



# **The Conch**

**A Forum For  
Critical Discussion**

# Part VI

## 4th April 2012

This booklet was printed to coincide with Part VI of The Conch: A Forum For Critical Discussion which took place at the South London Gallery on the 4th April 2012. The Conch is a bi-monthly event in which a changing roster of South London based artist collectives and galleries invite early career artists to present work, both finished pieces and works in progress, to a peer group of arts professionals. It is a forum to meet, share ideas, critique work and initiate discussion in a relaxed atmosphere outside of the academic institution. Part VI of the Conch included invited artists Christopher Kulendran Thomas, Rob Chavasse and Hannah Lees. The event is accompanied by a collection of specially commissioned texts, reproduced within this booklet, by emerging writers chosen by and discussing each of the presenting artists.

# Christopher Kulendran Thomas



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# The Allure of Collusion

Tom Trevatt

## The Allure of Collusion

In August 1940 Gilbert Renault, more famously known by his pseudonym, Colonel Rémy, returned to occupied France to volunteer as an agent in the French Résistance. During his time working for the British Government and the Free French Government in Exile, headed by Charles de Gaulle, Rémy became the most effective agent amongst almost 2000 volunteers. Working for the Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action (BCRA) Rémy organised one of the most active resistance networks (an organisation created specifically for military purposes; intelligence gathering, sabotage, espionage), the Confrérie de Notre Dame (Brotherhood of Our Lady). The express purposes of this network were the gathering of information, maps and photographs that aided the Allied armies in their incursions into both occupied France and German territory. Alongside the high profile resistance fighters as many as 400,000 French adults (by some estimates) partook in some form of resistance, be it producing, distributing or consuming resistance literature, committing acts of sabotage, gathering intelligence, housing spies, engaging in guerilla warfare. These activities, the networks created, the espionage, the clandestine publications, the economic resistance, people, relationships, weapons, forged documents, lies, secrets, loyalties made, loyalties broken, lives lost, loves formed, these things, these objects, these contingent materials of the Résistance are what the liberation movement colluded with.

In the attempt to radically open up Vichy's France and its collaboration with the German occupiers, the complicity of these secret networks and movements to their materials is paramount. Each document is to be held in secret, each relationship hidden. To lose a vital piece of information, for a file to slip into the wrong hands, to break the collusion could mean the end of not just the operation but the entire liberation movement. The Résistance was necessarily and constitutively closed. In opposition to the collaborative openness of Vichy's France, that prioritised economic and political advantage, even though it was finally denied these things, the Résistance relied upon secrecy and conspiracy. This closed system of operation, a system common to all spy rings, terrorist groups, secret government agencies, affords the agents involved upmost secrecy and protection. Without it these groups would not function and would not be in a position to radically eviscerate their enemies.

**Tom Trevatt**

## Christopher Kulendran Thomas

Conforming to the secrecy and the conspiracist ethos of affordance, for which every tactic is another line of expansion (to afford more), radical openness requires strategic calls or lines of subversion from within affordance. Radical openness, therefore, subverts the logic of capacity from within.

(Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials, Reza Negarestani)

Indeed, Negarestani is instructive here. And the logic of the French Résistance, indeed all similar secret/liberation movements, can help us understand better Negarestani's insistence on the use of the word 'materials' in his formulations on art. The artist in Negarestani's text, *Complicity and Contingency*, must approach their materials through an act of complicity with their contingency, a radical re-evaluation of the practice of art making that demands we think beyond the openness of contemporary art. This openness, the openness to the outside that pertains to a political liberalism, characterised by the pursuit of individual freedom and pluralism inherent in neo-liberalisms across the world, is named by Negarestani as a strategic openness. Strategic openness, he claims, can never account for the real, radical openness of the outside, that lacerates and butchers from within and without. The artist that can understand contingency as a radical rupturing from the outside must act as an accomplice to the contingency of their materials, that will themselves, bring with them a rupturing butchery. In Negarestani's text the materials, while perhaps read too literally as just the material 'stuff', paint, wood, metal etc that some artists use to construct a work, must be understood as the materials of the conspiracy. That is to say, the things we encountered with the French Résistance, the pamphlets, complicities, associations, secret meetings, love affairs, disastrous missions, successful ones, the bunkers, hideouts and dark cellars of rural French towns, the late night excuses to leave the home, lying to neighbours, all these acts, objects, relations. These are the materials of the Résistance in the same way not only do we think of artists materials as their paint or their canvas, but the very forms of practice that they inhabit. Their collusion, the complicity they maintain in regards to their materials must be understood through this very closure of the secret and conspiracist logic of Colonel Rémy and his comrades.

*This text is part of a much larger project on the fate of contemporary art.*

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**Rob Chavasse**



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**Memphis Blues, Again**

**Jamie Bracken Lobb**

## Memphis Blues, Again

## Rob Chavasse

Sleeping in a Dan Graham pavillion on the Japanese island of Naoshima

A porn shoot in an infinity pool on the 55 floor of the Marina Bay Sands hotel, Singapore.

An isometric line diagram of a regional scottish gallery with an inverted pitched roof.

1960s KAISER 6878 LAMP Bauhaus Eames Mid Century  
Modernist 50s 70s Era. Ebay. 26bids.

Rescue worker footage from inside the semi-submerged wreck of the Costa Concordia.

An 18 year old man lighting a red distress flare in his garden on his birthday.

