

FROM THE ADAMANTINE LAND:

VARIATIONS ON THE ART OF CHRISTOPHER BUCKLOW

BY DAVID ALAN MELLOR

"All powerful, inescapable astral strangers/ Deigning to let shine far off in time/
Something supernaturally sublime" Paul Valery, 'La Jeune Parque'

"Natural supernaturalism..." Thomas Carlyle, 'Sartor Resartus'

HIS FISSIONED SOUL

Christopher Bucklow conjures airy spirits, like Ariel, and they become rich and strange. With these beings he plots a fantastic narrative with a mystagogue's scientism, creating, in his own words; "New nuclear clothes for an ancient story".[1] A working through of the vast processes of nuclear fusion and fission inhabit his metaphors in the romancing of these pictures. His fabulous narrative concerns his own psychological form – its present movements and its history within the culture from which it arrives – the fissions and fusions, that is, like Uranium 235, of the naturally unstable mind. The other-worldly and more than human figures in his photographs, and in his videos and drawings, suggest an escape from the usual framing structures of identity in portraiture. In his series of Guests – for example, circles of light, the sun, jostle to flesh out these figures against a threshold of infinity where social place and time have, apparently, still to be created. These are radically pre-social bodies that gleam, creatures of light closer to their earliest conception as beings, like masses of naked protoplasm formed by fusion or aggregations of amoeboid bodies.

COLLECTING MIRRORED SPIRITS.

Bucklow's art inhabits an old and fantastic territory, more familiar, perhaps in nineteenth century photography. It is that of the soul made visible and registered as a spectral trace. Between the projected shadow of light constituted by his Guests and that slowly shimmying up the walls of the architectural piece Canopic Fusion Reactor, as well as his own narcissistic reflection in Eve or 'Fju:zan's mirror, in the drawings of the series The Mancunian Heresy. Bucklow has gathered all his guests into a sort of self-reflecting gallery. "Each of those figures is intended as a kind of psychic representative of an aspect of my personality. I think of this series as an extended self-portrait: Forms I have been, Forms that live in me now, and Forms I desire to become". [2] His use of water and the boxed metaphors of nuclear reactors, form some of the cores of his mythical narrative. Eve's specular exertions in The Mancunian Heresy, find their counterpart in the cultural anthropologist Sir James Frazer's



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SELF POSSESSING THE SILHOUETTE

early twentieth-century cataloguing of cross-cultural examples of the soul considered as a reflection – and one capable of seizure. [3] It was Frazer who recorded a remark made by the headman of a Lower Yukon tribe, made while he was looking at his people through the ground glass screen of a camera used by an explorer: "He has all of your shades in this box". [4]

If we follow this collecting of souls into the territory of Bucklow's Guests, on an occasion such as the exhibition Reactor in 1996 at Paul Kasmin's gallery in New York, the walls contained a veritable anthology of soul sparks, which, taken together, compose Bucklow himself [5]. In Bucklow's recursive universe glass gives on to mirrors; thus, in his drawings Eve is doubled and there is an impossible symmetry between Satan Radioactive/Radiopassive, where we see there an androgyne, another mirrored body. For Bucklow there is a fantasm of self-sufficiency which operates here, when he sees a world populated by his other selves, endlessly multiplied and mirrored.

Of all the founding stories of Western visual representation, it is Quintillian's account of the first artists working from outlining their shadows by the light of the sun which offers a scheme for Bucklow. Quintillian believed that the earliest painters used to draw around shadows, and the art eventually grew by a process of addition. The basic model of Bucklow's vision, then, is partly that of Quintillian, but also that of Narcissus-like fusion – of reflection and a circuitous self-possession and identification with the world. It repercussions: in the words of Ovid's account of Narcissus' rapture at his own reflection: "That which you behold is but the shadow of a reflected form". [6] For Bucklow, then, whatever he beholds is his own mental form. Rather than standing outside phenomena and observing, it is as if he stands in the still centre of a globe which is internally mirrored. It is a pre-Copernican universe – one in which the world is concave rather than convex.

CREATIONS OF HIS INNER CITY



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk TkTk,, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

What possesses him, what daemon goads him on from this centre point? Like the baby in his video JerUSAlem Bucklow jubilates in this state of ecstatic subjectivity. What is he doing in this hall of mirrors: perhaps he is exceeding himself, eks-statically, by projecting himself into temporalities before or beyond the present, in an attempt to glimpse or grasp his own finitude? His visual makings are full of excess- the extravagences of the Mancunian Heresy , the gazing into the sun, the tracings of daemons and soul sparks. Whether this terminates in an enhanced sense of his limits or not, remains to be seen.

A NUCLEAR SUBLIME



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk TkTk,, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

So Bucklow's vast projections of his mythified self make him exceed the bounds of identity: in *The Mancunian Heresy* he is legion; a doubled androgyne, chemically recomposed beyond the temporal and spatial city limits. Bucklow has wedded a transmigratory, Ovidian world of physical shifts and transformations with that great operative twentieth century mythology of nuclear physics: the modern alchemy. Another one of his selves is undoubtedly guilty of the sin - ascribed by orthodox Christians to heretical gnosticism; the vice of misleading seeing, the wasteful labor expended on patching misfitting misinformation together. And this patching extends to Bucklow's heteroclite operational theories and private mythologies, where he presses Egyptian beliefs and material culture, together with advanced techniques in nuclear physics, with Pressurised Water Reactors, to produce the metaphor running through the whole of the work. So his priests, in the P.W.R. Island Universe, are attending a fusion reactor, but they rise from sprouts that have their base in a hyacinth bulb. These fusing dramas of fertility and death might be said to resemble Bernini's imagining of Apollo and Daphne with his

1989: HYBRYDISING EDEN



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk TkTk,, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk TkTk,, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

vertical transformation of a womans body to vegetal plant. Bucklow is a fabulist of the quantum field; as if Ovid were picking through exchanges between gods and humans in the wake of the Manhattan Project. From this ground zero, this written introduction to Bucklow's art also mutates; what follows is a tracing of the process of Bucklow's nuclear myth of his mind's dynamic - his many isotropes from 1989 to the millennium - and beyond..

