By Alexis Petridis

By late 1965, the career of the Kingsmen was fading fast. Their singles were flopping. Their most recent effort, a bit of nonsense called *You Got The Gamma Goochee*, had struggled to No 122 on the Billboard chart. And no wonder. It sounded like a relic from a bygone era next to the stuff people were actually buying: Like a Rolling Stone or California Girls or My Generation. They'd managed to get a slot in a film called *How To Stuff A Wild Bikini*, alongside Annette Funicello, but that hadn't worked out so well: the critic from the New York Times had called the movie "the answer to a moron's prayers".

But there was one group of Americans who were still very interested in the Kingsmen: the FBI. One of the band was interviewed by the FBI in September. He informed the Bureau that no, he wasn't - as had been alleged by politicians and outraged parents - a subversive intent on corrupting the country's youth. And no, the incomprehensible lyrics to a single his band had released in 1963 weren't obscene. "It is his belief that only those who want to hear such things can read it into the vocal," noted the official report.

By the time they spoke to the Kingsmen, the FBI must have known the game was up. It had been looking into Louie Louie for nearly two years - playing the single at different speeds, calling witnesses, getting different experts in to try to work out what the hell the Kingsmen were singing - and it hadn't come up with a single solid piece of evidence that the record was obscene. A few months later, the investigation was stopped. One of the most bizarre chapters in American rock history was drawing to a close. There would be echoes of the Louie Louie controversy - looking for things that simply aren't there - for years to come, in everything from the myth that Paul McCartney was dead to the outcry about secret backwards messages hidden on rock albums in the 80s, but nothing quite like it ever happened again.

The moral outrage about Louie Louie began in earnest almost exactly 50 years ago, on 21 January 1964, when governor Matthew Welsh of Indiana received a letter from a teenager in the town of Frankfort claiming the song's lyrics were obscene, which led to the record being banned across the state. But the song itself dates back to 1957, when it was written and first recorded by LA R&B singer Richard Berry. The riff was based on *El Loco Cha-Cha*, a single by Cuban bandleader Rene Touzet, and its gimmick was that its lyrics were written in a cod-Caribbean dialect, which may well have been the cause of all the subsequent misunderstandings and trouble: "See Jamaica, the moon above, it won't be

long mi see mi love." Presumably this was an attempt to chime with the contemporary craze for calypso, which had reached such proportions by 1957 that Hollywood produced no less than four calypso-themed films that year. Berry's Louie Louie was a regional hit on the west coast, but it really took root when Berry toured the Pacific Northwest region, spawning umpteen cover versions by local bands.

The Kingsmen apparently learned it from a 1961 cover by the legendary proto-garage band the Wailers, from Tacoma in Washington, which was credited, for contractual reasons, to their lead vocalist Rockin' Robin Roberts. The Kingsmen's version, taped in their hometown of Portland, Oregon, was recorded in one take, with vocalist Jack Ely straining to be heard over the band's din. Their performance was filled with mistakes and the band hated it: even more so when they discovered that they had to pay for the recording session out of their own pockets. Released as a single in May 1963, it sold nothing until a label called Wand picked it up, at which point it started climbing the Billboard charts. It wasn't just the song's ultra-primitive riff, which bludgeoned its way into your brain through endless repetition: something about the chaos of the Kingsmen's performance seemed to appeal to people. By 14 December, it had reached No 2. Then it started sliding down the charts, leaving the Kingsmen as yet another of the local bands who hit nationally once, before fading into obscurity.

At least, that's what would have happened had it not been for that teenager in Frankfort, Indiana, and his letter. Welsh's secretary, Jack New, sent an aide to buy a copy. "We slowed it down and thought we could hear the words," New told the Indianapolis Star. Billboard reported that the governor's ears "tingled". Welsh then sent a letter to the president of the Indiana Broadcasters Association - who promptly telegraphed his members asking them not to play the record - and set up an investigation. Contacted by the Indianapolis Star, both the Kingsmen and Wand indignantly denied the charge of obscenity. Wand suggested, a little improbably, that persons unknown might have recorded an obscene bootleg version of the track and it was this that reached the governor's ears. The Kingsmen's drummer Lynn Easton insisted: "We took the words from the Richard Berry version and recorded them faithfully - there was no clowning around." The headline read: "Young Singers Dismiss As Hooey Obscenity Charge".

Rather perceptively, the man who headed up the Indianapolis investigation into Louie Louie, a prosecutor called LeRoy New, decided the record was filthy, but its garbled lyrics weren't. He thought there was something undeniably lascivious about the music - he later told the US writer Dave Marsh it was "an abomination of out-of-tune guitars, an overbearing jungle rhythm and clanging cymbals" - but the obscenity laws "just didn't reckon with dirty sounds".

Despite that, the FBI took up the case of Louie Louie in early February, investigating the Kingsmen's single under a law prohibiting interstate transportation of obscene material. The Bureau was doubtless spurred on by a series of letters sent to the US attorney general, Robert Kennedy, from concerned parents across America, who seemed to have got wind of events in Indiana, but not New's conclusion. "Who do you turn to when your daughter brings home pornographic materials?" pleaded one aghast correspondent. "The lyrics are so filthy I cannot enclose them in this letter ... We all know there is obscene materials available for those who seek it, but when they start sneaking this material in the guise of the latest teenage rock and roll hit record, these morons have gone too far. This land of ours is headed for an extreme state of moral degradation."

