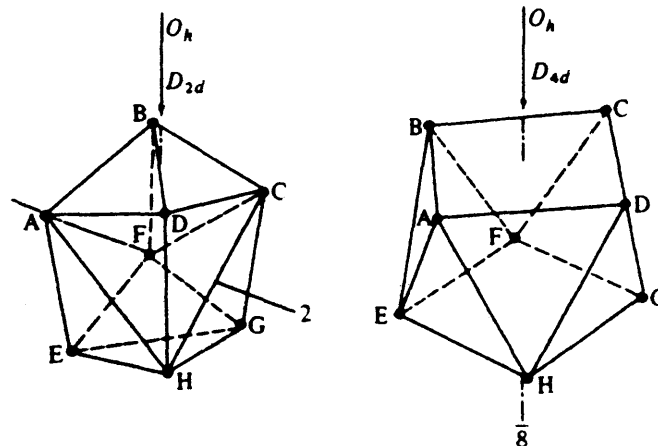


of Oxford University'.

Ayer's radicalism, together with his enduring commitment to scientific philosophising in the manner of Russell, made the rest of the British philosophical establishment uneasy, and his philosophical work was widely regarded as obsolete by the 1950s. (His masterpiece, *Language, Truth and Logic* was published in 1936.) Still, he had 'the qualities of his defects', as one Oxford professor sniffed; and his 'talents' as a teacher and populariser were condescendingly admired, especially when he turned them against the Common Enemy: he could always be relied on to lampoon 'Continental Philosophy' as 'preposterous', 'unintelligible' and 'chiefly an exercise in misusing the verb "to be"'.

The obituary which appeared in the *Independent* was by Richard Wollheim, who succeeded Ayer as Professor at University College London. Wollheim mourned Ayer not only as a thinker and a friend, but also as a representative of an epoch 'when British life was still permeable to wide-ranging, free-floating argument' – a period which had come to an end, Wollheim said, in the late 1970s. This comment on the cultural effects of Thatcherism provoked Robert Jackson, Secretary of State for Higher Education, into the ungentlemanly act of denouncing not only the obituary and the obituarist, but also their generally respected subject. In a barely literate letter to the *Independent*, Jackson deplored the 'poverty and superficiality' of Ayer's thinking, and accused him of having 'enormously narrowed the range of philosophical inquiry'.

Both sides have a point. The Professor is right to say that



Ayer wrote readable, popular books devoted to serious philosophical argument. In fact his sales were matched only by Sartre and Colin Wilson (whom Ayer thought almost as bad as each other). Whatever one may think of their doctrines, Ayer's books represent an age in which professional philosophy held itself answerable, philosophically speaking, to a non-professional public. On the other hand, as the Minister sees, Ayer's dogmatic negativism, allied with his imperturbable Eton-and-Oxford snobbishness, contributed largely to the destruction of this desirable cultural habitat. We shall not see his like again.

Jonathan Rée

IMAGES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

A fascinating and disturbing exhibition was on show at the British Museum this summer ('The Shadow of the Guillotine: Britain and the French Revolution', until 10 September). The exhibition was one of the main British bicentenary events. As the title suggests, however, it was not the usual celebration. Certainly, it differed completely from the big bicentenary exhibition in Paris ('The French Revolution and Europe: 1789–99', Grand Palais, until 26 July). There, the focus was on the Revolution's positive achievements. In London the emphasis was almost entirely negative. The French are reported to be angry about this; but it is we who should be upset. For the exhibition forces us to face up to some of the uglier aspects of our attitudes to France and Europe.

The subject of the London exhibition was the British response to the French Revolution. This was portrayed through a great variety of objects: prints and cartoons, paintings, sculptures, medals, pottery, posters, and textiles. Initially most people in Britain were sympathetic to the events in France. Radicals were predictably enthusiastic; but even moderate and conservative opinion was well disposed. The Revolution was regarded as a belated re-enactment of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688.