After 1989 he has oscillated between fusions which take the forms of grafts and weddings, and his description of their contradiction in the fissionable acts of his life before that year.[7] The substantial piece of work he first performed as an artist was the Pear -Hawthorn graft, one of the first of the series *Host* in 1989.[8] Here he fused representatives of the two Edenic trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, symbols of the Christian and pagan states of being, of the angelicised and diabolised forms of consciousness and unconsciousness. It was an act of botanic impossibilism- since, scientifically, (by the book) this union certainly should not 'take'. Further acts of genetic montage were successfully effected by him between 1989 and 1991, with *Host: Hyacinthus orientalis - Delft Blue* [fig.], and with the carnation flower *Host:Dianthus Chris Eubank*. With the latter he melded the ancient, natural genes of Britains only native *Dianthus* flower and its mutant descendents, a grafting which was also an allegory of racial differences and co-mingling: Chris Eubank is a British Afro-Caribbean boxer who has parodically incorporated traditional white British aristocratic forms of self-presentation- monocle, jodhpurs, spats and cane. It is Eubank's wilfullness (Adam's first sin in Eden), his masquerade, that has disqualified him in the eyes of many British boxing fans from their own cultural fantasy of authenticity (of naturalness) - and consequently become a metaphor of interest to Bucklow.

1990: LIGHT IN THE SIMIAN'S EYE



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TkTk,, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk TkTk,, Tk
TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

The Night Monkey's eyes shine and glimmer and for a glancing moment we can find in them a form of light as consciousness, which has embodied itself through corporealised scintillations, like the Guest's bodies. This metaphor—light as a 'body'—the body of culture and language living inquiline—like within us—is important to Bucklow's art, not just in the dazzling Guest series, but in his Host drawings and sculptures, too—and also in his videos, *Sartor Resartus* and *JerUSAlem* [Plates—]. Here is the experiencing of light and looking as a glistening badge of human subjectivity, pinned to the eye and body and to the activity of photography itself. Here is a form of sublime luminosity, a genre which overwhelms rational and humanist constructions of space and visual meaning. I would suggest that Bucklow's Guests possess a fiery identity, constituted from the divine sparks, when the logos, that quickening, enlivening action of language, is absorbed by the body. It is in this fashion that we might imagine Bucklow's Host pastels of monkeys, as sentient bodies emitting just such a compelling gaze. Light shines out of their eyes as white highlights on the surface of their pupils; glitters which incorporate and seize the subject viewer. Certainly this was Bucklow's experience as he drew them in *The Natural History Museum*, in London in February 1991: "I was transfixed—it is me staring back at myself in these pictures (that gaze is really the strongest sense I get from them—a returned stare, but held, rather than tantalisingly fleeting.." [9]. Scandalously, the "me" which is identified in this sentence is the base, simian body, our selves if we had never been baptismally dipped into the cultural ocean of the logos. The act of being transfixed while trying to transfix with a gaze, a sensation akin to being photographed, occurs in Bucklow's video 'Eju:zan [fig], where a time-travelling woman glances, in a fleeting way, at the camera, briefly locking the spectator into the distant frame of their viewing. But perhaps the pastel monkeys, in *Host*, effect a more shaking transfixion.

RECOGNISING YOUR YOUNGER SELF

Their piercing look provokes a revelation which inverts the supposed relation of status between humans and simians. The monkey *Host* pastels of 1991 are carnivalesque travesties of the human that is both regarding them and recognising himself painted in their gaze. One simian—*Cercopithecus Mono*—is represented almost as if it were wearing a Venetian carnival mask, an ornate covering around the eyes, which dissembles its moment of held communication: the other is a foetal *Douroucoulis* baby *Night Monkey*, *Aotus Trivigatus*, the only truly nocturnal monkey—a compact, living, grey *Rosswell Alien*, with oversized eyes. Bucklow's recognition of his own body beheld in and by the monkey was influenced by his readings of Ashley Montague's writings on palaeo-anthropology and particularly the concept of neoteny. Neoteny spoke of the retention of foetal or juvenile characteristics in the adult organism [10], but its implications are vast for the human too, if the human—as a primate—also conserves and finds attractive such foetal appearances, to the extent that a human adult may indeed be conceived as a foetal chimpanzee [11]. The pathos which Bucklow discovered in the young monkey's look might rest in its kinship with the homo sapiens artist looking at it and finding a version of part of himself, his own highlight, childish, reflection. Bucklow's art, we have proved, often includes, indeed may take as its main effort, such poeticising acts of incorporation—the fusing of bodies and the reconciling of entirely distinct states of being. The paradox of a human being sharing its genetic and anatomical identities with an infant chimp is one such piquant fusing of this kind. Rather than the neotenus apparition of *Calista Flockhart* (although in the features of the dolphins he has designed for his *Chandelier*, Bucklow faintly mirrored his own neotonous features of high forehead and round face)—perhaps Kubrick's *Star Child*, in 2001, is a better analogue. This radiant foetus, retaining aspects of the merely human in a stellar intra-uterine space, passes towards some cataclysmic mutation of homo sapiens, like the evolutionary paradigm shift which took place about 8 million years ago, when the human neotenuously 'detached' itself from the ape. It is across this gap that the monkey *Host* look so intently.