The sheer effort the FBI subsequently expended in attempting to decipher Louie Louie boggles the mind. The investigation went on for more than two years. The subsequent report on the song - unearthed in 1984 by video producer Eric Predoehl - runs for more than 140 pages. The records of the FBI's various attempts to work out the exact kind of obscenities that Louie Louie supposedly contained make for fantastic, demented reading. You can picture agents slowly going nuts as they desperately struggle to pin something, anything, dirty on the lyrics, regardless of whether or not that something makes any sense or actually features in the lyric. "Oh my bed and I lay her there, I meet a rose in her hair," suggested one interpretation. "We'll fuck your girl and by the way," offered another, failing to answer the fairly obvious question this provoked: what, exactly, is by the way? Some of the interpretations were quite lyrical - "Hey Señorita, I'm hot as hell" - although others were not: "Get that broad out of here!" One ad-hoc translator thought it was about masturbation: "Every night and day I play with my thing." Another particularly creative agent seemed to think it centered around the subject of performing cunnilingus on a woman who was menstruating - "She's got a rag on, I'll move above" - which, with the best will in the world, seems a spectacularly improbable topic for any rock band, no matter how raunchy, to be addressing in 1963. Another, more creative still, seems to have actually invented a perversion to fit the garbled vocals: "I felt my bone ... ah ... in her hair."

The question of why the FBI was so convinced that Louie Louie was obscene is an intriguing one. The Kingsmen were exponents of frat rock, garage rock's politer, collegiate older brother. Their sound was raucous, basic and R&B-influenced, but it was party music and the band that made it was utterly harmless. The reason Jack Ely's vocal was so incomprehensible was not out of a desire to insolently sneer and slur his words, but because he'd recently been fitted with braces: months after Louie Louie's release, Ely was ousted by drummer Easton, who proclaimed himself the Kingsmen's leader on the decidedly un-rock'n'roll grounds that his mum had registered the name of the group and was therefore in charge. They were devoid of the Stones-influenced surliness that characterized later garage



Shock, horror: the Kingsmen performing live, possibly singing Louie Louie. Photograph: Michael Ochs Archives

bands: no hint of the feral menace carried by, say, their fellow Washingtonians the Sonics (whose 1966 version of Louie Louie is a much darker beast than the Kingsmen's version), none of the parent-baiting malevolence of the Standells, gleefully suggesting on their hit Dirty Water that "muggers and thieves" were "cool people".

In fact, the bureau's persistence says less about the Kingsmen than the era in which it took place. Intriguingly, the concerned letters about Louie Louie and the start of the FBI's investigation coincide with the Beatles' arrival in the US: I Want To Hold Your Hand began its seven-week run at No 1 on 7 February, their first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show - watched by 73 million people and considered a seismic event in US pop culture - came two days later. These days, we tend to think of the mop-top-era Beatles as uncomplicated, unthreatening and universally adored, but to a certain kind of reactionary mind, the Beatles were anything but uncomplicated and unthreatening. Their very appearance marked them out as unfathomably strange and alien (in one extreme version of this response, far-right British politician John Tyndall, described the Beatles in 1963 as "effeminate oddities ... looking for all the world like the members of some primitive African tribe", before accusing them of ushering an era of "weirdness in the male type"). Furthermore, after several years in which rock'n'roll appeared to have been entirely denuded of its provocative power - its initial rawness streamlined and diluted with parent-friendly intimations of pre-rock pop by Bobby Darin, Paul Anka, Bobby Rydell et al - you only had to look at the reaction the Beatles were getting to know that rock'n'roll was suddenly an incredibly potent force once more. Perhaps the Kingsmen's Louie Louie got caught up in a weird, reactionary undercurrent of confusion and fear, a minor moral panic sparked by the Beatles' arrival that would only grow over the ensuing years, as rock music in-

creasingly started to resemble the revolutionary force its opponents thought it had been from the start. If that's true, then it's faintly ironic, given that the Kingsmen's brand of good-time frat rock was rendered obsolete by the opening chords of I Want To Hold Your Hand.

The British Invasion pretty conclusively did for the Kingsmen's career, but their cover of Louie Louie took on a life of its own, becoming not just the definitive version of the song, but a totemic piece of music. You only have to look at the list of artists who covered the song in the 70s and 80s to realise its popularity must be at least partially to do with the controversy and the FBI's investigation, which lent the track a hint of danger, an aura of rebelliousness that its makers never intended it to have: Motörhead, the Stooges, the Flamin' Groovies, the MC5, the Doors, Led Zeppelin, the Clash, Blondie, Patti Smith, Lou Reed, Black Flag.

Matthew Welsh, the man who in effect started the controversy, died in 1995. When Dave Marsh tracked him down a few years before his death, he found him "frustrated that Louie Louie is all he's remembered for", as indeed you might had you ushered in a series of important civil rights bills but people kept talking about the fact you got the lyrics of a pop song wrong. "I thought the whole thing was a tempest in a teapot, and not worth any extended pursuit," he sighed wearily. "I have no interest in it either way." But the myth he helped perpetuate wouldn't go away: 10 years after Welsh's death, a school superintendent in Benton Harbour, Michigan, attempted to stop a middle school marching band performing Louie Louie during the city's Grand Floral Parade on the grounds that the song was obscene.

Then it was gently pointed out to her that story was a myth, and that in any case the band would be playing an instrumental version, and the performance went ahead.

Louie Louie - five from the vaults

The Clash (1980)

You might have expected the Clash to have had a bash at Louie Louie when they were in their infancy. In fact, they saved it till 1980, recording it during sessions for Sandinista. Like Led Zeppelin - who played it in live in 1972 - maybe tackling the song during their pomp was an attempt to keep in touch with their spiky roots.

The Stooges (1974)

You want obscenity? The Stooges have got it. "Got a fine bitch, she's waiting for me/Just a whore, across the way," sings Iggy Pop. And those FBI lyrics about "having her rag on, so I move above"? Iggy uses them. From the live album Metallic KO, described by the critic Lester Bangs as "the only rock album I know where you can actually hear hurled beer bottles breaking against guitar strings".

Toots and the Maytals (1972)

Toots Hibbert took the song back to its Caribbean roots with his ska/rocksteady pioneers, the Maytals. As you might expect, the result sounds less like a teenager's frantic imaginings, and a little more like a seduction. Undoubtedly the least primitive version here.

Black Flag (1981)

Hardcore's defining band offered their own take on Louie Louie on a 7in single, before Henry Rollins had joined. As everyone does, they made up their own words, with LA nihilism coming to the fore. "Who needs love when you've got a gun?" they ponder. As do we all.