However, it soon became clear that something far more 'dangerous' was afoot. With the enormous success of Tom Paine's revolutionary pamphlet, *The Rights of Man* (1791–92), there was fear of a home-grown revolution. Alarm increased as events in France gathered momentum. In 1792, the monarchy was abolished and a Republic declared. In England, a concerted, government-supported propaganda campaign was organized. With the outbreak of the war with France in 1793, the full force of this campaign was turned

against radicals and revolutionary sympathizers. The mood was violent and ugly. When Joseph Priestley and some friends held a dinner to mark the anniversary of the Revolution, his house was burned down by a 'Church and King' mob. Prints, and even a plate and a jug, were produced to celebrate the event.

The ideas of the campaign were crude and simple. There is no difference between reform and revolution. Any challenge to authority leads inevitably to chaos and mob rule. Above all, the very idea of revolution is foreign; and English radicals are mere puppets, controlled and manipulated from France. The violence and hatred of the assault on the Revolution and its British sympathizers is startling. France is depicted as a place of terror, mayhem and madness. Despite the title of the exhibition, however, the guillotine is not a predominant motif (until much later at least). Perhaps this is because visually it is too geometrical, too clinical, to serve such crude propaganda, which requires an altogether lower and more barbaric kind of imagery.

Gillray's work stands out. He is revealed as an artist of remarkable and savage power. He exploits national stereotypes and chauvinistic prejudices quite brilliantly to produce a stream of vitriolic, grotesque and hate-filled caricatures. He portrays the Revolution as a time of senseless brutality and madness, destruction and chaos. The revolutionaries are shown quite literally devouring their own children.

Many of the pictures, by Gillray, Rowlandson and others, are familiar; but seeing them all together heightens their impact. One is reminded of the vilest of Nazi anti-semitic caricatures. The only thing that ultimately saves much of Gillray's work from being mere propaganda is the all-perva-

sive nastiness of his vision. Not even the British are spared. In a famous piece, 'French Liberty, British Slavery', an Englishman gorges himself on a huge joint of roast beef while a crazed-looking Frenchman is forced to survive on a few withered bulbs of garlic. As usual in Gillray, the Frenchman is a hideous grotesque; but the Englishman is not prettified either: he bulges out of his breeches, gross and ugly.

In this way the image is created of the Revolution as an alien and violent, senseless and destructive event. Reason gone mad. This is what the exhibition dwells upon. We are shown almost nothing of more sympathetic responses. We get no sense of the way in which the rest of Europe saw the Revolution, or of how the Revolution saw itself.

For this you must go to Paris, where a very different image of the French Revolution is on view. The contrast is apparent the moment you enter the gallery. In Paris, all is order, simplicity, geometric regularity, purity, harmony and light. A rigorous classicism rules. It is visible in everything from the early years of the Revolution: in the clothes, in the ubiquitous *tricolors* and liberty caps, even in the typography. The contrast with the messy, grotesque style of the English propaganda is unmistakable.

The Paris exhibition celebrates the Revolution. It portrays it as part of the European mainstream. The main emphasis is on its political ideals, enshrined in the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen': democracy, equality and, above all, liberty. In wider terms, however, the Revolution is shown as the culmination of the main progressive currents of European philosophy, science, industry, art and literature.

No doubt, this view of the Revolution – just as much as the one presented in London – is a product of propaganda. These are the images and ideas that the Revolution fostered of itself. But there is more to them than that. For these ideas, of equality and rights, and these images, of harmony and order, have profoundly shaped the subsequent development, not just of Europe, but also of the US and many other countries. Indeed, they still have the power to inspire. Here, however, these ideas and images continue to seem alien and unfamiliar. The impact of the anti-revolutionary hate campaign has lingered on far beyond its time.

Our relations with Europe are again at the top of the political agenda. And insularity and narrowness are still

prominent features of our response. They can be seen, for example, in Mrs Thatcher's recent attacks on the idea of European integration. At times she appears to regard everything European with suspicion and distrust. The EEC is portrayed as an organization in love with regulation and bureaucracy almost for its own sake, carried away with the desire to harmonize and standardize everything. Until recently, moreover, such views were common on the left as well.

At the time of the Revolution, Britain and France were deadly rivals, continually at war with each other. But now powerful economic forces are pushing Britain into closer and closer union with France and the rest of Europe. Mrs Thatcher's anti-European rhetoric may stir up ancient fears and temporarily slow this, but it will not stop it.