1993: THE ANGEL AND THE SIMIAN OTHER



Tk, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk Tk
TKTK,, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk

The great Jesuit natural scientist Athanasius Kircher, in his book *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* 1656, demonstrated a camera obscura which produced a diabolic silhouette. [12] This we surely see in Bucklow's *Sun of Hell* [plate] where the solar disc is rendered negative. But in fact this demonisation of the shadow does not happen in the series of Guests: on the contrary, here he trades in angelisations of his coloured, spectral bodies. He does this by welding together a syncretic mythology, a system patched from the methodology of his culture hero Blake and haunted by the same phantasm of Egyptian culture which animated Kircher.[13] Bucklow, like the English cosmographer Robert Fludd, placing a Satanic simian at the centre of the universe in one of his late sixteenth century cosmological diagrams, also embraces the monkey, but as the younger brother of man, de-diabolised, glimpsed from the perspective of post-Darwinian ideas in physical, but also mental, evolution.[14] This creature might be the consequence, we could imagine, of a wedding between the satanic, simian Host and the angelic cultural Guest. This is the being with his arms akimbo, Guest CB, who peers down from his Nietzschean height at the Great Noontide; the possessor of an illuminated Id, the afflatus blowing coldly against his brow, that supernatural breath of illumination, like the discharging cloud of electrons which glow around him.[Plate] He is also the universal Adam of the Kaballah; the Adam Kadmon: "...a primordial person, at once male and female, earlier than Adam and Eve, unfallen and quasi-divine, angelic and yet higher" and, importantly for Bucklow, lower "than the angels, a nostalgic dream yet also a prophecy of millennial or messianic splendour, blazing in fiery light" [15].

THE COMMUNITY OF GUESTS

So the Guests arrive, and like Andre Breton's 'Great Invisibles', they are entities from another plane, that place holding the repository of all human patterning.[16] But soon they flesh themselves in the astral remnants of dilated starlight and they turn to confront us, eyelessly holding our gaze.[17] They pass as Bucklow's friends and circle, but their scintillating figures retain traces of that extra-terrestrial origin in the imma-



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TKTK,, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk

1996: SUNS OF VENICE



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Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk

terial which has consumed the social identities which cling to them only as initials now. The Guests comprise a gallery of humanoids who stand as representatives of the fissioned personality, as spirits who hover in their impersonation and possession of the quotidian human body. In among the divided sexes in these portraits there is a simulacrum of Bucklow and his wife; Guests CB and SP, glowing as participants in a nuclear and cosmic wedding: "Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,/ That like two spirits do suggest me still;/ My better angel is a man right fair, /My worsen spirit a woman colour'd ill./..... I guess one angel is another's hell" [18].

Venice is inscribed in these pictures through the light of the place. Guest JG [Plate], is a solar imprint of a sea-wet eight year old, dripping from the lagoon and the sun is present, too, in the fortuitous reflections scattered from the Adriatic which reappear as stray light in other Guest photos:- these variable traces of light are octaves from a spectrum which Bucklow expressly went to live in Venice for.[19] The Guests appear from his thousands of punctures, letting in the sun to transubstantiate their drawn portrait silhouettes, as spangly points on transcendental Pearly Kings and Queens. The distinctive colours of the Guests correspond to the time of day when the sun shone on them: Guest RB [Plate] is sunset marked, golden brown and varnished, like Blake's *Ghost of a Flea*. On the other hand, there are dazzling Apollo-type figures, deposits of the blue light of midday, in auratic rejoicing, from their heads, like the same artist's *Bright Day*. A violet solar wind could be said to blow from these pictures. These winds of light are sultry, like *Notus*, the hot wind from the south, warmed bronze in hot coins across the body of Guest RB, or tonic, astringent, like *Zephyrus*, from the west.

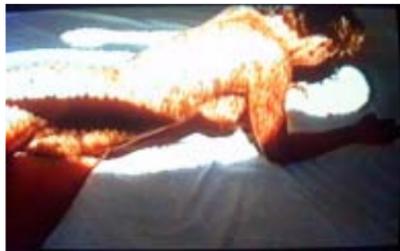
1994: LIGHT DANCES INSIDE WALLS



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk
TkTk, Tk Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

What the great photographer Eadweard Muybridge did by way of tracing a naked female's ambulation in the 1880s, Bucklow did over again in the Sartor Resartus video, of 1994 [Plates -]. Sartor inhabits the same controlled environment as Muybridge's little dramas- like Edison's Black Maria where the issue of light control and insulation is to the fore, with the storing and screening of light as a function. Sartor's setting for the young woman's interminable taking on and off of a shirt, pull-over and trousers, is a wooden camera, with - although we do not see it - a perforated roof with a Guest template of apertures and a white cloth on the floor.[20] We have the sense that there is an outside to this room of light, an outside which has the texture of another, sharper grain - like flint. It is glimpsed, this rocky, inhospitable place where the body meets little in the way of the erotic- an anfractious place seen at the introduction and at the close.[fig] The rockiness is an out-of-focus version of the aluminium cladding - another sort of clothing, if you will, which Israeli Army engineers, who built the hut, had placed around its exterior. The walls inside have wooden sheets with prominent graining: and like the Canopic Fusion Reactor he was to build five years later, it amounts to a trap for light, reflecting it from the outside walls, while keeping and generating it inside, like Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Box.

THE BRIDE, AGAIN



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, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

Allusions to Duchamp's Bride mythography seem apt in feeling for an understanding of Bucklow's Sartor on account of the woman's movement of undressing - Sartor, then, becomes explicable as a sort of a wedding video. Here is the primal Bride, but her lying down across the projected body of Bucklow - as Guest CB - entails here performing as a kind of reverse Eve, a turnabout of her being drawn from Adam's rib, from Adam's body: since here, in Sartor, [Plate] she is reabsorbed into the male Guest.[21] Weddings were present in Bucklow's mind and making following his shooting of Sartor, in his contribution to the Institute of Contemporary Arts exhibition, Fool's Rain.[22] For this show he produced an installation which he called Pew-end Bouquets

NAKED LIGHT



Tk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk Tk TkTk, Tk
, Tk TkTk, Tk TkTk, Tk Tk

from the Nuclear Wedding. This took the form of semen-covered, that is dew-coated, flower arrangements, recklessly using the contents of two testes and an entire field of Starburst Dahlias.

