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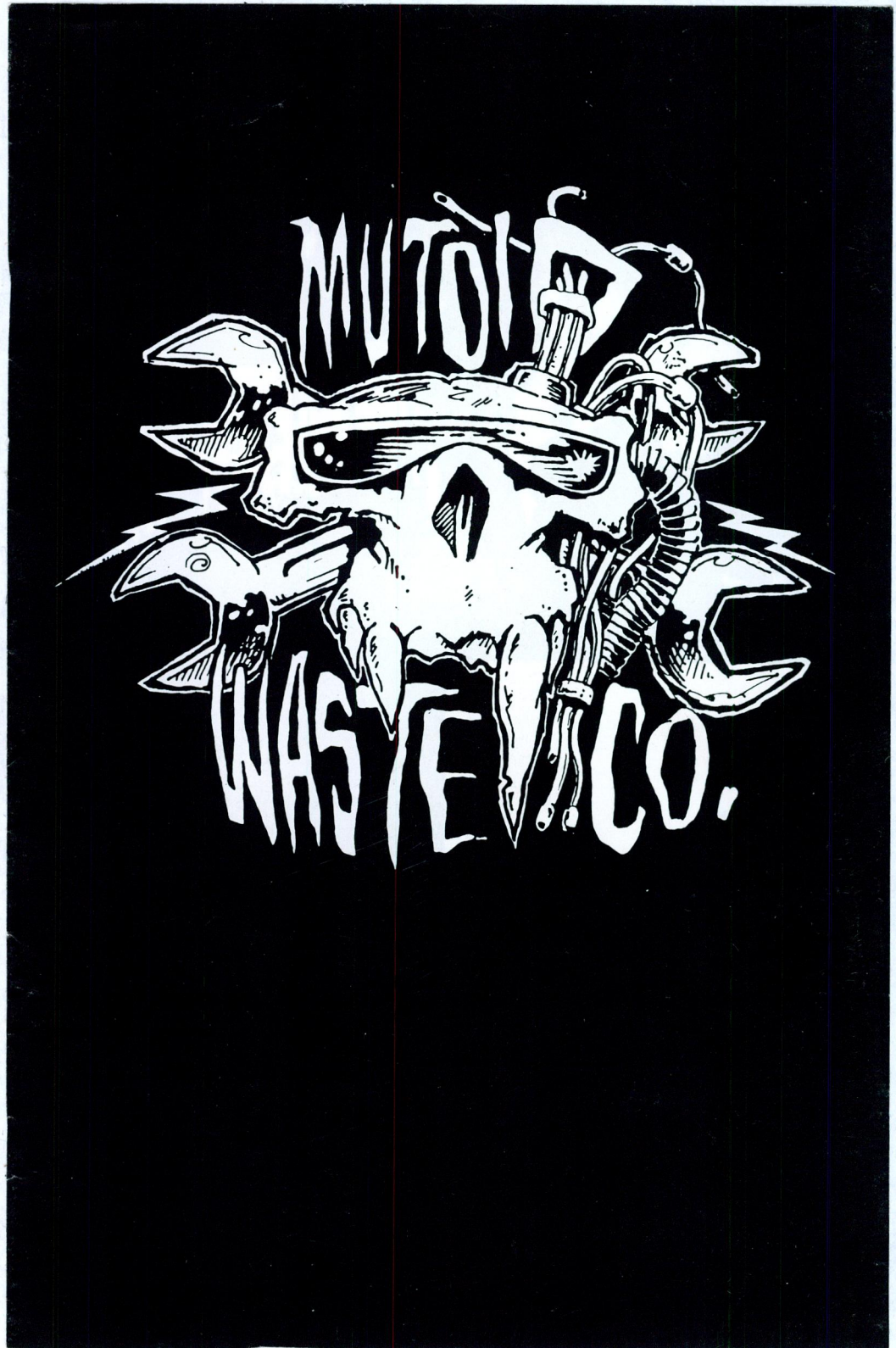
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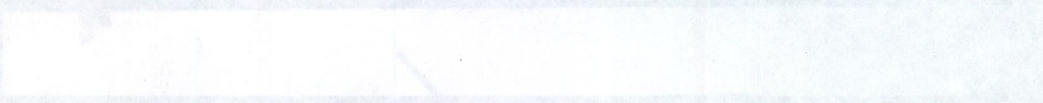
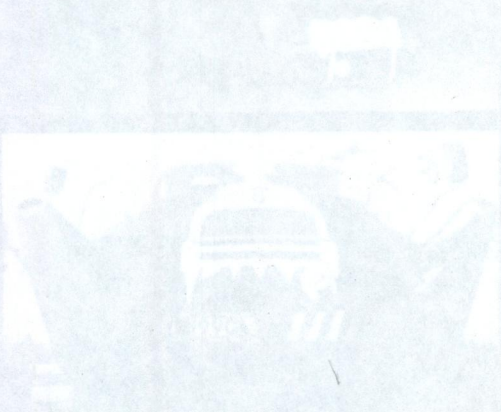
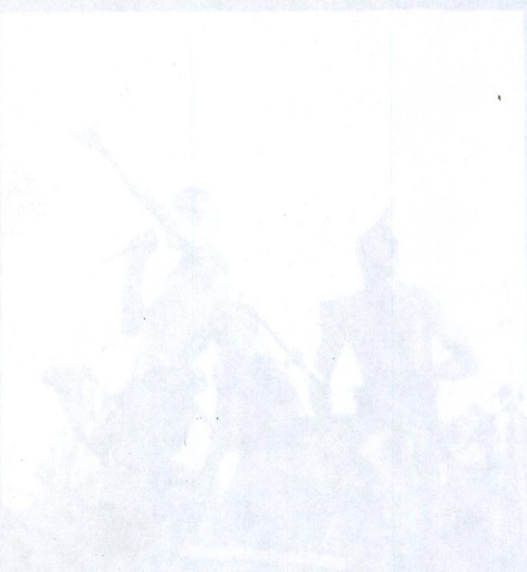
THE MUTOID WASTE COMPANY