Other factors are also at work. As Britain sinks down the economic league table, people are increasingly realizing that European 'bureaucracy' may sometimes offer substantial benefits. It can guarantee basic political rights and liberties, through the European Courts; and it may even help to ensure a minimum level of material well being, through the proposed Social Charter.

A significant change in attitudes to Europe has already taken place. The perception that there may be 'something in it for us' has certainly played a part in bringing this about. It would be unfortunate, however, if attitudes remained at this level. To go further, some old prejudices will have to be overcome; and we will need a better understanding of the European approach to social issues and political life.

To a great extent this is a legacy of the French Revolution. The bicentenary could have provided an opportunity to portray the ideals and achievements of the French Revolution – a subject about which the British, more than any other people in Europe, need educating. But the British Museum exhibition takes an insular and self-centred approach. It does nothing to fight the chauvinism it portrays. Indeed, whether by accident or design, it seems to revel in it. This is infantile; it harms no one but ourselves. 'Visual images should never be taken at face value,' the catalogue reminds us, 'we need always to ask what and whose purposes they serve.' The same questions can be asked about this exhibition.

Sean Sayers



REVIVING CULTURAL STUDIES

Amid a mildly revivalist spirit, the first meeting took place in June of a group to plan and produce a new magazine for Cultural Studies. Exciting times. Probably to be called *Mocs* (geddit? *Magazine For Cultural Studies*), it's an outcrop of the new vitality currently appearing inside the Association for Cultural Studies. The Spring conference of the ACS, on 'Enterprise Culture', was held by a great many of its participants to be one of the most challenging and lively conferences



held for quite a time. A hard act to follow, but one of the direct outcomes of that conference was a decision to launch this new magazine. It grew out of a sense that Cultural Studies is in danger of losing its way as an area of study ... a discipline ... an intervention – well, that uncertainty captures just where for a lot of us the problem precisely lies.

Why tell all this in *Radical Philosophy*? The idea for the magazine clearly comes out of the state of Cultural Studies and its needs. But a great many of the ideas for its form, its approach to possible readers, its style and project – even its editorial procedures – are pinched direct from *Radical Philosophy*'s inspirational 18-year experience. Not a journal, a magazine. There are far too many journals, some close to being unreadable except by special breeds of cognoscenti. Not just for academic specialists in HE, but deliberately aiming across involved critics, students and teachers, from school to HE, cultural practitioners, or just people with a general intellectual/political commitment to democratic forms of culture. Not long strings of unbroken prose (something I'm sure we learnt from *Radical Philosophy* ...). Instead,

shorter, provocative pieces of all kinds – not just articles or essays, but a mix of news, reviews, reports on activities, arguments, teaching materials, deconstructions, cartoons.

The analogy with *Radical Philosophy*'s original project is a real one. *Radical Philosophy* set out simultaneously to challenge philosophical orthodoxies, and to open up lines of connection with wider domains of social and political thought, so that the political meanings and implications of ideas would be upfront. Obviously the context in which this was done – the early 1970s – is quite different from now. Then, we were still to an extent basking in the hazy optimism of the 1960s, for all the darkening clouds. The new openings of ideas and cultural practices were still very much alive. Now the clouds have been raining Thatcherism on us for a good many years. But still. Cultural Studies was itself a product so much of that period, with its interest in new forms of culture and cultural participation. Its belief that the practice of studying culture is thoroughly implicated in all the political power structures of the culture it is studying was a key mark of that history. But one of the striking things about Cultural Studies in the past few years, in the opinion of quite a few of us, has been the whittling down of the interventionist/political side of the field. 'Ideology' seems to be disappearing as a concept, in favour of ... well, what? Considerations of power in relation, say, to the mass media are being sidled out in favour of studies of soap operas and their all-knowing audiences who decode at will – not noticing the privatisation implicit in that switch to this most domestic(ate) of television forms. Cultural Studies is in danger of losing its sense of 'making a difference'. Hence the newmagazine, hence the revivalism.