She strips herself bare and her gaze is also naked. Bucklow directed her to look at the camera at a particular juncture, a gesture of eliciting a penetrative look, the same looks which dazzle and which came from the monkeys eyes and which recur in 'Fju:jan the video. What she also does is to put flesh on to the metaphor of light as an unveiling. But she does more than undress- she puts back on the same clothes she removed. When she first puts on the shirt there is a sense of her acting out the spiritual metaphor of donning the wedding gown, the raiment of religious enlightenment. She puts on this robe under the sun, or at least a sun mediated through the projected body of Guest Bucklow. It was in such a way that Adam forfeited his cloak of immortality, according to King Edmund, King of Wessex in the 10th century, in the text of a charter which he granted, giving land to build the church at Batcombe, near Bucklow's current home in Somerset.[23]

THE MUSIC OF TIME AND LIGHT

Even though there is an absence of music, Sartor appears like a dance or ballet. She performs a complicated step - in her dance around the body of the projected male Guest. Is the story of Scheherazade being suggested, of a postponement of time through a recursive narrative - like a performance of Salome - which consumes itself, or rather postpones the state of nudity by reversing action (undressing) and time, evoking Duchamps' bridal passage?[24] The silence of the sound track feels as if some channel of meaning were being eclipsed - which the film feels ready to do itself, with its fluctuating light, as if deafness were imminent. In slowed-down slomo, the grain of the video is apparent, interfering with the grain of the wood partition walls. Light is reflected off the white

cloth sheet on the floor, which will be the ground for the projected Guest and her body as it begins a dance of ambiguous spatial positioning with the Guest. A play of superimpositions, of an other-dimensional lover present over the body, ecstatically under and over each other's bodies, thus re-fabricating a gestural cloak of immortality to re-cover the carnal. .

GOLDEN SHOWERS



Tk, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk



Tk, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk TkTK, Tk Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk

Just as at the beginning, the perforations of light play over her body like Zeus fertile gold [25] cascaded over Danae, so towards the end, a golden rain of another kind falls. The Danae legend must be cited here, since it illuminates Bucklow's film . In it, King Acrisius, King of Argos, hid his daughter away in an inaccessible tower, to protect her from the fulfilment of the prophecy that her son would die. Zeus found his way to her through a metamorphosis into a shower of gold and Perseus was conceived— Perseus, the manipulator of mirrors and repeller of the petrifying gaze of the Gorgon. Now, the erotics of light in Bucklow coincide with the play of the erotic by light in other artists— and with Titian, in particular, in his poesie constructions of the Danae legend. But JerUSAlem , his second video, made in 1994, revolves around a later, early nineteenth century, Romantic image of a child jubilating in light. This was based on an iconography which Bucklow had consciously sourced from Philip Otto Runge's Morning (1808). The picture had hyacinth bulbs, forecasting those in the 1989 planting as well as in 'Fjuzan and the Lightwater Eve drawing, in the margins of the frame, as decorations. In the video the baby is placed across the floor projection of Guest CB, like the ecstatic infant in the Runge who also greets the light, in this case the sunrise. There is more to this light; it is logos, the Christian and Post-structural Word, mysteriously extended to the child. Moments after, towards the video's end, the female baby passes water, a vertical spout of ejaculated urine, a golden shower, with drops like iridescent mercury. Annunciatory images abound in JerUSAlem, just as they do in Sartor. For light falling on the woman and child does look back to the signs of the Annunciation— and there is a premature reprise, or

1999: THE ILLUMINATED SOUL ARISES



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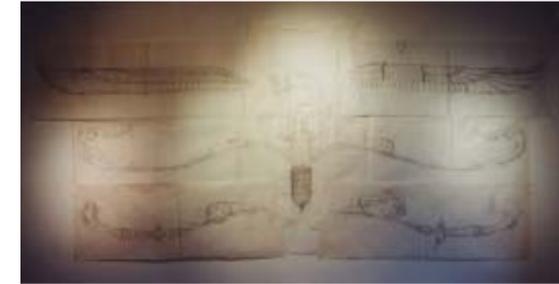
fore-glimpsing of Sartor in JerUSAlem in a dissolve as the light of Guest CB plays over her back. The infant plays with the mother's lips, light falls and miraculously the viewer senses the infusion of the logos. Here in JerUSAlem, as in Sartor , coins of light , that other, primarily poetic, golden shower, passes over the human body, giving a radiance which attains a Symbolist resonance.

From a hut in Israel in 1994, he passed to a concrete chamber on a Cornish cliff-top. Inside this camera, this box-room, a set of events and rituals were positioned and enacted by him; this was the Canopic Fusion Reactor. [26] Anatomising it, the installation comprised an arena — the 'Reactor' an inner city; a golgotha; a metropolis within the skull . Then — the 'Canopic' — a four part dissection of the mind as a quartered and layered projection within the pylon ; and finally, as 'Fusion' — the alignment of these quartered human images in a spatial conjunction at sunset. There is an allegorising, in this installation of Egyptian depictions of the soul (the ka) and its erect shadow, returning to the grave in the morning, representations of which, perhaps, are visual pre-texts of the hovering figure encased in the squat pylon-like building which formed the enclosure for the C.F.R. at Botallack, overlooking not only the sea, but also a disused uranium mine. Nor do Egyptian texts exhaust the infolded meanings present in Bucklow's ascensional bodies: they also extend across a salvatory perspective, for the ascent is redemptive — a secular version of the enactment of the Christian narrative. But the 'eternal return' of the resurrection of the body Bucklow sees potentially refigured "in the lives of all individuals (...[if] the imagination releases them from living death as slaves to the law of reason). [27]