BY

CONOR HEGARTY

**Submitted To The Faculty Of History Of Art
And Design And Complementary Studies
In Candidacy For The Degree Of
Bachelor Of Design In Craft Design
(Metalwork)**





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank

ESTHER KEVINS

&

MAGGIE MUTOID

Without whose help this thesis

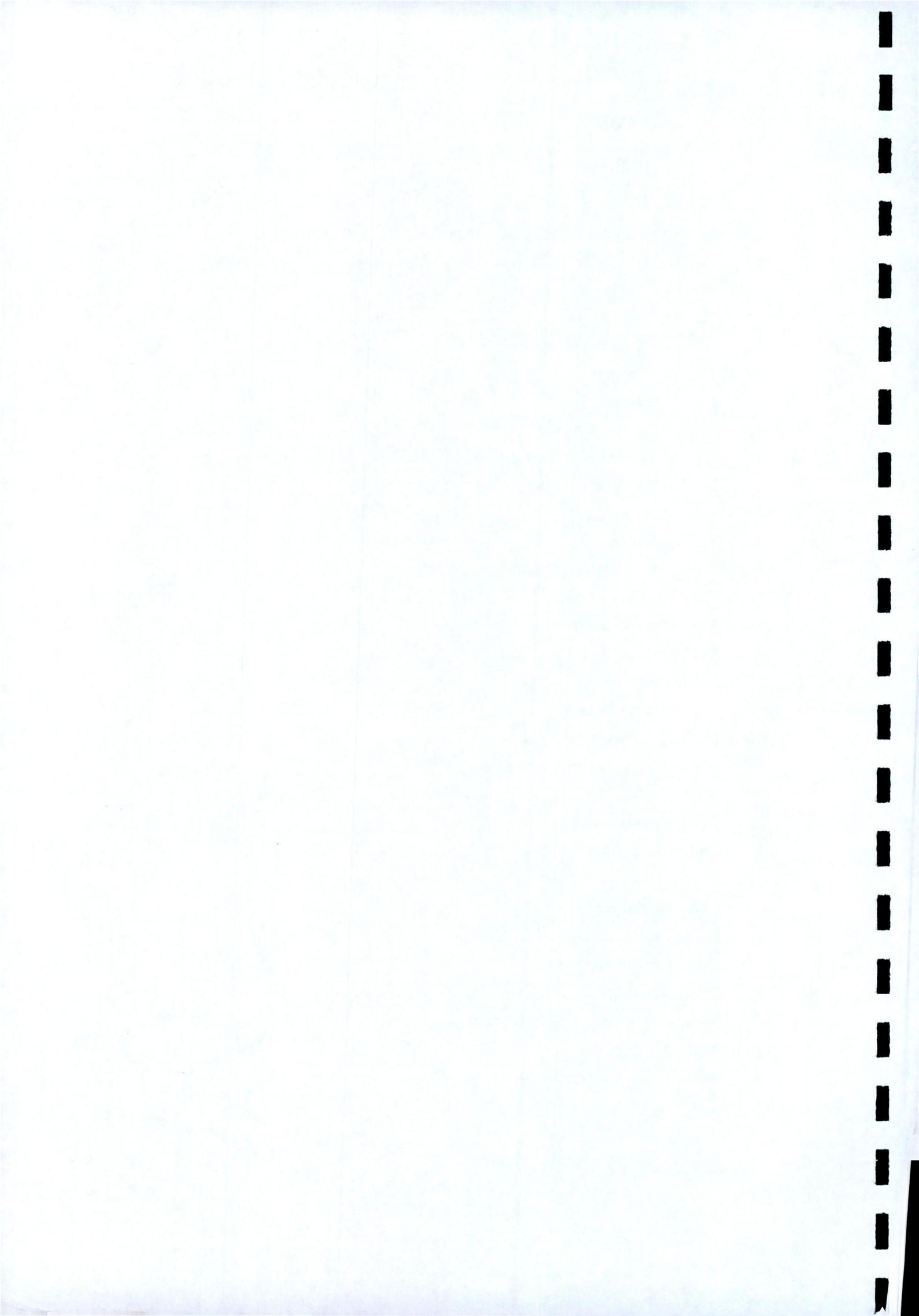
would not have been possible

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INTRODUCTION

The Mutoid Waste Company is a group of artists, mostly of English nationality, who create huge pieces of sculpture out of the unwanted junk and leftovers from the West's affluent and wasteful societies. They are tribal people living a nomadic lifestyle, an underclass well removed from the world of galleries and art critics. They wander from city to city in their trucks and buses gathering mechanical rubbish and building giant creatures or strange objects on plots of waste land before moving on again, leaving these short lived monuments to modern technology.

Actually, to be honest, this is more the mutoids of four years ago when they were still very much a subversive threat, albeit a minor one, to the openings and reviews of established art circles. These days the mutoids have become a victim of their own success. They have not been destroyed though, nor have they sold out on their anarchic ideals, they have merely mutated again to respond to growing media attention. Articles in trendy, fashionable, magazines and even a television appearance on Italy's nationwide RAI 2 channel have exposed them to a much wider audience, no longer just travellers at free festivals or squat parties.

The Italian people have now adopted the group it would seem. The government gave them land, an old quarry near Santarcangelo di Romagna now called Mutonia, and grants to help them survive.

