

(KÆK3'T3UPI3)
CACOTOPIA

INTERNATIONAL ANTHONY

BURGESS FOUNDATION

MANCHESTER, JUNE 2013

INTRODUCTION

In a discussion of George Orwell's famous work of fiction, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Anthony Burgess introduces the term cacotopia. Abandoning the more common expression of dystopia, Burgess uses the word in order to more forcefully designate a government of the worst kind. He writes, 'dystopia has been opposed to eutopia, but both terms come under the utopian heading... I prefer to call Orwell's imaginary society a cacotopia — on the lines of cacophony or cacodemon. It sounds worse' (1985, 1978). As societies imagined on the lines of cacophony or cacodemon, cacotopias evoke extreme states of political disharmony and social dissonance.

An amalgamation of the words cacophony and utopia, the term cacotopia was first coined by the British philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham. In his 1818 Plan of Parliamentary Reform Bentham writes, 'as a match for utopia (or the imagined seat of the best government) suppose a cacotopia (or the imagined seat of the worst government) discovered and described'. Cacotopia as a system of governmental cacophony is contradictory at heart. Neither a harmonious agreement on a collective norm, nor a state of pure chaos and sheer noise, a cacotopian government suggests a forced order of disunity, whitewashing the radical clashing of its elements. For Burgess it is such discordance, the dictation of a norm that suppresses its underlying conflicts, that forms the setting for Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1948), as well as his own visions of a government of the worst, developed in the novels *1985* (1978) and *The Wanting Seed* (1962).

In his continued discussion of Orwell Burgess further suggests that a cacotopian tendency of society is visible in his own lifetime. Indeed, when 'the stresses of contemporary life grow intolerable' we can read the signs for a coming cacotopia. 'There are bills to pay, machines that go wrong and cannot be repaired, roofs that leak, buses that fail to arrive, dull work to be done, an inability to make ends meet, insurance premiums that fall due, sickness, the panorama of the wicked world displayed in the press...'

Mirroring Burgess's vision of a mundane everyday as an index for a cacotopian future, the exhibition seeks to highlight a discordance between present everyday rationality and the potential chaos, oppression and violence such rationality holds and seeks to suppress. Including a selection of new and existing artists' works the exhibition presents a series of responses to the theme of cacotopia. Each artwork is rooted in a familiar aspect of the everyday, from the mass of advertising imagery to the omnipresence of the television screen and the abundance of domestic paraphernalia. Such objects and images become the material base for cacotopic fictions. Through the artists' interventions their familiarity is subverted and infused with a trembling uncertainty and looming unease.

Laura Mansfield
Curator

Denouncing the government in 1868, John Stuart Mill addressed the House of Commons: 'it is, perhaps, too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought rather to be called dys-topians, or caco-topians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable.' For Mill, cacotopia describes an impossibly bad world. For Anthony Burgess, however, cacotopia is entirely possible, and the signs of it are in the quotidian frustrations and privations of life.

Any discussion of cacotopias and dystopias has to include George Orwell's 1948 novel *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, with its bleak examination of an individual being crushed by the jackbooted totalitarian state. Orwell's critique of the intellectuals in a society as crypto-totalitarians who would distort any political ideology into a dogmatic system of control was powerful material for Anthony Burgess, who would take Orwell's writing in new directions with his own works of dystopian fiction.

Burgess's enthusiasm for Orwell's work is well documented through his own journalistic writings and his own well-thumbed copies of Orwell's books in the archive at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation. Anxiety about fascist and communist dictatorships and the prospects for democracy and the status of the individual following the catastrophes of the 1939-45 war can be found in other writers who preoccupied Burgess, such as Rex Warner (*The Aerodrome*, 1941) and Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World Revisited*, 1959), and in texts such as *The British Way and Purpose*, a strangely radical teaching manual issued by the War Office that aimed to prepare soldiers to take a full part in a functioning democracy and welfare state after demobilisation. Yet, for Burgess, these kind of futuristic visions which aimed to express highly political ideas were interesting not so much in terms of their prophecy as in terms of their realism in their presentation of life in England during and following the war. In Burgess's novel 1985, a literary response to Orwell's famous dystopia, he explains this further:

