

The Marks of the Arts Lab: Comics, Performance, and the Counterculture

ALAN TAKES A TRIP

Alan Moore first took LSD on a rainy day in September 1970 at a free festival in London's Hyde Park headlined by blues rock band Canned Heat, procuring some 'unlikely-looking purple tablets' from a 'shifty-looking dope dealer straight out of a Gilbert Shelton cartoon'.¹ It was an experience that would profoundly affect his life and work; one that he not only recollected in comics terms, but that even made an appearance in comics he later worked on. In *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen: Century 1969*, the League's Mina Murray takes a trip during the Rolling Stones gig of July that year, one of the most infamous of that series of Summer concerts in the park, as deliriously illustrated by Kevin O'Neill. For the teenage Moore, dropping acid formed part of his larger induction into the psychedelic hippie underground. Furthermore, it marked an important moment in the sequence of events that impelled him toward becoming a cartoonist—his own trajectory of turning on, tuning in, and dropping out of the social mainstream. He continued to use the drug, enjoying more than 50 trips over the following year, and developing what he later called an 'ideological' commitment to LSD and its emancipatory potential.² As for many of its hippie adherents, for Moore acid had a political aspect. It exposed the limitations of everyday utilitarian perception, revealing the countervailing sensuous possibilities of ego-loss and exuberant imagination, and, above all, the contingency of circumscribed notions of the real. In his words:

LSD was an incredible experience ... it hammered home to me that reality was not a fixed thing. That the reality we saw about us every day was one reality ... but that there were others, different perspectives where different things have meanings.³

Like many underground comix artists, notably Robert Crumb (a major influence), using LSD also had a significant impact on Moore's emergent cartooning style and visual sensibility. His involvement with the UK hippie counterculture at large fundamentally shaped his approach to creative practice, leaving an indelible mark on his future output, not solely in comics, but across a range of interrelated art forms.

Moore was not just convinced by the exaltation of the liberatory effects of LSD by countercultural ideologues, such as Timothy Leary, Michael Hollingshead, and Ken Kesey, he was also attracted to the accompanying romanticisation of the LSD source and guide. In tracts like Leary's *The Politics of Ecstasy*, drug dealers were fêted as the shamanic vanguard of a psychedelic revolution in perception, the most heroic of the three mythic groups who were ushering in a radiant new age, the others being rock musicians and underground artists and writers. Moore, therefore, also began selling acid among his peers, thinking he would 'probably have to leave the underground cartoonist and rock musician until a little bit later', but could 'get started on the LSD dealer'.⁴ However, his career as a dealer was ironically far less successful than his later endeavours as a writer, artist, and musician. When rumours of his drug dealing reached the Northampton Grammar School's headmaster in September 1971, Moore was summarily expelled.⁵ One of few working-class students, he had already singled himself out as a non-conformist provocateur at the school, which he found prescriptive and authoritarian, being reprimanded for both his conspicuously long hair and his extra-curricular countercultural ventures. A poetry zine, *Embryo*, self-published by Moore and a number of other pupils, had been banned from school premises after only its first issue, due to the use of the word 'motherfuckers' in one of the poems. Following his exclusion, the headmaster wrote to local further education colleges, universities, and art schools discouraging them from accepting Moore as a student, thereby denying him any further formal education. Requiring references from the grammar school to obtain many forms of work, he was subsequently forced into low-paid manual labour for those few employers who would take him on regardless. These including a local tannery, the Co-op Hide

and Skin Division; the Northampton Grand Hotel, where he worked as a porter and cleaned toilets⁶; and a warehouse of distributor and bookshop chain, WH Smith, in which he packed books and periodicals, including comics.⁷

THE FREAKOUT IS OVER

Moore's expulsion from school marks another key moment in his well-known biography, contributing to his decision to attempt a living as a freelance comics creator as one of few alternatives to a succession of such casualised labouring or service sector jobs. However, his personal persecution for promoting drug use and publishing controversial material has further significance as a microcosmic instance of a much larger backlash against the counterculture by the British state in the early 1970s, under the Conservative government of Edward Heath. This reaction was most clearly evident in increasing 'dope' busts, tightened drugs legislation, and police 'dirty squad' raids on radical groups and the underground press.⁸ Mapping this larger political, social, and cultural scene, and, in particular, identifying the role comics played within the underground's expression of cultural disaffiliation, helps determine how Moore's involvement in the UK counterculture profoundly shaped the aesthetics and politics of his creative work in all fields, and particularly his approach to cartooning and engagement with the comics form.

Possession of LSD had been made unlawful in Britain by 1966, and the Dangerous Drugs Act of the following year had introduced national 'stop and search' powers used to target hippies and the black community. High profile busts, like those in 1967 that saw members of the Stones receive draconian prison sentences for possession of cannabis and amphetamines (later overturned), had been accompanied by growing tabloid moral panic over the iniquities of the 'Permissive Society', of which recreational drug use had become emblematic. The year 1971, when Moore was expelled, saw further legislation in the form of the Misuse of Drugs Act, which introduced a classification system and widened the range of proscribed substances for which manufacture, supply, and possession were made offences. Aimed particularly at bringing a variety of psychotropic substances within the statutory remit, the act was seen to specifically target hippie drug culture, and was used by the police to hold suspects for extended periods without charge while they

analysed questionable materials. As a consequence of its progressive criminalisation, and despite its ostensible use for personal ‘inner voyaging’ of an expanded consciousness, hippie drug consumption therefore became increasingly politicised, emerging as a key battleground in the larger public conflict between the counterculture and the authorities.

The summer of 1971 also witnessed the trial of underground publication *Oz* in the longest obscenity proceedings in British legal history, in which comics played a key role. The case focused on *Oz* 28 (May 1970)—the infamous School Kids issue—for which editorial control had been passed to a group of school pupils of around Moore’s age (between 15 and 18). The magazine’s regular editors, Richard Neville, Jim Anderson, and Felix Dennis, faced four charges under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act: publishing an obscene article; possessing obscene articles for publication for gain; and sending indecent or obscene articles through the post. However, they additionally faced the obscure, antiquated charge of conspiracy to corrupt public morals, which—with sentencing left to the judge’s discretion—could result not only in the deportation of the two Australians, Neville and Anderson, but a possible life term in prison. The controversial School Kids *Oz* in question was one of the first issues that Moore read, and its contents certainly resonated with his own experience of the restrictive conditions at Northampton Grammar; in the editorial, Anderson summarised it as a general demand for ‘more freedom’: ‘get rid of the punitive exam system ... get rid of teachers who can’t see beyond their own prejudices ... give us the freedom to smoke, to dress, to have sex, to run school affairs’.⁹ At the trial itself, Neville similarly highlighted a lack of self-determination of young people: ‘children do not even have the most basic freedoms. They do not have freedom of dress or appearance. They do not have freedom to participate significantly in deciding what they should learn. They do not have freedom of expression’.¹⁰

The *Oz* case was seen by the defendants and many of their peers as an attempt to politically censor the underground press and thereby curtail the counterculture’s own freedom of expression. Barry Miles, co-founder of *Oz*’s main rival, *International Times* (shortened to *IT* following litigation threats from *The Times*), saw it as ‘an attempt by the authorities to curb the growth of the underground press and stop the spread of pernicious ideas about sexual freedom, the rights of children, and other hippie notions’.¹¹ In the closing speech in his own defence, Neville cited criticism of the Obscene Publication Squad (known as the dirty squad)

by groups such as the National Council for Civil Liberties. They had voiced concern that rather than pursuing the hard-core pornographers of Soho, obscenity legislation was being used to target alternative papers, with the police force thereby taking up ‘a new political role, a role that enabled it to decide which magazines can be printed and which can’t’.¹² Members of *IT*’s staff had, themselves, been tried on a conspiracy charge in January 1970 for publishing gay personal ads. The day before the *Oz* hearing began, *IT*’s offices were raided again, following a complaint against their companion comix title, *Nasty Tales*, whose editors faced their own obscenity charges at the Old Bailey criminal court in January 1973. As Mick Farren, one of the defendants in those proceedings (also a White Panthers activist and Deviants frontman) stated, ‘it seemed from where we were in the underground press that being raided by the police was almost a fact of life, like rain ...’.¹³ Alongside the growing number of drug arrests, the mounting frequency of dirty squad raids on underground papers and increasing harassment of their street sellers turned the *Oz* hearing into a major flashpoint in the intensifying antagonism between the counterculture and ‘The Establishment’.

In its interrogation of the School Kids issue, the prosecution focused primarily on content seen to promote illegal drug taking and sexual permissiveness—cast as representative of *Oz*’s fundamental endorsement of ‘dope, rock n’ roll, and fucking in the street’ (an MC5/White Panther slogan used repeatedly in the trial and defence campaign). Disproportionate weight was placed on the alleged detrimental impact of visual material relating to these topics, above all, the issue’s comics content. School kid, Viv Berger, notoriously designed one particularly contentious strip by combining panels from a Rupert Bear comic with material from Robert Crumb’s ‘Eggs Ackley among the Vulture Demonesses’ from *Big Ass Comics* 1.¹⁴ This amalgamation created a sequence in which the head of Mary Tourtel’s innocuous white bear with his familiar checked scarf is superimposed onto Egg’s body, dwarfed by his own erection, as he has sex with one of his ample-bottomed eponymous antagonists. Much of the humour comes from the retention of the anodyne captions from the original Rupert strip (in which text was kept strictly outside of the panel frame), incongruously recasting the demoness as ‘Gipsy Granny’, and sabotaging the former meaning of titles such as ‘Rupert Speeds In’ and ‘Rupert is Eager to Play’ to create bawdy alignments between the family-friendly strip and its adult underground counterpart.

Defence witness, Polish illustrator and painter, Feliks Topolski, asserted the artistic merit of this ‘witty putting together of opposite elements from the “comics” culture’.¹⁵ As a confrontational visual strategy it had clear antecedents in Dadaist collage and photomontage, methods which had themselves been taken up by more contemporary European avant-garde groups such as the Dutch Provos and the Situationist International (SI). The SI had developed the technique of *détournement* in their street posters and publications, which used comics devices to subvert commercial imagery. Speech balloons containing incongruous and puzzling radical polemics were implanted into adverts, film stills, and pin-ups, and comics and cartoons, themselves, were similarly reworded, the idea being to corrupt and repurpose material stolen from the visual culture of consumerism. During the apex of the student and worker uprisings in France during May 1968, the Council for the Maintenance of Occupations (CMDO), which included members of SI, occupied the School of Decorative Arts in Paris. They set up committees for printing, liaison, and requisitions that produced and distributed around 250,000 leaflets, comics, and posters, including wall comics or ‘strip posters’ for flyposting on the streets.¹⁶ As well as avant-garde photomontage, *détournement* equally drew from comic book precursors, reminiscent of the ‘photo phunnies’ and fumetti in Harvey Kurtzman’s *Help!*, an early outlet for many future stalwarts of the American comix scene, in which satirical captions and speech balloons were superimposed onto photographs of celebrities and old film stills.

Nevertheless, Topolski’s favourable evaluation of the School Kids issue’s graphics was not shared by the prosecution, who, Neville bemoaned, ‘throughout this trial ... failed to draw a distinction between an act and the depiction of that act ... [talking] about Rupert’s penis “being thrust in our face” as though it really exists’,¹⁷ a censorious conflation of depiction and actuality that Moore would later explore with Melinda Gebbie in their pornographic *Lost Girls* comic. In his summing up of the *Oz* trial, Judge Argyle drew the jury’s attention to the pictorial aspect of comics as the primary source of their potential obscenity: ‘ladies and gentlemen, don’t worry about the text, don’t worry about the words. Just look at the pictures when you are trying to decide if it’s obscene’.¹⁸ Pictures were thus more likely than words to be ‘obscene’—to ‘effect severe changes upon a reader’s thoughts and behaviour’ that deprave and corrupt them¹⁹—by virtue of their mimetic obfuscation of representation and reality. This suspicion of pictorial representation



Fig. 2.1 Friends of OZ: Oz Obscenity Trial badge. 1971. © Oz Publications

as deceptive and seductive testified to the endurance of the paternalist iconophobic attitudes that had underpinned the anti-comics crusade of the 1950s. George Pumphrey, a key figure in the British campaign that had culminated in the 1955 Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act, had referred in his pamphlet *Comics and Your Children* to American horror comics with stories, ‘told in vivid, disturbing pictures, drawn with a frightful reality’ and ‘almost insane cleverness’, that fascinated and thereby debased poorer readers.²⁰ In the early 1970s, comics were once more being publically interrogated for their alleged deleterious effects on juvenile readers as a pictorial medium. Yet being such a focus of the authorities’ ire, comics iconography at the same time was a prominent feature of the ‘Friends of Oz’ campaign protesting the allegations, for which John Lennon and Yoko Ono released the benefit record *God Save Oz* (that included the lyric ‘God save Rupert’). A panel from Berger’s Rupert-Eggs collage and a portrait of Crumb’s Honeybunch Kaminsky character were reproduced on a range of activist

materials including stickers and t-shirts in the run up to the trial (see Fig. 2.1), along with a 12-foot sculpture of the Bunch that was pulled on a float as part of a solidarity protest ‘carnival’ in July 1971. Comics, thereby, played a key role in the British counterculture’s self-identification and differentiation from the mainstream social mores and practices it contested, in a way that drew on the form’s persistent cultural illegitimacy, its perceived immaturity, and particularly its shocking and pernicious pictorialism.

THE FADING OF THE FLOWER CHILDREN

Yet the counterculture itself was changing in the face of such attacks. As stated, the *Oz* trial was felt not merely as an assault on the print culture of the underground, but as a key salvo in a war against the counterculture as a whole: the defence campaign insisted ‘while it is *Oz* on trial at the Old Bailey, it is in fact an entire community which is being prosecuted’.²¹ This feeling was heightened when, upon conviction for obscenity offences (having been acquitted of the conspiracy charge), the defendants were refused bail and remanded in prison for psychiatric assessment, resulting in them being forcibly shorn of their long hair, an important marker of hippie disaffiliation from ‘straight’ society. Although the convictions were later overturned on appeal, for many the action marked one of a series of turning points in which the idealism of the counterculture was forced to confront the undeniable material force of state power, just as Alan Moore was identifying with that hippie structure of feeling. It is important to consider the ensuing debates that ramped up within the counterculture at this time over the means of social change and the role of creative practice within it, as well as the intersection of personal and systemic transformation. Tensions between ideas of a revolution in the head or by means of exemplary lifestyle and those of confrontational political insurgency were critically important in inflecting Moore’s own anarchism and framing the politics of his work, even though his experience in this period to some extent contests the prevalent historiographical narrative of the British counterculture. Such questions of the relationship between culture and social revolution, and the necessity of political violence, were later explored by Moore in his and David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta*. Within the hippie underground, these political debates had also played out in and through the censored form of comics.

The term counterculture, derived from the concept of ‘contraculture’ coined by American sociologist J. Milton Yinger to describe the oppositional values of juvenile delinquents, was first applied to the underground or ‘freak scene’ by *Peace News* editor and historian Theodore Roszak in his 1969 book *The Making of a Counter Culture*. It was a phenomenon Roszak saw as primarily composed of university-educated, middle-class youth, who, disaffected with modern technocratic society and its emphasis on career, family, conformity, and consumerism, articulated a set of divergent cultural values. These counter-values included notions of authenticity, individuality, autonomy (including sexual liberation), nomadism, pacifism, pleasure, play, and immediacy. Combined they represented a disaffiliation from the post-war consensus, and therefore indicated a crisis within capitalist hegemony. As such, although the underground comprised a nebulous and heterogeneous set of practices, it contained a significant libertarian socialist streak, seen in an anti-authoritarian rejection of social hierarchy, and converse emphasis on decentralised power, voluntary association, and freedom from coercion (free love, free thought, freedom from exploitation). Within this, the prominence of ideas of personal sovereignty and defiance of social convention expressed in alternative bohemian lifestyles particularly aligned the counterculture with individualist anarchism. Even though he differed from the typical hippie profile described by Roszak in terms of social class, coming from a working-class background, this emphasis on self-determination chimed with Moore’s consolidating worldview. It formed the basis of his developing anarchist politics, which has a libertarian insistence on individual self-governance and a deep anti-authoritarianism at its core, evident in his commitment to creative autonomy.

Many of the metaphors circulating within the early hippie underground implied an idealist conception of social change by infiltration or infection rather than explicit confrontation, a ‘contagious culture’ as *IT* cartoonist, poet, performer and anarchist Jeff Nuttall put it.²² For many participants, being of a counterculture was therefore understood within an evolutionary framework akin to the philosophical anarchism of figures such as William Godwin or Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—understanding that the alternative values, practices, relationships, and institutions developed would ultimately supersede outmoded extant forms. With a pacifist rejection of violence and a libertarian suspicion of political organisation, Moore has expressed a certain affinity with this position, convinced of the need to ‘educate people towards a state where

they can take responsibility for their own actions' through rebellious cultural movements and underground traditions,²³ seeing his own work as promoting such an anarchist consciousness as 'propaganda for a state of mind ... [for] ... the way you see the world'.²⁴ Yet, the heightened severity of state reaction in the early 1970s was already challenging this perspective. For Trotskyist *Oz* contributor David Widgery, the underground had been successful in undermining 'the system's intellectually based forms of power ... [making] sizeable incursions into capitalism's ideological real estate, the family, school, work-discipline, the "impartial" lawcourts'. However, it was this challenge to capitalist hegemony that provoked the ruthless crackdown; 'the underground got smashed, good and proper by exactly those forces of which it stood in defiance ... The obscenity and dope trials ... were the first omens of a new legal viciousness ... They could take the Angry Young Men out to lunch, but the hairies had to go to jail.'²⁵

Indeed, in much of the literature concerned with the British counterculture, the turn of the new decade marks a watershed after which it transmuted, fractured, and ultimately dissipated. Above intensifying state repression under the new Tory government, the collapse of 'the Affluent Society' is cited as the key factor in this change, as the economic prosperity (and high government borrowing) that had sustained hippie strategies of 'dropping out' waned, and inflation, rents, and unemployment rose. Nuttall was among the first to assert that the counterculture was actually parasitically dependent on the social democratic welfare state, and thereby the surplus value and wage labour of the capitalist system, reliant 'on the excess material in the over-materialistic culture they purported to despise'.²⁶ That this undermined much of its anti-materialistic rhetoric was recognised to a limited degree within the wider underground itself: as the *Oz* campaign team put it, 'we see fun, flippancy, guiltless sex, and the permanent strike of dropping out as part of an emerging new community, but painfully acknowledge the limitations of leeching on the present society and becoming stooges of its consumer junkyism'.²⁷ Destabilised by the demise of the material conditions by which it sustained itself, the counterculture also had to adjust to the generally more belligerent socio-political landscape of the early 1970s. Not unusually this changing situation was approached through comics. A 1971 feature in *IT* entitled 'This Calls for Vengince!' (Fig. 2.2), published in the weeks just prior Moore's school expulsion, listed under a large image of Gilbert Shelton's Fat Freddy's Cat, not just 'dirt squad' and



Fig. 2.2 'This Calls for Vengeance!', *IT* 111 (26 August–9 September 1971) p. 3

'dope squad' raids on the underground, but attacks on other communities, including the re-introduction of internment in Northern Ireland and the attempt to curtail resurgent industrial militancy via the Industrial Relations Act, among escalating grounds for political dissent.