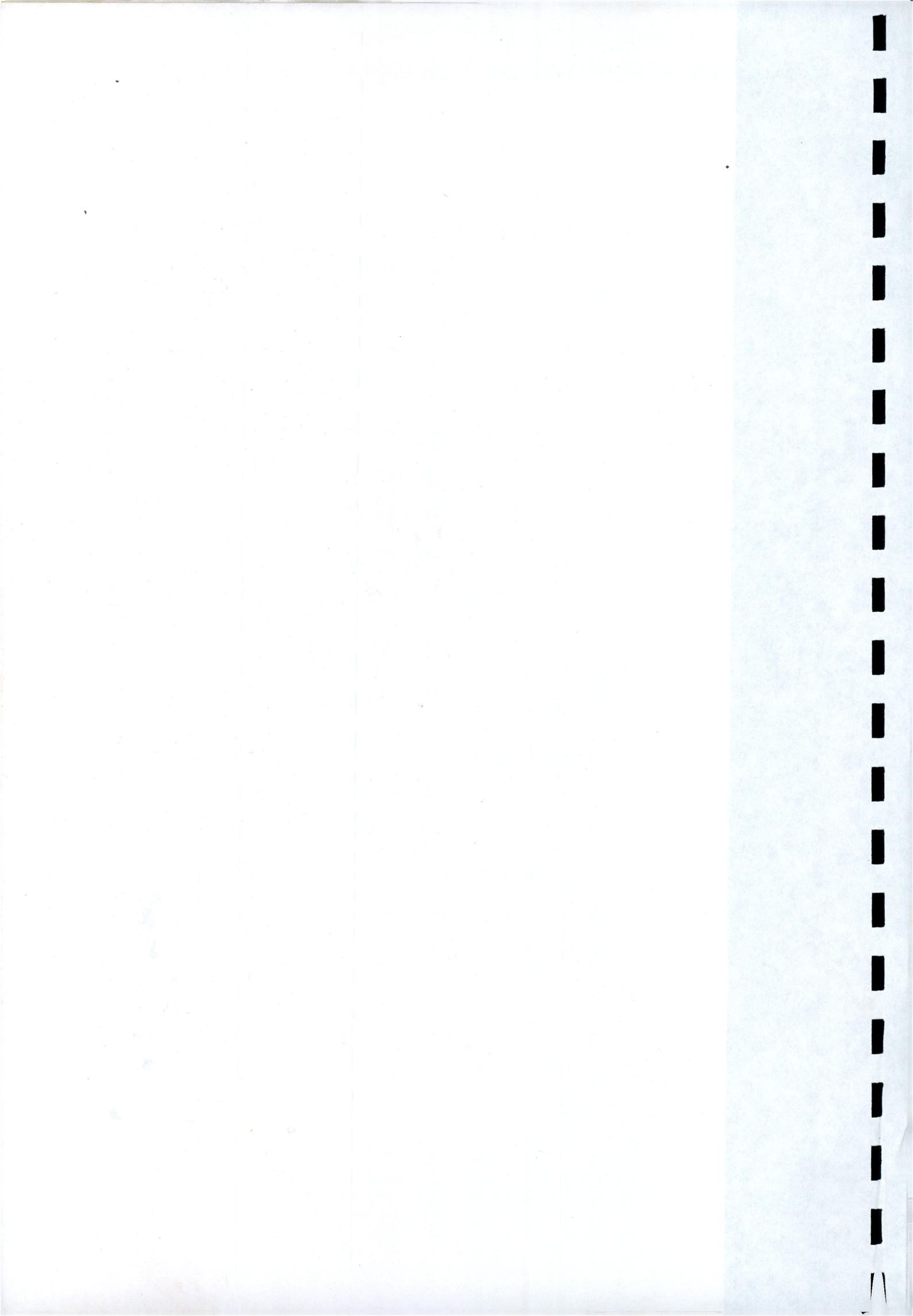
The thought of doing commission work would have been unthinkable for the mutoids eight or nine years ago but now has become their main source of income

with some quite prestigious commission, behind them including sets for George Lucas **Return of the Jedi**, a television commercial for the lager of Lamont and works for musicians Jean Michel Jarre, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and Nina Hagen. The mutoids are showing other evidence of changes in their original philosophies as they are currently in negotiations concerning a planned exhibition in Japan and Russia.

In this thesis I will attempt to explain the spiritual motivation behind the mutoids work and how their almost religiously fanatical approach to recycling has steered and inspired their unique style of work. I will be drawing comparisons with similar groups such as Archaos and the Dogs of Heaven and earlier more conservative forms of scavenger art not only to contextualise the mutoids but also, more importantly, to show how far above the rest they are in terms of originality and fervour.

The Mutoids In Costume





Chapter 1

The Free Festival Movement

To try to understand the Mutoid Waste company we should look back to their beginnings and examine the cultural environment in which the group was started. The one common factor that all original members of the group share is that they were all at one stage a part of the growing movement of travelling people, a counter culture still very evident in England and Ireland today. The early eighties saw huge numbers of people from a variety of creeds and classes take to the road as an alternative to living in polluted, over-crowded and crime-ridden cities. Travelling was a means of escaping the capitalist trap of urban living, everything was shared and skills and goods were bartered or swapped. These people were allowed to live pretty much as they wished for the first few years, free of police or government intervention. Summer was the best time of year for travellers, for this was the Free Festival season.

England's West Country in summer time has been a traditional place for travellers to gather because of the Solstice ceremony at Stonehenge on June 21st. From 1974, a free festival, lasting between a week and a month, was held annually in nearby fields. These gatherings were very important to travelling people who used the opportunity to trade goods and skills and earn enough money to get them through the winter. New friends were made, old ones re-acquainted and information and advice exchanged. In an article in London's ID magazine, veteran festival organiser Sid Rawle describes the economy of the free festivals:

"By 1980, the festival circuit supported a network of craftspeople, fire-circuses, dancers, healers, astrologers, jugglers, cafes, bars, jewellers, potters, importers, brewers, sculptors, artists, stages, showmen, publishers, trapeze artists, children's entertainers, bands, clothes stalls, candle makers, tattooists, sound engineers, riggers, acid and hash dealers, lighting personnel, blacksmiths, book shops and piercers. An alternative economy so self-sufficient and isolated from mainstream norms that those who encounter it for the first time are visibly shocked by its coherence and organisation".¹

At the end of the festival, those travellers living in buses, vans and trucks moved on together, travelling in convoy gave them a sense of community, safety and security.