'Let me tell you about 1949, when I was reading Orwell's book. The war had been over four years and we had missed the dangers — buzz-bombs, for instance. You can put up with privations when you have the luxury of danger. But now we had worse privations than during the war, and they seemed to get worse every week. The meat ration was down to a couple of slices of fatty corned beef. One egg a month, and the egg was usually bad. I seem to remember you could get cabbages easily enough. Boiled cabbage was a redolent staple of the British diet. You couldn't get cigarettes. Razor blades had disappeared from the market. I remember a short story that began, 'It was the fifty-fourth day of the new razor blade' — there's comedy for you. You saw the effects of German bombing everywhere, with London pride and lovestrife growing brilliantly in the craters. It's all in Orwell.'

Cacotopia is full of bad eggs and boiled cabbage, and laced with black humour: jokes with razors in them. What it also contains for Burgess is a debased and shallow mass culture, full of bad television and worse films; a rejection of history, and of what it can teach; and a disfigurement of human relationships, especially sexual ones. This can be seen in two of Burgess's other dystopian fictions, *The Wanting Seed* (1962) and his most famous novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). Set in an unspecified future, *The Wanting Seed* describes an

overpopulated world whose governments are struggling to maintain order in the face of food shortages and sprawling, densely populated megalopolises. In order to combat the rising population the totalitarian Ministry of Infertility polices the populace with the brutal 'greyboys', encouraging homosexual relationships with the slogan 'It's Sapiens to be Homo'. From this setup, Burgess explores increasing global famine and military dictatorship. And in *A Clockwork Orange*, dealing with the horrifying adventures and brainwashing by the State of the protagonist Alex, 'everybody [is] very quick to forget, the newspapers not being read much neither', the droogs are dressed 'in the height of fashion' as rape and murder are given a Beethoven soundtrack, and — as William Burroughs noted — 'the fact that it is a very funny book may pass unnoticed', the narrative proceeding as an hilarious, hysterical carnival.

Orwell's vision has not come true: while some might argue, for example, that contemporary life suffers from excessive surveillance, and that we exist in a state of perpetual war against imaginary adversaries, the horrors of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have not really arrived. Burgess's prophecies are even less accurate: 1985, written in 1978, feverishly imagines a takeover of England by power-hungry trades unions (who rename the country 'Tucland'), and it is fairly clear how that turned out. But it is the focus on materialism of Burgess's cacotopias, and their focus on how that materialism affects the individual, that makes them still relevant today. While it is hard to imagine cacotopian fiction in the vein of Orwell being written now, the product of a world made of grand political concepts such as fascism and communism, Burgess's preoccupations are with the decline and failure of modern culture and the abdicated responsibilities of individuals to its failure. Burgess writes in 1985: 'There is no such thing as the proletariat. There are only men and women of varying degrees of social, intellectual and religious consciousness. To view these in Marxist terms is as degrading as to look down on them as from a viceregal carriage.' In a critique of Marxism, he half-anticipates Margaret Thatcher's famous remark 'there is no such thing as society' by a decade, and wholly anticipates the incredulity we now feel towards the all-encompassing political narratives of the past.

Contemporary cacotopian fictions are in this mould, such as Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011-12), David Simon's *The Wire* (2002-08), or even George R. R. Martin's *A Song Of Ice And Fire* (1991-present). These do not offer a commentary on the desirability of certain political systems over others. Instead, they deal with atomised individuals prevented from making moral choices because of the crushing, compromising nature of the cacotopias in which they have somehow found themselves. We are delighted to host this new exhibition, which, appropriately enough, is a group show including diverse artistic practices and approaches, and which offers new ways of looking at the fractured world that we live in.