THE CONSOLATION OF THE CAMERA OBSCURA

Something of Plato's cave echoes around in the Canopic Fusion Reactor, but the associations are shifted from a parable of ignorance to the registration of the spectacular. Bucklow's dazzling devices divert and console in their play of intricate light and filigree surfaces, rather than make a theatre of a moralised autobiography. The indirect, averted gaze, is, for Bucklow, essential to any sort of inward vision or inquiry into the fiery mind. In the film *Forbidden Planet* (1956), Professor Morbius warns his earthly visitors against looking at the heart of the nuclear furnaces and instead he counsels regarding them indirectly, through mirrors—which give a safely diffused, mottled and warm view of the searing light of the reactors, like Bucklow's mellowed *Sol Invictus*. [Plate] This strategy of looking away, of deflecting the human gaze from dangerous light towards the beautiful, has been traced by Sarah Kofman in her study of the metaphors that have circulated around the camera obscura, and especially Nietzsche's imaginings of it. Kofman examines his *The Birth of Tragedy*, with its Sophoclean hero as a beautiful Apollonian decoy who averts the spectator's gaze from the abyss of the terrible aspects of the blinding Real; a dramatic hero who is uncannily like Bucklow's Guests and resembles the ascendent figure in the Canopic Fusion Reactor. Here is one who will conjure up salving visions which ... rise to the surface and grow visible— and which at bottom [are] nothing but the light-picture [Lichtbild] cast on a dark wall,... shining spots intended to heal the eye which dire night has seared. [28]. The screening effect which beautifies the unbearable world is the camera obscura itself, the instrument which delivers the spectacle of the lichtbild. It could be said that with the Canopic Fusion Reactor Bucklow created — only to have it destroyed by fire on the night of the new millenium — such a machine, to try to transfigure the fallen world around it— an apotropaeon — a magical apparatus which serves to placate horror. [29].].

1996: AN ALEXANDRIAN IN VENICE

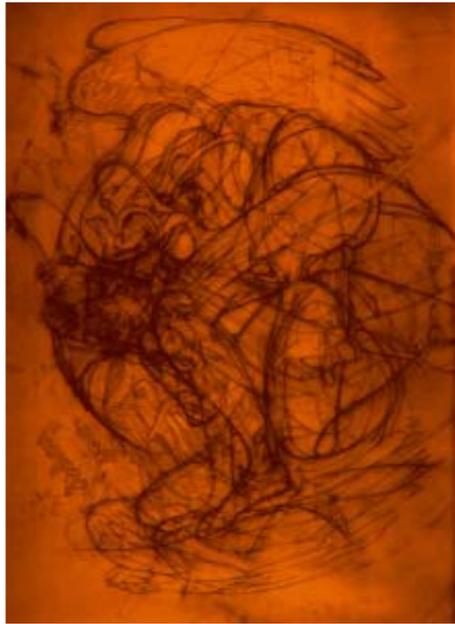


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, Tk TKTk, Tk TKTk, Tk Tk TKTk, Tk Tk

A VENETIAN CHANDELIER

The elaborate drawings for the sculpture *Island Universe* (PWR), [fig] a form of reactor, but here figured as a nuclear powered chandelier, deal in that conjugating alchemy such as we have seen with his grafting of plants and the fusing of the Guests.[30] The drawings crown the excrementality of ancient Egyptian culture with its representation of priests holding a torus of dung. These priestly standing figures at the top of the nuclear-powered chandelier are Tetrarchs, the epitome, as Bucklow sees them, of dissolution, of materiality; of the fission of the mental into bicameral conscious and unconscious strata. He has depicted them waiting, with various degrees of apprehension and dismay, for the emergence of a new fusion universe (within the mind), nano-seconds before its appearance, an imminent Advent. PWR is a decadent, virtually Neronian monument, but it anticipates some new state of being, a new horizon of time and light:— it possesses a Yeatsian sense of the Eastern other and its mysteries since Bucklow has already sailed partway to Byzantium, to Venice.

the hair of the Guests becomes fretted like the forms created by the glass and chandelier makers of the Venetian satellite islands of Murano and Burano: their bodies appear to be still ductile from the glass blower's furnaces, some still glowing with a dull heat, while some look as if they had been dipped in ice. Glassiness is inescapable as a visual metaphor in Bucklow, like his obscure chambers — and after all the by-products of nuclear power are stored in silos built to last twenty-five millenia.[31] In PWR, young women — Eve or 'Fju:zan — are entwined around dolphins, enticing the fish with mirrors held before them to spur them on along the acanthus leaved stems which form vanes of the chandelier. This, iconographically, corresponds to the stages of a narrative Bucklow has written out for the drawings of *The Mancunian Heresy*, but which also underlies the video *'Fju:zan* (1997), where Eve holds a mirror to Adam, " ...her fortunate sin is sending Adam a mirror that he may better behold the face of his agony. 12. Adam projects his own self onto all things (the naming). 13. Now he sees himself in Eve's mirror for



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the first time" [32] . This felicitous sin is alluded to in a letter to the author: "O felix culpa! – Eve increases Adam's pain (– her Judas kiss... her fortunate sin is sending him a mirror across time that he may better behold the face of his agony, and thus be stung to awaken)".[33] The priests seem to grow– genie–like from the communicating canopic vessels which sprout from the central barrel of the hyacinth chandelier, which, like Diana of the Ephesians, is multi-breasted. At the tips of the acanthus vanes are seraphic beings, with foliate wings, offering illumination. Seraphim of a sort, it might be said, thickly populate Bucklow's imaginary universes, as they do in William Blake's – but in Bucklow they are grounded in actual people – in the cast of characters he first assembled in the series Guest.