Although only 23, Joe Rush was already quite a veteran to the travelling scene. He had spent most of his childhood and teen years moving about, living on a barge and in an old church amongst other places.

Joe rush began to make sculptures in 1978. His first piece was a helmet resembling a prop from an anarchic post-apocalyptic movie. Rush lived in a van behind Royal Crescent mews in Shepherds Bush in his native London. Here he worked on his sculptures of welded scrap metal, "mutating" scrap into art. He made a living producing highly finished furniture, again recycled from junk, which sold at a comfortable rate from the Crucial Gallery in Kensington Park Road.

However, the works Joe made for himself was much more frantically-built and much more anarchic. He made sure the pieces were seen by carrying them or wearing them around the Portobello Market on a sunny Saturday afternoons, attracting a lot of attention to himself.

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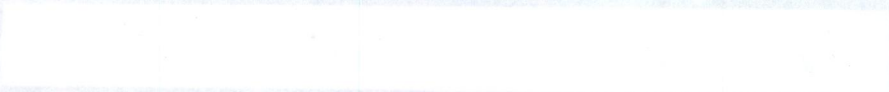
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May of 1984 saw Joe's first exhibition when the "Mutoid Waste Exhibition" was held in his Shepherds Bush Studio. The most striking piece at this show was a motorbike and rider portrayed as one smooth form with no visible join between the two. Joe advertised the exhibition by driving up and down the Portobello Road in a customised car, which he named the mutant preacher mobile, and stopping often to preach his mutation sermon.

Robin Cooke was fascinated by what he saw Rush doing. Cooke was working as a mechanic not far from Rush's studio and the two became friends. Cooke claims that the basis of their friendship was that he was an artistic mechanic whilst Rush was a mechanical artist. Joe and Robin changed their identities, they became the Reverend Joe-King Rat (Mutoid preacher God O.B.E.) and Auto-Mech respectively. The Mutoid Waste Company was born. Later that year Ricky Lee joined the team and the main creative core of the mutoids was assembled and still exists to this day. Slowly, the site on Shepherds Bush, which now resembled a scrap yard, began to fill up with vehicles. The group registered themselves as a circus, allowing them parking privileges closed to other travellers, and succeeded in obtaining permission from the Greater London Council to stay on the site between Evesham Street and Bard Street, long enough to work on some pieces. However, on night, two men attacked the site, throwing as many as ten crudely made petrol bombs and smashing bus windows. One bus was burnt (but not too badly) and in the ensuing melee Joe Rush had two ribs broken. The mutoids packed up and went back on the road.



Joe Rush At His Mutoid Waste Exhibition In London (May 1984)



In 1985, however, things began to change for the travelling people. Wiltshire County Council, the National Trust and English heritage announced that there would be no more free festivals at Stonehenge. This signalled the start of a changing climate for travellers in Britain. In a booklet entitled A Series of Shock Slogans and Mindless Token Tantrums that accompanied the "Christ" L.P. by an early eighties English Punk Band called Crass, the band's drummer, Penny Rimbaud, recounts the tale of Wally Hope. ²

Phil Russel, or Wally Hope as he was known to the authorities, the initiator of the first Stonehenge Free Festival, was arrested when police raided a house he was visiting under the pretence of looking for an Army deserter, searched his pockets and found three Acid tablets. Russel was imprisoned for seven days without being charged. He was refused the right to a phone call so no one knew of his predicament and on the seventh day Russel, because he refused to wear his prison uniform claiming it gave him rashes, was diagnosed schizophrenic and institutionalised. Wally Hope was sectioned under the Mental Health Act of 1959 and committed for an indefinite time to a mental hospital. Here he was prescribed massive doses of Largactil and Modecate until they induced a condition known as Chronic Drskensia. When Wally Hope was finally discharged a month later his brain and body no longer functioned properly, damaged beyond repair by his enforced medication. Some two months later, Russel killed himself, unable to face living the rest of his life in a drug induced stupor.

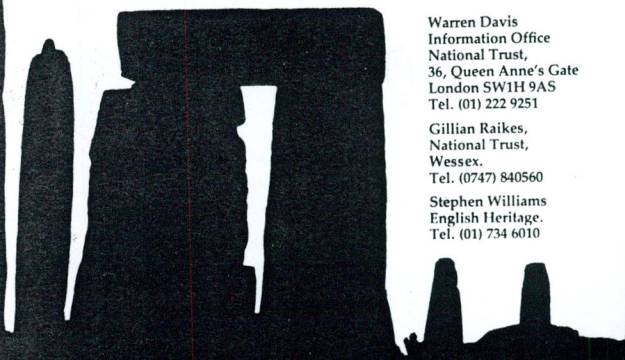
English Heritage



The National Trust

STONEHENGE

English Heritage and
the National Trust announce
that there will be no festival
at Stonehenge in 1986



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Help us to preserve the past for the future