Patti Smith Group (1979)

Always aware of her rock history - here it's paired with a reading of the Velvet Underground's Pale Blue Eyes - Smith, naturally, had to take on such a staple. It's slowed down, it swings. It sounds a whole lot sexier than the Kingsmen, in fact.



'They expected controversy ... but they did not expect to go to jail' ... the protest band Pussy Riot. Still from the film *Pussy Riot - A Punk Prayer*

Pussy Riot: Behind the balaclavas

Last month, Nadya and Maria of Pussy Riot were released. Masha Gessen, who corresponded with the women in prison, examines how their trial became the first battle in Putin's 'war on modernity' - and a dark moment in Russian history

By Masha Gessen

"I threw a fit," Nadya said. "I screamed until they gave me the book." This was one of the nicest things anyone had ever said to me. The conversation had begun half a year earlier, when I visited Nadezhda "Nadya" Tolokonnikova in prison. "Tell me what to read," she said. "What do you want to get out of it?" I asked. Did she, as a perennial autodidact, want new knowledge, or did she, as a prisoner, want high-quality entertainment? "Inspiration," she said.

I was in awe of the intelligence with which she

read, so I feared anything less than brilliant would fail to impress her. I was also acutely aware of the fact that she was only allowed to have a few books at once and that she had very little time to read (though I did not realise then just how little). Worst of all, I suspected nothing could inspire her. After 15 months behind bars, seven of them in this penal colony in Mordovia, Nadya seemed to be descending into depression.

Back in February 2012, when Pussy Riot staged *Punk Prayer* - a musical protest at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in which they appealed to the Holy Virgin to "chase Putin out" - a two-year jail sentence for a 40-second peaceful protest would have seemed unimaginable. The five young women in balaclavas chose a location sure to draw attention - the capital's largest cathedral, where the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church officiates on church holidays and the country's rulers attend, as do the cameras - and they aimed at one of the most potent forces in Russian politics: the church, which was then campaigning for Vladimir Putin as he sought to return for his third term as president. They expected controversy - as protest artists, they sought it - but they did not expect to go to jail. Their performance came at the height of the Russian protest movement, which felt exhilarating - and relatively safe: the most any protester had netted was 15 days of administrative arrest. The arrest of Pussy Riot on 4 March 2012, the day Putin was re-elected president, marked the beginning of the crackdown, and

their trial in August of that year set the dark absurdist tone for the trials to come. People jailed for peaceful protest now number in the dozens in Russia, and trials like Pussy Riot's, less well attended but similarly cruel and bizarre, have become the familiar reality of Russian opposition. But Pussy Riot were the first, perhaps because they had aimed and articulated their protest so well.

A month or so before my visit to the jail - just over a year into Nadya's sentence - she had written to me that she felt herself turning into a "Russian man" (by which she meant a non-thinking individual of any gender), that she found herself looking forward only to tea and sweets and she envied me my existence "in the life of the intellect". I wrote back assuring her that once tea and sweets could once again be taken for granted, her mind would certainly return to life.

But for now, Nadya seemed to be losing her battle to maintain motivation of any kind. When her husband, Petya, tried to convince her to join the other Pussy Riot convict, Maria Alyokhina, in filing formal complaints against prison authorities, she waved him off. When he insisted, she grew irritated. She said she wanted only for her term to pass as quickly as possible, and monotony was good for that while fighting was not. And when he told her she looked beautiful, she scowled and said it was the green prison uniform.

What Nadya did not tell us during that visit - what she could not and would not tell us with the guard

present - was that her life in the colony had become torture. The work day in the sewing factory was growing ever longer; by the end of the summer it would reach 17 hours. The production quotas were swelling, and punishment for not fulfilling them was becoming more common. This included being denied hot water for tea, food and sweets sent by friends and relatives, access to the dormitory except to sleep for a few hours, and, of course, beatings, usually administered by other inmates. In addition to the factory work, inmates were given jobs in the grounds, lugging around stones, dirt and whatever else, often pointlessly. Nadya had been sleep-deprived for weeks; she was also often hungry.

Her tentative attempts to fight the conditions at the penal colony had resulted in a harsher regime not only for her but for other inmates, turning them against Nadya. It seemed to be a dead end: protest was clearly not only dangerous to Nadya personally, it was harmful to other inmates. No wonder she seemed desperate and depressed. I had to re-read whatever I was going to send to Nadya, to ensure

The book also contained detailed accounts of the most important dissident trials and stories of the dissidents themselves: Kaminskaya had watched them evolve, either having met and become friends with them before she became their lawyer, or forming relationships with them over the intense months or years before and during their trial. Many of these people had also written books, and Petya and I had delivered most of them to Nadya on a previous visit, but Kaminskaya's was by far the best of the Soviet-era memoirs. She also described the prosecutors and quoted their speeches, and on several occasions I was struck by the similarities between their rhetoric and the rhetoric of those who had convicted Pussy Riot.

In the case of Nadya and Maria and their third co-defendant, Ekaterina "Kat" Samutsevich (she was convicted but her sentence was later suspended), the prosecution sought to prove they hated Russian Orthodox believers, since they were accused of committing a hate crime called "felony hooliganism". In Soviet times, prosecutors tried to

ly thwarted discussion, roughly for ever. To explain a concept often required an excursion into another concept and then a dependent construction and an additional reference, and in the end, rather than crystallising and clarifying an idea, things fell on a page to be untangled by the reader. Here, for example, is what she wrote to me when I asked how someone like her could have grown up in a place like Norilsk, the perennially dark, shockingly polluted, culturally desolate, and very, very cold city north of the Arctic Circle:

"On the subject of independent education and the origins of a rebellious personality type. A significant role in my story was played by my father, Andrei Tolokonnikov. He managed, amazingly, to focus my vision in such a way that now I am able to find things that are interesting, challenging, and curious anywhere at all. That includes the experience of being incarcerated. My father gave me the ability to receive all kinds of cultural production, from Rachmaninov to the [ska punk] band Leningrad, from European arthouse film to *Shrek*. At the age of four I could distinguish a baroque building from a rococo one, and by the age of 13 I loved [Venedikt Erofeev's profanity-filled novella of alcoholic rumination] *Moskva-Petushki* and Limonov [the nationalist opposition activist known for sexually explicit writing]. The lack of censorship in my education and, in fact, the concentration on that which could not pass the censorship of official Russian education pushed me to be passionate about possessing knowledge that privileged the culture of rebellion."