Island Universe (PWR) uses the panoplies of fantastic Alexandrian decoration – in a luxuriant style, associated with excess and oriental decadence in the Hellenistic world. Pliny inveighed against such grotesques (grotteschi as they would be on their rediscovery at the beginning of the 16th.C., secreted in grottoes, hidden in past time, like the jewel–brooch in Fju:zan) [fig.] for their impossibility to exist in the real world. To this aspect of the fantastic was also added a phobic dimension, made anxious by their riotous fertility, and oriental otherness, entities which were threateningly corrosive of civic Roman systems of representation and meaning. Here again is the forbidding Law, the warning against a direct vision of the monstrousness of nature hybridising itself. For Bucklow to manufacture such things at the culturally hybridised Venetian centre of glass making is also appropriate, since the myths of Venice are rich in their connotations of otherly ornamentation at, or beyond, the edge of Europe.

1997: IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE



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If you wished to find the genre which his video 'Fju:zan' could be placed in, a kind of science–fiction historical romance would be roughly appropriate. It is a concentratedly bizarre film; tracking a female fashion model from the contemporary world, wearing a Sony Walkman and stacked trainers (modern chopines and emblems of aspiration), who has fallen down a wormhole time tunnel and emerged in the past, near the genteel 'wilderness' of Selbourne Hanger in Hampshire.[34] The supposed time frame is not that of Gilbert White – even though the location was chosen on account of its associations with this first English naturalist and ecologist from the eighteenth century: it is, instead 1589, in the Elizabethan era, the epoch before the naming and taxonomical fissioning of the world's flora and fauna by Linnaeus. We are temporally sited four hundred years before Bucklow had planted the Hyacinthus Orientalis Delft Blues at Selborne which the heroine of the video now fore–shadows.[35] There is an element of Derek Jarman's anachronistic Jubilee in Bucklow's design, since, at the other end of this time tunnel, the model is being observed and sought by another Guest figure, SarTorus, in present day Soho in London. In the original version of the video, at Paul Kasmin's Gallery in New York in February 1998, the linked but separate narratives of the time–space ambassador of SarTorus, and the fashion model –'Fju:zan striding through the Selbourne woods, were placed on separate monitors and as a character exited 'monitor left' – it emerged simultaneously into the time stream playing on the adjacent monitor. (A formal doubling and separation which also occurs in drawings such as Lightwater Eve from 'The Mancunian Heresy').[36] This multiplication of views infects the gazes, too; SarTorus' eyes overlook the model in a montage sequence like that found in The Man With The Movie Camera, they appear pulsing, milky and transparent like the daemonic alien eyes in the fifties S.F. film, It Came from Outer Space : a gaze which beams across the time barrier by regarding fashion photographs of her neotenous face in glossy magazines.



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Tk Tk, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk TkTK, Tk Tk



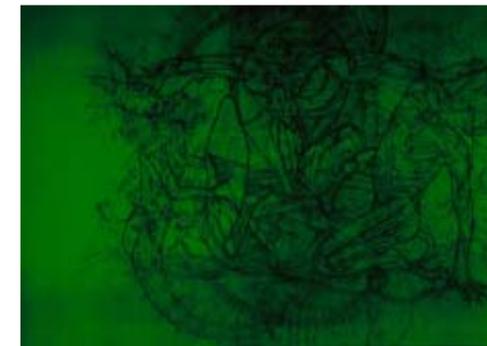
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The drama of Fju:zan is minimal but protracted: the model walks forever in the woods in a gorgeous historical costume of velvets and iridescent man-made fibre, dragging the long train of her dress across the fallen autumn leaves. Never, it would seem, has velvet looked so luscious, throwing whorls of pressure front interference patterns across the electronics of the video image. A Union Jack manufacturers label – made from the same artificial fibres is glimpsed, signifying fusion, but in this case a politico-cultural fusion, from the moment of the inception of the first imperial British state, created in Tudor and Elizabethan times, but figured here like the 'USA' in JerUSAlem as a declaration of a teleological movement towards United (inner) States.[37] The image of the growing and blooming hyacinths had arisen as a dream, to Bucklow, while he was visiting Assisi in the summer of 1989: it was a revelation and a prescription for his art. The model crouches and clears leaves from the woodland floor, planting bulbs of *Hyacinthus Orientalis*. The doubled Lightwater Eve (a drawing from the series *The Mancunian Heresy*) carries such hyacinths in her womb, signifying the conception of a message across time to her still unborn lover Adam. The video tracks time and growth: while the first part was shot in October 1996, Bucklow went back to the woods of Selbourne expressly to film the hyacinths now full grown in the spring of 1997. Recording this process of vegetal metamorphosis is complemented by a closing sequence filmed inside the Oxford nuclear centre JET (Joint European Torus), during a fusion experiment. Chemical change and the fusion of hydrogen atoms in atomic metamorphosis, as a theme, is certainly related to Bucklow's Carbon Cycle jewel brooch which the fashion model wears and which the artist had manufactured at the Chanel workshops in Paris. The brooch, which takes the form of a circle of mistletoe feeding on itself as its own host, embodies – in plan – an allegory of his own metamorphosis – his meeting and later marriage to his wife in 1988, and his epiphany at Assisi the following year.[38] An ornate emblem of personal mythology, the brooch stands for the artist as a sculpted version of a flow chart or plot diagram of his own growth and fusion (1957 – 1989) – a bodily and mental state which had superseded his earlier, fissionable behaviour and development.[39]

FAR REMEMBERED: THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT



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Tk Tk, Tk TkTK, Tk TkTK, Tk Tk TkTK, Tk Tk