The countercultural community is perceived to have splintered at this time, as a result, not just of such external pressures, but its own

internecine conflicts. A proliferating array of political groups, ranging from various New Left factions bolstered by the international student movement to urban insurrectionists such as the Angry Brigade, saw discussions about the methods by which social change should be achieved and the validity of political violence further intensify. Emergent social movements, such as second-wave feminism and the gay liberation movement, were even more profoundly testing, prompting forceful debates about the chauvinism of the underground itself. The fragmentation of the underground is furthermore attributed to increasing assimilation of its cultural forms by various shades of exploitative hip capitalism. This included the commercialisation of rock music and hippie festivals, and the attenuation of the underground press into rock music papers and listings magazines such as *Time Out* (which would eventually abandon its cooperative basis). As it was put in *IT*:

at the turn of the decade occurred a time for re-assessment. Western capitalism, far from being on its knees, seemed actually to be gaining revenue from the movement—Columbia Records and the Foulks Brothers were running the revolution at 10% and copyright. Ideas conceived in genuinely revolutionary minds were being assimilated and co-opted.²⁸

Yet, as American political analyst, Thomas Frank, has argued, rather than being an inherently anti-capitalist youth culture that was subsequently recuperated, many of the ways in which the counterculture rebelled against homogenous and conformist ‘mass society’ were both welcomed and anticipated by elements of the business world.²⁹ In some senses the underground pre-empted a new post-industrial ideology of creative consumption and immediate gratification appropriate to expanded leisure and luxury goods markets. With its stress on spontaneity, pleasure, and play, it prefigured the creation of continuously transgressive consumer subjectivities more attuned to quickened cycles of fashion and obsolescence and the visually appealing design of technologically produced symbolic goods. This kind of hippie consumption and abundant instances of hip entrepreneurialism had been periodically challenged from within the counterculture itself, often through visual and performative means, with the San Francisco Diggers’ 1967 mock funeral for ‘Hippie, devoted son of mass media’ commonly cited as an early example.³⁰ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, this internal critique had become even more strident, extending to attacks on the underground as a kind of anarcho-capitalist

counter-economy of fetishised experiences, packaged values and lifestyle commodities, including drugs. Groups such as Black Mask/Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers in the USA and King Mob in the UK, criticised the counterculture for its reproduction of capitalist exploitation and consumerist ideology. As Newcastle's Black Hand Gang put it, 'the "underground" is just another range of consumer goods ... The Beatles, Zappa, the Crazy World of Arthur Brown ... products like these mark nothing more than the furthest frontiers yet of consumer society'.³¹ Once again, this debate played out through comics means, with the US groups drawing inspiration from superhero outsiders, such as The Incredible Hulk, and their UK peers acclaiming the anarchic antics of kids' comics such as *The Beano*. Members of King Mob also famously fly-posted a strip poster, composed of a comic détourned with Situationist slogans parodying the underground and declaiming culture as the 'ideal commodity', on the offices of *IT*, who then used it as the cover page for issue 26, in February 1968. Such arguments over 'selling out', commodification and the impact of commercial imperatives on the ability to articulate an alternative world-view have also framed Moore's career, evident in frequent clashes with publishers over issues of censorship and creators' rights, and tensions between reaching wider mainstream audiences and the pursuit of provocative and esoteric self-published or underground works.

Considering these political and economic challenges, accounts of the hippie counterculture tend to paint a picture of an unequivocal split in the early 1970s between contradictory but previously co-existent sections. These are usually categorised as the underground's cultural and political wings—the freaks of psychedelic style facing off against the activists of the Movement. Depending on the particular affiliations of the author, this schism either indicates the failure of idealist, hedonistic, and naive attempts to create alternative social and cultural relations within existing capitalist society, or the divisive, opportunist, and extremist appropriation of countercultural energies by various political factions and interests.³² However, Alan Moore's own experience undermines this prevalent 'Death-of-the-Sixties' narrative, which equally tends to cast structurally transformative political activism and exciting, imaginative cultural production as mutually exclusive, and thereby bury the legacy of the underground's cultural practices as they continued to intersect with oppositional social movements.

Due to his age and the fact that he lived in Northampton, Moore was distanced from the early years of the hippie underground. While most

historical chronologies focus on major centres of activity, such as London and San Francisco, they fail to account for provincial and regional scenes. This narrow focus has led to attention being concentrated on small cliques of well-known countercultural luminaries, passing over the experience of the freak scene in its more diffuse forms. As *Oz* contributor and *City Limits* editor Nigel Fountain has suggested, it was ‘tougher to be a freak’ in smaller and more dispersed scenes, where even the innocuous elements of psychedelic style were provocative and symbolically charged—in such situations, the political and cultural were consistently conflated.³³ In Britain, many key countercultural formations and practices persisted in local and provincial guises long after their apparent departure from the national and international stage, including the underground press itself, which survived in the form of community and regional alternative papers for many years after national publications such as *Oz* and *IT* folded.³⁴ As Elizabeth Nelson points out, it was not until the 1970s that the rural counterculture and the commune movement, influenced by veganism and ecology, became a discrete phenomenon.³⁵ DIY cultures and social movements historian, George McKay, has demonstrated that the free festival movement in the UK, ‘embryonic’ at the time of ‘the dystopia of Altamont’, only really got going in the 1970s.³⁶ It is within this distributed context that Moore’s involvement with the underground took place. It is therefore instructive to see the intersection of cultural and political insubordination, of critical and anticipatory practices, continuing to play out in his creative work; and the way in which he conceived it as a form of activism. Crucially this approach was developed not only in his cartooning but across his artistic practice as an integrated whole.

MUSHROOMING IN THE REGIONS: THE ARTS LAB MOVEMENT

For Moore, the most important manifestation of the hippie counterculture, which had the greatest impact on his future practice, and a strong regional presence, was the Arts Lab movement. For Moore, the Northampton Arts Lab was:

the only organisation I have ever enjoyed being a part of ... I can’t even begin to describe the effect they had upon me, and I suspect it would be difficult to measure the effect they had on British culture. It was basically

the idea that in any town, anywhere, there was nothing to stop like-minded people who were interested in any form of art, getting together and forming completely anarchic experimental arts workshops—magazines, live events, whatever they could imagine doing. And it was completely non-hierarchical, it worked fine.³⁷

Following his peremptory ejection from the education system, involvement the Arts Lab became his central focus; he later went so far as to say: ‘the Arts Lab was what I was living for to a degree’.³⁸ What involvement in the Lab gave him was an introduction to heterodox creative practices guided by radical politics: determinedly collectivist, anti-disciplinary, experimental and process-driven, rather than product-focused. Combined with a countercultural aesthetics based on indeterminacy, play, and reflexivity, this marked an attempt to radically transform the relationship between cultural producers and consumers and reintegrate art into everyday life, which would have a profound impact on his future practice, his developing visual sensibility, and the way he conceived the relationship between culture and politics. To fully understand the Arts Lab concept and establish the movement’s larger role in the history of British comics, it is necessary to map its development from the original London Lab to its emergence as a national phenomenon.

A Trip Down Drury Lane

The first Arts Lab had been established by a group centred around Jim Haynes, in the summer of 1967, in London’s West End. Haynes was an American expatriate who had set up a paperback bookshop in Edinburgh in the late 1950s which, alongside imported US books and controversial titles such as William Burroughs’ *The Naked Lunch*, offered free tea and coffee, poetry readings, folk nights, exhibitions, and ‘a permanent party atmosphere’.³⁹ Subsequently, he became involved in helping to organize the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and form its Writer’s Conference. He also established the city’s Traverse Theatre, transforming a derelict building into a 55-seat auditorium, along with bar and restaurant-cum-gallery space, and staging provocative new works that often attracted the censure of the tabloid press.⁴⁰ Haynes’ success led, in 1966, to an invitation from the, then, Labour government’s Arts Minister, Jenny Lee, to create a London Traverse at the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre. However,

disappointed in ‘the restrictions and pressures of running a theatre company in a large conventional space’, he resigned, resolving instead to devote his time to helping edit *IT*, which he co-founded in 1967, and to ‘finding a warehouse in which to create an experimental space’.⁴¹

What Haynes found was two connected run-down warehouses at 182 Drury Lane. The site was reconfigured to provide space for a range of cultural activities and creative practice—there was a large gallery area at the entrance and a restaurant upstairs at the front that served New Age macrobiotic food. John Henry Moore (no relation), another of *IT*’s co-founders and a long-term collaborator of Haynes, designed a theatre space, and he and David Curtis installed a cinema in the basement with wall-to-wall foam rubber mattresses in place of seats. Haynes himself lived in the back of the building above the storage and dressing rooms, and ‘a number of other people live[d] in various corners’,⁴² including for a time one of the *Oz* Schoolkids, T. I. Bradford.⁴³ The Lab put on a mixed programme of plays, exhibitions, live-art shows, poetry readings, art-house film screenings, dance performances, musicals, lecture series, workshops, music concerts, psychedelic light shows, and all-night parties, as well as providing rehearsal space, a free medical clinic, and access to information in the form of books, periodicals, audio and film recordings, and noticeboards. Scheduling was hectic; as playwright Lee Harris contended, ‘varied activities ... change from day to day. I’ve known there to be some thirteen different events in one evening’.⁴⁴ The Lab was run on a not-for-profit basis and access was free, although screenings and performances were ticketed at the fixed price of five shillings, with flexibility depending on ability to pay. It aimed not only to provide artists the opportunity to create and showcase work outside the existing systems of patronage and the commercial market, but to transform modes of cultural production and consumption and the connection between art and daily life. It was to be an open, anti-hierarchical, and participatory space for all those who ‘like films, poetry, environments, paintings, sculptures, music—old or new—food, plays, happenings’, but moreover ‘warm flesh, soft floors, happiness; better things for better living, through chemistry or what was once called art’.⁴⁵

The Arts Lab project was indebted to earlier attempts to create complete cultural environments, and challenge formal divisions among the arts, including Arnold Wesker’s Centre 42, Pop Art mixed-media happenings inspired by Allan Kaprow and Jim Dine, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament jazz-and-poetry events, and Haynes’ own undertakings

in fringe theatre. However, it differed from these precursors in that it presented a more concrete challenge to dominant modes of cultural production, due to an overarching commitment to indeterminate, unconstrained, and collective practice, and its existence as part of a wider network of anti-institutions that made up the countercultural infrastructure. In response to the question ‘What is an Arts Lab?’, Haynes listed the following characteristics:

1. a Lab is an ‘energy centre’ where anything can happen depending on the needs of the people running the Lab and the characteristics of the building;
2. a Lab is a non-Institution. We all know what a hospital, theatre, police station, and other institutions have in the way of boundaries, but a lab’s boundaries should be limitless;
3. Within each Lab the space should be used in a loose fluid multi-purpose way—i.e., a theatre can be a restaurant, a gallery, a bedroom, a studio, etc.;
4. I am interested in creating a fluid commune situation where a group of people live and work together. At the Covent Garden Lab, we have 15 to 20 people who live and work together 7 days a week. No one is paid—‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to his need’—we have space, food, ideas, work, etc.⁴⁶

This playful, unstructured, and responsive approach to artistic practice produced a lively sense of creative freedom, ‘an atmosphere that suggested that if an artist wanted to do anything enough, that almost anything was possible’.⁴⁷ This was combined with a commitment to collaboration and skills-sharing among practitioners, challenging conventional individualist and idealist notions of authorship by ensuring that no single person determines results and that material production and technical knowledge were incorporated with conceptual design. There was equally an emphasis on the active participation of spectators, blurring distinctions between creators and audiences. The politics of the Arts Lab therefore lay not just in the exploration of radical ideas and topical issues in experimental media, but the way in which the material and social practices of creating and staging art were refigured in contradiction to the reification of artistic labour in both institutionalised ‘high’ art and commercial popular culture. As Haynes put it, ‘... (as for art)

we are more interested in bringing people together in a real involved way, not very interested in ‘marketing’ art or anything for that matter’.⁴⁸ Instead of an understanding of art as the production of isolated cultural goods within specialised genres or disciplinary boundaries, emphasis was placed on process and hybridization, performance, and experience. Aligned with communist ideals of collectivist living, this prefigured radically transformed social relations, as part of the counterculture’s larger ‘anti-system’ of aesthetics that aimed to destroy not just artistic categories, but the larger separation of art from people’s day-to-day experience, the idea of culture as a separate sphere.⁴⁹ Rufus Harris, co-founder of underground legal advice service, *Release*, contended in an *IT* feature on Arts Labs, ‘in the past nearly all creative achievement was the product of isolation ... involving no co-operation or contact. Now things are being brought back into a social context—people are setting up situations in which their creativity ... remains part of life—and life ... can be creative’.⁵⁰

As stated, in the context of the British counterculture, the Arts Lab was one among a number of attempts to reconfigure social organisation on a more direct democratic and participatory basis, and shape alternatives to the existing institutions of the state and civil society as a form of counter-public sphere. It operated as part of a larger decentralised network of social centres, independent stores, co-operatives, communes, and transitory spaces that together formed what Stuart Hall called, a ‘systemic inversion’ of existing social structures,⁵¹ a kind of loose federation of semi-autonomous anti-institutions that constituted the parallel infrastructure of the ‘Alternative Society’. Others included the London Free School community action centre, set up in 1966 in Notting Hill by figures including Michael X and *IT* co-founder John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins, which put on regular Pink Floyd gigs as well as running play groups, advisory services, and adult education classes. There was also a London Anti-University in Shoreditch, established following the Dialectics of Liberation Congress of 1967, which had hosted popular critical theorist Herbert Marcuse among other dissident thinkers, activists and artists, and offered self-organised education in the form of low-fee courses on sociology, politics, poetry, and music (free for the unemployed). Further examples would include bookshops, such as Better Books and Indica, that also functioned as resource centres and performance and exhibition spaces; shops-cum-community centres, such as Granny Takes a Trip and Gandalf’s Garden; a network of hippie squats and crash pads used

by itinerant heads and touring agit-prop theatre groups; offshore pirate radio; and the underground press itself, along with the regular mixed-programme club nights, such as Spontaneous Underground, UFO, and Middle Earth, that supported the papers financially.

However, as with many of these anti-institutions, the loose organisational makeup of the Arts Lab frequently led to internecine conflicts over its administration, particularly given its perpetually precarious financial situation—often reliant on celebrity donations to stay in operation. There were further tensions over its use as both an accessible community resource and a laboratory for artistic experimentation. In December 1968, a splinter-group broke away from the Drury Lane collective to form a New London Arts Lab, in protest at the handing-over of the space and all scheduling to the Jack Moore and the Human Family arts troupe, as well as the use of Lab money to fund their subsequent bus tour of Europe (with geodesic dome in tow). This decision had been communicated via a notice signed by Haynes and Jack Moore—a unilateral pronouncement that overruled resolutions made at an earlier staff meeting, undermining claims to non-hierarchical and collective self-management. Haynes, Jack Moore, and others claimed this veto had been used to halt steps towards more coordinated scheduling and quality control sought by one Lab ‘faction’, which they alleged would lead to increased centralisation, placing the interests of artists above the interests of the wider underground community.⁵² Conversely claiming a more democratic organisational structure, the new Lab, in a former chemical factory on Robert Street in Camden Town, focused on experimentation with new media, especially film and video workshops and screenings, and was known as the Institute for Research into Art and Technology (IRAT). The split pointed to the paradox faced by the anti-institutions of the counterculture at large, connected to the contradictions of instituting prefigurative social and cultural alternatives within the existing socio-economic configuration. On the one hand was the problem that, as Harris put it, ‘as soon as one introduces system and administration, one also introduces an element of inflexibility, and the thing could become as dead as the traditions it is trying to break’.⁵³ On the other was the risk of the tyranny of stucturelessness in seeking alternative forms of organisation.⁵⁴

The Covent Garden Lab ultimately ceased activity in October 1969, following further arguments over the use of the space, which was increasingly doubling up as a doss house. A group of artists had occupied the

empty Bell Hotel next door for use as studio space, after failed attempts to rent it from the Greater London Council (GLC).⁵⁵ However, there were disagreements over whether the new space should primarily be artist accommodation or operate as a free hostel. The latter position won out, and ‘the beats, hippies, and homeless young people who congregated around the West End quickly took up the offer’,⁵⁶ only to be promptly ejected by the police, as immortalised in the Fairport Convention track ‘Genesis Hall’ (the nickname for the squat). A number of those involved went on to start the London Street Commune movement and squat in several large public buildings under the banner ‘We are the Writing on your Walls’, famously including, in September 1969, 144 Piccadilly, an ex-residence of the Queen Mother. However, the factional tensions within the Arts Lab that had been stirred up once again were this time compounded by the fact that, by this point, it was in financial meltdown; deeply in debt, with the landlord starting legal procedures to collect overdue rent. An emergency request to the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) for a grant of £7000 was rejected, with members reported to have denounced the Lab’s activities as ‘immoral’,⁵⁷ and the anti-institution disintegrated.

Nevertheless, at the same time as the original Lab closed its doors, the number of regional Arts Labs was rapidly expanding, further demonstrating the endurance of countercultural practices in local contexts, despite the demise of their metropolitan precursors:

Like a many-headed hydra, other arts labs mushroomed in its likeness and elsewhere throughout the UK spaces for performance became utilised in cellars, pubs, and outside spaces that facilitated opportunities for collaboration between artists working in different mediums.⁵⁸

While only six new UK Labs were identified in *IT* in October 1968,⁵⁹ an update one year later, just as Drury Lane collapsed, reported on the creation of eight regional co-operatives made up of over 50 individual Labs. These ranged from the ‘fully-fledged’ who had secured permanent premises to those at a very early stage of development, ‘sometimes no more than a nucleus of people meeting and planning their first benefit’.⁶⁰ The ‘What’s Happening’ listing section of *IT*, that drew its details from the BIT syndicated information service for countercultural activities devised by Hoppy and Peter Stanshill, evidenced a growing flurry of Arts Lab activities. In November 1969, BIT initiated a dedicated monthly

Arts Lab Newsletter, which listed numerous Labs by region, with contact details and news from each. Each group sent in a stencil with information about their activities for duplication in the newsletter, although sometimes deadlines were missed and reports had to be phoned through. The newsletter also reprinted material from Lab publications, along with articles, interviews, and letters from other papers such as the *L.A. Free Press*, and reports from connected collectives such as the London Film-Makers Co-op (based at the Robert Street Lab). Several national gatherings of the Arts Lab movement were also held, including a conference at the Cambridge Corn Exchange in January 1969, at which key issues of fundraising and negotiations with local councils were discussed, alongside the problem faced by the Covent Garden Lab of balancing ‘effectiveness as a creative centre’ with serving the immediate community by ‘providing a situation in which anyone can enter at their own level and be fully absorbed’.⁶¹

The Freedom of the Press: The Birmingham Arts Lab

As England’s second largest city, it is no surprise that the most long-lived of all the Arts Labs was that in Birmingham, which survived from 1968 to 1982. As the most significant Lab in the Midlands, it had a strong influence on surrounding groups such as the Northampton collective, but, moreover, had an impact on the development of British comics that has yet to be adequately assessed. The Birmingham Arts Lab was set up by a group of artists who had been putting on rock gigs and light shows at a local club and, in January 1969, procured the use of a building on Tower Street, purpose built in the interwar years for youth work. From its initial incarnation as a nightclub, at which ‘music was played, coloured lights were projected, and people ate vegetables and brown rice and drank instant coffee’, the Lab quickly developed an ambitious mixed-programme of regular events and creative activities.⁶² A former gym was transformed into an international art-house cinema, by taking down the wall bars, painting it black, and installing a set of antique cinema seats and a pair of BTH projectors in a home-made projection box. A performance area for experimental fringe and agitprop theatre, live art, music, poetry readings, and alternative comedy was created, which included a hinged panel at one end used to provide an all-round screen for immersive lightshows. Avant-garde performances included stringing

up wires across rooms ‘with gongs and tin plates hanging from them, ready to be pinged by members of the public with knives and forks’, while other performances were staged on the roof or on the streets outside.⁶³ There were workshop spaces used for dance, electronic and acoustic music, theatrical improvisation, and film production, and the store rooms, water tank, and even the 4ft space between the floors, were used as living areas. Altogether this created an engagingly chaotic space later captured in a single-panel cartoon by Hunt Emerson, a major participant in the Lab and a significant figure in UK underground comix (see Fig. 2.3).