This was not an exceptional failure of style: Nadya has sounded like this more recently. After her release from prison she has tried to explain what kind of changes she and Maria want to see in the penal system, and careened quickly and hopelessly into bureaucratese: Russian does not have a language for discussing social and legislative change any more than it has a language for discussing feminism. But in September last year, when she was drafting her open letter from a Mordovian penal colony, she was using Russian for what it does incomparably well: describing human misery and humiliation in its many shades and varieties.

"It's both funny and frightening when a 40-year-old woman tells you, 'So we're being punished today! I wonder whether we'll be punished tomorrow, too.' She can't leave the sewing workshop to pee or take a piece of chocolate from her purse. It's forbidden."

"Dreaming only of sleep and a sip of tea, the exhausted, harassed and dirty convict becomes obedient putty in the hands of the administration, which sees us solely as a free work force. So, in June 2013, my monthly wages came to 29 rubles [50p] - 29 rubles!"

"A threatening, anxious atmosphere pervades the manufacturing zone. Eternally sleep-deprived, overwhelmed by the endless race to fulfil impossibly large quotas, the convicts are always on the verge of breaking down, screaming at each other, fighting over the smallest things. A young woman was stabbed in the head with a pair of scissors because she didn't turn in a pair of trousers on time. Another tried to cut her own stomach open with a hacksaw. She was stopped from finishing the job."

Nadya's evolution over the three months after our visit to the penal colony, when she claimed to wish only for monotony, went something like this: she tried to reconcile herself to the life of the inmate as putty, to dream only of living to see the end of her term. Prison conditions, meanwhile, continued to get worse and protest continued to seem both dangerous and impossible. The solution had been there all along though, described in many of the dissident memoirs the censors were withholding from Nadya: she had to declare a hunger strike. A hunger strike means automatic solitary confinement, thereby pro-



Nadezhda Tolokonnikova at a court appearance in April 2013. Photograph: Maksim Blinov/AFP/Getty Images

my memory was right and I was helping her make the most of the small amount of time she had for reading. The matter was further complicated by the fact that the book had to be in Russian - prison censors do not read other languages, so they reject foreign books out of hand - and it had been years since I'd been impressed by anything written in my native language. I dug up a few books that I found stirring when they were first published in the 1990s, when I was in my 20s and early 30s. They now seemed petty and flat. I reached further back, to books that had affected me when I was a teenager, and finally hit paydirt. *A Lawyer's Notes*, a memoir by Dina Kaminskaya (the English translation, published in 1982, was titled *Final Judgment: My Life as a Soviet Defence Attorney*) detailed her transformation from a criminal defence lawyer into a lawyer who defended Soviet dissidents, then into a dissident and, finally, a political exile. It also cogently explained how the Soviet courts became as corrupt as they were: after years of carrying out the Central Committee's whims - now handing out 10-year sentences for petty theft, now showing indiscriminate leniency - judges and prosecutors had so much experience with power and cruelty, and so little experience with accountability and agency, that it's a wonder they didn't accept bribes more often. Two generations later, Nadya and Maria faced the Russian court, a direct descendant of the Soviet one, except even more predictable - and devoid of defence lawyers such as Kaminskaya.

prove that the dissident defendants hated the regime. Both cases were religious in nature and rested simply on the defendants' stubborn otherness: if the public, and the court, hated the women sitting in the box in the courtroom, then surely the defendants must hate them back and should therefore be sent to prison.

I stole my copy of Kaminskaya's book from my mother's library about 30 years ago and was unwilling to part with it; the only Russian edition had had a tiny print run and I could not even find a used copy for sale. I downloaded a digital copy, printed it out, and waited for Petya to take it on his next visit to Nadya. He stopped by in late September. Three months later I found out that Nadya had never received the other dissidents' books we had taken to her - they were held up by the censors - but when Petya told her I had sent her a book that would inspire her and they refused to hand that over too, she threw such a fit that the warden relented.

By this time Nadya herself had created a piece of extraordinary writing. I had been corresponding with her for a while and had read other pieces of hers. I did not think of her as a gifted writer. Her thinking was clear though quite complicated, but she had trouble finding the verbal constructions that would convey that clarity. The problem, at least in part, was with the Russian language itself: most of what had interested Nadya before going to prison had to do with philosophy, feminism and conceptual art - three areas in which Russia had systematical-



Protestors attend the Solidarity Vigil for Pussy Riot Performance Anniversary on 20 February 2013 in Washington, DC. Photograph: Kris Connor/Getty Images

protecting other inmates from the wrath of the wardens - and protecting Nadya from prisoners who would harm her. Before going on strike, though, Nadya went to see a warden and asked to have the length of the working day reduced in accordance with the law. The warden threatened to have her killed by other inmates.

Nadya's demands, then, would have to include the transfer to a different colony. But before going on strike, she needed to tell people what was going on in the prison - all of it, even the things no one ever talks about, not even years after being released. She drafted her letter on scraps of paper she would pass to Petya when he came to see her; she also dictated passages to him.

"Sanitary conditions at the prison are calculated to make the prisoner feel like a disempowered, filthy animal. Although there are hygiene rooms in the dorm units, a 'general hygiene room' has been set up for corrective and punitive purposes. This room can accommodate five people, but all 800 prisoners are sent there to wash up. We must not wash ourselves in the hygiene rooms in our barracks: that would be too easy. There is always a stampede in the 'general hygiene room' as women with little tubs try and wash their 'breadwinners' (as they are called in Mordovia) as fast as they can, clambering on top of each other.