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In both Sartor and Jerusalem, the light-blessed jubilation of the woman and child could be a recollection of the primary light, an act of remembering origins which Plato called anamnesis [40]. Metaphors of light in western philosophy are so formative and structuring that they are, in Jacques Derrida's reckoning, a kind of thinking of their own – a photology – Derrida's term for the dominance of western metaphysics by images of light. There are different strands of such photological philosophy – the ideal, primal light of Plato being one kind of visual poetics and one which Bucklow seems to have conjured with. But while Bucklow – as a child of light – has returned to that fourth century Gnostic scenario of union with the light, a belief recounted in the tract written in Alexandria, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* [41], he has, as ever, psychologised and internalised the whole matter – locating the light of the Gnostics not as an external realm but in an inner, self enclosed parrallel universe, which we contain and yet have only occasional access to, as if through worm holes that open and close seemingly at their own will. Gnosticism has been a crucial inspiration for his own fantasmic counter-histories of creation, such as his multi-personed cosmogony in graphic form – the 1999 drawings *The Mancunian Heresy*. This is Gnosticism through an eccentric and personal prism; the title links his natal Manchester, in parody, with the religious sectarianism of 3rd century Iraq.[42] His interest with Gnosticism resides in an admiration for their freely projective re-interpretations of the Christian Creation story, rather than any subscription to their philosophy. (He sees their fascination with a union with light as a psychological trope for a desired psychic coherence, rather than revealed wisdom). According to the Gnostics conjectured origin of the world, light-filled and incorruptible celestial spirits are contrasted with carnal man and the oppressive rulers of the material universe, the Archons. Over against this material world is the imperishable light, [43] an ever-rejuvenated existence bathing in lucency for the Gnostic children of light, and a return to ..the Holy Land of Adamantine. Analysed from a psychological point of view the projected mental strata within this text can be surely apprehended, but Bucklow would tear down and reverse the location of 'the good' as construed by Gnostic theologians. [44]

THE SHINING SHADOW
AGAINST OBLIVION



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Perhaps the purpose of the Guests and particularly the ka-like image entombed in the nuclear containment pylon at Botallack, was to act as a luminous left-over, a shadowed, silhouetted reminder and remainder of that imperishable light which came from those inner adamantine lands. A veil exists, claimed The Hypostasis of the Archons, "between the world above and the realms that are below; and a shadow came into being beneath the veil: and that shadow became matter and that shadow was projected apart..." [45]. Bucklow may allude to this notion of a veil, for he sees it as a prime example of the psychic mechanism of censorship. With a subtle inflection of material and metaphor, inside the Canopic Fusion Reactor he has placed another mechanism – the semi-transparent muslin veil where the ascensional figure appeared two hours before sunset at Botallack, magicked through the aperture punctured wall through which the twenty thousand suns poured their light to paint themselves as a 'live' Guest in the C. F. R.

1999: UNLEASHING THE
BIOMORPHIC METAPHOR

In The Mancunian Heresy, as in Gnostic texts such as On the Origin of the World, supernatural beings are continually generating worlds – possessing powers to procreate among and within their selves. Death, in On the Origin, being androgynous," mingled with his own nature and begot seven androgynous offspring; they had intercourse with each other, and each one begot seven" – a chain reaction [46]. The endless boundary-less biomorphic couplings of The Mancunian Heresy, teem with weird Goth-cum-Gnostic versions of Bucklow, his wife and their circle, in pictorial visions where the populations of Blake metamorphisise into De Kooning's late nineteen forties style. The biomorphism of The Mancunian Heresy carbon toner prints which were exhibited at Anthony Wilkinsons Gallery in June/July 1999, has definite, and admitted memories of Gorky and especially De Kooning about 1946-7, of Attic and Pink Angels, but with allegorical meaning. Of Pink Angels, Bucklow has said that if it had been Duchamp, you would have



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IN THE ROSICRUCIAN GARDEN



Tk, Tk TKTK, Tk TKTK, Tk TKTK, Tk Tkk TKTK, Tk TKTK, Tk TKTK, Tk Tk, Tk TKTK, Tk TKTK, Tk Tk TKTK, Tk Tk

thought of alchemic vessels. The alembic hourglass biomorphic form associated with Satan in Satan Radioactive/Satan Radiopassive [fig.] is, according to Bucklow, a fissioning early childhood mind being impregnating by YHVH with external information.[47] For The Mancunian Heresy, he adopted a kind of graphic style which could interlace outlines together, rendering them transparent. There are similarities with the graphic style of Stanley William Hayter and Wilfredo Lam in the 1940s, and kinds of cosmic mythomania scaled against the smaller sagas of human generation. This is especially marked in the satan drawing He's already in me,[48] with its fissioned multiple phalli and elaborated muscular torsions around orifices. One might also think of Bellmer, but Bellmer's illustration of Sadian transgression does not aim at the same territory as Bucklow's grotesque comedy of Judeo-Christian narrative heterodoxically re-inscribed on the bureaucratic surfaces of contemporary nuclear physics. .

There is, of course, a pastoral element within this nuclear sublime. Among the subjects which he drew in 1999 was a narrative of perverse Genesis which heretically re-negotiates the Fall, in order to restore not only an idyllic Adam and Eve, but also a new heaven. From the archaeology of Symbolism certain floral attributes capped this narrative: it called for a climactic chemical wedding with a Rhodium-lanthanide compound producing a crystal. Such a creative strategy opened the door to the afterlife (or the half-life) of Rosicrucianism with its veiling, floral marriages and esoteric and heterodox Christian symbolism. Bucklow self-grafts into his narrative as a composite Christ and Lucifer-like figure; he styles himself as an invented androgyne St. Christifer – founder of the cult, in another Mancunian heresy-like pun, the Christian Satanists. Various atomic changes are outlined in the Mancunian Heresy which perhaps repeat some alchemic marriage; they end with – stage "12. A balance of stable nuclides is formed and Rhodium-lanthinide compound is produced. 13. The crystal of this substance is rose-like in



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INNER CITY RIOT:

form ".[49] So Bucklow's Love Story ends with the rose – in Christianity, of course, the red rose symbolises the blood Christ shed on the cross and consequently became a symbol of God, but there is also the sign of Adonis' blood and all sub rosa things, all still secret. And this obscure discretion is a dilemma for Bucklow, conflicted by wishes to be more understood in his acts of creation, while building ever more complex programmes and systems. His anxiety over his system and its presentation to the heathen, its oblique disclosure as a personal myth, is comparable with Duchamp's detachment yet dependence on exegetes. The personal mythologies of the whole Carbon Cyle as planned in the Chandelier and brooch and as drawn in The Mancunian Heresy are, perhaps, licensed by The Large Glass with its grinding – fissioning – machinery and staffage of chemical apparatus. Beuys is also pertinent here, but there is a definite Duchampian Bucklow, in his wedding of a biographical narrative with machine metaphor, and it is also visible in Duchamp's painting of c.1911, Spring] .[50] with aspirant, ascendent male and female figures placed around a tree and chemical vessel – a new Adam and Eve, where the alchemical pastoral still subsists in this hybridising of Rosicrucian Symbolism and Cubist technical language.

