

described as dealing with equally vague concepts of place. Stefan Kern's aluminium bench-like objects were appropriately used by visitors at the opening, though perhaps without their being aware that they were sitting on art objects. People seemed less eager, on the other hand, to experience 'a new relationship between colour, architecture and emotion' by wrapping themselves up in Corné Gabriëls's folded fabric floor piece, or to take their shoes off and enter Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's carpeted room containing a clock radio, a small malfunctioning TV, a non-functioning telephone, and a pile of Dutch daily newspapers. Henrietta Lehtonen's *The Nest* is more inviting, but is not meant to be participatory: two sofas and a table are arranged with rugs as a reconstruction of the living-room nest that the artist (like most of us, I would imagine) built at the age of five. Eran Schaerf also plays with memory in his *Erinnerung verklärt*, a piece from 1988 consisting of billious green play-balls stamped with enigmatic texts that refer to the incomplete utterance, when what is said is always too late. For Schaerf, language is a fragile memento, a plurality of inexplicable, arbitrary fragments. Several of these fragments were printed on the backs of a De Appel business card printed for one of the curators, and visitors could help themselves from boxes of them left on a table.

A more narrative use of language can be seen in Voebe de Gruyter's installation titled *Crumplings* which combines typewritten stories detailing events in daily life with photographs and drawings of crumpled papers. The presentation is informal, almost casually thrown together, but I wonder whether it was necessary to include the pristine chrome drum littered with crumpled sweet wrappers. The video pieces featured in the exhibition tend to eschew narrative in favour of simply recording the passing of time, as in Dan Asher's rather voyeuristic observation of a homeless woman intently studying a frayed plastic bag. Siegrun Appelt contributes a 42 minute video recording the swiftly passing landscape viewed from the window of a train travelling between Naples and Rome, which would perhaps have been less tedious had it been projected instead of viewed on a monitor. Otto Berchem's video showing a group of children playing a sort of counting and lining-up game does benefit from being projected, but the reason for the work remains unclear – what are the rules of the game? Who invented it, the children or the artist? The same questions could be applied to Adam Chodzko's *Strange Child*, in which a video of a group of people building a 'stick den' is projected in a room containing the actual stick construction, while the sound track of the people, chatting amongst themselves and telling stories about the ways in which they, themselves, had been strange children, emerges rather inaudibly from a couple of small speakers. Like his previous work involving the recall of a fashionable item of clothing or bit-part players in a movie, Chodzko initiated this piece with an advertisement inviting potential participants to

get in touch with him. This time, however, the notion of 'recall' has a different meaning, more in the sense of remembering.

Throughout this exhibition one had the feeling of recalling other, older work, particularly that from the 60s. The spirit of Fluxus, for example, was certainly evident in Appelt's slide projections of skies (which directly recalled Geoff Hendriks's work), as well as in Ruggeri's Yoko Ono-like *Monochromes* that spectators were invited to touch while they formulated questions about their past. Jonathan Monks's series of A4-sized paintings, bearing various numbers of days, look at first like a remake of On Kawara, but the joke is meant to be on the art market as the days refer to expiry dates: if the paintings are not sold after the designated number of days they will be destroyed. Monk's laddish attempts at provocation came over rather feebly at De Appel – even his video projection of white paint drying (which at a previous showing in Amsterdam led one member of the audience to state that it gave a new definition to the word 'boredom') was safely tucked away in a corner.

What has obviously been repressed, but which is returning with a vengeance in much of the work in this show, is the desire to be avant-garde. Yet even that, too, manages to 'find its way' within the institutionalised context of a training course for curators who are as much smitten by that desire as the artists themselves. ■

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## ■ Ian Wallace

Genesta London April 2 to May 10

In the intervening 27 years since Ian Wallace's *Magazine Piece* was first staged, the late 60s dialogue between the (sub)urban, the natural and the minimal, from which it emerged, saw itself rudely sidelined throughout most of the excesses of the 80s only to resurface within the recent widespread use of context as a tangible form of practice. Genesta's timely re-staging of *Magazine Piece* continues the current mini-trend for the re-presentation and subsequent reassessment of key, or neglected, works from the earlier conceptual period. (See Juan Cruz' review of 'Made New' AM202 and Michael Archer's 'Reconsidering Conceptual Art' AM193).