The Lab was run on a co-operative, volunteer basis and initially used a members and guests admission system to circumvent licensing problems. It aimed to fill a perceived need for new forms of collectivity, self-expression, and self-determination using the arts; generating a creative community that involved local people in cultural production with the aim ‘to release their own personal creativity and help the development of an awareness of self-identity’.⁶⁴ Participants such as theatre programmer Stuart Rogers recalls an atmosphere of liberating creative ferment and intermedia experimentation, free from the constraints of existing institutional frameworks:

the one unifying factor among the astonishing diversity of art we promoted or produced was that, more often than not, it extended the frontiers of what had been thought possible until then ... There didn’t seem to be any limit to what artists could attempt ... unencumbered by administrative baggage, untouched by any thought of commercial sponsorship.⁶⁵

However, the most significant aspect of the Birmingham Lab in terms of its impact on comics, and the visual arts more broadly, was the fact that it had its own printing capabilities, enabling the formation of an Arts Lab Press. In 1972, the Tower Street facilities were expanded downstairs to include a painters’ studio, a gallery, and a screen printing room, used by Bob Linney, Ernie Hudson, and Ken Meharg to produce vibrant psychedelic posters advertising Arts Lab events—some 120,000 of them, in about 350 different designs.⁶⁶ Former showers were converted into a dark room, complete with a second-hand horizontal bellows camera and 10×8-inch photographic enlarger obtained from the auction of a bankrupt printer’s equipment. The facility was used for developing film, but more importantly for producing metal printing plates, colour



Fig. 2.3 Hunt Emerson. *Birmingham Arts Lab 1970s* (1998). © Hunt Emerson

separation, image scaling, and making halftones for the reproduction of photographic images. Along with an A4 offset lithographic press (initially loaned from the local cash and carry but later independently acquired), this meant the Lab could not only print their own cinema and theatre programmes, leaflets, and flyers, but a range of publications in substantial print runs of high quality and colour. Moreover, they were, thereby, free from the problems faced by underground papers such as *Oz* and *IT* that constantly had to switch commercial printers because of police intimidation, or refusals to print provocative material—one of *IT*'s printers had even refused to typeset an advert for contraceptives.⁶⁷

In 1974, Hunt Emerson took over operation of the press from Ernie Hudson, who moved on to focus on silkscreen. Having already produced four issues of his *Large Cow Comix* series, he promptly 'hijacked it to print comics', setting up an Ar:Zak comics imprint, named for Moebius' iconic *Métal Hurlant* character.⁶⁸ The Birmingham Arts Lab had received funds from the ACGB to cover poetry performances and the production of a poetry magazine. This was *Street Poems* which, based on 'the idea that there's a little bit of poetry in everyone', presented work from contributors including factory workers, students, civil servants, stay at home mothers, the unemployed, 'and even a few poets'.⁶⁹ Emerson, despite providing some of the illustrations that framed the poems, apparently hated it. However, its third issue, published in 1976, included a free pilot copy of *Streetcomix* 1, a 'new venture masterminded by Hunt Emerson' featuring several Arts Lab cartoonists, with further issues promised depending on its reception.⁷⁰ The response was favourable and it was followed by a wave of additional publications, further enabled by the acquisition of a larger A3 offset litho press. There were five subsequent semi-annual issues of *Streetcomix* itself, showcasing a host of British creators 'working in a less commercial vein than that usually associated with the comics medium',⁷¹ including Suzy Varty, Chris Welch, Steve Bell, Tony Schofield, Pokkettz (aka Graham Higgins), Mike Weller, Kevin O'Neill, and Bryan Talbot. The Birmingham Arts Lab cartoonists were also involved in organising the *Konvention of Alternative Komix* (KAK), the first of which, in 1976, was hosted at Tower Street, with Ar:Zak producing special convention anthologies, *KAK Komix* and *KAK'77*, that were free to 'konferees'.

Having access to 'the means of production', as Emerson put it, in the form of their own printing equipment, gave cartoonists not just the ability to self-publish their own work free from editorial restrictions or

commercial imperatives, but the opportunity to experiment with the machinery itself, pushing it to the limits of its capabilities and using this to challenge entrenched conventions of comics design. As Emerson attested,

seeing your work in print, and beyond that, having the chance to experiment with that print ... everybody found it stimulating, People would push the boundaries because they had the opportunity to do so ... We were printing from photographic negatives on to metal plates, and we used to work on the negatives, scratching out and painting black paint on them, creating stuff on the negatives that never existed on the paper. We'd be getting effects in the drawings, collaging things with feathers and bits of rubbish, stick them under the camera and see how that worked ... we always felt as though the machinery was part of the process for us.⁷²

This chance to play around with technology and various stages in the reproductive process (including layout and paste-up, photographing content, and printing using different inks and papers), yet still produce comics in substantial print runs, was unique within the UK comics scene and rare in the underground press; 'a kind of step between commercial printing and self-publishing', as Emerson characterised it.⁷³ Having access to the reproductive apparatus transcended the traditional division of comics production, in which writers and illustrators were distanced from the invisible labour of printers and colour separators, reclaiming that work as part of a collective creative process, which, as with much Arts Lab practice, became in some ways more important even than the end result. This was fundamental to Ar:Zak, the Arts Lab Press, and the wider Arts Lab's radical challenge to the conventions of cultural production. Walter Benjamin argued that art had to be considered not just in terms of the political position it takes up *vis-à-vis* the social relations of its time but its own position within the relations of production.⁷⁴ Radical work like epic theatre pursued an *Umfunktionierung* or functional transformation of the apparatus and institutions of cultural production in order to take them out of the hands of the few. Arts Labs similarly aimed to make the cultural apparatus work 'for the benefit of the general public',⁷⁵ and as part of that anti-institutional network Ar:Zak pursued a functional transformation of comics that had a significant impact on subsequent alternative, new wave, and small press scenes.

Anything and Anyone Might Happen: The Northampton Arts Lab

The Northampton Arts Lab emerged a year after its Birmingham counterpart, in September 1969, and, although no less ambitious in intention, was more short-lived, lasting only until the autumn of 1972, when Emerson was just beginning to self-publish his *Large Cow Comix*. It was inaugurated by Dick and Janice Smith, a couple of young teachers who put out an announcement at local hippie club night 'Badge' for other interested participants. In *IT*'s October 1969 index of regional Labs, the Northampton incarnation was listed as a 'quite new project that has unearthed about 20 people willing to help and for the rest is fighting hard against local lethargy'.⁷⁶ Like other Labs, the group hoped to secure the use of dedicated premises for their activities, even identifying an ideal empty building and making plans to send a deputation to the city's mayor to request its use (and ask for further suggestions if refused).⁷⁷ In the meantime, they met on a weekly basis at the Beckett and Sargeant Youth Centre and held regular mixed-programme events in various locations around town. These included poetry and music performance, such as the night at the local YWCA promoted in the *IT* feature, which apparently featured a 6-piece jazz group, eight or nine poets, and a small brass ensemble.

Theatre also made up a significant part of their repertoire. The listing sent into the *Arts Lab Newsletter* dated January 1970 reported on the staging of two plays, one that experimented with lights and sounds, and another about progressive atheist Northampton MP, Charles Bradlaugh. It also reported on a piece of street theatre in which the group had staged a shooting incident in a local shopping arcade, apparently so convincingly that one member, Mick Bunting, was assaulted by an onlooker whose wife had fainted when she heard the shots. Plans were announced for a further dramatic piece about the rising cost of living, with a set constructed from newspaper and an epidiastroscope used to project headlines onto the stage in a very Brechtian fashion. Collaborative, multimedia performance was clearly fundamental to the Northampton group as to the Arts Lab movement as a whole, even key to their efforts in the visual arts—the newsletter report also mentioned plans to erect an interactive kinetic sculpture in the market square, a 9-foot tall toy made of three pivoting cubes with interchangeable heads, bodies, and legs on each face, like a giant game of surrealist Exquisite Corpse.

As well as their meetings and events, the group additionally launched a print publication in August 1970, initially called *Clit Bits*, but later appearing under the title *Rovel*, *Fitz-Rovel* and *Deliver Us From All Rovel*. It was cheaply and modestly produced; typed and stencil duplicated, with simple illustrations, and corrected by hand where the stencil didn't print cleanly. Content comprised poems, prose fiction, dramatic sketches, interviews, reports, and articles covering a range of subjects from hitchhiking to hippie non-violence to the hypocrisy of moral decency campaigners, such as Mary Whitehouse, as well as artwork including several comic strips by Moore. The magazine was intended to be a 'graphical expression' of the ideas behind the Arts Lab movement. It was a 'magazine to clarify and consolidate ideas and to disseminate information', to raise the group's profile, and to help in their efforts to pressure the local council for premises.⁷⁸ But, moreover, it was itself a space open for anyone to contribute, which blended different art forms, thereby aiming to 'expose more people to the Arts Lab concept'.⁷⁹ Smith's editorial in the first issue, *Clit Bits*, further summarised the group's ambitions for the Lab as a whole, and its intention to create, in Haynes' words, 'an environment where anything and anyone might happen'.⁸⁰ As with other Labs, the emphasis was on the creation of an alternative cultural space, run on an unstructured basis, open to indeterminate creative exploration. This was grounded in a fundamental communitarian commitment to collaboration and socialised creative practice. For Smith, 'the benefits of working in a group situation are discussion and criticism, building up happening from ideas, ... The artist can experiment and therefore develop, learn from other members of the group'.⁸¹ Underpinning this was an insistence that arts practice was available to everyone, emphasised in subsequent editorials including Moore's own in the fourth issue of the magazine, which stated that 'all you have to be to be in the Arts Lab is Human, or at least a passable replica thereof'.⁸²

Within this co-operative space of the Lab, participants from across the local community would be able to engage in a wide range of creative activities and workshops that transcended disciplinary specialisation and enabled the sharing of technical expertise. Indeed, there was a particular emphasis on collaboration in multi-media performance work that blended forms. Key to this transdisciplinarity was the use of new audio-visual technologies. The Lab aimed to enable 'a fusion of Art in every possible form with mechanical knowledge' and the group was highly

interested in the use of electronic media, in light shows, set design, and Colin King's experiments with playback in recording equipment.⁸³ They hoped to construct an electronics workshop once they secured a building, along with discussion and meeting rooms, a theatre for dance, film, poetry performance, drama and mime, and a silk screen workshop 'for those whose heads are full of images without the technical skill to print and reproduce them'.⁸⁴ The emphasis on appropriating new technologies in collective forms of intermedial, experimental, creative practice, was common across the Arts Lab movement, a key part of its aims to integrate art and everyday life by demystifying cultural production.

Alan Moore came into contact with the Arts Lab while he was still at Northampton Grammar through several friends who had got involved following the Badge announcement, and was encouraged to join by one of his *Embryo* collaborators, Ian Fleming (responsible for the 'motherfuckers' poem). At first, he was suspicious, 'because I didn't want this magazine we'd just got off the ground to be absorbed by this larger body. But I went along, and I got on with everybody, and we became members'.⁸⁵ Gradually the two groups coalesced, beginning with the reciprocation of advertisements in *Embryo 2* and *Rovel* (the second issue), and a collaborative poetry event held at the Racehorse Inn in December 1970. The editorial of *Embryo 3* (February 1971) formalised the merger, and the magazine became an Arts Lab publication. Association with the Arts Lab would deepen the countercultural aesthetics of Moore's work across poetry, illustration, and comics, particularly in terms of an emphasis on collaborative, transdisciplinary performance. In this context, it is therefore imperative to consider Moore's output in its entirety, and not just his comic strips in isolation, in order to grasp the development of a distinctive artistic sensibility informed by the multisensory explorations of psychedelic culture, and above all intermedia performance, that involvement in the Lab gave him access to.

ALAN MOORE IN *EMBRYO*

Embryo itself was the combined initiative of Moore and a group of pupils from the grammar school, and students from the nearby girls' convent school, Notre Dame, with a shared interest. In the editorial of the first issue, Moore outlined its aims to 'provide an outlet for some of the local, frustrated poets, and also to try to evoke interest in poetry in the

reader'.⁸⁶ He insisted on its status as 'solely a non-profit making magazine', somewhat optimistically stressing 'any money we get exceeding the original costs is sunk back into it'. Decision-making was intended to be collective, with the quality of submissions to be judged by 'a panel of the staff rather than by one individual member'.⁸⁷ However, Moore played a key role, editing the first two issues and being responsible for the vast majority of the illustrations that accompanied the poems, with his home address provided for contributions and correspondence. The magazine was entirely self-published: typed up and printed using a Gestetner stencil duplicator at a local insurance company, Phelan & Agutters, and later Cliftonville School. It was collated by hand, with everyone walking around a long table with the different pages laid out in sequence and one person at the end with a long arm stapler. For Moore, this laborious mode of collaborative hands-on production had a certain social and creative value, 'much more integrity and ... a different aura to stuff that is just soullessly mass produced no matter to how high a standard'.⁸⁸

Embryo had a clear oppositional edge, declaring itself 'the magazine that eats people'.⁸⁹ In the editorial of the second issue, Moore unapologetically validated the use of the word 'motherfuckers' that had invoked the censorious ire of the school headmaster, taking the opportunity to confrontationally use it again before asserting 'THE REAL OBSCENITY GOES ON ALL AROUND US, UNDER MANY DIFFERENT NAMES'.⁹⁰ Although this was followed in parentheses by the self-deprecatory 'nice rhetoric, man, nice ...', the altercation reflected the clashes over obscenity, representation, and creative freedom between the wider underground and the state, which would peak with the *Oz* trial the following year. That the *Embryo* team perceived objections to the use of certain 'street words' as an attempt to curtail their freedom of expression was evident in one of the poems in issue 2, which referred to the censure and asserted their refusal to bow to such pressure:

The whole town had been stirred
 They started to write
 They got up and scribbled
 In the middle of the night
 The elders had been shocked,
 Their tongues wagged disapproval,
 They ordered that some words
 Should have a hasty removal,
 But the writers stuck it out

And their pens scratched in the night
 After all what did it matter?
 Because they believed they were right.⁹¹

A connection between *Embryo's* own localised censorship row and the dirty squad busts on the national underground press occurring at the same time is perhaps suggested by the inclusion in the third issue, published in February 1971 after the police raids on the *Oz* offices, of an illustration of Rupert Bear with his trademark checked scarf and trousers, credited to one 'Alan Bear'.⁹² In that same issue, all the contributors' names were altered to include the middle name 'Rupert', mimicking its adoption by regular contributor James Rupert Moore. A more clear-cut reference to Berger's Schoolkids Strip and the *Oz* trial was seen in Rupert Bear's later appearance in Moore's work in the second volume of his and Kevin O'Neill *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. One of the talking animal-human hybrids created by Doctor Moreau, the strong sexual instincts of H-9 (Rupert) were sated by Moreau paying a local gypsy woman to 'placate' him.⁹³

Concrete Poetry

Although *Embryo* included both poetry and prose fiction, it predominantly contained the former, a focus that indicated poetry's crucial importance to the British counterculture, as well as the influence of 'little magazines' on the underground press. Like *Embryo*, the small-scale magazines that had earlier catered to the coffee-bar bohemians of the Beat generation were cheap, ephemeral, often self-published periodicals that operated as an alternative print culture. From the late 1950s onwards, but particularly as they proliferated in the early 1960s, such poetry zines had become an important outlet for experimental work by creating a network of production and distribution that bypassed commercial avenues. As poet-critic Robert Sheppard described it, 'fugitive presses operating through mail order or a few shops, or selling at readings have propagated the most formally inventive work. They have rejected the increased commercialisation of poetry publishing'.⁹⁴ Figures who would later help inaugurate underground papers had earlier produced their own poetry zines, including Barry Miles' *Tree*, his and John 'Hoppy' Hopkin's *Long Hair Times* (forerunner of *IT*), and Jeff Nuttall' *My Own Mag*. This informal

network of poetry zines and small presses was supported by organisations such as the Association of Little Presses, and the Writer's Forum Workshop run by experimental poet Bob Cobbing, as well as bookshops such as Better Books (which Cobbing managed) that acted as distribution centres. Importantly, there were also crossovers between poetry zines and emergent UK comics fandom, with *Embryo* being partly inspired by the psychedelic poetry Moore came across in one of John Muir's self-published fanzines.⁹⁵

Alongside the flourishing of samizdat poetry publishing, the 1960s saw the emergence of a new poetic performance culture that was fundamental to the hippie underground. As Moore himself notes, 'to some degree, poetry was the absolute centre of the counterculture'.⁹⁶ Many accounts of the British counterculture date its birth from the 1965 International Poetry Incarnation at the Royal Albert Hall, also known as 'Poets of the World/Poets of Our Time'. The event, attended by around 7000 people, went on for four hours, and brought together Beat heroes, such as Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and William Burroughs, with British poets, such as Adrian Mitchell, Pete Brown, and Alexander Trocchi, as well as contemporaries from continental Europe such as Ernst Jandl. Performers denounced the war in Vietnam and flouted a ban on the 'four letter word associated with Lady Chatterley',⁹⁷ while blooms from Covent Garden flower market were distributed among the crowd who danced, painted their faces, drank wine, and smoked cannabis.⁹⁸ For many attendees the event marked the emergence of a dissenting generational consciousness; in Sheppard's assessment it was 'an act of imaginative insurrection against the instrumental reason of a world they were to recognise increasingly as not theirs—the world of the atomic bomb and Vietnam'.⁹⁹ This casting of the event itself as a visionary awakening of a new cultural formation was epitomised in its 'invocation', a reworking of William Blake that formed an unanticipated prologue to the proceedings: 'spontaneous planet-chant Carnival! ... immaculate supranational Poesy insemination! ... Albion! awake! awake! awake!'.¹⁰⁰

The presence of Beat poets signified the crucial influence of American poetry on what would become known as the British Poetry Revival of the 1960s. Many young British poets had been fired up by the modernist poetics, consciously internationalist style, political radicalism, and emphasis on live performance of the Beats, as well as sharing their profound interest in jazz.¹⁰¹ Jazz had played a crucial role in both Beat

readings and the ‘jazz-and-poetry’ events that had nourished the incipient Revival movement. Correspondingly, in their attempt to institute a forceful poetic culture grounded in public performance, British poets of the mid-1960s also turned to contemporary music for inspiration. Rock music became seen as a benchmark for intensity of audience experience and a means to free poetry from its exclusive associations with high art seriousness. For Eric Mottram, a central participant in the Revival, ‘from the lyrics of The Beatles and other rock groups, and from Bob Dylan and a few other soloists, poets could learn that lyrical forms too could be reinvested to give contemporary force’.¹⁰² Popular music was seen to reflect people’s everyday lived experience—whereas, according to Adrian Mitchell, ‘most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people’.¹⁰³ For Michael Horowitz, another major Revival figure, the possibility of combining poetry and music in mixed performances in informal settings like pubs, clubs, and bookshops, could make poetry similarly engaged, vital, and relevant, opening it up to new audiences. He therefore set up *New Departures*, putting on countless shows that involved jazz, plays, mime, speeches, light shows, and dance, alongside spoken word poetry. Like the Arts Labs, this was conceived with an expressed aim to eliminate what he dismissed as ‘the fashionably vaunted gap between art and life’.¹⁰⁴ In this regard, this attempt to situate poetry within a pop culture rather than a high art context was part of a larger effort to break its identification with a middle- and upper-class culture of private reading seen as exclusive, stultifying, and reactionary. As Horowitz put it—in typically 1960s terms—this was a move to ‘get poetry out the hands of the professors and the squares. If we can get poetry out into the life of the country, it can be creative’.¹⁰⁵

Performance therefore became not just a means for radical poets to deliver texts to an audience but part of their conscious opposition to the official British verse of the post-war Movement poets, seen as lacklustre, mawkish, and nationalistic. In Mottram’s caustic assessment, ‘the thin Tory-Liberal rationalism and whining of the Angry Young Men’ had rapidly metamorphosed ‘into middle-brow rigidities and safeties in the 1960s and 1970s’.¹⁰⁶ In the British Poetry Revival, oral performance therefore had a fundamentally political aspect. This was not merely in terms of polemical content but as a result of the shift of emphasis onto the public reading of a poem as an exchange between poet and audience, and a validation of the commensurate ‘distributed social engagement that occurs when a text is performed’.¹⁰⁷ In opposition to what

Horowitz called ‘the conformist programme, which defined poems as “the words on the page” ... a two-dimensional concept-cage’,¹⁰⁸ for the Revival poets, the written poem became a score. A poem’s meaning was resituated within the multidimensional aspects of its performance in a given context. It varied according to the contingencies of voice, articulation, expression, gesture—the physicality of bodies in space—as well as the ‘circumpoetics’ of introductions and commentary, and, crucially, the individual interpretation of the listener. Public poetry reading was seen to lead to a new kind of listening, which highlighted the abstract, concrete, and extra-semantic dimensions of the performed poem, as listeners noted ‘sound patterns, tempo, the grain of the voice, its embodiment, its acoustic properties, as well as the complex iconicity of poetic language’.¹⁰⁹ Inciting new forms of attention and audience engagement, and destabilising the authority of the written text in this manner, was perceived to break conventional ideas of poetic authorship and thus contribute to its democratisation.