Announcement From The National Trust Ordering

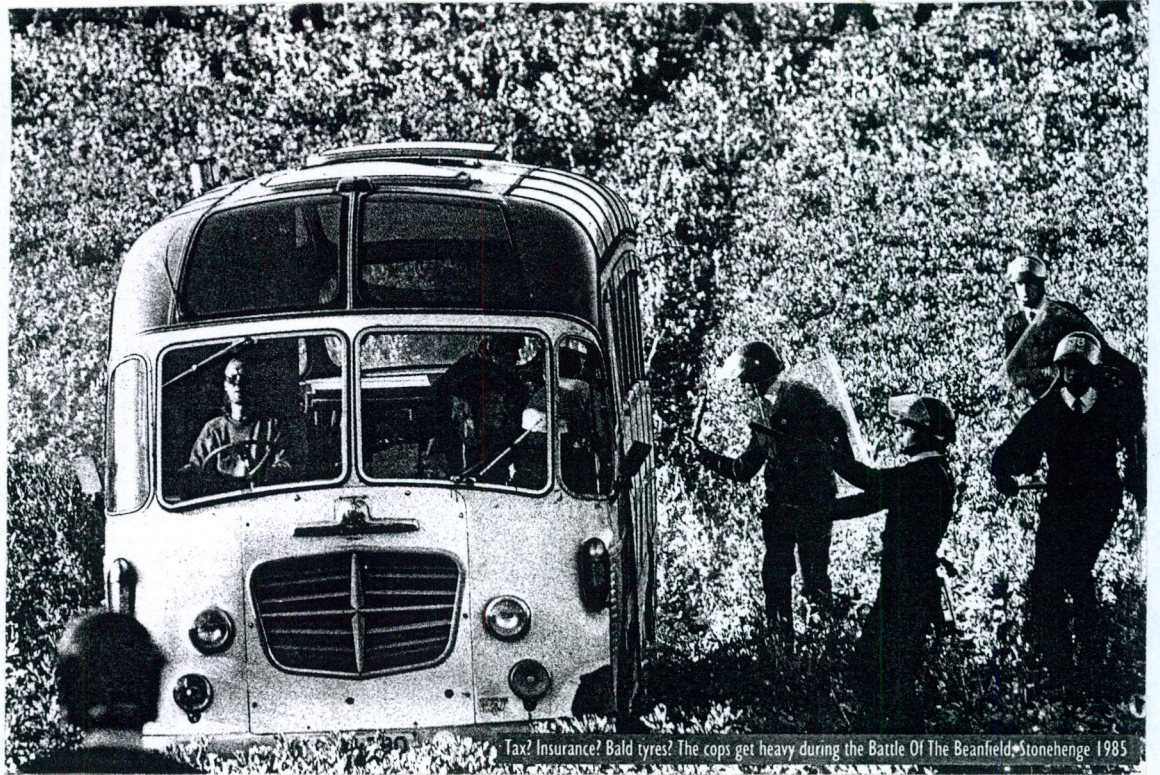
An End To The Stonehenge Free Festival



The travellers knew well just how ruthless the authorities could be when they wanted to stamp out something or someone they considered a threat to stability but no one could have expected this ruthlessness to reach the extremes it did in July 1985.

Many travellers chose to ignore the government's ban on the Stonehenge Festival but those who did try to reach the Henge that year were the victims of the notorious "Battle of the Beanfield". The events of that day are probably the most infamous and sadly remembered in the twenty year history of the travelling community. The police set up road blocks all across Wiltshire and herded all the Henge bound hippies into a single convoy of some hundred and fifty vehicles. The convoy was stopped on a back road off the A303 near Cholderton, just three miles short of Stonehenge. The police began making arrests indiscriminately so the travellers broke down some fences and swung their trucks and busses into a beanfield near the Savernake forest. The police surrounded the field ensuring no one could escape and next day ordered the travellers to leave in an orderly queue so they could be arrested. The travellers claimed that they had broken no laws and stayed put. That day more police arrived swelling their numbers to over a thousand, all in full riot gear. Ambulances arrived and waited for the casualties. The travellers were scared for themselves, their children and their homes and appealed to the few reports who had got past the police lines and into the Beanfield to tell people what was happening.

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The Battle Of The Beanfield 1985. Rose And Baby Kaya Flee Riot Police While Busses Burn In The Distance



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Dawn next day the police attacked. A thousand of them ran riot for two hours. In an interview with the New Musical Express, Rose stated;

"They had helicopters with loud speakers, shouting "Take the bastards out! Take the bastards out!". All the policemen were worked up into a frenzy, they really got into it. They knew I had a baby on the bus, and so did other people, but they saw the baby and smashed the windscreen."

The police used one vehicle to ram the others and set fire to several others whilst they smashed windows and beat men, women and children indiscriminately. Lord Cardigan, who had allowed the convey through his land and had ridden with them on his motorbike, said he had arrived at the beanfield to see "truncheons going in like nobody's business".⁴

It was during this year, in the midst of all this turmoil that the Mutoid Waste Company made one of their most important pieces of work, a piece that earned them a cult status amongst travellers nationwide. The Stonehenge festival ban meant that most travellers went to the Glastonbury festival that year to celebrate the solstice. The mutoids went too and collected dozens of scrapped cars and vans on the way. When they got there they constructed a car henge, a full scale copy fo Stonehenge, by standing cars on their ends in pairs and capping them with cars or vans.

The Car Henge was seen as a fitting protest to the Beanfield events. If city folk, so preoccupied with their commercialism and technology, wouldn't allow the travellers to go to Stonehenge, then they would raid the towns, take the symbols of greed and technology and create their own henge.



The Car Henge, Glastonbury





The Car Henge was built by travellers for travellers. No one bought it or wrote critiques about it. On the morning of the solstice, thousands of people gathered inside and around it to celebrate the sunrise, banging the cars with hands and sticks creating a cacophonous reception to the longest day of the year. The henge was built, enjoyed and left to be destroyed (as many pieces inevitably were) by the relevant authorities.

For the next three summers, the mutoids continued to work at these free festivals and at commercial ones like Glastonbury. Found cars and scrap metal was cut apart with angle grinders and welded together to make works of art. The mutoid waste roadshow travelled the country putting on performances in city parks and at festivals. In their brochure/press release, the mutoids describe their road show as:

"A unique mixture of mutated vehicles, pyrotechnics and acrobatics, futuristic characters set to a synchronised backdrop of light, music and sound effects. This is live mutation".⁵

They spent their winters in London, squatting large abandoned warehouses, an old bus station and an old school in Ladbroke Grove. They decorated these halls with the abundance of raw materials to be found in the city's skips and old industrial estates and staged all night parties for three thousand people at a time.