Two ladies sat in a courtyard created between 4 buildings, a glass tank, 6 inches in depth covers the entirety of this external space at ceiling height. a dozen or so small Koi swim about suspended in water contained in the tank.

Lion attack on human in the circus. 7mins 55 secs.

A young man picking up a giant disposable camera on the Bolivian Salt flats.

A tattoo of the playboy bunny smoking a joint in the small of a porn stars back,  
as seen POV.

JOB LOT box old 60's reggae cassette stuff mixtape. Ebay. 12 bids.

Nelson Muntz is Barney Gumble.

Half a night spent sleeping through a thunderstorm under a Swedish petrol  
station forecourt.

Mr Blobby Fancy Dress Costume Best Any Party. Ebay. Buy it Now. £180

For images see: [robchavasse.co.uk/conch.html](http://robchavasse.co.uk/conch.html)

On the opposite page is outlined a collection of things/references culled from emails sent between Chavasse and myself over the last year. Largely internet scavenged they all contain elements of human experience in varying extremes and act only as passing reference points or shortcuts.

Chavasse' practice in a way, is a study of phenomena. He often talks about looking for a formula for these occurrences or looks to ways of working out a specific set of instructions for their make up. The result of this research may manifest in the specific re-combination of a spacial plane or the use of something as simple as an industrial light source to create an effect on the viewer. The end result often falls somewhere between facsimile and reality and supplies for a glimpse, a discernible amount of something close to genuine or authentic real world sublime experience. When it is successful he is left with a process that is repeatable and transposable into an art environment i.e the white cube.

For The Conch he presents something designed to parade his collection of hefty monographs and art theory books. Often jibbed for the fact nothing on his bookshelf is about anything that has happened in the last 30 years of art history, it is quite an easy jump to make from his previous work to this piece of Modernist inspired sculpture. He is not usually concerned with the discourse surrounding the production of 'art objects' but has in-spite of this set out to produce a coffee table. The reason for this quick turn could be read as simply symptomatic of a number of personal drives, a dissatisfaction with a non-craft based outlet, a nest building urge or simply the gratification of constructing on a domestic D.I.Y scale.

Regardless of his reasons it's hard to approach the subject of artists designing furniture without wanting to make quick and obvious references, there is Donald Judd's forays into commercial furniture design, Ettore Sottsass' connection to the title of this text and others from Dali through to Bauhaus. In all of these briefly outlined examples there lies the initial intent, that is primarily to design a piece of functional furniture. Following this methodology Chavasse has drawn on a very particular personal experience and tried to strip it down to the bare essentials that gave it its initial power and impact for him so as to make it speak about a potentially universal experience.

This is a commodified, 'shift-dragged experience' for the masses, one mans particular time and place specific moment available for purchase to be displayed in your living room. All he asks is just don't put your feet up, man!

**Jamie Bracken Lobb**

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**Hannah Lees**

**The Bridge**



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**Matthew de Pulford**

## The Bridge

As I remember it, we were both in a white space. It wasn't a room, nor was it open. We carried rope, poles and tarpaulin, and together we laid them out before us. I stood the poles upright and set about tying them to the horizontals which she had scattered on the floor. I thought of them as edges, delineating a pre-existing set of axes which I was yet to perceive in the overwhelming light.

I moved around the prismatic structure, fastening the tarpaulin, only occasionally catching sight of her amid the flapping sheets. One time she moved her mouth as if in speech, but I heard nothing. After a while I could no longer see her and she did not respond when I called her name.

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I enter the structure, hoping to shade my eyes from the overpowering whiteness. Perhaps she has been inside before me; a few worm-sized openings have been torn in the frayed fabric, miniature windows through which the brightness burns beams. Approaching and adjusting my eyes I peer through.

I see her in the distance with a man. She scatters handfuls of something too small to see (seeds perhaps) which hover, suspended in clusters perpendicular to the floor. He has pulled his T-shirt away from his belly and is trying to use it to catch them. Somehow he fails, passing through the mess every time without making contact.

I turn away. Walking through the structure I notice that a sheet of torn tarpaulin has fallen to the ground. Though the light from outside remains overwhelming, it shimmers across the slick weave of the material, and I feel as though I can see cloud patterns emerging. Slowly, I push down onto it with my fingertips, feeling the damp chill of the earth beneath. As it starts to penetrate I lift my hands away. From the webbing between each digit a green shoot pushes through the skin. Each unfurls, twitches, and withers, only to be replaced by another shoot which repeats the process; this happens three times in total.

Mathew de Pulford

## Hannah Lees

In the next chamber the floor is covered with sand. Six poles have fallen and criss-cross each other; they click-a-clack as they rock in the wind. A single, glowing hole in the canopy throws a dancing crescent onto the stack, while a lizard dashes a sigma across the ground, marking, then erasing its route with a flicking tail. Raindrops start to tap overhead.

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Another time, I am in a city, standing on a bridge overlooking a river at low tide. A metronome and the top of an oval hang in the haze above the buildings flanking the waterside.

She approaches on the sandbank below, dragging a stick behind her. Silt quickly fills her footprints and the wavering line that marks her trail. She disappears under the bridge and I walk down the steps to meet her. When I step onto the shingle she is gone.

A flooded boat sits awkwardly under the bridge's rusty girders, a quarter buried. As I come to it I alarm a duck and a group of ducklings. They waddle through the boat's smashed hull, settle in the water, and float away.

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