



Ink Mathematics

*A schizophrenic with a Napoleon complex is given a lie detector test and when asked . . .
"are you Napoleon"? replies "no". The machine registers a lie.¹*

The title **Ink Mathematics** is taken from a song by Captain Beefheart. Like some Dadaist art Beefheart's work is anti rational and deliberately obtuse, debunking traditional methods and concepts. He is an artist whose fractured lyrics using split tenses and musical forms amount to what could be described as an anti rhythm, a man whose mind seems to be organised according to some truly unique electrical rhythm.

Abnormalities of the measurable electrical rhythms of the brain, a less than average control over immediate impulse, defects of nature as well as nurture, a tendency to take phantasy for fact, an uncertainty over one's actual identity, are the hallmarks of psychopathic behaviour.

Central to the work are the related subjects of fire and arson represented in various forms and readable in many contexts. As a fundamental tool for play and experimentation, as a powerful human attractor and an agent of arousal, as a catalyst for creation and destruction, and as a living force without any conscious intention. Texts have been borrowed from the writings of Philip K Dick, Patrick Hamilton and Herbert Huncke, all dealing with aspects of aberrant or what now might be called dysfunctional behaviour. Relating stories of pain and ecstasy, borderline conditions where a loss of self is experienced, a detachment of mind and body or what psychiatrists would call splitting. A whole sphere of human creativity used to channel the energies of outsider lifestyles, irrational urges that need satisfying. Urges which appear to be endemic and continuous. The motivation, the real spark behind most acts of arson is the thrill, the most rational explanation of all.

¹ RD Laing, *The Divided Self*, Penguin 1990. First published 1959 Tavistock publications.

Ink Mathematics examines a set of concerns indelibly linked to the materials and processes used in their construction. The materials used include u.v. blacklight tubes, smaller versions of which are sometimes used to scan and authenticate banknotes, and invisible ink, sometimes used to mark possessions and prove ownership in the event of theft. Household firelighters are also an integral part of the work. These concerns and preoccupations are in turn focused around the idea of the self and the accumulation of experiences that shape a person. To see indeed if it is possible to talk about the self as an absolute, as an autonomous phenomenon located within an existential core and not as an absorber or experiencer of external sense data; a saturated self shaped by and filtering sense data, endlessly mutating from one self to another self, a cell within a system of interdependencies where one's self means little and matters of choice are illusory in a continuum where you can't depend on your past and your present is sliding away. The ability to self determine or exercise free-will, and control destiny, are called into question. Various strands grow off this and touch on aspects of the social arena, the psychoanalytical and extend an interest in the area of ownership and authenticity. Previous work, **Proof**² has included the use of stolen objects to look at value systems and the status of the object. The proposition being that within a system of constantly shifting values, authenticity, which operates on many different levels, usually comes out at the top of the hierarchical scale, yet dishonesty and theft could be transformed into qualities of the highest value. The elements within *Ink Mathematics* are presented in an evidential, random and informal way with the intention of throwing light on, or illuminating the serial relationship between them. Possible patterns of thought and behaviour, both rational and irrational, propose themselves. Repetitive behaviour consolidates the self.

² Proof, exhibited in 'Perspective' 1998, Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast

Deviant fragments from unacceptable codes are unearthed in an attempt to establish a web of connections, to fix and pin matters down, to make the thing finally known, as clear as plate glass, and create some fragile and momentary certainty in the interplay between the material and the intentional object of a mental state. On occasions that which is present to consciousness may not correspond to any material reality. This state of non-correspondence appears to be ubiquitous in art, possibly the essential oxygen needed for its existence, within which meanings are constructed around misreadings and mistakes.

When asked in an interview in Rolling Stone magazine in 1975 by R. D. Laing

"Why would a public, with an interest in music, want to listen to what has been described as a schizo rant?" Captain Beefheart answered,

"Uh, . . . yes, . . . I mean . . . my attitude to that is, go fuck yourself."

"O.K. Can I change the subject to your intentions? Is the anarchic vision in your music conceived as some form of utopian state?"

"Why don't you go home O blob ear you great"

"Well, would psychic disintegration and tangential communication be acceptable to you as accurate descriptions of your work?"

"Mmmm. . . . interesting, not just interesting but tapered and also bulbous."

"Might it be that this cut-up approach, the contorted incomprehensibility is simply an attempt to express the inexpressible?"

"mmmm webcor, webcor."

Laing. "Well, I don't know what to say now except farewell you bastard"

The inability to tell a lie because of some primitive fear, some superstition, can be seen as the inability to establish one's full measure of autonomy and identity. No doubt in most circumstances good reasons can be found against telling lies, but the inability to do so is not one of the best reasons.

I'm gonna grow fins

'N go back in the water again.

I'll said, I'll said. ³

Conor McFeely

October 2000

Bibliography

Patrick Hamilton, Hangover Square, Constable and co 1941

Herbert Huncke, The Evening Sun Turned Crimson Cherry Valley Editions 1980

Philip K. Dick, Confessions of a Crap Artist Magnum ed. 1979

³ Captain Beefheart, Grow Fins, The Spotlight Kid 1972