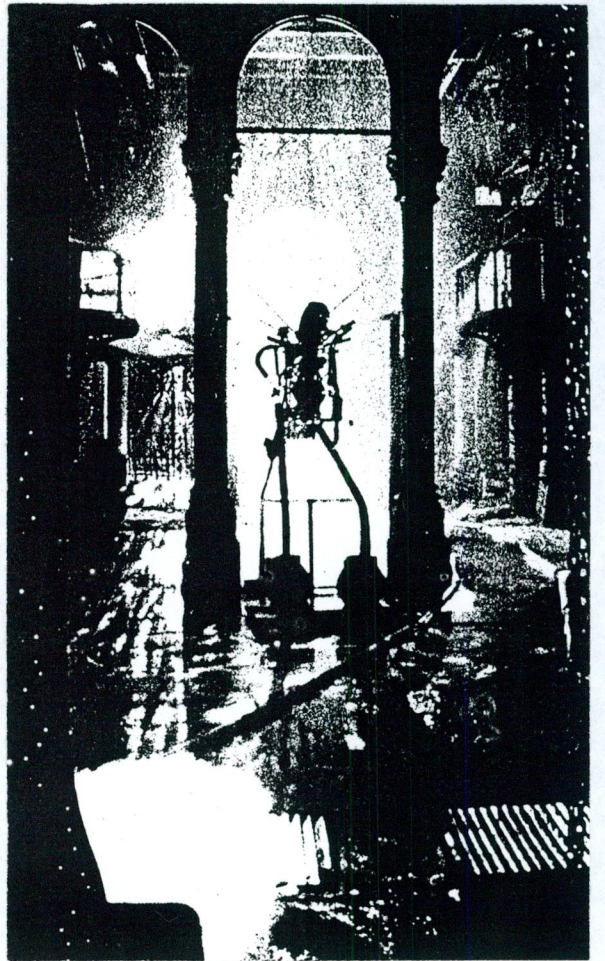
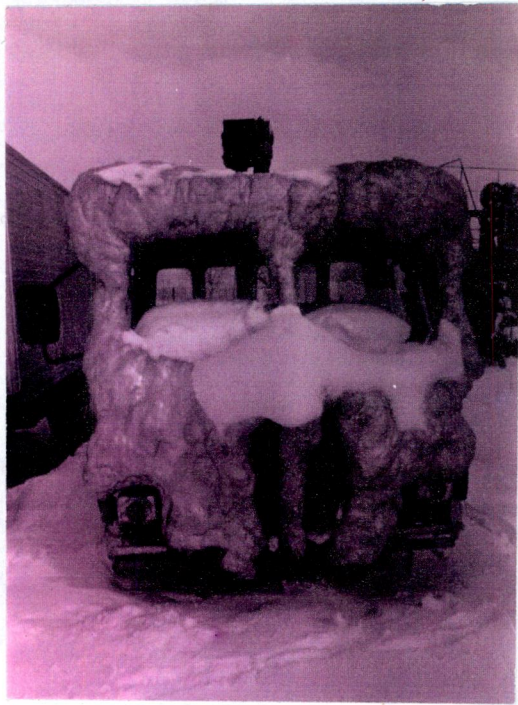
In 1987 Joe Rush took a stand at the International Contemporary Arts Fair in London. He wasn't very impressed and describes the fair as:

"... The most drab affair ever. The mutants livened it up a bit with a lobotomy and I stomped about around with a Ghetto Blaster helmet on my head blaring out sirens. I'd much rather take my stuff to Tesco's or down the market. You get a much better reaction and more people get to see you".⁶

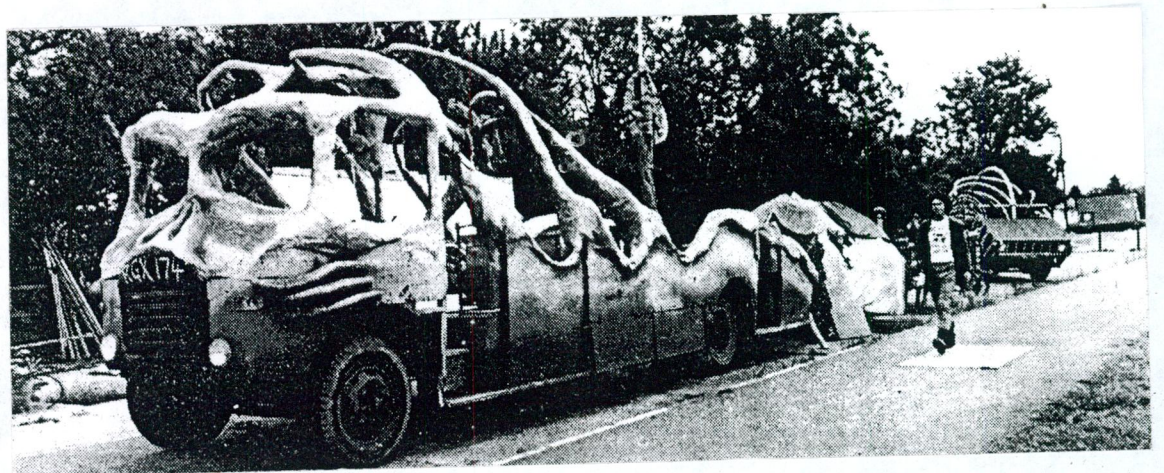
The mutoids created quite a stir at the exhibition, Joe rode about on his creations and performed public lobotomies on often unwilling members of the public with the help of his nurse and girlfriend Lucy Wisdom and assistant Hari Chromehead. Later that year, the group took the roadshow to the Edinburgh Arts Festival to much critical acclaim and made their first television commercial. The group was approached by an agency working for the Lager of Lamont. They were given money and total artistic control. Unfortunately, the advertisement was never screened, the agency took one look at what the mutoids produced, images of fire, water, robots, a mutated Alfa Romeo floating down the Thames on a raft of oil drums flanked by mutant drummers and clips of a wild post-Apocalyptic party, and ran, scared. The mutoids television debut was postponed for another few years.