*Magazine Piece*, an 'open-ended concept', exists formally as a text/instruction. The text reads: '*Magazine Piece* (1970). The cover and facing pages of a mass-circulation magazine attached to a wall in a given arrangement until exhausted by the format'. At Genesta this proposal was interpreted three times; twice employing a grid formation (utilising the *Guardian's* *Weekend* supplement and the 'lifestyle' magazine *Wallpaper*) and once as a linear sequence (*World of Interiors*). Despite the seemingly rigid



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**Ian Wallace**  
*Magazine Piece* 1970  
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nature of the instruction, Wallace's concept allows for a fairly broad range of improvisation: the type of magazine that can be employed is open, the number of pages involved is not specified and likewise the method of their attachment; here metallic adhesive tape and staples were used (echoes of Ryman's multiple fixings?).

In spite of these utopian gestures of empowerment, through his diminished presence in the (final) work a more collaborative authorship is suggested, Wallace reintroduces his own subjectivity through his implementation of certain additional aesthetic decisions. One grid formation is displayed on a wall painted bright yellow, whereas the linear arrangement is suspended below a painted grey band. It is hard to ascribe a value to these specific devices. Inevitably they can only be read as somehow significant. Ultimately decorative, they function arbitrarily. More worryingly, Genesta's choice of two 'aspirational' interior design/lifestyle magazines and a leftist arts tabloid, located this particular installation of *Magazine Piece* within a fixed *milieu*; that of an educated, consumer-led, socialist middle-class. Gallerygoers, I suppose.

As such, suggesting a reading that engaged with, say, the problematics of post-war modernist design (as articulated in recent works by Jorge Pardo, Simon Starling Sam Durant and others) not only seemed reasonable but was 'encouraged' through the 'dialogue' between the style-obsessed pages of *Wallpaper* and the Eames' 'Aluminium Group' chair behind the gallery desk. However pedantic, it might be worth stating that *Magazine Piece* would have offered up a significantly different reading

had it been staged in a damp basement and used pages from *The Big Issue* and *The Economist*. The obvious danger is that the context can become too didactic. With the safety net of its original intention removed, *Magazine Piece* has to work doubly hard to resist over-enthusiastic contemporary (mis)readings. For an audience unfamiliar with Wallace's subsequent work, significantly less visible here than that of his fellow Vancouverites Rodney Graham and Jeff Wall, it is perhaps understandable that *Magazine Piece* encounters so many obstacles.

Despite this lack of historical framing there are still discernible constants at work within *Magazine Piece*. By literally disrupting the narrative, sequential flow of the text – only the right hand 'facing' pages of the magazines are visible – Wallace not only proposes a possible breakdown in a traditional linear form of communication, he also demands that we fundamentally re-evaluate our relationship with the minimalist primary structures, the grid, the row etc. Through the casual methodology of its display, *Magazine Piece* ensures that the banal and repetitious are not monumentalised, if anything they are further deflated. While deployment of this tactic is now a feature of almost every undergraduate degree show, it is worth remembering that in 1970 this type of questioning was in its infancy.

Overall a sense of doubt, both contemporary and historical, pervades *Magazine Piece*. Perhaps it is this sense of doubt that connects it to a recent failure to find new, adequate, critical categories for art, an art recently 'summarised' by Liam Gillick through his use of the terms 'mobility' and 'confusion' (see 'Coming to Terms with

Terms', *AM205*). There is something inherently fallible about Wallace's position, a position that implies a genuine, less ironic and more openly humanist critique. We are left with the impression that Wallace has never tried to resolve completely the implications of *Magazine Piece* for himself. So it remains in flux, which is probably no bad thing. ■

Matthew Higgs is an artist.