Will Carr

Deputy Director, International Anthony Burgess Foundation



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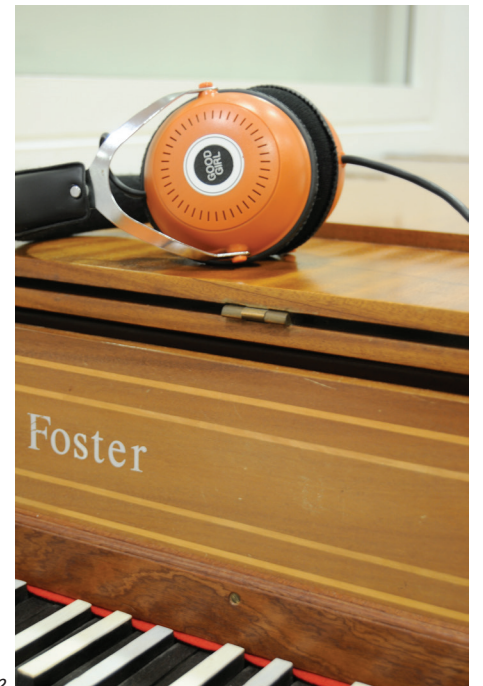
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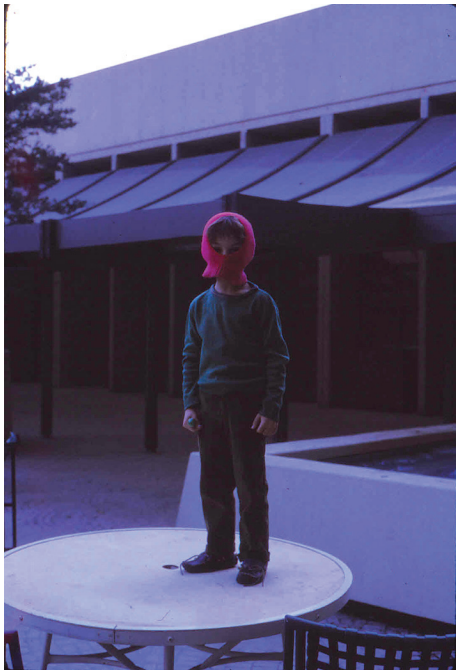
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14

WORKS

- 14 *Atlanta*, 1970—71
Photograph, Anthony Burgess archive
Reproduced with kind permission from the International Anthony Burgess Foundation

- 7, 12 *Good Girl*, 2012
David Wojtowycz
DVD, audio and found headphones

- 1, 4, 5, 11 *Untitled (mothclothdress)*, 2013
Franziska Lantz

- 3, 5, 11 *Untitled (cacotopia backdrop)*, 2013
Franziska Lantz

- Untitled (cacotopia soundtrack)*, 2013
Franziska Lantz
Played on boom box from the Anthony Burgess archive.

- 6 *Tomorrow Belongs to You Part II*, 2013
David Wojtowycz
Watercolour on paper

- 1, 4, 9 *Stolen Identities*, 2013
Matti Isan Blind

- 8 *Keep, Mind, Open*, 2013
Matti Isan Blind
Typewriters from the Anthony Burgess archive

- 2, 13 *Suspension I*, 2012
Elisabeth Molin
DVD

- 3, 10 *We Are Stuck Here Together Part Two*, 2010
Rebecca Lennon
Video and monitor

Typewriters, harpsichord and chairs from the Anthony Burgess archive

During the course of the exhibition a work by Heather & Ivan Morison responding to the theme of cacotopia was distributed throughout the city of Manchester.

REBECCA LENNON

Rebecca Lennon combines sound, video, collage and live performance with incongruous technical and hand made props. Informed by a sense of madness in the hysterical image consumption and endless mythologies of our time, a sentiment that echo's Burgess's dystopian fictions, Lennon draws from cinema, ebay, terrorism, protest, debt, cult and commodity, to warp and disturb the things that are familiar to us. Her solo exhibitions have included *Don't let it end this way, tell them I said something*, Bloc Projects, Sheffield; *We are Stuck Here Together*, Ceri Hand Gallery, Liverpool and *Since They Got Rid of Time* Galerie Metro, Berlin, 2008. Rebecca was selected for the EMAN-EMARE Residency at CANTE (Centro de Arte y Nuevas Tecnologías) in San Luis Potosí, México, in 2012.