An important part of the Mutoid Waste Roadshow was their vehicles. The group were constantly working on their trucks and busses and over a period of three years totally metamorphosed their Bedfords and Leylands into forty to fifty foot long mechanical insects and monsters. One truck was given teeth and two huge boar-like tusks, but definitely the most impressive vehicle was the Skull Bus. When the Mutoids found this vehicle it was in quite bad condition having been burnt out. The roof and every window were missing. They built up skeletal ribs to form a cage-like roof and, using a hard-setting spray on foam, modelled the front of the bus into a skull, a three dimensional replica of the Mutoids insignia, the Broken Hill Skull.

THE
POST



The Skull Bus In 1987 And 1993





This bus was the centre piece for many of their shows. Members of the group would stand inside the roofless bus, beating out a repetitive and hypnotic rhythm on huge handmade drums. This rhythm was known as the Zombie Beat and was invented by Mutoid and percussionist Ivan Tresseko. Whilst the drummers played other members would dance and drive around signing, shrieking and blowing fire. All wore intricately detailed costumes made from junk; wire, foam rubber and pieces of machinery. They were heavily influenced by the cyber punk genre. This style of film making and comic art combines near-present futuristic settings with a sense of decay, the cities are deteriorating and law and order is breaking down. In films like "Mad Max" (1979), "Blade Runner" (1982) and comics like "Akira", perhaps the best examples of this genre, leather clad barbarians, half man/half machine struggle to survive in a bleak landscape. This malevolent ambience promoted London's "I.D." magazine to use such invented buzz words and Tech-no-future and Tech-noir when writing about the performers, conjuring up a world of organic technology, dark barren lands and futuristic barbarians. I'm told by my friend Esther that their costumes often incorporated fake cybernetic limbs and features (bionic eyes being a favourite with flashing lights and tubes and wires connecting different parts of the body).

In the winter months of 1987 and 1988 the Mutoids settled in London and staged several huge parties, establishing them as leading names in London's club culture. Their band, fronted by Joe and steered by Ivan Tressenko, was become a success and they had begun recording on their own "Mutoid Skank" label when Tressenko was tragically killed in the Kings Cross Tube inferno. This was a blow to the

Mutoids, personally and artistically, but they mutated once more and took a new direction. Now every year, the Mutoids have a huge party on the 18th November to commemorate Tressenko's death. These are always spectacular affairs, some have been more successful than others and some have got them into a lot of trouble.

Possibly the most spectacular of these parties was the November 1987 performance in an old bus depot on Battlebridge in Kings Cross. When the Mutoids moved in they found that a blocked drain had left part of the depot flooded. They couldn't afford to drain it so they made it into a feature:

"It's quite good that we don't have a lot of money in a way because you can't make things random but accidents are where all the good work comes from. We use problems and work around them. Take that blocked drain, rather than try to fix it, we made it into an ornamental lake".⁷

They built a perilous bridge over the pool and built a sculpture of a washed up mutant motorbike and tin can water skier. They cut the roofs off cars and sank them in the foot deep pool to give an impression of depth. Much of the lighting for the show was provided by the Mutoids vehicles and two rusty cars were hung from the ceiling with their headlamps shining onto the crowd below. The crowd of three thousand was entertained by Mutoid Zombie drumming, two sound systems, and travelling bands Screechrock and 2000 dirty squatters.

"We charged £2 or what ever they could afford. Nobody begrudged paying and it turned out to be a great way to finance our venture".⁸



A Mutoid Warehouse Party, London 1987



The party was declared the event of the decade by The Face magazine⁹. Directions magazine, in their May 88 edition had a slightly different opinion referring to it as the event of the "decayed"¹⁰ which I imagine Rush found to be even more complimentary. Over the next year the Mutoids held parties on waste ground beneath the West Way in Paddington and an old council depot on the Edgware Road.

The 1988 November Commemorative party wasn't quite so successful with eviction notices served on the group by police on behalf of National Freight Carriers, the owner of the land. The Mutoids left the site and the sculptures too big to move were broken up and sold for scrap. This was quite a blow to the Mutoids, who for the last two years had managed to stay clear of the Anti-Traveller Legislation beginning to appear in England. Josh Bowler (A.K.A. Hari Chromehead) said in an interview in 'Time Out'

'The police do come, in fact they come in their van loads. More often than not they recoil in amazement and return to the station shell shocked"¹¹

In 1986 the Wiltshire Police launched 'Operation Solstice' saying that a festival would be 'A serious threat to law and order'¹²

The home secretary Hon. Douglas Hurd described hippy convoys in the house of commons on June 3rd 1986 as:

"A band of Medieval Brigands who have no respect for the rights of others".¹³

Two days later, then prime minister Margaret Thatcher said that her government would be "only too delighted to make life difficult for hippy convoys".¹⁴

The free festivals, the Galleries and stages of the Mutoid waste company were under threat and a crack-down on squatting meant that the Kings Cross Eviction was going to be the first of many. In June 1989 the Mutoids left England for the European Mainland, leaving behind them an impressive back catalogue of work including set design for Jean Michel Jarre (Mutoids Tricaph and Strapper designed and built sets for the celebrity tent and royal box at the docklands concert), George Lucas 'Return of the Jedi' (1983) as well as work for Eric Clapton, Virgin, Thames TVS, BBC, TVs, Nina Hagen, Flesh for Lulu and Frankie goes to Hollywood in various media events.