We are allowed to wash our hair once a week. However, even this bathing day gets cancelled. A pump will break or the plumbing will be stopped up. At times, my dorm unit has been unable to bathe for two or three weeks.

"When the pipes are clogged, urine gushes out of the hygiene rooms and clumps of faeces go flying. We've learned to unclog the pipes ourselves, but it doesn't last long: they soon get stopped up again. The prison does not have a plumber's snake for cleaning out the pipes. We get to do laundry once a week. The laundry is a small room with three faucets from which a thin trickle of cold water flows."

After months of sleep deprivation and malnourishment, Nadya was in no shape to maintain a hunger strike. She was hospitalised within a few days. In the prison hospital that serves the entire Dubrovlag, the many-branched Mordovian gulag, she met women whose stories made the torture she had seen seem like a dress rehearsal. These women came from a penal colony for repeat offenders. Nadya's second open letter mentioned them.

"I have seen the eyes of women from Penal Colony #2, eyes full of silent fear and resignation ... Unlike in my colony, where the administration prefers to use the hands of other inmates to punish the undesirables, there prison staff themselves beat

the inmates who attempt to protest or resist; they place them in solitary, where only two arguments are used: the beatings and the cold."

A newfound confidence was evident in this letter, as though Nadya were aware she had found her voice for addressing the Russian public and its officials. There was another new element as well: a number of references to the cases of Soviet dissidents described in Kaminskaya's book, the one she had won by throwing a fit at the beginning of her hunger strike. She had read it and discovered she had a legacy: she was following in the footsteps of people who had fought the same battle and slept on the same bunks.

If Nadya had been aware of any legacy before, it would have been that of the Moscow Conceptualists, a group of contemporary performance and visual artists and writers who, in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, had reappropriated the language and rituals of Soviet officialdom for the purposes of disarming it. *Punk Prayer* had been designed and performed very much in the Moscow Conceptualist mould: it was a brilliant prank of an artwork, and no one had planned to go to prison over it. Indeed, several participants in Pussy Riot's previous actions backed out precisely because they thought the group was pushing its luck and might get into serious trouble.

Pussy Riot was an open-membership collective in which every participant performed anonymously. "Being Pussy Riot is like being Batman," one participant told me. "You put on the mask - and you become Pussy Riot. You take it off - and you are no longer Pussy Riot." The mask, in this case, was a balaclava. It could be any colour as long as it was bright and one wore tights to not match it.

There were five women at the cathedral that day wearing balaclavas (one more appears in the resulting video clip because some of the footage was shot the day before - in the intervening sleepless night this woman had changed her mind about participating). Three of them - Nadya, Kat, and Maria - were ultimately arrested and therefore unmasked, and stood trial as Pussy Riot. All had travelled very different roads to Pussy Riot, the cathedral and jail. Kat was a disillusioned software engineer who had worked on nuclear submarine missile systems before becoming a photographer and attaching herself to Nadya on one art project after another. Nadya was a philosophy student who had been part of the radical art collective Voina and then, as she read more and more feminist theory, invented Pussy Riot. Maria had come by way of environmental activism and a love of writing and film. Still, with the



Maria Alyokhina, smiling as she sits in a glass-walled cage in a court in Moscow. Photograph: Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP/Getty Images

exception of Maria, none of the women thought of herself primarily as an activist: some were artists, one was a musician, but all of them wanted to scream about different things that made them mad about Putin's Russia.

Together they created a great work of art, a distillation of tensions that made people intensely uncomfortable, challenged their assumptions, and provided them with images and concepts for describing their reality. "Mother of God, chase Putin out," *Punk Prayer*'s refrain became the single most important meme of Russian protest culture, spanning many variations and allusions - in jokes and protest posters ("But Mother of God, didn't we ask nicely?"). The trial, an undrafted piece of absurdist theatre that played for nine stifling days in August 2012, became a part of the performance. The prosecution played the inquisition; the judge played its enthusiastic helper; the defence attorneys played the fool; and only the defendants themselves played it straight, giving pointed political speeches at the end of their ridiculous ordeal. And more than a year later, Nadya read Kaminskaya's book and recognised whole chunks of her own witch trial in the Soviet dissident lawyer's descriptions.

Perhaps because Maria had long regarded herself as an activist, she found her feet in prison fairly fast and with seeming ease. Soon after she arrived she was threatened by a group of inmates, and felt compelled to ask for "protective solitary", which is exactly the same cold and dark place as punitive solitary except one goes there voluntarily, to the extent that anything in prison is done voluntarily. "I arrived in solitary, dropped my things, and realised that if they were going to use their rules and regulations against me, I'd better study them," Maria told me soon after her release. There is nothing obvious about the conclusion she drew: a more reasonable - and certainly a more common one - would be "then I may as well give up". But Maria became a jailhouse lawyer. She collected documentation and filed endless complaints, on her own behalf and on behalf of other inmates. Within months, she had the prison administration scared of her - to the point that she was never actually allowed to enter the sewing factory, where she surely would have discovered numerous violations of labour and safety codes. As it was, Maria spent many days in court fighting the penal colony - and, miraculously, even winning a few victories.

Nadya had a few hearings as well, though while Maria focused on law and procedure, Nadya used the public forum - and, especially, the media, whose interest in the Pussy Riot inmates dwindled but

never entirely disappeared - to speak publicly. It was a performance that grew increasingly political as time went on. By her last court hearing she had perfected the art of using every opening in the proceedings to make a statement and managed to give four prepared speeches in the course of one morning.

Then she lived through her desperate summer and her hunger strike and, in the hospital, discovered both the horrors other inmates had experienced and the inspiration that a long-dead woman's book could provide. Thus was born another lifelong dissident.

Outside the prison, the Putin regime was evolving, too. The hopeful period during which Pussy Riot had come into being, gone to jail, and become world-famous, was long over. The current moment in Russian history is at once much darker and possessed of starker contrasts: Putin and the church have declared war not only on the opposition but, it seems, on modernity itself. Pussy Riot's trial was this war's first great battle. As I corresponded with Nadya and Maria in jail and watched them fight it out in court hearings that followed their big trials, I worried they might not be ready for the reality they would find when they were released: rarely has a country - even Russia - changed so profoundly in just two years.