In alliance with this stress on the contingency of the poem as realised through performance and the activation of the listener, so that, as Sheppard put it, ‘he or she has to enter into the artwork to complete it’, the poetics of the British Revival similarly centred on indeterminacy.¹¹⁰ This again was in sharp contradistinction to the officially sanctioned poetry of the Movement that privileged ‘closure, narrative coherence, and grammatical and syntactic cohesion’, shoring up individual authorship by relying on level tone, uniform metrics, personal anecdote, and an ‘empirical lyricism’ to produce the effect of a stable, consistent voice.¹¹¹ In place of what Mottram condemned as this ‘safety of recognition’ and ‘predetermined forms based on prejudice and habit’, the Revival championed innovation, risk-taking and exploration.¹¹² It comprised poets working across a range of forms, including a significant number experimenting with hybrid practices such as concrete poetry, sound-text, and visual poetry. The range of techniques deployed included collage and cut-up procedures that, like their visual counterparts, owed much to antecedents in the modernist avant-garde. Such techniques opened up a multiplicity of articulations through discontinuity and the destabilisation of language. Furthermore, they foregrounded ‘the artificiality of form’ through defamiliarisation strategies of what Richard Sheppard terms ‘process-showing’, an approach that would form a key element of Moore’s own practice analogous to Brecht’s V-effect.¹¹³

The value placed on oral performance, rather than supplanting the role played by zine culture in experimental poetry, actually opened it up to increased exploration of multimodal forms, particularly in relation to practices of visual and concrete poetry. The interesting commonalities shared between comics and visual poetry have been under-theorised, an oversight being redressed in the work of Tamryn Bennett, Steven Surdiacourt, Derik Badman, and Rob Clough. Pioneering British sound-text poet of the 1960s, Bob Cobbing, insisted that all poetry has a visual aspect, with the graphic design of printed verse affecting the way it is read and understood. As Ian Davidson affirms in an article on visual poetry as performance, ‘the arrangement of lines, shifting left-hand margin(s), and the use of white space, all affect the rhythmic aspects of the language, the pace of reading, and the way attention is given to particular words’.¹¹⁴ For Davidson, the poem on a page is ‘perceived both synchronically, all at once in a form of gestalt experience, and diachronically, in that it is read over a period of time’.¹¹⁵ This is comparable to the simultaneous perception of panels in relations of tabular montage and linear decoupage theorised by French comics writer and critic Benoît Peeters, as well as Andrei Molotiu’s ideas of sequential dynamism and iconostasis.¹¹⁶ In poetry, the arrangement of stanzas and lines and typographic choices suggest order, measure, pace, and emphasis. Key amongst these is the poetic line—as Davidson continues, ‘the line combines the idea of the poem as a unit of time, in the way it creates rhythms within the poem, and as a visual object in the way it informs the spatial distribution of the words on the page’.¹¹⁷ This has clear similarities to the complex spatio-temporal relationships formed by the layout of the comics page. Moreover, as Hannah Miodrag has pointed out, ‘it has a particular relevance in terms of the literary, rhythmic, and aesthetic effects created by the fragmented spatial dispersal of textual lexias across the page’.¹¹⁸ Poet, writer, and artist, Tamryn Bennett, has further interrogated the affinities between comics and poetry in general, arguing that both use the spatial arrangement of visual and verbal segments in a manner that emphasises gaps and breaks, disjuncture and liminality, in distinction to the syntactical priorities of prose. For Bennett, this ‘segmentivity’ allows for ‘works to be created and understood in multiple directions’, an emphasis on plurivectionality and simultaneity, which challenges the dominance of narratological analyses focused on linear narrative sequence.¹¹⁹ A similar emphasis on gestalt and multidirectionality is stressed by Gene Kannenberg with regard to comics’ visual design

as ‘spatial texts’, in which, quoting David Scott, the interrelationship of various parts ‘tends to be seized simultaneously or through multiple—and multidirectional—strategies of reading, of which the traditional linear, horizontal mode is only one of a variety of options’.¹²⁰

Visual poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, with its roots in Dada and Fluxus antecedents, drew out the spatial and graphic properties of written verse, experimenting with layout and typography, collage, pattern, and illustration. This emphasis on the concrete nature of language, calling attention to the materiality of the printed word, was closely related to contemporary performance culture. Not only did poets use the graphic design of work to help score their readings, but visual poetry was, itself, seen to disrupt and denaturalise the reading process in a way that opened it up to multiple indeterminate interpretations, thereby mandating a more participative role for the reader in which they act to ‘perform’ the poem, in a way similar to the work of the spectator of epic theatre. To quote once more from Davidson:

Visual texts, in their processes of formation and reformation, in the freedom they allow for interpretation, combine the abstraction of music and graphics with the significance of verbal language. A user cannot simply ask “what does this poem mean?”, but must become involved in its aural and visual construction, putting words and shapes together, they must collaborate in the performance of the poem.¹²¹

In many ways the printed poem became, as in Jeff Nuttall’s conception, ‘a paper exhibition’,¹²² capturing, visually, the performance aesthetics of the British Poetry Revival. Similar ideas lay behind the Northampton Arts Lab’s desire for their publications to act as a ‘graphic expression’ of the concept of an Arts Lab as a communitarian, transdisciplinary, cultural anti-institution.

A cursory review in *IT*, in May 1971, part of a wider overview of the self-published poetry, science fiction, and political zines proliferating across the country, described the poetry in *Embryo* in just two words as ‘Standard variable’. Moore has dismissed his own poems of this period as ‘usually angsty, breast-beating things about the tragedy of nuclear war, but that were actually about the tragedy of me not being able to get a girlfriend’.¹²³ Yet, despite being typically raw and overblown adolescent outpourings, they include several aspects that would characterise much of his later creative output. In terms of content, there is a focus on

political issues and topical relevance, including musings on the apocalyptic environmental effects of said nuclear conflict but also opposition to the Vietnam War.¹²⁴ Rather than expressing a hippie utopianism, many of Moore's poems sketched a bleak dystopian vision of the future, drawing particularly on Orwellian themes in ways that anticipated later comics series like *V for Vendetta*. A notable example is 'Ministry of Love', with its imagery of sinister telescreens and black corridors, where the walls 'have eyes as well as ears', and 'Echoes of machineguns blow with torn posters across the curfew-emptied/afterdark streets'.¹²⁵

Much of Moore's verse took motifs and themes from the genres of science fiction and fantasy that enjoyed significant crossover popularity in early UK comics fandom. Examples include 'A Voice of Flame', which noted the early influence of H. P. Lovecraft with a reference to 'Cthuga', while demonstrating, in its incantational form, a play with language Moore would later take to extremes in his similarly-titled first prose novel, *A Voice of the Fire*, which included an entirely invented Neolithic dialect.¹²⁶ Similarly, 'The Brain of Night' used the rhythmic effect of several anaphora to create a heady sense of careering through space 'on circuit wings out past the gleam of Mars'.¹²⁷ Alongside such exhilarating journeying through outer space, like much contemporary science fiction, Moore's poems also explored psychological realms of inner space inspired by his experience of LSD. 'Mindflare: Neurosis 80', for example, suggested an acid trip, using ellipses and conjoined words like 'strobe-drifting' and 'windhowl carscreech' to invoke its perceptual effects, ending with the comedown of 'Empty morningstreet, newspaper bounce on wind like torn butterfly'.¹²⁸ However, the sense of unleashed imaginative possibility intimated by the poem's open form of unfixed line length was tinged with the menace of a potential bad trip. This sense of the fragility of the imagination, and its vulnerability in the face of mundane instrumentalist ways of perceiving the world, was more fully evoked in 'Deathshead'.¹²⁹ Here a jarring exchange is staged between the narrator's aching romantic musings on the moths of Saturn 'that fly lazily/through the roof gardens there', and an interlocutor who offers more prosaic observations of moths' 'death rate/in various places', leading to a breakdown in metre culminating with 'the bodies of moths fell and broke underfoot'.

In terms of form, Moore's poetry was most indebted to the Beats, seen in the loose free verse of the aforementioned 'Mindflare: Neurosis 80', so redolent of Ginsberg, its opening 'Drifting through the redneon

brain of nightlight/Empty wetsparkling street’ even recalling the second line of his infamous *Howl*. For Moore, ‘reading ... *Howl* for the first time was something of a revelation—I suddenly saw things that could be done with language that I hadn’t really dreamed could be done before’.¹³⁰ He and Peter Bagge would later pay irreverent tribute to Ginsberg’s poem in ‘The Hasty Smear of my Smile ...’ a pastiche of post-war alternative American culture as experienced by the Kool-Aid Man.¹³¹ Burroughs also ‘fascinated’ Moore,¹³² and his anti-textual cut-up approach and familiar tropes of near-future techno-dystopia were particularly evident in ‘Moonshadow’ (Fig. 2.4), which intercut voices in incongruous registers identified graphically using indented margins and contrasting upper and lower case type: “IT’S COMING FROM THE VAN ALLEN BELT!”/I have spilled my coffee’. The discontinuous narrative bends space and time as a cheerless futuristic setting of collapsible cars, ‘air-lock silence’, and the ‘empty moan of spacebreezes’, nebulously collapses into the sinking of the Titanic and the Kennedy assassination in a very Burroughsian fashion. Disorienting effects (both verbal and graphic) are used to connect the reader’s/listener’s interpretation to the narrator’s experience of ontological destabilisation, and thereby suggest the duplicity of language and its susceptibility to manipulation.

As stated, this breaking open of any transparent connection between word and meaning was a key aspect of Revival poetics. Like the Revival poets, Moore’s *Embryo* poems were increasingly written with live reading in view, demonstrating an attention to the acoustic qualities of performed verse and an exploration of the auditory effects of the spoken word. As Moore later recalled, ‘most of the writing I used to do was used for performance, so consequently I learnt that when you are reading a poem it has to read properly, which is to do with syllables and stresses’.¹³³ He particularly experimented with the rhythmic possibilities and phonic materiality of compound words, as in the futurist ‘Paranopolis’ with its gunfire alliteration of ‘MANIAC WHITELINEATING MOTTORMATTERWAY’ and iconic onomatopoeia of ‘tubestraintrain echoes’.¹³⁴ It was involvement in the Northampton Arts Lab that provided Moore the opportunity to regularly read his poems at their Tuesday night youth centre gatherings, as well as perform them at the poetry nights they organised at different venues across the city. However, the Lab also allowed him to branch out into other artistic fields and multi-media practices, and he experimented not only with poetic form but hybrid performance that included light

MOONSHADOW. ALAN MOORE.

Out between the planets, singing the shadowed tunes of Uranus
 And sliding through the siren song of Neptune, alone
 Amongst the nebulae, the half morning of Mercury whispering into
 The illuminated lips of Sirius, merging into earlyday
 Newyork emptystreet windmorning, the vast globe of the colliding planetoid
 Approaching above the skyscraper skyline...

BACK THROUGH THE MOONSHADOW I RUN, REALISING THAT YOU ARE STILL INSIDE
 AND THAT I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT TO GET YOU OUT...

Alone in the coffeesteam solitude
 Of the midnight cafeteria, eyes misted and
 noiseless...

" IT'S COMING FROM THE VAN ALLEN BELT!
 IT'S COMING FROM THE VAN ALLEN BELT!"
 I have spilled my coffee. It dribbles like
 black and molten plastic into my lap.
 With a dull and lonely ache I realise that
 My planet is about to die.
 I am crying.

AS THE BIZARRE MULTICOLOUR COMICSTRIP ALIENS ENTERED THE SMOOTH
 YELLOW ROOM
 IT AIMED BY RAYGUN AND FIRED...

Turning, I climbed into the collapsible car
 and headed for the airlock silence of
 the vacuum zone...

Grey and windwashed officebuilding corridors aching with tormented,
 Lonely not-light, empty moan of spacebroozes down dim and sterile
 newspaper flapping windrush corridors and with a sudden feeling of
 terror I realised that I was in the vacuum zone....

" WHERE AM I? WHAT SHIP IS THIS?"
 " YOU ARE ABOARD THE TITANIC. WE ARE HEADING
 FOR CAPE RACE."
 " BUT THIS SHIP WILL SINK.. 1600 PEOPLE LOST.."
 " I KNOW..."

The captains face was powder white in the light of Aldebaran, and the
 Great steel lemming headed deeper and deeper into the twilight region...
 Into the vacuum zone...

IT WAS APRIL 14, 1912..

Just as the moon turned red I climbed
 Onto the freight car and headed for the
 Vacuum zone...

Kennedy smilewave, bulletskull and crucified angels along the road to
 Dallas.
 The colliding planetoid is almost here. Is almost here. Is almost...

Electric-grey images of disasterflashing
 Like blindman feverdream
 Through the Saturnian cinema...
 Outside the gibbering and chooping
 As the ghouls congregate

Already we are entering the vacuum zone. The moonshadow is growing larger..

Fig. 2.4 Alan Moore. 'Moonshadow', *Embryo 2* (December 1970) p. 20.
 © Alan Moore

shows and music, costumes and props, highlighting the convergence of the verbal and the visual. Some of these were devised in advance by Moore and collaborators such as Brian Ratcliffe, while other occasions were recalled as being more improvisational—local folk musician Tom Hall would ‘play something impromptu and we’d perform it with that, and it would be beautiful’.¹³⁵ Combining poetry with other media was also developed in Moore’s later comics practice, for example with his poem ‘The Mirror of Love’ which appeared in the *AARGH! (Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia)* benefit anthology with illustrations by Steve Bissette and Rick Veitch, and later in book form accompanied by photographs by José Villarubia.

Psychedelic Visions

A similar freeform, exploratory, and composite approach was taken to *Embryo*’s visual form. The zine’s graphic design was constrained by its method of reproduction—to use a stencil duplicator, text had to be typed onto a stencil sheet of waxed or plastic-coated paper backed by a sheet of carbon paper, onto which headlines and drawings could be cut with a stylus or stencil pen.¹³⁶ Most illustrations were simple line drawings—areas of dense shading or solid black ink didn’t print well because they would cause the absorbent paper used to stick to the drum of the duplicator machine, and instances including large areas of black ink printed with a mottled textured surface as a result. As Moore himself put it, given the constraints of the simple technology, ‘a kind of a faux Aubrey Beardsley Art Nouveau line was about the best thing that you could manage’.¹³⁷ Although it was cheap and widely accessible, stencil duplication meant limited print runs (often a maximum of 500 copies before the stencil tore) and low print quality, with poor registration, unwanted blotching, and uneven inking common, as well as a tendency for the absorbent paper to look grey and dull and for printing on one side of the paper to show through on the other.¹³⁸ Using a manual typewriter to produce the stencils meant that type was often not cleanly cut, or conversely the centres of ‘e’s and ‘o’s dropped out if typed with too much pressure. Without a IBM golfball typewriter, *Embryo* was further limited to using a single standard typeface of uniform weight and point size, and, not being typeset, was restricted to monospaced type (i.e., with a fixed character width) that gave it a mechanical appearance and made it harder to read.

Nevertheless, in a nod to the graphic experimentalism of concrete poetry, *Embryo* played around with shifting margins, indents, fluctuating line length and column width, contrasts between lower- and upper-case type, and irregular spacing between words and lines, as in Moore's 'Moonshadow'. However, the majority of the visual interest came from Moore's line drawings, which filled the blank spaces of almost every page. Despite their simplicity in terms of the absence of tonal variation (apart from a few standalone images that used stark contrast of blank page and dappled black ink), these illustrations created some striking page compositions. In certain cases, they decoratively framed the poems or were interspersed among them, but increasingly they formed full page images that cut across lines of text in dynamic diagonals (see Fig. 2.5). In terms of iconography, Moore's illustrations featured generic science fiction and fantasy imagery, including wizards with long beards and voluminous cowls, and long-haired maidens with similarly flowing robes or pulpy futuristic capes. The figure of a bald, pointy-eared alien with an elongated neck, reminiscent of Dan Dare's antagonist The Mekon, featured on the cover of the first issue and on repeated occasions in the interiors. Often these figures were theatrically posed, with a hand or arm outstretched, or hair and clothing swirling and billowing in emulation of the flowing outline and soft cuts of hippie fashion—allowing those sinuous lines to sweep across the page and through the typed text, creating a lively, somewhat melodramatic sense of movement.

Generally, Moore's drawings were seemingly unrelated to the poems, but occasionally he would visualise specific poetic imagery. Often this illustrated the more deadpan observations of everyday life in Northampton from core contributors such as Andy Cooper and Ian Fleming. One example is Cooper's 'Son of Haight Ashbury', which, accompanied by an image of nonchalant figure in flares and fur-trimmed coat standing in a puddle, satirised Northampton's 'weekend hippies': 'Lost in a wilderness/Between the Lion and the Plough/On a Sunday night/Roam wild the forgotten children of/Woodstock nation — Northampton style'.¹³⁹ On occasion, sharp contradictions were created between Moore's enthusiastically psychedelic drawings and poems that dealt with this more mundane subject matter, highlighting the disjuncture between notions of a revolution in perception inspired by LSD and the more austere reality of a declining industrial town. In one such instance (Fig. 2.5), Ian Fleming's account of bus journeys through the 'wet suburban void' and Alex Wood's reflections on a dead neighbour,

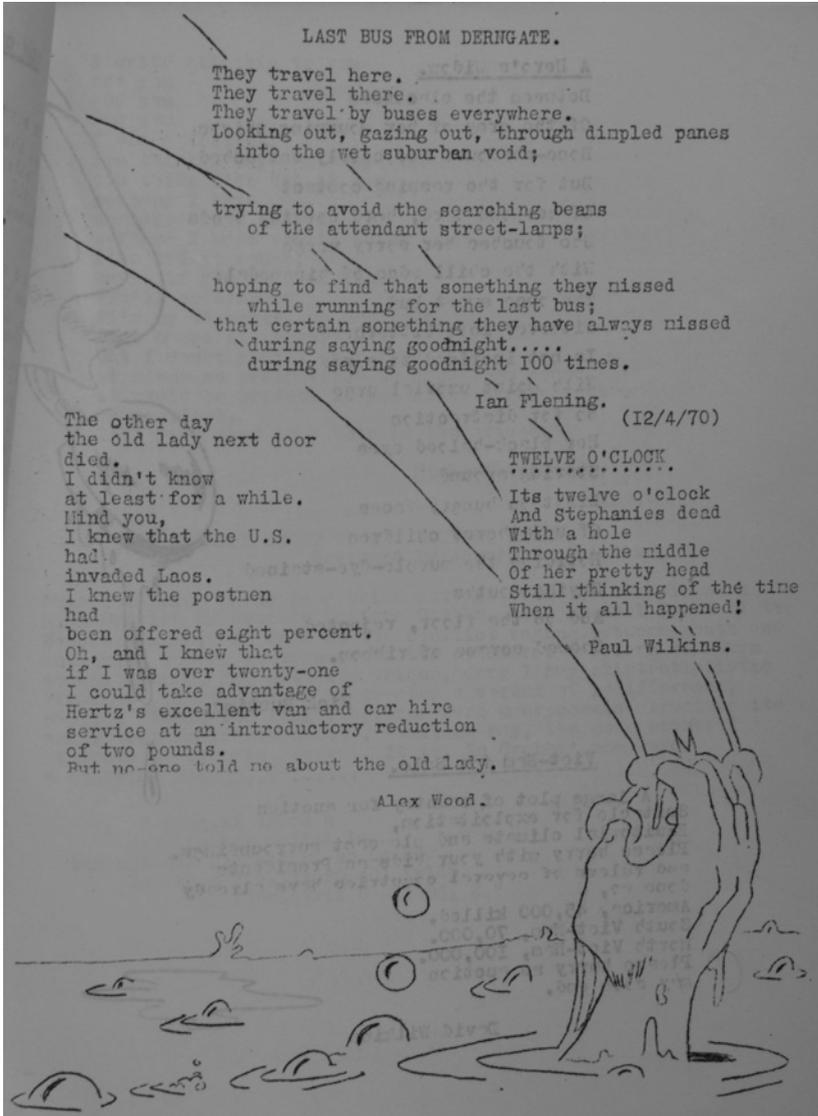


Fig. 2.5 Alan Moore. *Embryo 3* (February 1971) illustration. © Alan Moore

the postal strike, and car hire advertising, were incongruously juxtaposed with an image of a hand rising dramatically from a bubbling pool of liquid and launching an arc of light across the page like a space rainbow.