FRANZISKA LANTZ

Franziska Lantz is an artist/musician based in London. Flowing notions of building as drawing as singing as growing as dancing as composing produce cross-pollinated constellations between her audio and visual work. In staged and arranged performances Lantz has been using masks, props and backdrops to set the scenes to deep beats and physical instrumentals with vocal associations. Between 2008-2012 she has been producing the weekly Radio programme "DriftShift" on London's ResonanceFM, where found sounds and texts are distributed in the form of a semi-autobiographical audio soil. Recent exhibitions have included *Let the Rhythm Hit 'Em*, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, Berlin, *Bedtime stories*, *Badtime stories* at Supportico Lopez, Berlin and *Night falls (HaVe A LoOk ! HAVe a Look!)* at FormContent, London. Franziska also participated in the 2010 artists music festival curated by Andy Holden, *Be Glad For The Song Has No End* at Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge and the Project *SEVEN SITES* curated by Laura Mansfield and Swen Steinhauser in different spaces across Manchester. Most recently Lantz developed a performance work for the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds as part of the exhibition *Government* by Michael Dean. For the opening of *Cacotopia* Lantz produced and performed a new work that explored and responded to material on dystopian futures held within the Anthony Burgess Foundation Archive. Opening the exhibition Lantz introduced a cacophony of electric and acoustic sound. In addition to the opening night performance a sound installation by Lantz featured as part of the exhibition. As visitors descend into the archive area, echoing beats and repetitive text filled the red walled stairway in a layering of audio samples that served to frame the ensuing space with a cacotopian 'sound track'.

ELISABETH MOLIN

In her photographic depictions Molin attempts to construct momentary alterations in the viewer's perception - both reconstructing pre-existing spaces and documenting spaces which are undergoing a state of transformation. The work presents a trembling indistinction between the factual and the fictional that resonates with Burgess's own writing. She recently received the Bar-Tur 'Identities' award for photography and is currently studying an MA in Photography at the Royal College of Art.

MATTI ISAN BLIND

Blind's most recent series of sculptures stand as totems of colour and form. Enlarging simplified silhouettes of everyday objects Blind creates cutouts within looming rectangles of colour. The sculptures reference ritualistic practices, subsuming the everyday and familiar into indexes of performative action. Blind's use of everyday imagery reflects Burgess's development of futuristic visions that grew out of his contemporary environment, transforming the familiar into something strange and threatening. Throughout his practice Blind explores notions of perception creating scenarios that blur the boundaries between reality and fiction and have the ability to transport the viewer from a common, known place into a site that is instantly unfamiliar and unknown. Blind has shown work in the group exhibitions *Herbei ein Licht!* Lismore Castle Arts: St Carthage Hall Chapel Street, Lismore, Co. Waterford, Ireland, 2012 and *BORN AFTER 1924* at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 2011.

HEATHER AND IVAN MORISON

Tension between actuality and fiction permeates Heather & Ivan Morison's practice. Working in both performance-based and site-specific scenarios, with one-off happenings or large-scale sculptural installations in the public realm, Heather & Ivan Morison survey, record and collect in an effort to rebuild and represent the familiar. They are inspired and fascinated by the natural world and a variety of other activities, from gardening and kite flying, to tree fanaticism and science fiction. Incorporating these activities directly in their work, the artists make their own observations and discoveries, revealed in pieces that include flying sculptures, puppetry performances and architectural constructions, presenting the viewer with situations that invite reconsideration of our understanding of the world. Exploring how meaning arrives through storytelling the Morison's practice often involves the production and distribution of abstracted texts. Following their continued interest in apocalyptic and utopic science fiction Heather & Ivan Morison are producing a new work in direct response to the cacotopian theme. Extending their catalogue of card works the Morison's produced a postcard that was distributed throughout Manchester, sending out a cacotopian dictum into the city. The Morison's have exhibited widely including representing Wales at the 52nd Venice Biennial.