We by no means all tidily agree with each other. Truth to tell, having only worked together to such a small extent so far, we don't know each other well enough to have found out (surely the experience of *Radical Philosophy* in those first days). What I've written above would probably have been written differently by any other member of the new Collective – though perhaps with the same kinds of conclusion at the end. But one of the strengths seems to be a belief that that need not be a problem. Indeed, the mark of the opening planning meeting was the serious friendliness of it. The two most bitter debates we managed to have were over the name of the magazine, and over whether we should be going for one with a glued spine or with staples. Those of us brought up in the *Radical Philosophy* tradition proudly but firmly went for the compromise position: let it be 'saddle-stitched'.

The magazine is going to launch its first issue next February/March. In an *RP*-size format, with about 48 pages, it will cost £2.50 and come out twice a year at first. It will, we hope, be a part of a counterblast against the new censorship, the rightist seizure of concepts like 'community' and 'cultural identity', against privatised and enterprising culture, for culture as emancipatory. The first issue, still under formulation, is likely to have pieces on Enterprise Culture, the Salman Rushdie affair, and war series on TV. Like *Radical Philosophy*, it will be produced entirely by a voluntary Collective, and we'll hope to keep close friendly relations with other such magazines in overlapping areas. Good luck to us!

Martin Barker

PHILOSOPHY AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Philosophical reflection on the visual arts in Britain has always been a largely conservative preserve. The theoretical innovations and developments in the art history and cultural theory of the 1970s were mainly directed against the very idea of the 'aesthetic' as a distinct experiential or theoretical sphere. And while aesthetics, as a discipline, has survived only on the margins of institutionalised philosophy in Britain, and has been, in this respect at least, something of a threat to established conceptions of philosophical activity, it has never taken up the challenge implicit in this position or pressed it home with any force.

The appearance of a new journal, the *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, committed to a re-examination and investigation of the relations between philosophy and the visual arts from the standpoint of the latest philosophical and artistic developments, is greatly to be welcomed. Published by Academy Editions, who already produce two glossy and highly successful colour magazines with a theoretical slant, *Art and Design* and *Architectural Design*, the new journal appears in the same large format, although with black and white reproductions and a thankfully less hectically fragmented style of design.

The pilot issue, edited by Andrew Benjamin, is already out. (Volume 1, Number 1 will be next.) Its contents include Julia Kristeva on Jackson Pollock, Joseph Margolis on the interconnection of art and history, Paul Crowther on violence in painting, Clive Dilnot and Maruja Garcia-Padilla on allegory, and a nicely balanced variety of other pieces. The presence of David Wood's essay on Escher and Calvino ('Thinking Eccentrically About Time'), and Wendy Steiner on 'Pynchon and Pictures' reveal the broad interdisciplinary perspective of the journal – both widening the scope of traditional conceptions of 'visual art' and interrogating its relations to other representational and narrative forms, as well as opening it up to a more radical consciousness of its own historicity.

The editorial describes the project of the journal in terms of a confrontation between philosophy and visual art which will not leave the self-conceptions of either untouched. And it shows a clear identification with the current philosophical, as well as artistic, avant-garde. Although, as it acknowledges, the validity of the whole discourse of the 'avant-garde' is itself something which is currently the subject of heated debate. This will provide the topic of the third issue (Vol. 1, No. 2). (The next issue will concentrate on Philosophy and Architecture.) What is less clear is how much of a political dimension there will be to the debates. But this, presumably, will be up to the contributors.

Copies are available from all large bookshops, or from Academy Editions, 7 Holland Street, London W8 4NA

Peter Osborne

NIETZSCHE SOCIETY AND CONFERENCE

A special one-day conference is to take place on 28th April 1990 at Essex University under the auspices of the Department of Philosophy. The occasion will be used to launch the Nietzsche Society of Great Britain. The aim of the Conference is to develop "Nietzsche Studies" in the UK in a concerted way by bringing together people from different academic disciplines, including Philosophy, Politics, Sociology, European Studies and Literature; and co-ordinating their research activities. Participation in the Conference and Membership of the Society will be open to anyone with an interest in Nietzsche.

Anyone who would like to organise and/or participate in a workshop should write with details of their proposal to: Keith Ansell-Pearson, Nietzsche Conference Organiser, Department of Political Studies, Queen Mary College, University of London, Mile End Road, LONDON E1 4NS.