Moore's drawings often made use of such sweeping contours and long, winding lines, along with distorted bubbling or dripping forms that suggested disintegration and metamorphosis. Repeated marks were often used to reproduce lighting or atmospheric effects, suggesting twinkling stars, snow, or licks of flame, further adding to a sense of animation and instability to his images. Often this would obscure or distract from the legibility of the poems, both calling attention to the page as a marked surface and prompting a seeing through it in terms of pictorial depth that interfered with the reading of the text across it. Designing and illustrating the majority of the *Embryo* covers (four out of the five published), produced using an electronic stencil cutter rather than cut manually, gave him further scope graphically. With electrostencil a greater range of imagery could be reproduced, including dry transfer lettering, screentone (patterns of dots transferred from pre-printed sheets also known as instant tone or mechanical tints), and halftone photographs, as well as greater tonal variation. Moore used a range of different typographic styles on his covers. The cover of issue 3, an image apparently swiped from a science-fiction magazine, combined an ornate curvilinear typeface with spiral loops and tails used for the title, with an epigram in heavily gothic block typeface. Contrastingly, the covers of issues 2 and 5 employed overlapping and distended hand-drawn bubble letterforms (see Fig. 2.6). In terms of composition, the covers used a bold symmetrical stained-glass window arrangement, with decorative patterned borders and arched headlines framing the central imagery, producing a sense of fullness and stasis. However, illustrating them also allowed Moore to begin to develop the densely worked textures and high-contrast tonal effects that would become characteristic of his later cartooning style, and produced a converse sense of movement and plurivocality. The cover of the third issue embellished the original image with a combination of screentone and his own fine hatching to create a vibrating optical effect emanating from the moon. The cover of issue 5 (Fig. 2.6) combined textured pattern with glassy tonal contrast, particularly in the figure's hair. Although, like the interior illustrations, the covers were black and white images, they were printed on coloured paper that varied even within each printing, further speaking to an emphasis on playful mutability in their design.



Fig. 2.6 Alan Moore. *Embryo* 5 (November 1971) cover. © Alan Moore

Moore's developing illustrative style, seen most fully in the *Embryo* covers, owed a great deal to psychedelic visual art and particularly the innovative graphic design of record sleeves, underground papers, and

posters. The term psychedelic (literally mind-revealing) had been coined by British psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond in 1957 to describe ‘the effects that hallucinogenic drugs produced in the conscious mind by altering visual and auditory sensations’.¹⁴⁰ LSD consumption produced what German-American psychologist Heinrich Klüver called ‘form constants’, spirals, loops, coils, twirls and cones, and dense lattice, filigree, honeycomb, and chessboard patterns, as well as polyopia (the multiplication of a single image), size variation (micropsia and macropsia), and enhanced colour perception.¹⁴¹ Many artists and designers tried to reproduce these effects in everything from graphics to textiles, and produce psychedelic work that similarly invoked the immersive, euphoric feeling of a trip down the rabbit hole into a world of imagination beyond the reality perceived by ordinary consciousness.

Posters, in particular, became expressions of this aesthetic in which ‘neon colours, spinning shapes, and dense, space-filling patterns are used to translate the psychedelic experience’.¹⁴² In the UK, notable poster artists included Michael English and Nigel Waymouth, whose work as Hapshash and the Coloured Coat ‘defined the visual mood of late 1960s counterculture design’, alongside Martin Sharp, one of the Australian founders of *Oz*, and Bob Linney, Ernie Hudson, and Ken Meharg at the Birmingham Lab (see Fig. 2.7).¹⁴³ Moore himself designed many of the posters for Northampton Arts Lab events.¹⁴⁴ Countercultural posters operated as a kind of threshold, using psychedelic visual effects to invoke ontological destabilisation, and suggest a liminal conjuncture of the material world of the everyday urban environment with an imaginative realm of expanded consciousness. This reflected the prevalent Blakean metaphor of the ‘doors of perception’ taken by Aldous Huxley as the title of his famous account of using mescaline, and which gave the Doors their name, as well as the San Francisco Diggers’ ludic use of a ‘Free Frame of Reference’, a giant yellow picture frame that participants were invited to step through.¹⁴⁵ However, by acting, like LSD itself, as an entry point to an alternate reality of heightened perception and establishing a cohesive visual identity for the heterogeneous counterculture, these posters also played a gatekeeping role. As many commentators have pointed out, as much as hippie posters aimed to reproduce the psychedelic experience, they also served to exclude the uninitiated, those squares who did not pass the acid test. As such, according to art historian Scott Montgomery, ‘viewing and comprehending the fluid cultural coding within these posters was an essential part of countercultural

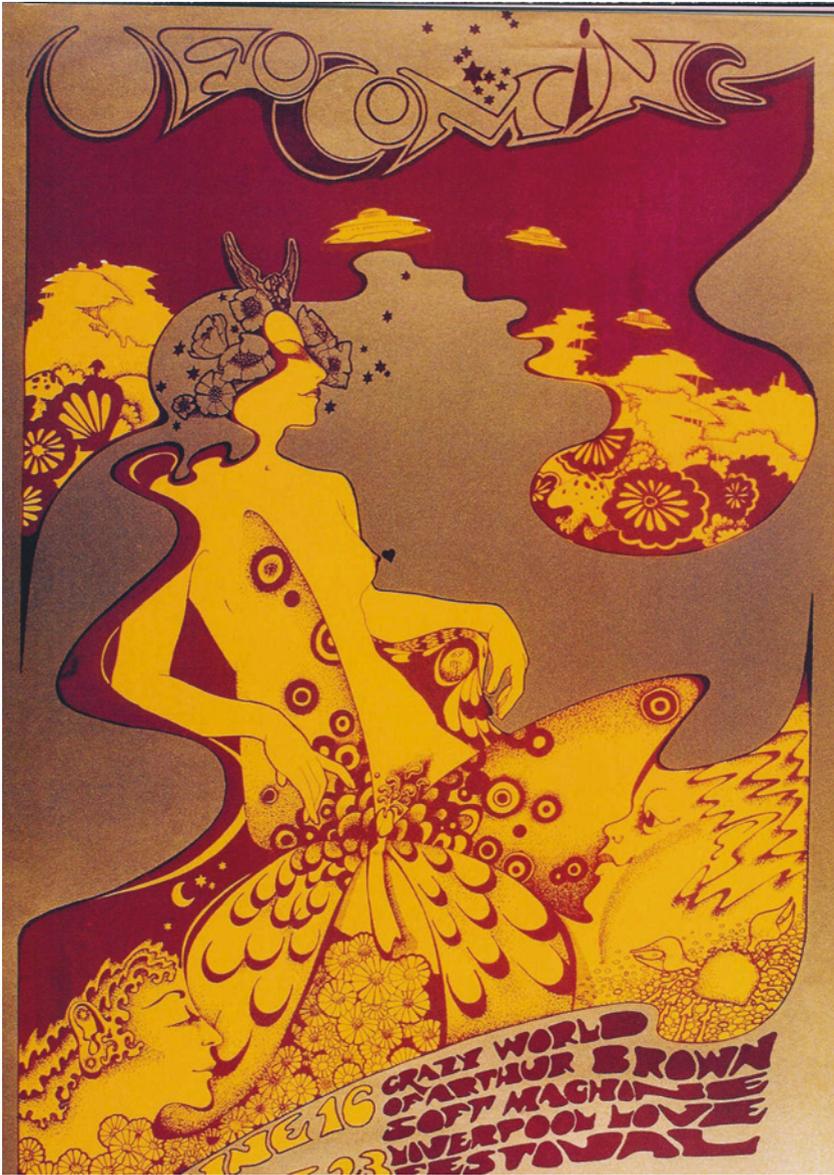


Fig. 2.7 Hapshash and the Coloured Coat. UFO poster (June 1967).
© Michael English and Nigel Waymouth

identification and self-definition'.¹⁴⁶ This is supported by *IT*'s own analysis of the way posters notified heads about its UFO club nights:

UFO posters were designed not to blast the information across but to attract people who "felt" for that type of "psychedelic" design to look further into the poster and eventually decypher [sic] the address and time. The medium WAS the message completely. A revolution in design-effectiveness.¹⁴⁷

The way that posters fulfilled this gatekeeping role was precisely through their contravention of the dominant principles of commercial graphic design. Developments in post-war poster design had been led by the modernist principles of immediacy, legibility, and clarity, with controlled geometric composition, photography favoured over hand-drawn illustration, rectilinear bands of text laid out on areas of pure, often primary, colour, and clean, sans-serif typefaces. Psychedelic posters were almost the direct opposite. Compositions were decorative, with elements overlapping, intersecting, and mirroring each other, and ornate, organic patterns filling the picture space to create dense, varied textures and optical effects that produced the illusion of motion and pulsation. Fluid drawings blended the thick lines, sinuous scrolls, and arabesques of Art Nouveau with the metamorphic forms of liquid light shows, while also combining the iconography of popular science fiction and children's picture books with erotic imagery and distorted abstract shapes. The rules of traditional colour theory were reversed, with the use of clashing, hyper-saturated complementary colours, which when adjoined created intense vibration effects similar to Op art paintings by figures such as Bridget Riley, and which impeded the viewer's ability to distinguish between elements. Hapshash and the Coloured Coat developed the unusual application of gold and silver metallic inks at the same time as innovating in terms of achieving gradations of different colours in a single print layer. In opposition to Jan Tschihold's well-established modernist ideals of transparent typography, hand-drawn text was treated plastically, with letterforms morphing and distending into asymmetric curves and iconic shapes and set in 360° arrangements. Victorian and Jugendstil typefaces were revived with exaggerated slab serifs or anamorphic distortions.¹⁴⁸ Combined, these design elements created the paradox of a 'slow poster',¹⁴⁹ which required time for the details being communicated (of date, time, location, performers) to be gradually discerned, and both

cognitive and affective modes of interpretation. Like visual poetry, these posters mandated by their indeterminacy a more proactive spectator, while challenging the functionalist imperatives of commercial communication design. The attention drawn to the decorated surface of the work, and the tensions produced between fullness and movement, opacity and denotation, invited the viewer to enter into a game with its elaborate embellishment and look in an unusual, protracted and recursive way.

This spoke to a suspicion of positivist ideas of the semiotic transparency and the rational objective authority of the written word within the counterculture at large, demonstrated in the Burroughsian critique of the way words served to warp and inflect reality in the service of exploitative vested interests that Moore emulated in his poems.¹⁵⁰ The underground was characterised by a converse privileging of embodied aesthetic experience, positioning the extra-semantic aspects of pictorial expression as revelatory, in a way that countered more widespread distrust of the visual image as irrationally deceptive, stimulating, and enthralling, as seen in ongoing condemnations of comics.¹⁵¹ However, rather than a straightforward reversal of iconophobic attitudes, the underground rejected any hierarchy of word and image altogether, at least in any sense of a more or less privileged proximity to an incontrovertible real. This emphasis on the plasticity of visual form, on the tactile materiality of printed surface, and the heuristic value of the decorative shaped Moore's approach to comics in a way that contravenes the prevalent tendency to derogate the illustrative, painterly, noisy, or 'ornamental' aspects of comics form as redundant intrusions on the sleek, stripped down readability of sequential narrative. This attitude can be seen underpinning Peeters' critique of decorative page composition that privileges comics' tabular dimension as tending towards needless 'degradations of sequential continuity' for facile, spectacular aesthetic concerns independent of narrative content.¹⁵² It is similarly evident in ideas of 'narrative drawing' put forward by figures such as Groensteen and Hatfield, which favours a kind of streamlined rhetorical cartooning tending towards maximum legibility and enunciative efficiency, over 'illustrative drawing' that 'leans more heavily towards the decorative', the expressive and the aesthetic.¹⁵³ Psychedelic illustration's converse indulgence in the decorative had a key political aspect in contesting ideas of seamless or transparent readability of visual forms that shaped both post-war graphic design and contemporary comics studies.

Moore would continue to produce psychedelic illustrations over the course of his career, such as his cover art for the 1995 *Hexentexts* CD, which featured the track ‘Hair of the Snake That Bit Me’ he composed with Tim Perkins.¹⁵⁴ An approach to comics design that psychedelically stressed its ornamental tabular aspects over linear sequence can be seen in the visual invention of his, J. H. Williams III, and others’ *Promethea*. The ABC Comics series included a sequence in which the drawn and inked artwork morphed into the photography of Villarubia, as well as a well-known double-page sequence on a Möbius strip that invited a consciously recursive way of looking at the comics page. It also featured an issue that was a continuous circular frieze with decorative Tarot borders, and a final chapter that worked as a typical US comic book but which, unstapled, also folded out into a double sided psychedelic poster. Such emphasis on the global aspect of the comics page and its opaque element as an embellished surface would go on to be a key feature of Moore’s cartooning, opening up a fissure between material form and narrative content by making visual design ostentatious rather than self-effacing, and thereby highlighting unusual ways in which comics can be looked at and handled that stresses the agency of the reader.

New Worlds of Comics

The hybrid form of comics had clear appeal as a site to similarly explore the tensions between abstraction and figuration, opacity and transparency, movement and stasis, played on in psychedelic posters. One of Moore’s earliest attempts to bring together his experiments with poetry and illustration in comics, while continuing to traverse both fantastic outer and inner worlds, appeared in the guise of unfinished science-fiction strip ‘Once There Were Daemons’, the first page of which featured in *Deliver Us From All Rovel* and which continued with a further four pages in *Embryo*’s final issue of November 1971 (Fig. 2.8). Moore had previously contributed several short comics to *Embryo* including a series of strips entitled ‘Window Funnies’ featuring a crude blobby cartoon figure in a variety of surreal situations. These included self-reflexive play with comics structure, the second instalment dealing with a progressively disintegrating setting that ultimately included the disappearance of the panel borders. ‘Once There Were Daemons’ involved a convoluted storyline that begins with a mutant trapped on a spaceship having been pursued by a bald telepathic cyborg bounty-hunter called The Incubus (who



Fig. 2.8 Alan Moore. 'Once There Were Daemons', *Embryo* 5 (November 1971). © Alan Moore

looks like the Vision or the Silver Surfer), and the two of them subsequently captured by the Qys (a name later used by Moore for another alien race in *Marvelman*). It then abruptly shifts location to the planet Wick, where Kklq, a ‘blind warp wizard’ (with more than a passing resemblance to Swamp Thing), is similarly hunted by the Qys’ android sentinels.

Moore’s overarching interest in the science fiction genre, evident across all his contributions to *Embryo*, was shared by many in the hippie counterculture. Science fiction periodical print culture had important correlations with poetry zine and underground press publishing, with DIY fan practices shaping the digest magazines that formed its economic foundations, until they were displaced by paperbacks from the late 1960s onwards.¹⁵⁵ Moore’s earliest published work had come through his own involvement in the overlapping comics, science-fiction, and horror fanzine scenes of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Having met the young Dave Womack at the second British comics convention in 1969, he sent him some illustrations and an article on Lovecraft, the latter of which featured in the first issue of his dual comics fanzine/adzine *Utopia/Vallhalla* in February 1970. This was followed by Aubrey Beardsley-inspired artwork and an article on The Shadow, which appeared in horror fanzine *Seminar* in November 1970; and illustrations, poetry, book reviews, and prose fiction in amateur horror anthology *Weird Window* in 1971.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Moore’s involvement in comics fandom and the fanzine scene was not only his ‘first exposure to a creative community’, but the way that he entered the counterculture, as a result of its crossover with the underground.¹⁵⁷

In terms of UK science and speculative fiction, the politically radical, experimental new-wave science fiction (SF) published in *New Worlds* magazine under the editorship of Michael Moorcock from 1964 was particularly impactful, *New Worlds* itself having started life as the fanzine *Novae Terrae*. Moorcock was an enduring influence on Moore, as an anarchist writer who also penned lyrics for, and performed poetry with, psychedelic rock band Hawkwind, who were partly inspired by his Eternal Champion. Science fiction spoke to the generational consciousness of the counterculture that perceived itself in evolutionary terms as a kind of post-human mutation, and its sense of cultural dislocation from a broader social entropy epitomised by the devastation of the H-bomb and the psychosis of bomb culture. As Colin Greenland puts it, *New Worlds* was ‘very much a magazine of the 1960s in its commitment to the popular arts, to freedom of imagination, to the original and the

unconventional'.¹⁵⁸ It shared the counterculture's valuing of aesthetic originality, social relevance, liberated sexuality, and creative autonomy, as well as its combative relationship with the authorities over freedom of expression, and precarious reliance on Arts Council subsidy. Moorcock vociferously defended writers such as Burroughs against allegations of obscenity, and battled WH Smith over refusals to stock issues of the magazine deemed offensive, in the wake of questions being asked in the House of Commons as to 'why public money was being spent on filth'.¹⁵⁹

In terms of content, many of *New Worlds'* contributions concerned inner rather than outer voyaging, exploring the internal spaces of consciousness and the perception of the individual estranged and dislocated from the technocratic world of modern experience—interrogating the feeling, as J. G. Ballard put it, that 'the only true alien planet is Earth'.¹⁶⁰ This subjective aspect contrasted to the genre's established emphasis on 'objects and objectives, mechanics and materials', at the same time replacing imperialist frontier heroics with downbeat themes of void, existential angst, and equivocation over technological development.¹⁶¹ This was matched by stylistic innovations in dissociation and ambiguity, using fragmentation and incoherence to disorientate the reader. In Greenland's words, this allowed them a 'more imaginative entry into the text', in a way commensurate with both visual poetry and psychedelic graphics—a new form of hyperconscious writing that demanded a more hyperconscious reading.¹⁶²

Moore's 'Once There Were Daemons', likely through a combination of intention and inexperience, certainly disorients the reader. Its structure is abstruse, with the obscure connections between different story strands held together by an ambiguous, indeterminate narrator in lengthy captions that comment obliquely on both the past encounter between mutant and cyborg, and the future significance of the three Qys targets. The device of telepathy emphasises the protracted internal reflections and subjective perceptions of characters in a way that contradicts the relatively short duration of the scenes depicted, creating a disjuncture between the time of the action and the time of reading. In terms of textual content, the captions of wordy commentary are accompanied by sizable boxes containing the mental directives of The Incubus and the internal monologue of Kklq. Word and thought balloons provide the contrastingly abridged, functional utterances of the Qys and prosaic responses of the mutant, the latter providing a deadpan humour

and indicating a certain self-deprecating awareness of the rest of the strip's bombast. This layering of voices creates a confusing montage effect, exacerbated by Moore's use of unpronounceable alien names that emphasise the acoustic form and concrete materiality of words. The reader's confusion is shared reflexively by Kklq in the final scene, as, in phrasing itself unfamiliar and estranging, the warlock observes: 'Qys ... This does not make logic. It is a not-word'. This was an approach to language that Moore would again use in *The Ballad of Halo Jones*, which plunges the reader into a world of outlandish futuristic slang, as well as working alien languages and alphabets devised by artist Ian Gibson.