In late December 2013 Putin, in a gesture timed to polish his image ahead of the Sochi Olympics, released several high-profile political prisoners, including Nadya and Maria, who had two months knocked off their sentences. They walked out of their respective penal colonies three months to the day after Nadya declared her hunger strike, and 27 years to the day after nuclear physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov returned to Moscow from internal exile. They immediately announced that they would be launching a movement to fight for the rights of Russian prisoners, showing that they were not only ready to face Russia's new political reality - they were already swinging at it. In the month since, they have been collecting documentation on human rights abuses in prisons, organising court cases and letter-writing campaigns, and travelling to co-ordinate individual efforts; they have not paused for a minute.

● *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot* by Masha Gessen is published by Granta.



Pussy Riot photographed at a private studio in Moscow - photo by Vanya Berezkin, courtesy -Artchronika magazine --- Image by Vanya Berezkin/Corbis Photograph: Vanya Berezkin/ Vanya Berezkin/Corbis

Boy George: soundtrack of my life

The singer, DJ and former Culture Club frontman on using Joni Mitchell as a marker of excellence, listening to Nico during his first sexual experience – and why David Bowie was a ‘life-saver’

Interview by Corinne Jones

Born George O’Dowd in 1961, Boy George rose to fame as the lead singer of 80s pop band Culture Club, whose hit singles included Do You Really Want to Hurt Me, Time (Clock of the Heart), and Karma Chameleon, which reached No 1 in 30 countries and was the bestselling single in the UK in 1983. With his colourful attire, braids and androgynous looks, Boy George became an integral figure of the new romantics movement in Britain, going solo in 1987 and recording music every decade since. His new single, My God, released on 26 January, is taken from his 2013 album, *This is What I Do*.

THE ALBUM FOR WHEN I’M FEELING SENTIMENTAL

T-Rex, *Electric Warrior* (1971)

The lyrics of Cosmic Dancer are so beautiful. Hearing his songs now, you remember how special Marc Bolan was in terms of what he wrote about – such bonkers lyrics. Although Bowie was out there as well as a lyricist, no one was quite like Marc Bolan, the things he wrote. He was so optimistic in a funny sort of way. It reminds me of being a kid in the 70s, that was when I first discovered music and particularly glam rock. The 70s was the biggest influence on me, and probably all the people that made music in the 80s who were growing up in the 70s. *Electric Warrior* was quite an interesting bridge from T-Rex’s poppy stuff (later on Bolan got really poppy with Metal Guru) – but *Electric Warrior* was still a bit prog in a way, a bit dark, quite rock’n’roll. It’s a little bit more downbeat as a production, I think. I still listen to the album – certain songs like Life is a Gas, Cosmic Dancer, I’ll play them a lot. They’re the sort of songs that I always remember to play if I’m having a sentimental moment. It’s difficult to put into words, but the album is just so sassy: “Bleached on the beach, I want to tickle your peach, it’s a rip-off” goes the song Rip-Off, another song on the album I love.

THE ARTIST WHO MAKES ME TRY HARDER

Joni Mitchell, *Blue* (1971)

I think *Blue* has a similar quality to another of her albums, *Court and Spark*, but it’s a little bit more – dare I say it – maudlin, with songs like A Case of You and This Flight Tonight; with all of her songs I can always relate to doing the thing she’s singing about. She sings on This Flight Tonight, “I shouldn’t have got on this flight tonight” – I have done that! I had an affair with a boy in Chicago, and I flew to see him near Christmas and he didn’t turn up. That was years ago, but when I hear that song now, I remember it. She gets into love very well, looking at it from a cynical angle and in a very honest way, and whenever I listen to anything she writes I think: Oh, why do I bother? I use her as one of my markers of lyrical excellence, she makes me think: I must try harder! I’ve met Joni loads of times. She talks like she writes; she talks in prose. She’s not Aretha [Franklin] but she’s able to tell a story – some of my favourite singers are people who have unusual voices, not traditional singers, but they are really good at telling a story. There’s been so many times in my life when I’ve put Joni on: there’s always a song of hers for when something goes wrong in your life. Hijira even, I know it’s not on this album but I’ve sat and cried to that quite a lot in my life.

THE ALBUM I LISTEN TO BEFORE GOING OUT

Spacehog, *Resident Alien* (1995)

I discovered Spacehog quite by accident, I heard that song In the Meantime – it’s got this great bass – in America in the 90s, I probably saw it on MTV. I was going back and forward to the States a lot during the 90s. I just loved the song and ended up buying the album and it is brilliant – it was big in America but it wasn’t big anywhere else. It’s one of my favourite records and I play it a lot, it’s totally rock. There’s a lovely song on it called Starside which is so Bowie-esque. Around the time it came out, there was a spate of great records: Belly’s Feed the Tree, Blur were going quite fiercely at the time, there were a lot of American bands, like Concrete Blonde. I’d recommend the album; it’s a really good record to put on if you’re going out somewhere and want to get yourself in the mood – I think it’s uplifting.

THE ALBUM THAT SAVED ME FROM SUBURBIA

David Bowie, *Hunky Dory* (1971)

I probably could have chosen eight Bowie albums but I’ve gone for *Hunky Dory* because I remember the first time I saw the cover and heard the record; it was 1972-73, and it was just so different to everything else. And it’s lyrically brilliant: songs like Eight Line Poem and Quicksand – “I’m sinking in the quicksand of my youth...” I even discovered Dylan through this album, because there’s his Song for Bob Dylan: “Now hear this Robert Zimmerman, though I don’t suppose we’ll meet...” I ended up becoming obsessed with Bob Dylan and Lou Reed because of Bowie; it was quite an educational record. There are a lot of songs on there that, as a kid, you felt like he was talking to you. I was discovering myself, living in suburbia, feeling out of place – he was a life-saver, really. Such an artist. When I went to see Bowie in 1973, I must have been 12 or 13,, at Lewisham Odeon, it was a transforming experience, seeing other, older kids as immaculately dressed as Bowie. Many years later that happened to me – I’d do gigs and there’d be people in the audience who looked better than I did! Listening to this record I just wanted to know who Bowie was... I had dinner with him in New York once, and people always say you should never meet your heroes, but he was really charming. These days, when I’m asked to do certain publicity, or anything on TV, I always think: What would Bowie do? If I can’t imagine Bowie on the show, then it’s a no.