One of Bucklow's strongest self-identifications– as with Blake –is with a visionary model of the universe's foundation as a possible metaphor for his own internal creative powers. This is not new in Modernist theory– Kandinsky in 1915 had turned to such cosmological metaphors as commentaries on his own creation of *kleine welt*, little worlds, driven by a model of artistic production which valued internal necessity. Bucklow has had to find forms to describe his own secret creative economy – the analogy between reactors and minds is established, but the intellectual orientation of his system can also be seen in the fact that he also found and underlined these remarkably Jungian words [51] – on what he would interpret as the homeostatic psyche – from an extract from the Gnostic Great Announcement "...one power divided above and below; generating itself, making itself grow, seeking itself, being



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mother of itself, father of itself, sister of itself, daughter of itself, son of itself– mother, father, unity being a source of the entire circle of existence "[52]. In his complex and beautiful art which rises beyond so many boundaries, Bucklow has unscrolled a fantasy of self-incorporation: the self as legion of fertile forces.

- 1 Christopher Bucklow letter to the author 31st December 1997
- 2 Christopher Bucklow Letter to the author, 25th March 1997.
- 3 Sir James Frazer The Golden Bough Wordsworth Editions, Ware, 1993, p.192.
- 4 Frazer op. cit. p.193.
- 5 Christopher Bucklow: Reactor, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York, ? Month 1996
- 6 Ovid Metamorphosis Book III Trans. Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge MA, 1984, quoted in Victor I. Stoichita A Short history of the Shadow Reaktion Books 1997, pp.32-3
- 7 Bucklow was a museum curator and writer. For a discussion of this see Addie Vassie, Interview with Chris Bucklow, Next level magazine, London, Summer 2003
- 8 The chronology of the genetic works is as follows.....
- 9 Christopher Bucklow, Letter to the Author, 23rd January 2000.
- 10 Ashley Montagu's Culture and the Evolution of Man , cf. 'Time, Morphology, and Neotony in the Evolution of Man, OUP, 1962 pp.324-42, p.335.
- 11 John Gribbin and Jeremy Cherfes The Monkey Puzzle 1982, p.159.
- 12 Cf. Victor Stoichita A Short History of the Shadow Reaction Books, London, 1997, p.131. See also Bucklow's essay 'The Axolotl and the Id' in catalogue to Little Angels, Houldsworth fine Art, London 2000 (unpaginated)
- 13 For 'patching' see Bucklow's use of Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus in his notes published in Under the Sun, catalogue to exhibition at Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco 1996
- 14 For Fludd see interview in Creative camera magazine, London
- 15 Harold Bloom Omens of Millenium Fourth Estate, London, 1997, p.9-10
- 16 Breton?.....
- 17 The technique of the Guests.....
- 18 William Shakespeare, The Passionate Pilgrim.....
- 19 The Bucklows lived in Venice from April 1996 to July 1997
- 20 Commissioned by Dahlia Levin, curator of the Herzliya Museum.....
- 21 nb plate... the shadow is very like the caesarian sections or possibly sterilisation incisions which often occur in the later paintings: see fig.
- 22 Curated by Max Wigram, ?Month 1996
- 23 The inscription reads.....
- 24 Reverse time streams also occur in The mancianian heresy where the fission reactor runs backwards recomposing the split atoms of the fission daughter products back into uranium.
- 25 Ovid Metamorphoses , Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981, p.110.
- 26 Commissioned by The St Ives International.....
- 27 Christopher Bucklow The Sea of Time and Space, Sea of faith magazine, UK Summer 1998 p.14-15
- 28 From the Birth of Tragedy trans . W. Kaufman, Vintage, New York, 1967, p.220-1, quoted in Sarah Kofman Camera Obscura of Ideology Trans. Will Straw, Athlone Press, London 1998, p.47-8.
- 29 The building was destroyed by arson late on the night of 31st December 1999
- 30 The glass version has not yet been made. The piece exists as a maquette.....
- 31 There is a sense that if the mind is figured as a reactor
- 32 Text accompanying the Mancunian heresy.....AWG
- 33 Christopher Bucklow Letter to the author.....
- 34 Duration, personnel Guests Vs and MS.....
- 35 Explain reneacting 1989.....
- 36 Illus in BM book.....forthcoming.....
- 37 A united kingdom within the skull.
- 38 Explain carbon cycle.....
- 39 See note... above.....
- 40 Cf. Cathryn Vasseleu Touching Light Routledge, London 1998, p.3.
- 41 Ed. James M. Robinson The Nag Hammadi Library, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1996, p.163.
- 42 Explain Manicheanism.....
- 43 The Hypostasis of the Archons, in ed. James M. Robinson The Nag Hammadi Library, op.cit. p. 169.
- 44 On the Origin of the World in ed. James M. Robinson, op.cit. p.178.
- 45 The Hypostasis of the Archons, in ed. James M. Robinson op.cit. , p. 167.
- 46 Origin of the World, Op Cit p.177
- 47 Conversation with me
- 48 BM book.....
- 49 Text to The Mancunian Heresy, Op Cit.
- 50 Illus. In MOMA
- 51 In copy lent to the author by Christopher Bucklow.
- 52 Elaine Pagels The Gnostic Gospels Harmondsworth, Middlesex, p.73.

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CREDITS