This alienation of the reader is extended in 'Once There Were Daemons's divergence from established conventions of comics' visual design and resulting disruption of habituated reading protocols. Page layouts are striking and baroque, with panels of dramatically contrasting sizes and irregular shapes. Figures consistently bleed over or traverse panel borders, or frame scenes with the outlines of their own bodies, as in the overlapping collage of panels that composes two-thirds of the second page, creating uncertainty as to the correct reading order. The confounding dynamism of this page layout is compounded by panel breakdowns that intercut dramatically shifting points of view, discontinuous tight closeups, and extreme foreshortened perspectives, along with an illustrative style that uses patterned backgrounds filled with lines or dots to contribute to the high-contrast tonal modelling of figures. This dramatic chiaroscuro is echoed in the alternation of replete, heavily-inked, figurative panels with ones entirely composed of captions in white space, a checker-board device Moore similarly used in a comic strip in *Fitzrovel*.

This early attempt at visual storytelling is noticeably rough and imbalanced, particularly in the terms of lettering and composition, with an overwhelming amount of text per panel and words awkwardly squeezed into caption space as a result of poor copy-fitting. Like the illustration in the comics fanzines Moore subscribed and contributed to, much of the imagery was swiped from comics he was reading in this period, perhaps accounting for its montage effect.¹⁶³ As a result, 'Once There Were Daemons' gives a sense of the work that was influencing Moore at this time, with a clear debt to the late 1960s Marvel work of artists, such as Jim Steranko, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko, on titles such as *Silver Surfer*, *Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD* and *Doctor*

Strange. As Lance Parkin has pointed out, this work, esteemed by both Moore and nascent UK comics fandom more widely, had affinities with psychedelic art in the tendency towards introspective narratives and experimentation with visually arresting layouts that were ‘more stylised and impressionistic’.¹⁶⁴ The use of acute foreshortening and ornate page design with panels sutured by overlapping figures, and the inclusion of abstract patterned marks to provide energy and movement is particularly redolent of Kirby’s Marvel work and its infamous crackle.¹⁶⁵ The prolix captions could even be seen as an emulation of Stan Lee’s garrulous editorialising. However, Moore’s use of dramatic tonal contrast and dynamic breakdowns also evidenced the increasing availability of older work by figures such as Will Eisner and Wally Wood through reprint collections of *The Spirit* and EC titles in the UK.¹⁶⁶ These were all elements that would be developed in his later, more original cartooning, alongside the stylistic effects of indeterminacy and reflexivity drawn from visual poetry, psychedelic poster design, and new-wave science fiction, which reflected ideas of a transformed orientation toward the reader.

RE-FORMING AND PERFORMING IN NORTHAMPTON: FROM ARTS LAB TO ARTS GROUP

The development of Moore’s particular graphic sensibility and approach to creative work was, as has been argued, deeply embedded in the wider cultural radicalism of the counterculture as a whole as channelled through the Northampton Arts Lab. However, the existence of the Lab was precarious and by the end of the summer of 1972 it had disbanded. According to its successor, the Northampton Arts Group, the causes were ‘very similar to those that caused the demise of similar groups everywhere—lack of money, public support at gigs, really good usable premises and equipment, and the general frustration of not getting very far, all of which caused general disillusionment’.¹⁶⁷ The final Northampton contribution to the *Arts Lab Newsletter* particularly noted frustration at their lack of progress in procuring a dedicated space, with Janice Smith professing ‘this whole premises thing is so depressing ... Richard and I have equipment, files, funds, posters, *IT* copies piling up around our bedsit which leaves very little room for twenty people in a meeting trying out new techniques for lightshows’.¹⁶⁸

The Birmingham Arts Lab owed much of its longevity to funding from the Arts Council. Labour's Arts Minister, Jenny Lee, had made expanding regional funding a distinctive aim in the 1960s, as part of a larger project for a kind of redistribution of minority culture via increased arts subsidy, viewed as a way of ameliorating wider social problems. However, as it continued to prioritise traditional elite culture, as 'civilising, uplifting, and a barrier to commercial mass culture', the government had trouble situating new intermedia forms within the ACGB's standard categorisation of the arts.¹⁶⁹ In 1969, the Arts Council established a New Activities Committee (NAC) to provide funds for such challenging contemporary practices, which included a sub-committee investigating the work of the Arts Labs. One of the Birmingham Lab's co-founders, Peter Stark, sat on the NAC and its successor body, the Experimental Projects Committee. They managed to secure a grant of £1500, with ACGB chairman, Michael Astor, apparently arriving at Tower Street with the cheque in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce.¹⁷⁰ A similar sum was allocated to establish a Midlands Regional Arts Co-operative (MRAC), one of the eight covering the Arts Lab network, to assess and provide a platform for 'new activities' across the region. A subsequent gathering was organised by Stark and the MRAC in Birmingham, with artists and performers attending from over 40 groups, including members of the Northampton Lab, who performed jazz and poetry.¹⁷¹ Participants agreed to distribute the remaining money amongst them, with Stark as regional coordinator inviting letters of application. The Northampton Lab applied for a grant to help them acquire premises and continue their work.¹⁷² At a further meeting held in February 1970, where delegates for each group argued their case, they were awarded £20, by no means enough to realise their ambitions.¹⁷³ Moore himself recalled a further application for ACGB funding, a move he vocally opposed, in which the Northampton group wrote 'a 50-page summary of our activities ... and they offered us five pounds'.¹⁷⁴

This demonstrated the problems faced by the Arts Labs in their efforts to secure official funding, which had been raised as a key issue at the 1969 Arts Lab conference in Cambridge. According to Rufus Harris' summary, participants complained that 'long slow negotiations with bodies such as the Arts Council ... very often result in nothing at all, or so little bread that you sit back and realise you could have spent the same amount of time and energy earning it'.¹⁷⁵ The Birmingham group itself bucked the trend, managing to acquire more substantial funds. However,

government subsidy led inexorably to changes in the Birmingham Lab, as it made the ‘painful transition from hippie commune to a formally-constituted publically-funded organisation’, arguably relinquishing its anti-institutional role, and particularly losing its appealing anarchic nature when it moved premises to the Holt St Brewery site in Gosta Green in the late 1970s.¹⁷⁶ Overall, the fact that the Arts Labs had to turn to government support to realise their ambitions and avoid collapse revealed the practical difficulty of maintaining parallel social institutions and the contradictory dependence of the counterculture more broadly on the state.

Despite the demise of the Northampton Arts Lab, several members and contributors to *Embryo* and *Rovel* went on to form the analogous Northampton Arts Group in the spring of 1973, and Moore was also involved. The group was a loose association of around 20 members that put on events featuring experimental music, poetry, performance, and lightshows, and produced three issues of a magazine of poetry, prose, and reviews that went by three different titles (issue 1 being *Myrmidon*, issue 2 *Bedlam*, and the third entitled simply *Northampton Arts Group Magazine*). Moore produced the covers for all three issues (see Fig. 2.9), his work on *Myrmidon* again emulating psychedelic poster art in its decorative symmetrical composition, disintegrating spiral forms, tonal patterns, and particularly in the extreme contortion and distended arrangement of the letterforms in the almost illegible title. In both this and ‘Lounge Lizards’, Moore demonstrated an increasing control in his mark-making and arrangement of forms in pictorial space. The latter illustration was apparently what he subsequently had in mind when drafting ‘The Doll’ for DC Thomson’s Scriptwriter Talent competition, a pitch for a strip about a ‘freakish terrorist in white face makeup’ that would later influence the character design of V in *V for Vendetta*.¹⁷⁷ Moore also contributed dystopian prose pieces to the Arts Group magazines and freeform poems such as ‘The Electric Pilgrim Zone Two’, which layered mundane quotidian reality with fantastical romance in an mournful elegy for a lost world of the imagination reminiscent of *Embryo*’s ‘Deathshead’:

And Tristan watched the Spectre-castles sink into the loam of time
and none remember, none believe they stood
But reared their office blocks and counted change
and gave up truth with Alcohol for Lent
Cashed in their gowns of gold for rags of grey
and never wondered where the heroes went.¹⁷⁸

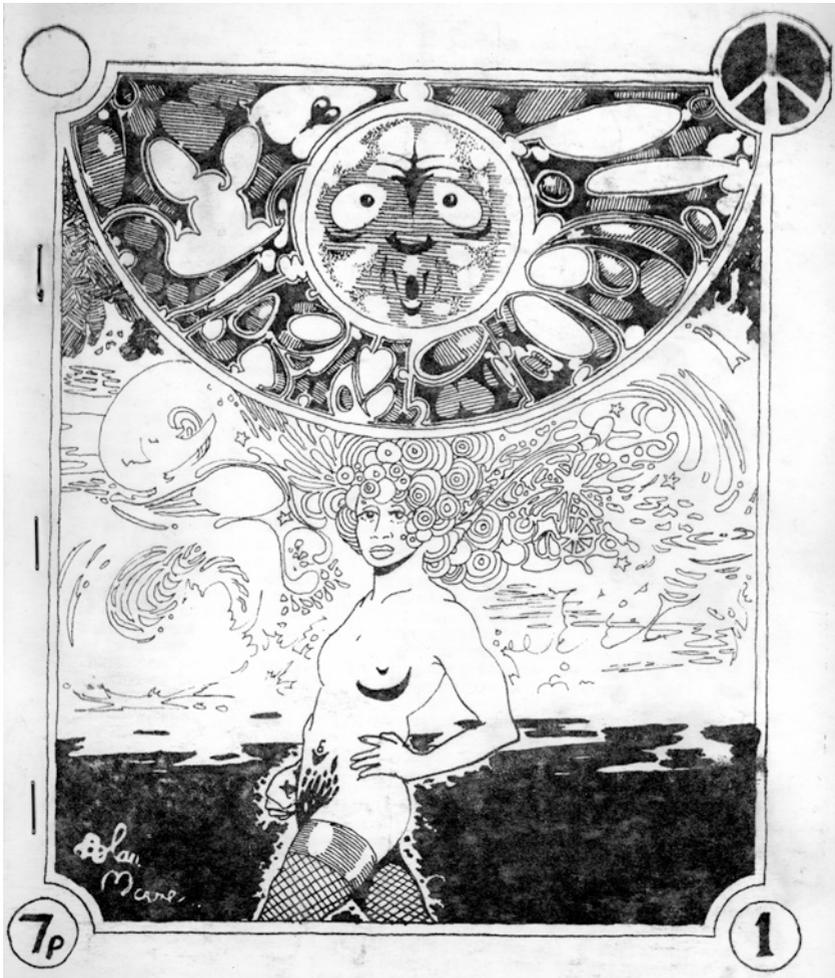


Fig. 2.9 Alan Moore. *Myrmidon* (1973) cover. © Alan Moore

Life's Just a Cabaret: Another Suburban Romance

Although Moore was listed as only an 'occasional' member of the group, he was apparently an 'inevitable' presence at poetry readings, performing pieces called *Lester the Geek* and *Hymn to Mekon*, accompanied by music, as well as songs by political psychedelic rock band the Fugs and folk-rock singer Roy Harper.¹⁷⁹ Performance was the ongoing mainstay of his creative practice and would shape his work across all art forms. From the poetry readings of the Arts Lab and Arts Group, Moore became 'increasingly aware of what an audience responded to',¹⁸⁰ and 'how certain rhythms could generate different effects and hold the attention of the audience'.¹⁸¹ A performance of an earlier version of 'The Electric Pilgrim', which had appeared in *Embryo* 5, as a staged drama with participants acting the parts of the 'psychedelic saint' Tristram, his lover Andromeda, and a wizened Merlin, had led to a realisation that what looked good on the page, didn't necessary sound good as spoken word ('there were too many syllables the lines had no rhythm to them').¹⁸² This fed into this growing 'obsession with rhythm' in both visual and verbal work, as 'even in your work that is to appear on the printed page, the audience will be creating their own rhythm inside their heads', demonstrating the ways that performance influenced Moore's practice across different media.¹⁸³

Moore had been inspired by the touring performance groups the Lab had hosted, particularly the Principle Edward's Magic Theatre group based at a commune in Kettering, who blended music, dance, light shows, poetry, and drama.¹⁸⁴ Their name, with its conflation of theatre and magic taken from Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, was later echoed in *The Moon and Serpent Grand Egyptian Theatre of Marvels*, the first of several one-off, site-specific, multi-media ritual performances Moore was later involved with in the 1990s, as well as the apparently non-existent magical cabal of collaborators that produced them.¹⁸⁵ As stated, Moore, too, amalgamated various art forms, techniques, and materials in his Arts Lab performances, reflecting the 'basic Arts Lab agenda, which tended towards multimedia'.¹⁸⁶ One of his collaborations with Brian Ratcliffe, who had an interest in the mechanics of comics, involved using an overhead projector to create a 'live comic strip, where we would project up speech bubbles and an array of characters stood in the right positions on stage acting out this drama'.¹⁸⁷ A large cardboard panel framework was created on stage, with costumed performers appearing within its panels

and their word balloons and sound effects projected as text.¹⁸⁸ Although the words were apparently barely readable, the experiment recalled the early fusion of performance, drawing and animation in vaudeville acts by strip cartoonists such as Winsor McCay, as well as Brecht's use of projected inscriptions in works such as his and Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*.¹⁸⁹

Moore saw the 'pinnacle' of his early experiments with language, rhythm, music, and performance as the recitation piece 'Old Gangsters Never Die' written in 1974, during the period of his involvement with the Northampton Arts Group. It would later form part of a piece of musical theatre he co-scripted in 1976 with future *Hellblazer* writer Jamie Delano, who he met through the Arts Group, called *Another Suburban Romance*. The play was designed to include a 'number of ambitious lighting effects' and an 'elaborate taped backing track' of 'very prog/Zappa ish' music composed by Glyn Bush (aka Grant Series) and Michael Chown (aka Pickle/Mr Liquorice) from local band Stanton Walgrave but was never actually performed.¹⁹⁰ It had four scenes and five characters, called Kid, Gangster, Whore, Politico, and Death, and an ambiguous setting, with references to incongruous historical events and cultural phenomena. The plot concerns a search for the mirror used by Bela Lugosi, who had died accidentally having cut himself shaving, which all the characters view as a way of making money, but which ultimately leads them to a darkly absurd ending in Death's office. The piece included poems, mime, extended monologues, and discourses on sex as a commodity; political corruption, manipulation, and bureaucracy; and mortality and theology, as well as three songs written by Moore: 'Judy Switched Off the TV', 'Another Suburban Romance', and the repurposed 'Old Gangsters Never Die'. As Hannah Mean-Shannon has observed, the lyrics in all three play with perception and reality, using disjointed, layered, and recursive narrative structures, ambiguous voices, and the conflation of disassociated imagery (as in the 'blitz-kiss' of 'Another Suburban Romance'). This interweaving of what Mean-Shannon calls 'a realism based on observation' with 'jumps into the surreal or absurd', recalled Moore's *Embryo* poetry.¹⁹¹ In a similar fashion, the stylistic indeterminacy of the pieces served to involve the reader in the disturbed state of mind of the narrators, whereby 'the storyteller's perception becomes the reader's reality'.¹⁹²

'Old Gangsters Never Die', in particular, deals reflexively with the act of performance itself, as emphasised in its comics adaptation by Lloyd Thatcher (Fig. 2.10), which comprised part of the artwork that



Fig. 2.10 Alan Moore and Lloyd Thatcher. 'Old Gangsters Never Die'. (1983)
© Alan Moore and Lloyd Thatcher

accompanied the song's later release on a record by the Sinister Ducks, one of the bands Moore was subsequently involved in (see Chap. 3). The recitation was originally performed by the character Gangster in the play. In it he muses on the various sticky ends of mobsters, in a way that serves not only as a reflection on the aesthetics of violence but also on roleplaying, enactment, and spectatorship. The lyrics slip between historical references to figures such as John Dillinger and Al Capone and knowing allusion to the clichés of film noir. Self-referential mention is made to the space of performance itself, the footlights and foyer of the (movie) theatre, and an imagined audience is addressed at the same time as the actual one: 'Hey! Hey John! I got tickets for the show here in my very hand. Enjoy the show'.¹⁹³ The refrain of the title is repeated and the tempo of the spoken word inexorably builds up to an agitated climax before falling away. As Means-Shannon argues, this careful attention to the 'more formal aspects of poetic language and structure' and breaking of the narrative into lines and half-lines using repetition, brings 'the lyrical aspects of the language to the foreground'.¹⁹⁴

This use of metafictional self-referentiality that called the audience's attention to the construction of the work and the artificiality of its performance, had strong connections to Brecht's V-effect. Indeed, *Another Suburban Romance* bore similarities to Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* in its presentation of the proto-fascist collusion of politicians and mafiosos, with the reactionary Politico using Gangster to assassinate civil rights activists and trade union leaders—the establishment and organised crime figured as 'two separate buttocks' of the 'same old asshole'.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, it used several identifiably Brechtian forms of defamiliarisation, including exaggerated anti-naturalist language and gestures, narrated 'voiceovers', direct address to the audience, references to the play itself ('This is the Social Relevance scene, isn't it?'), songs that interrupted and commented on the action, and typification of characters. 'Whore's Poem', for example, was full of self-reflexive allusions to performance—plays, costume changes, and showgirl songs—and included the line 'life's just a cabaret' that anticipated frequent references to cabaret and musical theatre in Moore's work (discussed further in Chap. 3). Highlighting the act of performance in this way opened up a critical perspective on the wider social performance of gender raised in the poem and the various ways women have to monetise their sexuality: 'sell your ass for hard cash or invest it in a wedding ring'.¹⁹⁶

The Brechtian aspects of Moore's play and the wider performativity of his creative output as a whole, testify to the way that the experimental fringe theatre and live art practices of the late 1960s and 1970s drew from traditions of radical theatre. This movement as a whole, was focused on redefining performance, aiming to take work out of theatres and into alternative spaces, blend media and genres, and reconfigure the relationship between performers and spectators. New audiences were sought out by nomadic touring co-operatives, such as the carnivalesque John Bull Puncture Repair Kit, who performed outdoors and at rock festivals; Inter-Action who turned a double-decker bus into a mobile theatre and workshop; and agitprop groups such as Welfare State, who preferred the street to the stage. As documented by Susan Croft and the Unfinished Histories project, they 'experimented with physical and visual vocabularies creating hybrids drawing on clowning, mime, dance, opera, drag acts', as well as panto, music hall, and film.¹⁹⁷ In their desire to transform relationships 'between performers and audiences and between companies and communities' through 'a new directness',¹⁹⁸ they drew on Brecht's theory and practice of epic theatre, and concepts of *Verfremdung*, *Haltung*, and *gestus*, as precursors such as Arnold Wesker had. The also looked to Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed that sought to engage the audience as interactive 'spect-actors' with an aim to motivate critical dialogue and social transformation. However, they equally turned to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and converse ideas of using 'creative disintegration and reduction' to appeal to the senses beyond reason and affect audiences viscerally.¹⁹⁹ As Annalisa di Liddo notes, a further influence was Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre and notions of the collective psychic experience of heightened perception and an intimate encounter between actors and spectators.²⁰⁰ While there were contradictions between collaborating with the spectator as either a critically distanced expert or an immersed participant, there was a general rejection of the naturalistic theatrical conventions and the fetishisation of the dramatist's script. Interactive, collaborative, and improvisational techniques were used to demystify cultural production and destabilise the authority of written texts with an aim to empower audiences as co-producers in the creative process. Epitomising the Arts Lab commitment to transdisciplinary, experimental, and participative cultural practice, radical theatre therefore undertook a functional transformation of the theatrical apparatus, by changing the 'connection between stage and public, text and performance, director and actor'.²⁰¹ By invoking audiences as

producers themselves, it followed Benjamin's ideas of exemplary cultural production in which the 'apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators'.²⁰²

Comics and/as Performance

Among the other art forms that underground theatre groups drew into multimedia performance was comics and cartooning. Ros Asquith produced cartoon illustrations for the Inter-Action Fun Art Bus, while Forkbeard Fantasy blended film, animation, cartoons, and live performance, traversing stage and screen in the vein of McCay. In 1975, the Birmingham Arts Lab toured a stage show performed by Paul Fisher with costumes designed by Suzy Varty, based on the Dogman character that first appeared in stage monologues written by Fisher and then in comics form illustrated by Hunt Emerson.²⁰³ All-female troupe Beryl and the Perils deployed the classic British character from DC Thomson's *Topper* as a proto-feminist icon, inspired by Nicola Lane's comics in *IT*. In 1971, agitprop group The General Will toured a play by David Edgar about obscenity, pornography, and the *Oz* trial, called *Rupert*, once again demonstrating the currency of the appropriated comics character as a condensed symbol of the underground as a whole.