THE ALBUM THAT GAVE ME HOPE

Lou Reed, *Transformer* (1972)

The Who did a massive concert at Charlton football ground with 73,000 people in 1974, and Lou Reed was on the bill. I was 12 and was told emphatically [by my parents]: “You must not go.” I went, obviously, and arrived as Lou Reed was about to come on stage. I was just amazed. After hearing *Transformer*, I went back to listen to the Velvet Underground and became a fan of everything Lou Reed had done. But *Transformer* was a great record. If you think about the music of the time, it was completely out of sync with everything else. It was vaudevillian, with songs like New York Telephone Conversation and Make Up – very much later on I discovered Tom Waits and all of that sound – but it

was a sort of weird, druggy, theatrical, marching-bands-on-valium sound. I've also chosen it because of the lyrics - particularly Walk on the Wild Side, it has such a great narrative. When you're a kid and you know you're gay, and you hear Bowie singing "a cop knelt and kissed the feet of a priest, and a queer threw up at the sight of that", and then you hear Walk on the Wild Side, you know there's hope - you know you're not the only one that has these weird thoughts.

THE SOUNDTRACK TO MY FIRST SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

Nico, Chelsea Girl (1967)

This was when I had my first boyfriend. I met this guy who was the editor of a pop magazine called *My Guy* at a lesbian club in Swiss Cottage. I went out with him for a while - he was older than me and had Nico's album *Chelsea Girl*. I never knew about Nico until him. I spent the one night at his house and he had that album on constantly, all night, so it was kind of like the soundtrack to my first real sexual

experience, and I just fell in love with the record. Nico has an amazing voice (a bit like Marlene Dietrich, who I also love), and I thought she was beautiful as well. I particularly love that song Somewhere There's a Feather on the album - it's a Jackson Browne song. When you're a kid you devour all the information about the music you love.

THE TRACK I PLAYED OVER AND OVER

Sly and the Family Stone, If You Want Me to Stay (1973)

I went to live in Birmingham for a year when I was about 17, in 1978-79. I'd met this guy called Martin Degville who was in the band Sigue Sigue Sputnik - he was quite mad, used to wear fishnet tights on his face - at a punk weekender in Bournemouth. Punks at that point were the enemy of the state, no one would let us in anywhere because of the way we looked. We were gathering on a street corner that weekend, and there was this thing on the other side of the road, a vision: oh my God, this guy in high stiletto heels with a white face and a massive white

quiff and shoulder pads - he was just *outrageous*, another level from what we were doing. And me and my girlfriends were in awe, looking at him. I befriended him and I started to go up to Birmingham for the weekend and hang out at the clubs up there for the punk scene. I had this relationship with my best friend, a boy, and when that went pear-shaped, I decided to leave home and move in with Martin. We lived with two girls called Janet Doublenose and Rhonda Beyonda. Rhonda was a big Sly and the Family Stone fan, and I remember one day sitting in her room while she played their album *Fresh*, and the song If You Want Me to Stay came on - it's just a great song, fantastic falsetto vocals. It's probably one of my favourites of all time. It's got the best bass line ever, and it's Sly Stone at his peak; it's just a great, emotional piece of music. I'd play it over and over, as you do, when you're that age. Sly Stone is one of the greatest singers, you can hear it - the emotion. I'd love to work with him, even if he just did a little warble on one of my tracks I'd be really happy.

THE ALBUM THAT I STILL LISTEN TO

Tubeway Army, Replicas (1979)

I was always dismissive of anyone who sounded like Bowie. But I forgave Gary Numan. I bought this album when I was living in Birmingham. Me and Jeremy Healy, my mate who went on to be a successful DJ [and a member of Haysi Fantayzee], sat and listened to *Replicas* and loved it, even though we thought he [Numan] was a bit of a Bowie clone. But it was a brilliant record, and he looked brilliant as well, which was very important then. It wasn't enough to be a good musician, you had to have a good look too! It was around that point that I was discovering early Human League, bands like Cabaret Voltaire, I was already a massive fan of Fad Gadget, who, for me, was the king of electro - the unsung hero. Even now, when you hear Are Friends Electric, it still sounds good. You're very lucky if you make a record that doesn't age - his album has aged brilliantly because it's so different, it's so electro. I always think you have to invest something of yourself in everything you do to be good, which is why I love *Replicas*. I can still put it on and get that feeling that I had when I first heard it.



Boy George: 'Whenever I listen to anything Joni writes I think: Oh, why do I bother?' Photograph: Richard Young/Rex Features

How to eat: hotdogs

Yo, dudes! This month, How to Eat is saluting an American classic, the hotdog. But should it be beef or pork? In a bun or baguette? Eaten with champagne or beer? And smothered in mustard or, erm, brown sauce?

By Tony Naylor

Hot diggety, folks! It's 2014, a new year, a new start and for How to Eat - the blog that is all about the most *awesome* ways to eat your favourite blue-collar classics - it is time to get back to the business of smart-ass chow pedantry. As you may have guessed, dudes (unless you imagine I typed this drunk, in Albuquerque), we're chewing over a US import this month, the hotdog.

Please remember that while, below the line, a franks exchange of an opinion is welcome, dogs' abuse is not. If someone doesn't agree with you, don't be a little wiener about it, it only makes things wurst.

Sausage

To be clear, we're talking about what a Brit would understand as a frankfurter: a relatively smoothly blended pork sausage. There are people who would try and convince you that a hotdog sausage should be all beef, aka the "tube steak", but they are as wrong, albeit for different reasons, as those who would try and sell you a frankfurter made entirely from mechanically recovered chicken.