## ■ Mark Wallinger

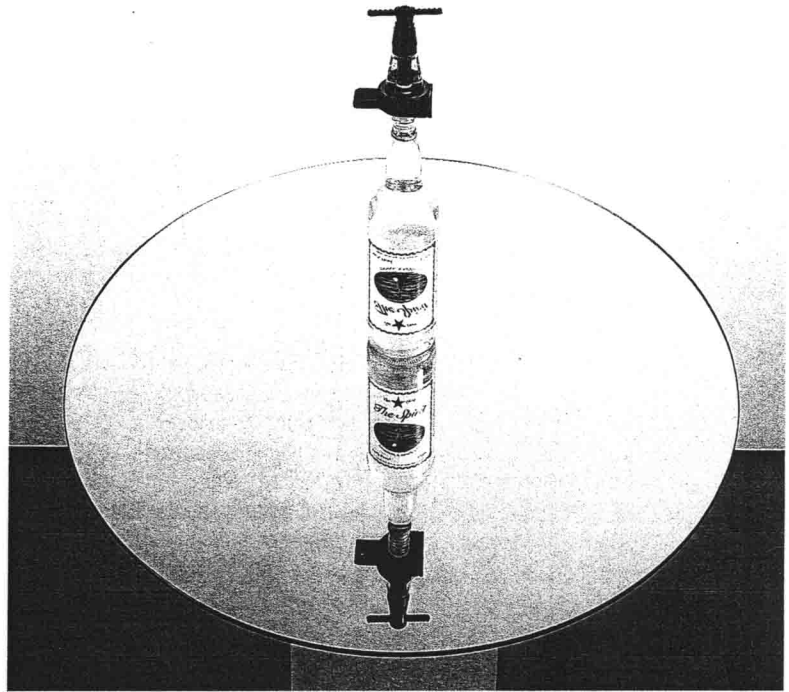
Anthony Reynolds Gallery London March 14 to April 19

Anthony Reynolds Gallery may not quite be the Kingdom of Heaven, but it's the place to be if you want to experience the glory of 'God'. Having put our dear old Royal Family centre-stage in *Royal Ascot* Mark Wallinger has now turned his attention to the sacred cow of religion. The four pieces in 'God', while intelligible individually, when taken together amount to a sustained speculation on the absurdities of spiritual dogma and the problems inherent in a blind faith in absolutes.

The first thing we see from the street outside is a black and white poster that fills the gallery's window, proclaiming that 'Mark Wallinger is Innocent'. The piece could not be more ambiguously assertive: innocent of what, exactly, or are we to believe that Wallinger is, after all, no more than a naïve and saintly ingénu? The questions remain unanswered, perhaps intentionally so, as the ambiguities of the poster's intentions serve as a preface to a show that is rich in illusory truths and undecidable elements.

On the back wall hangs *Seeing is Believing*, a triptych of respectively red, white and green screen-printed light boxes with a black roundel on each of the two coloured panels. In the middle panel, printed like an optician's eye test in letters of descending size, is the message 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God', taken from the 'Gospel according to Saint John'. Here the concepts of 'seeing' and 'believing' find themselves propelled into a precarious realm of ambiguity that implies that the two are – not only in terms of religious belief – about as unrelated to each other as it is possible to be. The optician's eye test, around which *Seeing is Believing* is based, is itself a search for a form of 'truth', but substituting 'In the beginning was the Word' for the normal collection of letters makes a nonsense out of the optician's search for empirical certitude.

*Upside down and back to front, the spirit meets the optic in illusion*, consisting of little more than a labelled bottle of water with a spirit-dispensing optic in its neck, is nonetheless packed with allusions to faith, identity and the authorial presence. As with the pub spirit bottle the label is printed upside down but, with typical Wallingerian perversity, is also printed in reverse, rendering it unreadable unless viewed in the circular mirror



on which the bottle stands. Having peered downwards into the mirror's image we discover that 'The Spirit' – 'Produced in the UK by Mark Wallinger; Est. 1959' – is not only 'original and absolute' but is also '100% proof': properties that in their broadest sense, if we believe what *Seeing is Believing* tells us, are unattainable. We also learn that 'The spirit is distilled and bottled at source' and are offered an address in Chigwell where Wallinger grew up and which was, presumably, the site of his conception.

... *the spirit meets the optic in illusion* exists, when seen in the context of 'God' as a whole, as not so much a metaphor for, but as an analogous counterpart to, the theme that runs throughout the show. It implies, by analogy, that the act of faith that is crucial to our belief in God is not so different from the faith that one must have in the artist (and his artworks) in order to see, as in Wallinger's case, a work of art and not just a bottle of water. Parallels are implied with the Sacrament of Communion ('Blood of Christ') and the Wedding at Cana (water into wine) and, in a manner related to Michael Craig-Martin's *Oak Tree*, 1973, the notions of transubstantiation and cathexis are applied to a secular model in order to contest the likelihood of an irrefutable logos of meaning.

The most ridiculous and entertaining piece in the show is *Angel*, a seven and a half minute video of what initially appears to be a blind man (Wallinger), mumbling incoherently in some foreign dialect while stuck at the foot of an escalator at the Angel Tube station. It is not long though before we realise that his indistinct

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**Mark Wallinger**  
*Upside down and back to front the spirit meets the optic in illusion*  
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