In general, the relationship between comics and performance has not received as much critical attention as comics' connections to literature and film. However, there are interesting correlations between the two as multimodal forms that are worth exploring further, particularly for the light shed on the performativity of Moore's practice as a whole. As theatre scholar Jennifer Worth has proposed, both comics and theatre involve a particular admixture of 'narration and imitation', temporality and spatiality, telling and showing (although these are arguably both also present in prose and moving image).²⁰⁴ Worth also points out that the terminology applied in comics analysis often underlines a link to performance, the prime example she gives being Will Eisner who 'borrowed freely from the language of theatre and performance' in his pioneering works *Comics and Sequential Art* and *Graphic Storytelling*, using the term 'actor' to describe the characters who 'speak' to each other through the text, and discussing layout using the term '*mise en page*'.²⁰⁵

The highly disputed origins of comics have been seen by scholars such as David Kunzle to lie in the mass culture of modernity. As such, comic strips of the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth century bore a close relationship not just to newspapers revolutionised by industrial technology, such as steam-driven presses and paper machines, lithography and railways, but also to contemporary forms of popular visual spectacle, such as vaudeville, music hall, cabaret, early cinema, and animation. Like the transmedia iterations of the Yellow Kid in America, early British comics had a synergistic relationship with theatrical performance, with iconic characters such as Ally Sloper appearing in touring music hall acts, as well as magic lantern shows, ventriloquist routines, early live-action film shorts, amateur street theatre, and village parades. At the same time, the ‘funny paper’, *Ally Sloper’s Half Holiday*, included depictions of Sloper on stage, as well as interviews with music hall performers, listings and reviews, and sheet music.²⁰⁶ Similarly, the Casey Court gang from *Illustrated Chips* appeared on the vaudeville circuit in the guise of a stage act that included the young Charlie Chaplin as their leader Billy Baggs, while celebrity performers such as Dan Leno starred in their own comics titles.²⁰⁷ Significantly, it was to many of these earlier forms of popular performance that radical theatre and live art groups of the 1960s and 1970s looked for models of interactivity and audience participation.

As Moore himself has asserted, the Arts Lab performances were the context in which he ‘first started writing songs and working with musicians, which gives you a certain sense of the dynamic of words that you don’t get from any other field of endeavour’.²⁰⁸ His subsequent comics work would continue to demonstrate the attention to the acoustic form of the spoken word, with the use of literary devices, like alliteration and assonance, seen in his *Embryo* poetry, as well as an awareness of the non-verbal aspects of speech, using graphic devices to convey tone, pitch, volume, speed, and pattern. As Miodrag points out, Moore’s engagement with the auditory aspects of language is often non-naturalistic and exaggerated, making frequent use of contrived recitative rhythms, as in the ‘iambic gallop’ of speeches by William Gull in *From Hell*, or V in *V for Vendetta*, along with staged expository dialogues in which characters act as choruses.²⁰⁹ While Miodrag sees these habits as undermining the widespread adulation Moore has received for the quality of his writing, they speak to the theatricality of his work as a whole and the impact of radical fringe theatre and performance art upon it.

Moore's attention to spoken language is crucially connected to an understanding of the embodied nature of speech derived from performance, which equally comes into his comics practice. As explained in the 1987 documentary 'Monsters, Maniacs and Moore', which itself used the framing device of a dialogue between Moore on stage and an audience of himself (that included a performance of 'Old Gangsters Never Die'), in writing comics dialogue, Moore would role-play characters in front of a mirror. This was done to work out how they 'would act', 'how they feel, how they think, how they stand', and particularly, to ascertain the impact of their character and physicality on their verbal expression,²¹⁰ as in Swamp Thing's glacial speech patterns that evoke his global environmental consciousness. This consideration of the staging of character is echoed in Moore's attentiveness to the elements of comics *mise en scène*, including the gesture, pose, expression, and costume of characters and the narrative role of lighting, setting, décor, and diegetic sound. This is evident in his detailed full scripts, which provide suggestions for collaborators about all these elements in the description of panel compositions. For Moore, 'writing short sketches and plays' with the Lab taught him 'about the dynamics of setting scenes up, resolutions, stuff like that',²¹¹ and this included attention to the dramatic possibilities of comics spatial organisation, for instance, making use of the hiatus of the page turn. As Moore attests, 'doing performances you learn a certain amount about dramatics, which doesn't only apply to a stage performance. Things like timing are just as important in comics as they are in theatre, it's just that they are expressed in a different way using a different medium'.²¹²

The multi-media ritual performances, such as *The Birth Caul*, *The Highbury Working*, *Snakes and Ladders*, and *Angel Passage* that Moore went on to produce with The Moon and The Serpent group were conceived explicitly as one-off, site-specific performances tied to a unique location and date in a way that emphasised the contingency of performance. Moore later claimed that such singularity leaves the force and instantaneity of the performance undiluted by repetition, something that, as di Liddo argues, 'comics, permanently fixed on paper and allowing as many readings as one wishes, can only fail to represent'.²¹³ However, this neglects what Brian Wikoff calls the 'structural multiplicity of comics', the fact that a comic in the process of its production 'undergoes several iterations from conceptual activity, scripting or storyboarding, to preliminary sketching, the inking process, transfer to a print-ready

format, colouring, and duplication'.²¹⁴ Common practices of serialisation across several episodes and publication, republication in a number of different formats, and translation into different languages, could be as further such iterations. In some ways, these different stages of a comic's production can be viewed as a series of performances: with its materialisation an improvisational interpretation of its imagined design; the script existing as a kind of score for its visualisation (like the written poem for its recitation), and the mark up of proofs requiring enactment by colour separators and printers. In this sense, a comic is not an immutable and consistently repeatable trans-historical object, but exists as multiple, variable performances that are materially contingent on the processes of production and reproduction, importantly undermining the straightforward ascription of authorship.

Like the performed poem, a comic engages multiple senses and relies on its activation by the reader. As both di Liddo and Worth suggest, this is something also shared with theatre: 'comics, like theatre, are a medium of communication where ... the audience must be "a willing and conscious collaborator" to fill in the gaps of action'.²¹⁵ In many ways, the comics reader collaborates in the construction of meaning by performing acts of what of McCloud famously termed 'closure', participating imaginatively to stitch a narrative together and generate movement from stasis. As many commentators have observed, as a hybrid, multimodal form, this involves a synthesis of reading and looking in a way that consistently calls attention to the concrete materiality of comics. Film theorist and historian Tom Gunning has described the oscillation between reading comics in terms of linear, temporal succession, and spatial totality in theatrical terms:

Comics offers simultaneously two alternative regimes of reading: an overall one that grasps the page as a total design and a successive one that follows the order of successive frames one at a time ... the intricate and varied negotiation a reader *performs* through the confluence of image and words within a course of movement.²¹⁶

There is a further oscillation between figuration and abstraction to be navigated—as Patrick Maynard asserts when applying his work on drawing to comics, this is an indeterminate move made by the viewer of all depictive works 'back and forth between subject and worked medium'.²¹⁷ As a result of such tensions between subject and surface,

story and picture, many comics scholars have highlighted the way comics invoke a heightened awareness of the act of interpretation itself.²¹⁸ A comic to an important extent is therefore also performed by its readers, its meaning additionally contingent on the process of its consumption in a multiplicity of particular contexts. As Ian Hague argues, this performance of the comic by the reader in specific environmental conditions is not a visual process alone, but an experience that involves all the senses: ‘readers do not interact with comics through their eyes alone; their whole bodies are involved in the *performance* of the work’.²¹⁹

What marks Moore out as a ‘truly performing’ comics creator in di Liddo’s words, is the way that he calls attention to these performative and embodied acts of making, remaking, and reading.²²⁰ Di Liddo focuses primarily on the way Moore as comic book writer ‘consciously performs the act of narrating’.²²¹ Yet with the statement that comics is actually an ‘intrinsically performative medium ... where the illusion of mimesis is incessantly broken by the blatant antirealism of the lines that intertwine on the page’, she also raises questions of the performative aspects of cartooning.²²² Approaches to comics following the conduit model have tended to downplay the performative aspects of drawing in comics as it shapes narrative content. Randy Duncan, for example, following McCloud, argues that ‘comics are reductive in creation and additive in reading’, with creators selecting specific instances to encapsulate, which are then to be put together by the reader through closure.²²³ However, while this may speak to the conceptual procedure of constructing a narrative, in terms of the material process, cartooning as a form of drawing and/or painting is additive rather than reductive. As Paul Atkinson argues, ‘the act of drawing, unlike taking a photograph, does not begin with the plenitude of a visual field but instead describes a process whereby the space of the page is marked by the gestural movement of the artist, a process which is retained to some degree in the completed image’.²²⁴ Drawing is thus in part a record of the performance of the graphiateur, and as such, as Groensteen suggests in theatrical terms, comics visual form is partially apprehended as ‘a graphic performance’,²²⁵ one “delectable” on its own terms, in all its graphic materiality’.²²⁶ In Marion’s terms, the graphic line has a dual nature as both *ligne-contour* and *ligne-expression*, the former the line that describes figures and thereby articulates the subject, and the latter the line that maintains some its internal force and compulsion, that restages the act of drawing and thereby distracts from narrative.²²⁷

In the case of Moore's cartooning, this performative, plastic aspect of the line is consistently foregrounded. The dense and patterned mark-making used to create heavy tonal contrast, which he developed in his early comics and cover illustration work with the Arts Lab and Arts Group, gives a sense of intensity and recursivity. There is a feeling of recurrent action, meticulously going over the same space, with multiple lines and dots to build up this patterned tone. This corresponds to Moore's account of his cartooning process: 'I tend to do quite tight pencils—this is why I'm so slow. Rubbing out, drawing again, rubbing out, drawing again, making a mess with graphite thumbprints—then when I'm satisfied with it, going in and doing the inking'.²²⁸ However, this emphasis on a repetitive accumulation of marks also invokes a sense of movement, vibration, and reverberation. This psychedelic approach draws attention to the expressive, material aspects of cartooning, rather than its linear temporal procession, highlighting the page as an embellished surface and a spatial totality. As Atkinson argues, this priority of *ligne-expression*, 'retards the reading of the comic because the eye must attend to the plasticity of the drawn image'.²²⁹ This is matched with the way in which Moore's page layout, as falteringly initiated in 'Once They Were Daemons', often stresses the global tabular arrangement of panels, by virtue of the lack of a determinate reading order for those panels in linear succession, opening the page up to plurivectorial exploration. This foregrounding of cartooning as a material act and graphic performance—by amplifying the tensions in the form—at the same time, therefore, stages the interpretive agency and embodied activity of the reader. This was intimately connected with ideas of the empowering nature of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and incoherence expressed across the performance and print culture of the underground.

Crucially, however, this approach contravenes the widespread demand for unambiguous readability and for comics' graphic form to be self-effacing, to not distract the reader from the story by drawing attention to form. In terms of the politics of the counterculture as a whole, and its rejection of instrumentalism and alienation and emphasis on pleasure, play, and autonomy, it is interesting to consider this embrace of the decorative and opaque elements of form and the materiality of medium over the demands of narrative functionality in terms of the ideology of time. As Scott Bukatman argues, early twentieth-century newspaper strips navigated (and parodied) the rigid, regulated conception of time and the efficient, mechanical movement of bodies within it, visualized in the

chronophotography of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey, and underpinning the instrumental rationality of industrial capitalism. The idea of time as made up of regular, exchangeable units was echoed in the ‘graphic and rhythmic precision’ of uniform grids of equally sized panels, fixed perspective, and the legible sequence of moments of movement broken down across it.²³⁰ Comics became a ‘medium of the instant’, themselves subject to rapid, regularised production, consumption, and obsolescence.²³¹ In this sense, the ‘transparent’ grid of discreet, conventional page layout refracts a capitalist conception of time as uniform segments of action, linear, repeatable, and exchangeable, and the imposition of that time to efficiently regulate and discipline bodies. Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, whose work strongly influenced Peeters’ taxonomy of comics page composition, has argued in explicitly economic terms that in cases where ‘aestheticism’ takes precedence over narrative ‘exchange based on equivalences seizes up’ and the reading process is halted because the ‘exchange value of the panels’ is interrupted by ‘the use value’ of drawings.²³² In these terms, then, to emphasise the aesthetic value of visual design, the pleasure of comics plastic form delectable in and of itself, becomes a radical counter-hegemonic act, a defiance of the instrumental rationalisation of time like the slow psychedelic poster.

The Marks of the Arts Lab

As a whole, Moore’s work across the fields of poetry, illustration, comics, prose, theatre, and music produced during the period of his involvement with the Northampton Arts Lab, and the Arts Group, betrays the indelible mark of the hippie underground that produced such anti-institutions and its countercultural aesthetics. A common theme is the incongruity between imagination and reality, between the possibilities of a perception liberated by LSD and the alienating everyday experience of authoritarianism, corruption, militarism, industrial decline, and banality. Crucial to this was an interrogation of the counter-hegemonic and emancipatory possibilities of form, in terms of offering an alternative way of seeing and listening that contested functionalist logo-centric rationalism and positivist ideas of semiotic transparency by destabilising language, through an accentuation of the concrete materiality of the spoken word as uttered sound, and the printed word in its epigraphic and spatial aspects. This

attention to the page as a material surface was further seen in his illustration, with its emphasis on ornamental composition, expressive typography, thick organic line and decorative pattern. This attention to the disarticulation of written text, the plasticity of the drawn line, and the fluctuation of repeated marks in dense tonal pattern foregrounded the indeterminacy of the oscillation between figuration and abstraction. Such ambiguity was at the core of psychedelic aesthetics in its endorsement of the aesthetic, affective and experiential, but particularly in the revelation of the contingency of reality. For Moore, as for many countercultural practitioners, this indeterminacy formed a key part of the reflexive performativity of his work, in terms of exposing its synthetic constructiveness and the acts of making and interrupting habituated protocols of reading and looking, equally emphasising the role of the reader as a further collaborative performer of the work. While the immersive, trance-like aspects of psychedelia were the opposite of Brechtian ideas of cool critical spectatorship, this emphasis on facilitating a dissident, engaged way of seeing through performative process-showing and defamiliarisation, that highlighted the historical contingency of reality and opened up the possibility of its transformation, had continuities with his ideas, which would be further developed in Moore's practice.

In terms of the development of this performative sensibility, and Moore's larger approach to artistic practice, the impact of the Arts Lab and the Arts Group is hard to overestimate. While, by Moore's account, 'it was messy' and 'no lasting work of art emerged from it', what did emerge from his involvement with these groups 'was a certain set of aspirations, feelings, an idea of possibilities more than anything'.²³³ Their valuing of experimentation led to an ongoing commitment to creative risk-taking: as Moore himself attests, 'Arts Labs thinking has been an underlying factor in a lot of my subsequent work. It is how I do tend to organise projects: let's have fun, let's experiment'.²³⁴ The ludic aspects of Arts Lab practice, with the avowal of improvisation and playing with form, subverting expectations, and entrenched convention, along with the insistence on creative self-determination, led to an emphasis on cultural practice as process. This had an important counter-hegemonic element, as the rejection of the idea of creativity as manufacture of cultural commodities for the market or rarefied objects of art, which also shaped Moore's approach to art:

None of the art we were producing was wonderful, and so I can't say that I learned at the feet of any great masters. What it did teach me was a certain attitude to art, an attitude that was not precious, that held that art was something you put together in fifteen minutes before you went on stage and performed it.²³⁵

Part of this rejection of the reification of artistic labour was the repudiation of specialisation and a transdisciplinary approach to cultural production, shown by the difficulty in extracting any one of the various forms Moore worked in from the larger contexts of his multifaceted practice. Crucial to this trans-disciplinarity was the anti-hierarchical and communitarian nature of the Lab, which affirmed unfettered collaboration and technical skills-sharing, and common access to the material means of cultural production. The resulting destabilisation of Romantic ideas of individual authorship was part of the way the Labs wanted to integrate art into the everyday life of communities and collectivise creative practice using modern technology, aiming, like Brecht, to 'make use of all means, old and new, tried and untried ... to put reality in the hands of people'.²³⁶ Such ideas were at the heart of participatory and materialist performative strategies, including Moore's, for transforming a hierarchical relationship between artists and audiences. The demystification of creative practice had a, hoped for, heuristic function in emphasising the distributed nature of interpretation and the audience's/reader's own creative agency, further repudiating ideas of cultural production as a specialised activity and thereby, in Benjamin's terms, promoting 'the socialisation of the intellectual means of production'.²³⁷

While the Arts Lab movement waned in the early-to-mid-1970s alongside the counterculture more broadly, rocked as it was by the external and internal conflicts as 'the tone of the times was changing',²³⁸ the conviction that experimental, transdisciplinary, grassroots cultural practice could contribute to radical social transformation endured, including in Moore's own work. The diffuse legacy of the radical politics and aesthetics of anti-institutions such as the Arts Labs was seen in the independent media, decentralised community arts projects, underground and alternative comics scenes, DIY fanzine practices and music subcultures of the 1970s that continued to intersect with dissenting social movements in framing cultural production as a site of resistance.

NOTES

1. Moore in Khoury, *Extraordinary Works*, p. 19.
2. Ibid.
3. Moore in *ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
4. Moore in *ibid.*
5. Moore got into the grammar school having passed the competitive national 11-plus exam that determined secondary school education, which was biased in favour of children from middle-class backgrounds.
6. Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 41.
7. Parkin, *Magic Words*, p. 40.
8. Robert Hewison, *Too Much, Art and Society in the Sixties 1960–75* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 154.
9. Jim Anderson, “School Kids Oz?” *Oz* 28 (May 1970), p. 4.
10. Richard Neville in Tony Palmer, *The Trials of Oz* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1971), p. 34.
11. Barry Miles, *Hippie* (London: Cassell, 2003), p. 374.
12. Neville in Palmer, *Trials*, p. 229.
13. Mick Farren in Roger Hutchinson, “The Nasty Tales Trial, a Fable of Vice and Virtue”, *IT* 147 (9 February 1973), p. 20. The perception that they were being deliberately targeted was not unfounded. Allegations of police corruption made following the *Oz* trial forced an inquiry that uncovered an extensive bribery ring whereby, according to reporter Alan Travis, ‘the Soho porn merchants had some of the most senior police officers in Britain on their weekly payroll’. Its ‘chief architect’ was Chief Inspector George Fenwick, the senior officer responsible for the *Oz* prosecution, confirming suspicions that police action against the underground press was being used to appease clamorous, moral decency campaigners such as Mary Whitehouse, while covering up their own corruption. See Alan Travis, “Oz trial lifted lid on porn squad bribery”, *The Guardian*, 13 November 1999. The staff of *Nasty Tales* were ultimately acquitted, but underground and alternative titles continued to be seized by the police into the 1980s. The 1973 proceedings were documented in a special edition of the comic, *The Trials of Nasty Tales*, which included art by Dave Gibbons, Edward Barker, and Chris Welch, alongside samples of American comix. Moore himself later contributed to the *Knockabout Trial Special*, a title created to cover the costs incurred in an unsuccessful 1983 obscenity trial against Knockabout, formerly Hasslefree Press, one of few remaining UK underground comix publishers at that time, and to this day.
14. David Huxley, *Nasty Tales, Sex, Drugs, Rock n’ Roll and Violence in the British Underground* (Manchester: Critical Vision, 2001), p. 94.