Due to the rise of the gourmet hotdog (surely, an oxymoron?), beef dogs are making inroads in the UK, but, certainly historically, compared to pork, I have found beef dogs too tightly compacted, too meaty and - as with many upmarket sausages knocking on for 100% meat content - a bit dry. You can't make sausages from just lean, prime cuts. Sausages need the sort of lubrication that pork readily supplies.

In fact, you have to be careful in jazzing up the hotdog (you want to be able to take a clean bite of sausage with each mouthful), that you don't ruin this simple pleasure. If too dense, too coarsely ground, sausages can be a chore to eat. If they're not prepared or cooked with care, natural casings (in principle, far preferable) can be problematically chewy. If you have to wrestle with and tear at your dog, much less resort to a knife and fork, something is badly wrong. No, you do not want to eat a bland "frankfurter" emulsion of gummy, minimum-meat-content material, rendered inert by sodium nitrate and ascorbic acid, bulked out with soya protein and potato starch, but, despite the hype, not every "haute dog" eats better than its factory-made equivalent.

Fundamentally, you want a fat, sensitively smoked (it anchors and adds a bit of depth to the flavours) pork frankfurter. Its bouncy inner should be semi-coarse - so there's a dense texture to it, but you don't get lockjaw chewing it - its casing taut enough that, when grilled, it delivers a pleasant (as the German would have it) *knack* or crack, as you bite into it. Size isn't everything, but I find 18cm satisfying, with a girth around 4cm. That dog must fill that bun and then some. There should be at least a 1.2:1 meat-bread ratio or it looks and tastes all wrong.

Go easy on the spices, too. Chilli-laced dogs (as



Hotdogs ... do you go easy on the mustard or not? Photograph: Getty Images

opposed to dogs topped with chilli), are usually more raw heat than tasty meat, and a heavy handed use of cayenne pepper, garlic, mace etc, can be equally offputting. The predominant true and smooth flavour of that sausage should be pork. And is there a vegetarian alternative? Not personally. I've never met a vegetarian sausage that I liked.

The current popularity of the corn dog - essentially, a battered sausage for people who wouldn't be seen dead eating a battered sausage - is mystifying.

Buns

In terms of practicality, the Austrians have this nailed. They serve small or half baguettes - tip cut-off and then hollowed out - into which the sausage is dropped. That is a serious amount of bread to go at, which may explain why it has never caught on here. Instead, as in the US, the bun choice is between a side-split/hinged bun or a top-loader. The New England top-loader (lightly grilled to give it backbone, but please, no steaming) is far preferable, both aesthetically - everything sits up nicely, in the bun - and because, trusting it is of sufficient depth, it can absorb a reasonable amount of moisture without collapsing. Structurally, that "hinge" on a side-split bun is a notorious weak spot which, when wet, splits all too easily.

While, but of course, you now see places serving brioche hotdog rolls, it is curious that, unlike with burgers, there hasn't been more tinkering with the hotdog bun. Surely, the perfect hybrid roll is yet to come, amalgamating the strength and durability of a higher-gluten bread on the rustic-sourdough axis, with the easy eating of the fluffy, white original.

Toppings & condiments

In many ways, your attitude to sauces and toppings will be defined by how you eat yours. Have you remained true to the original concept of the hotdog as a mobile, hand-held meal? Or are you a fashionable flibbertigibbet, happy to sit and eat one at a table?

The integrity of the hotdog as a portable product can only be maintained if key rules are observed. 1) All toppings must be secured either under a layer of grilled cheese or, on a top-loader, by making sure said toppings are firmly tucked deep into the bun's cleft. It may look appealing, but anything you stack in a teetering pile atop a hotdog, will end up on the floor as soon as you take a bite. 2) It is all too rare, but sauces should be applied under the sausage so they don't end up all over your top lip and nose. 3)

The bun must not be sopping wet. Anything moist, ie. beef chilli, pulled pork, should be placed on top of the sausage, not just poured all over the bun.

But which toppings and condiments do and don't work? You can put anything on a dog, but should you?

Yes: butter-braised or, at a push, boiled/ steamed onions; bacon (Bubbledogs do a bacon-wrapped dog that sounds like a stroke of genius); mild mustard; dried, fried flakes that adhere well (chicken skin, onion flakes, bacon bits); ketchup; gherkins; cheese; sauerkraut (shredded items conveniently mould themselves around the sausage, see also coleslaw); pickled cucumber; tomato relishes; a bit of beef for contrast (eg. not overly hot chilli, chopped pastrami etc); macaroni cheese. NB: combine no more than three.

No: fried onions (bitter, stringy, a Zantac attack!); squeazy cheese; pulled pork, chopped ham etc. (pork on pork, why?); chorizo is too domineering; likewise hot jalapenos carpet bomb any food they are served with; mayonnaise, sour cream, thousand-island (cold, smooth, unctuous sauces taste wrong against a grilled bun); fried egg, chips; olives; mango chutney, BBQ sauce (the devil's goo); sweetcorn, peppers, mushrooms; guacamole; brown sauce on "breakfast" sausages; out-of-context mozzarella; raw onion or fresh tomato - does this look like a salad?

Sides

The only thing you want with a hotdog is another hotdog. Unlike a burger, which if it's a good one, should be greasy and running with juices, there isn't the moisture in a dog that would make fries a wise side. With the bun, it just ends up a carb overload. What's that? Onion rings? Ha ha. Very funny. No one *really likes* onion rings ... do they?

Drink

There is a minor trend in that, there London for cocktails and champagne with hotdogs. I offer that fact without comment. It doesn't need any. Given that it and the hotdog were both stars of the 1904 World's Fair in Louisiana, you could argue that Dr Pepper and dogs are historical bedfellows. But that would be forgetting that Dr Pepper is horrible. No, stick with cola, fizzy water (the carbonation will help "scrub" your mouth clean) or a dry beer with a sharp, hoppy lick, which will further cut across the dog's flavours.