DAVID WOJTOWYCZ

Wojtowycz develops his works around titles that allude to movies and fiction, playing with narrative structures that are imbedded within popular culture. He creates posters, watercolors, sculptures, and installations that evoke an abysmal, highly stylized parallel world imbued with death, sex, bodily fetish, and Hollywood myth. Some of his key motifs are the doppelganger theme, mirror reflections, and the merging of image and likeness. He has recently exhibited in the group exhibition *Still*, at Transition Gallery and the Hackney Picture House, London and developed a new work for AND (Abandon Normal Devices) 2011 Festival, Preston.

Accompanying the exhibition a programme of artists' films exploring contemporary manifestations of the cacotopic were screened on Saturday 25th of May alongside the video installation *Schamdruck*, by Ulf Aminde. The programmed films and installation each present a subversion of the everyday through structures of repetition and interruption, from a technological disruption of the projection screen and representations of disconnected filmic landscapes to juxtaposed fragments of destructive imagery infused with subversive melancholia.

FILMS SCREENED

Uncomfortable Silence iiiii, 2012

Rebecca Lennon

1 minute 50 seconds

HD video

New Dawn Fades, 2008

Jen Liu

5 minutes 23 seconds

DVD

Data Panik, 2012

Matti Isan Blind

40 seconds

HD video

o81126, 2009

David Wojtowycz

8 minutes 26 seconds

DVD

Venusia, 2007

Aline Bouvy and John Gillis

Original soundtrack written and composed by Sandi Sirocco

8 minutes

DVD

Schamdruck, 2011

Ulf Aminde

Looped DVD and curtain.





ULF AMINDE

Aminde's works offer up real-life and staged situations. When working as a director of theater, performance projects and films the encounter with participants, performers and actors becomes a focal point of his practice. In varying constellations, his protagonists enter a relationship with him. Instigating this personal encounter Aminde explores the clash of his interests, expectations, and desires with those of the others, forming the tense interaction between the artist and the performer into the subject and core of his productions. Together with the participants he develops images that negotiate questions of identity, social roles, and, thus, his own position as an artist. Aminde has exhibited widely including recent solo shows *Der Noth gehorchend, nicht dem eignen Trieb* at Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg and the weight at Tanja Wagner Gallery, Berlin. He has participated in the group exhibitions *Risk Society*. *Individualization in Young Contemporary Art from Germany* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, *Macht Geschichte! X Wohnungen, 16*. *Internationale Schillertage* at the National Theater Mannheim and the performance *A Burnt-Out-Case?* with Anders Smebye at NGBK, Berlin.

ALINE BOUVY & JOHN GILLIS

Artists Aline Bouvy and John Gillis have collaborated since 2000, creating multifaceted works that explore the potential and possibility of collage. Their sculptures, drawings, and videos derive from transformations of everyday structures. Through paradoxically, but purposefully lo-fi means, they meld video animation, assemblage and installation into a surreal visual language. The ensuing escapades are lush tapestries of glittery spectacle and sensorial stimulation, shaping the contemporary image culture into Gillis' belief that, "You can lie with collage, and you can feel with it". Recent solo exhibitions have included *Sharp Dull* at Nosbaum & Reding, Luxembourg, *Heat in Coupling* at La Chaussette, Brussels and *Venusia* at EMAF ArtBox, Osnabrück as well as the group shows *The Long Leash* at The Ister, Brussels, *Mercury Retrograde: Animated Realities* at Stephan Stoyanov Gallery, New York and *Celluloid Brushes* at Witte de With Rotterdam



JEN LIU

Jen Liu's paintings on paper, videos and installations draw on diverse histories to construct fictions that connect with and interrogate contemporary society. For each inter-related series Liu develops texts that begin with a single line of enquiry, such as 'the environment gets worse', which metamorphosize into dream-like non-linear narratives with fantastical props and costumes. Infused with a sense of reverie and the absurd Liu's visual narratives always retain a melancholia that serves as a means to subvert and enhances our observations in the work and the worlds we inhabit. Her recent solo exhibitions have included *B/L-ACK TO BLACK* at Space of Drawings, Copenhagen; *SOD Invites: Jen Liu* (performance) at Antechamber Project Space, Copenhagen and *SIX COLORFUL TALES: OF THE EMOTIONAL SPECTRUM (WOMEN)* with John Baldessari at Ceri Hand Gallery, Liverpool.

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