15. Felix Topolski in Palmer, *Trials*, p. 169.
16. Steef Davidson, *The Penguin Book of Political Comics*. trans. Hester and Marianne Velmans (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 140. A notable example of détournement was *The Return of the Durutti Column*, a comic by André Bertrand distributed to Strasbourg University students and pasted up around the city in 1966. It combined cartooning with images of western films, Lenin, Ravachol, toothpaste adverts, the Bayeux Tapestry, and Eugène Delacroix's painting *The Death of Sardanapoulos* expropriated from magazines, with their meaning hijacked by inserting radical slogans and extracts from Situationist texts.
17. Neville in Palmer, *Trials*. p. 232.
18. Judge Argyle in *ibid.*, p. 250.
19. Geoffrey Robertson in *ibid.*, p. 27.
20. George Pumphrey *Comics and Your Children* (London: "Comics" Campaign Council, 1955), p. 9
21. Oz Obscenity Trial (1971). Accessed 20 April 2015. <http://www.felixdennis.com/gallery/felix-1970s/>.
22. Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 8
23. Moore in Killjoy, *Mythmakers and lawbreakers*, p. 44.
24. Moore in Baker, *Alan Moore Spells It Out*, p. 28.
25. David Widgery, "What Went Wrong", *Oz* 48 (November 1973), pp. 8–9.
26. Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, p. 205
27. Oz Obscenity Trial.
28. Hutchinson, "Nasty Tales Trial", p. 17.
29. Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, , Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
30. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
31. Tom Vague (ed.) *King Mob Echo: English Section of the Situationist International* (Edinburgh: Dark Star, 2000), p. 106.
32. For example, John Desmond, Pierre McDonagh, and Stephanie O'Donahoe map a split between 'revolutionary' and 'aesthetic' countercultures in "Counter-Culture and Consumer Society", *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 4, no. 3 (2000), pp. 241–280. For Michael Brake, the 'hippie subculture ... divided into mystics and politicians' *Comparative Youth Culture* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1985), p. 98. Simon Rycroft following Neville's account in *Playpower* (1970) sees the counterculture dividing into 'popular undergrounders' and 'radical leftists' "Mapping underground London: the cultural politics of nature, technology and humanity", *Cultural Geographies* 10, no. 1 (2003), pp. 84–111.

33. Nigel Fountain, *Underground: The London Alternative Press 1966–74* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 178.
34. See Robert Dickinson, *Imprinting the Sticks: The Alternative Press Beyond London* (Aldershot: Arena, 1997).
35. Elizabeth Nelson, *The British Counter-Culture 1966–73, A Study of the Underground Press*. (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 1989), p. 51.
36. George McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance since the Sixties* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 14.
37. Moore in Matthew De Abaitua, “Alan Moore Interview” (1998). Accessed 9 June 2017. <http://www.harrybravado.com/articles/alan-moore-interview/>.
38. Moore in Khoury, *Extraordinary Works*, p. 34.
39. Calder in Howard Astor (ed.) *In praise of joy: whitewashing fences with Jim Haynes*, a celebration (Ontario: Mosaic Press, 2005), p. 16.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
41. Haynes in *ibid.*, p. 112.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
43. Anderson, “School Kids Oz?”, p. 5—apparently the initials stood for ‘The Incredible’.
44. Lee Harris, “Theatre of Change”. *IT* 44 (5–28 November 1968), p. 13.
45. “Arts Lab”, *IT* 19. (5–20 October 1967), p. 20.
46. “An Alternative to Marriage?” *IT* 66. (10–23 October 1969), p. 16.
47. Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 101.
48. “An Alternative to Marriage?”
49. Hewison, *Too Much, Art and Society*, p. 86.
50. Rufus Harris, “Arts Lab Pow Wow Gets Things Moving”. *IT* 50 (14–27 February 1969), p. 7. This is clearly a somewhat myopic view of art history, influenced by the dominance of Romantic individualist notions of creativity.
51. Stuart Hall in Hewison, *Too Much, Art and Society*, p. 147.
52. “Arts Lab Split”, *IT* 45 (29 November–12 December 1968), p. 19.
53. Harris, “Arts Lab Pow Wow”, p. 7.
54. This was an idea put forward by feminist Jo Freeman about the emergence of unacknowledged hierarchy and informal elites in women’s liberation groups in the early 1970s. See “The Tyranny of Structurelessness”. Accessed 10 June 2017. <http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.
55. Haynes in Astor, *In praise of joy*, p. 115.
56. Phil Cohen, “Reading Room Only”. *History at Large* (25 March 2011), accessed 9 June 2017. <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/reading-room-only/>.

57. Graham Saunders, "The Freaks' Roll Call: Live Art and the Arts Council, 1968-1973", *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 1 (2012), p. 34.
58. Ibid.
59. James Hannah, "Theatrics and Things". *IT* 42 (18–31 October 1968), p. 9.
60. "An Alternative to Marriage?"
61. Harris, "Arts Lab Pow Wow".
62. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *The Birmingham Arts Lab: The Phantom of Liberty* (Birmingham: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, 1998), p. 5.
63. Ibid. p. 15
64. Peter Stark, "Building in Britain: a progress report on the development plans at the Birmingham Arts Lab" (August 1969) in *ibid.*, p. 5.
65. Stuart Rogers in *ibid.*, p. 15.
66. Ibid. p. 17.
67. Astor, *In Praise of Joy*, p. 23.
68. Hunt Emerson, "Back to the Lab: Hunt Emerson. Flatpack Festival: Projects" (2013). Accessed 14 January 2015. www.flatpackfestival.org.uk/2013/03/back-to-the-lab-hunt-emerson/.
69. "The Story so far", *Streetpoems* 3 (Birmingham: Arts Lab Press, 1974).
70. Ibid.
71. *Streetcomix* 2 (Birmingham: Ar:Zak, 1976), p. 3.
72. Emerson "Back to the Lab".
73. Ibid.
74. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", in *The Work of Art*, pp. 79–95.
75. Brecht, "Notes on the Opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*". In Silberman, Giles and Kuhn, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 63.
76. "An Alternative to Marriage?"
77. *Arts Lab Newsletter* 5 (February 1970).
78. Janice Smith, "Arts Labs", *Clit Bits* 1 (August 1970).
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Alan Moore, editorial *Deliver Us From All Royal* (1971)
83. Smith, "Arts Labs".
84. Ibid.
85. Moore in Lance Parkin, "Alan Moore Interview, Part II: The Arts Lab" (November 2014). Accessed 9 June 2017. <https://lanceparkin.wordpress.com/2014/11/04/alan-moore-interview-part-ii-the-arts-lab/>.
86. Alan Moore, editorial. *Embryo* 1 (c. September 1970).
87. Alan Moore, editorial. *Embryo* 2 (December 1970).

88. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017. Moore and the new Northampton Arts Lab deliberately recreated this mode of hand collation for the first issue of their magazine *Peasants with Pens*: ‘we still ended up just for old times’ sake walking around a long table and had somebody with a long-armed stapler’ (ibid.).
89. Moore editorial. *Embryo 2*.
90. Ibid.
91. Megan Malone, Untitled. *Embryo 2* (December 1970).
92. Alan Moore. Rupert illustration. *Embryo 3* (February 1971).
93. Paul Gravett and Peter Stanbury, *Great British Comics: Celebrating a Century of Ripping Yarns and Wizard Wheezes* (London: Aurum Press, 2006), p. 65. In *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Century: 1969* a crude cartoon of H-9/Rupert Bear with a huge erection appears in a panel background.
94. Robert Sheppard, “British Poetry and its Discontents”, in *Cultural Revolution? The challenge of the arts in the 1960s* eds. Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 127.
95. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017
96. Ibid.
97. Michael Horowitz (ed.) *Children of Albion: Poetry of the Underground in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 341.
98. Miles, *Hippie*, p. 76.
99. Sheppard, “British Poetry”, p. 126.
100. Horowitz, *Children of Albion*, p. 338.
101. Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (eds) “Introduction”. *New British Poetries: the scope of the possible*. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 6.
102. Eric Mottram, “British Poetry Revival 1960–1975”. In ibid., p. 27.
103. Adrian Mitchell in Horowitz, *Children of Albion*, p. 357.
104. Ibid., p. 322.
105. Ibid., p. 328.
106. Mottram, “British Poetry Revival”, p. 24.
107. Nicky Marsh, Peter Middleton, Victoria Sheppard, “‘Blasts of Language’: Changes in Oral Poetics in Britain since 1965”. *Oral Tradition* 21, no. 1 (March 2006), p. 47.
108. Horowitz, *Children of Albion*, p. 317.
109. Marsh, Middleton, Sheppard, “Blasts of Language”, p. 65.
110. Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950–2000*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 3.
111. Ibid., p. 2.
112. Mottram, “British Poetry Revival”, p. 36.

113. Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, p. 4.
114. Ian Davidson, "Visual Poetry as Performance", *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 9, no. 2 (2004), pp. 99–100.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
116. See Benoît Peeters, "Four Conceptions of the Page From *Case, planche, recit: lire la bande dessinée*", trans. Jesse Cohn, *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies* 3, no. 3 (2007) and Andrei Molotiu Molotiu, Andrei. "Abstract Form: Sequential Dynamism and Iconostasis in Abstract Comics and Steve Ditko's Amazing Spider-man", in Smith and Duncan, *Critical Approaches to Comics*, pp. 84–100.
117. Davidson, "Visual Poetry as Performance", p. 102.
118. Miodrag, *Comics and Language*, pp. 65–79.
119. Tamryn Bennett, "Comics Poetry: Beyond Sequential Art". *Image [e] Narrative* 15, no. 2 (2014), p. 113.
120. Gene Kannenberg Jr. "Graphic Texts, Graphic Contexts: Interpreting Custom Fonts and Hands in Contemporary Comics", *Illuminating Letters: Typography and Literary Interpretation*, eds. Paul C. Gutjahr and Megan L. Benton (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts, 2001), pp. 165–192.
121. Davidson, "Visual Poetry as Performance", p. 101.
122. Nuttall, *Bomb Culture*, p. 151.
123. Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 32.
124. One of Moore's contributions to *Deliver Us From All Evil* was a prose piece "Guerilla 1000" which used science fiction tropes and a futuristic vernacular to relate the experience of a soldier in the Killzone who loses his legs in a fight ostensibly for 'peace, liberty, and human rights' but which is actually for 'money, property, and power'—a strong indictment of the war in Vietnam.
125. Alan Moore "Ministry of Love", *Embryo* 2 (December 1970). Moore's "Breakdown" in *Embryo* 4 had similar Orwellian themes ('Cold terminal eyes in the control chamber fingerbutton proseflash') and ends with a conversation between Orwell, Lovecraft, and Ray Bradbury. It also references numerous of Moore previous *Embryo* poems.
126. Alan Moore, "A Voice of Flame", *Embryo* 2 (December 1970).
127. Alan Moore, "The Brain of Night". In *ibid.*
128. Alan Moore, "Mindflare Neurosis 80", *Embryo* 3 (February 1971).
129. Alan Moore, "Deathshead", *Embryo* 2 (December 1970).
130. Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 30.
131. Alan Moore and Peter Bagge, "The Hasty Smear of My Smile ...", in *Hate* 30 (Fantagraphics Books, June 1998).
132. Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 30.
133. Moore in De Abaitua, "Alan Moore Interview".

134. Alan Moore, "Paranopolis", *Embryo* 2 (December 1970).
135. Moore in Parkin, "Alan Moore Interview". Moore and Hall would later record a duet version of Moore's song 'Madame October', which featured on Hall's 1994 *Watering the Spirits* album, and also on *Rocking for Romania* (2005), a BuiltH Balkan Crew benefit album with cover art by Leah Moore.
136. Women's Community Press. *Making Your Mark: Producing your own Publication*. (Dublin: Women's Community Press, 1986), p. 34, and Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
137. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
138. See Chris Treweek and Jonathan Zeitlyn, *The Alternative Printing Handbook*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 13. Moore recalls the print run of *Embryo* being about 100–200 copies—Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
139. Andy Cooper, "Son of Haight Ashbury", *Embryo* 3 (February 1971).
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141. Ken Johnson, *Are you experienced? How psychedelic consciousness transformed modern art*. (Munich: Prestel, 2011), p. 34.
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147. Barry Miles, "UFO is Dead—Long Live UFO!" *IT* 29 (19 April–2 May 1968), p. 3.
148. Steven Heller and Louise Fili, *Typology: Type Design from the Victorian Era to the Digital Age*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), p. 165.
149. Criqui, Bell, and Gastaut, *Off the Wall*, p. 16.
150. Colin Greenland, *The Entropy Exhibition, Michael Moorcock and the British 'New Wave' in science fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 67.
151. Poynor, *Communicate*, p. 14.
152. Benoît Peeters, "Four Conceptions of a Page From Case, planche, recit: lire la bande dessinée", trans. Jesse Cohn. *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*. 3, no. 3 (2007).

153. Charles Hatfield, *Hand of Fire: the Comics Art of Jack Kirby*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp. 36–77.
154. Alan Moore, cover *Hexentexts: A Creation Books Sampler*. (Codex Records, 1995).
155. Brian Stableford, “The Third Generation of Genre Science Fiction”. *Science Fiction Studies* 23, no. 3 (November 1996), p. 321.
156. Poetry originally published in *Seminar* was reprinted in *Embryo* 5, and *Embryo* also featured poems by Steve Moore, a key figure in British comics fandom who Alan became close friends with, exchanging correspondence and following each other’s zines from the late 1960s onwards.
157. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
158. Greenland, *The Entropy Exhibition*. Preface.
159. Rob Latham, “Sextrapolation in New Wave Science Fiction”, in *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*, eds. Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 62.
160. J. G. Ballard in Greenland, *The Entropy Exhibition*, p. 51.
161. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
162. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
163. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
164. Parkin, *Magic Words*, pp. 28–29.
165. Hatfield, *Hand of Fire*, p. 24, p. 66.
166. Parkin, *Magic Words*, p. 29.
167. Northampton Arts Group, editorial, *Myrmidon* (1973), p. 1.
168. *Arts Lab Newsletter* 6 (April 1970).
169. Lawrence Black, “‘Making Britain a Gay and More Cultivated Country’: Wilson, Lee and the Creative Industries in the 1960s.” *Contemporary British History* 20, no. 3 (2006), p. 335.
170. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *The Birmingham Arts Lab*, p. 4.
171. Griselda Grimond, list of participants at gathering, 5 May 1970, Art Council of Great Britain Archive, Archive of Art and Design, ACGB/112/279/10.
172. Janice and Richard Smith, letter to Peter Stark, undated, ACGB/112/279/41.
173. Minutes of the New Activities Committee, 3 February 1970, ACGB/32/92.
174. Gary Groth, “Big Words, Part 1”. *The Comics Journal* 138 (1990), p. 61. In his 1971 editorial for *Deliver Us From Rovel* Moore was emphatic that the Northampton Arts Lab was separate from the Arts Council: ‘Nor are we anything to do with the Arts Council, heaven forbid’. Arts Lab member George Woodcock similarly bemoaned that

- Arts Council funding relied on ‘who you know and what influence they wield’ in an article on “The Arts: A Statement”, in *Fitzrovel* (1971).
175. Harris, “Arts Lab Pow Wow”, p. 7.
 176. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, *The Birmingham Arts Lab*, p. 4.
 177. Alan Moore, “Behind the Painted Smile: Sweatshop Talk III”. *Warrior* 17. 2, no. 5 (March 1984), pp. 18–19.
 178. Alan Moore, “The Electric Pilgrim Zone Two”, *Bedlam* (1973) p. 19.
 179. Northampton Arts Group, editorial, *Myrmidon*.
 180. Moore in Parkin, “Alan Moore Interview”.
 181. Moore in Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 35.
 182. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
 183. Ibid.
 184. Parkin, *Magic Words*, p. 45.
 185. Moore in Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 252.
 186. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
 187. Moore in Parkin, “Alan Moore Interview”.
 188. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
 189. See Summers, “Sparks of Meaning”, p. 155.
 190. Moore in Parkin, *Magic Words*, p. 52, and Bauhaus Gig Guide. Accessed 10 June 2017. <https://bauhausgigguide.wordpress.com/>. Stanton Walgrave did perform one of the songs ‘Whore’s poem’ at their gigs, as did later band The Mystery Guests, which included several of the same members. Moore himself has performed ‘Old Gangsters Never Die’ in a range of contexts, including a poetry jam put on by the new incarnation of the Northampton Arts Lab in March 2017. Glyn Bush contributed poetry to the Arts Group’s 1973 *Bedlam* magazine and later frequented the Birmingham Arts Lab.
 191. Hannah Means-Shannon, “Transforming Perception in Another Suburban Romance”. *Sequart*. (2012). Accessed 9 June 2017. <http://sequart.org/magazine/15091/meet-the-magus-part-8-transforming-perception-in-another-suburban-romance/>.
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 198. Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, p. 103.

199. Hewison, *Too Much, Art and Society*, p. 86.
200. Annalisa di Liddo, "Transcending Comics: Crossing the Boundaries of the Medium", in *A Comics Studies Reader*, eds. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 32.
201. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", *The Work of Art*, p. 90.
202. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
203. Hunt Emerson, *Katalomix* (Birmingham: Ar:Zak, 1977), p. 1.
204. Jennifer Worth, "Unveiling: *Persepolis* as Embodied Performance". *Theatre Research International* 32, no. 2 (July 2007), p. 154.
205. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
206. See Christina Meyer, "Medial transgressions: comics—sheet music—theatre—toys", *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 7, no. 3 (2016), pp. 293–305, and Roger Sabin, "Ally Sloper: The First Comics Superstar?", *Image and Narrative* 7 (October 2003). Accessed 20 April 2015. <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/graphicnovel/rogersabin.htm>.
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210. Moore in "Monsters, Maniacs and Moore", *England Their England*, directed by Norman Hull (UK: Central Independent Television, 1986).
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212. Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
213. Di Liddo, "Transcending Comics", p. 328.
214. Brian W. Wikoff, "Lines that Move: Winsor McCay's Work in Performance and Comics, 1900–1920" (MA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2009), p. 38. Peeters makes a similar argument in "Between Writing and Image", p. 113.
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216. Tom Gunning, "The Art of Succession: Reading, Writing and Watching Comics". *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 3 (2014), p. 44, emphasis mine.
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218. See, for example, Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven, "Introduction: Graphic Narrative". *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006), p. 767.
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221. *Ibid.*
222. *Ibid.*
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224. Paul Atkinson, "Movements within Movements: Following the Line in Animation and Comic Books", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4, no. 3 (2009), p. 269.

225. Groensteen, Thierry. *The System of Comics*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2007), p. 161.
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227. See Atkinson, “Movements within Movements”, p. 274.
228. Moore in Millidge, *Storyteller*, p. 302. Moore himself has compared the obsessiveness of his meticulously detailed process to Outsider Art, Moore, interview with the author, 5 July 2017.
229. Atkinson, “Movements within Movements”, p. 274.
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