Since 1988, things have got worse for Travellers. 1992 saw the introduction of 'Operation Snapshot' where by the police set about photographing every Traveller and vehicle and storing them on computer file. The police have even recorded serial numbers of sound systems so they can be tracked across the country and the owners arrested if these sound systems turn up at free festivals. Andrew Puddephatt, general secretary of Human Rights Organisation LIBERTY states;

"There clearly is police harassment of the Travellers. Police intelligence should not be keeping tabs on people who have not committed a criminal offence"¹⁵

Last summer (1993) Police prevented 90 per cent of all free festivals. Some of the more confrontational gatherings, like the Torpedo Town Festival on the Welsh border, did go ahead but my friend Rob from the MUTAGEN sound system told me that there were more riot police there than Travellers. The Avon Festival is the first free festival of the year and traditionally one of the biggest. In the summer of 92 the Avon festival was held in Castlemorton, over the border in Worcestershire and attracted 25,000 to 50,000 (sources vary) people. it lasted 2 weeks and the common became a no go area for police. Last year however, Convoys heading to Avon were all stopped on the M5 when several hundred riot police blockaded the motorway at a cost of £300,00 and another beanfield type situation was only averted because some travellers succeeded in stopping cars and asking the occupants to wait around and act as witnesses.

John Majors "New age travellers?... not in this age", ¹⁶ Speech cast year proves that he shares Thatchers view of today's Nomadic people.

Chapter 2

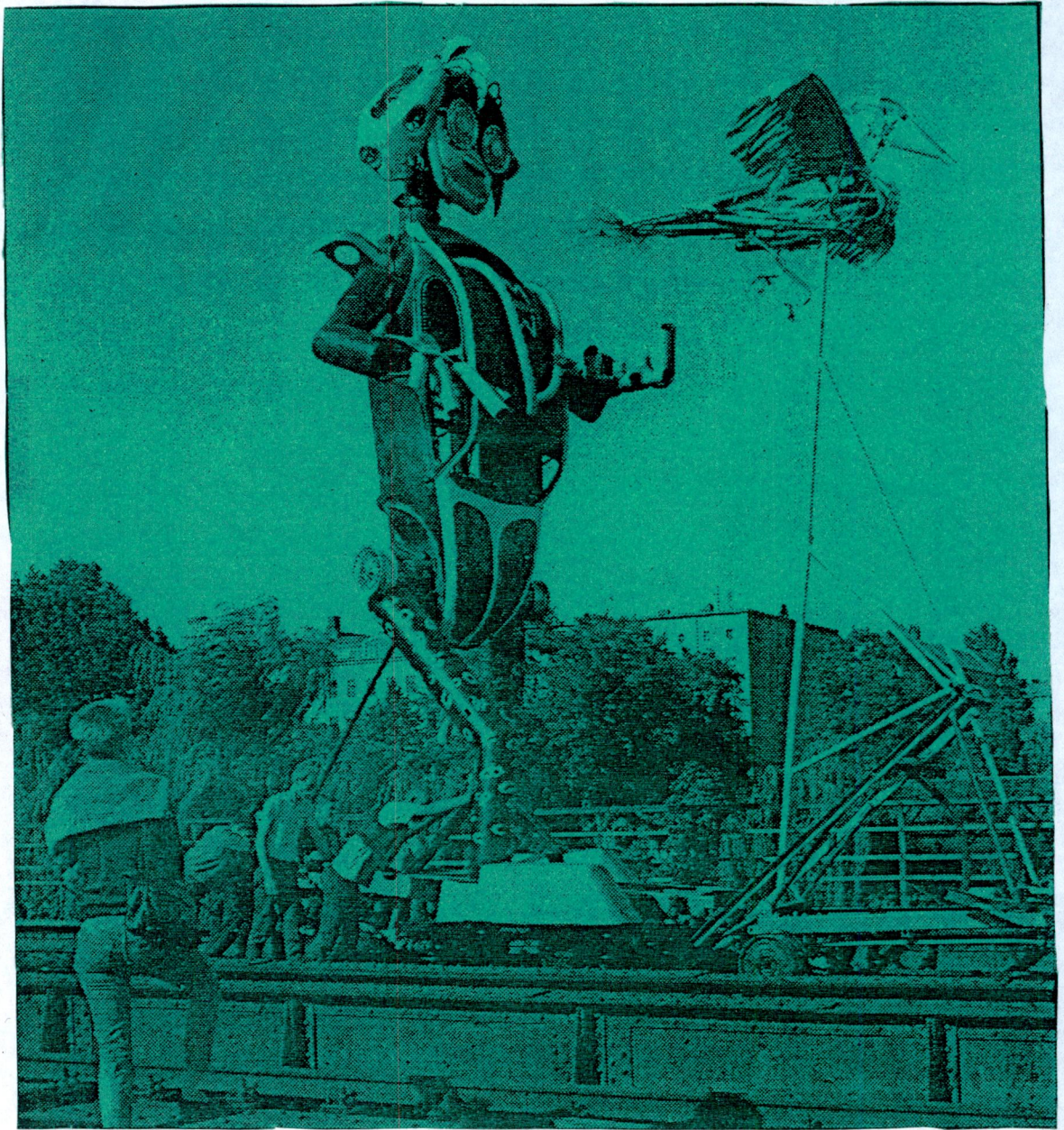
Mutoid Waste Company in Europe

Most of the information for this thesis comes word of mouth from acquaintances and friends rather than from books. The travelling community is a very close, tightly -knit one and it seems that everyone who has been on the road for more than 3 years has a story about the mutoids, having worked with them, met them, argued with them or a least seen a performance. The rest of the information is from honest and straight talking music papers, fashion magazines and fanzies. I think that this method of compiling information suits this particular story well. I think that to read about the mutoids work in an exhibition catalogue would undermine their efforts greatly. If the work was taken out of its correct context and placed in such a sterile and oppressive setting as a gallery it would appear naive and foolish, not to mention somewhat cramped. The 1987 Olympis arts fair sounds as if it was a success because rush and friends, I believe, went there with pre conceived notions that they wouldn't enjoy it unless they enlivened the event with some humour, hence the live lobotomies etc. Personally , I would much rather hear tales of summer nights, fire, body paint, drug heightened awareness, machinery, music and magic.

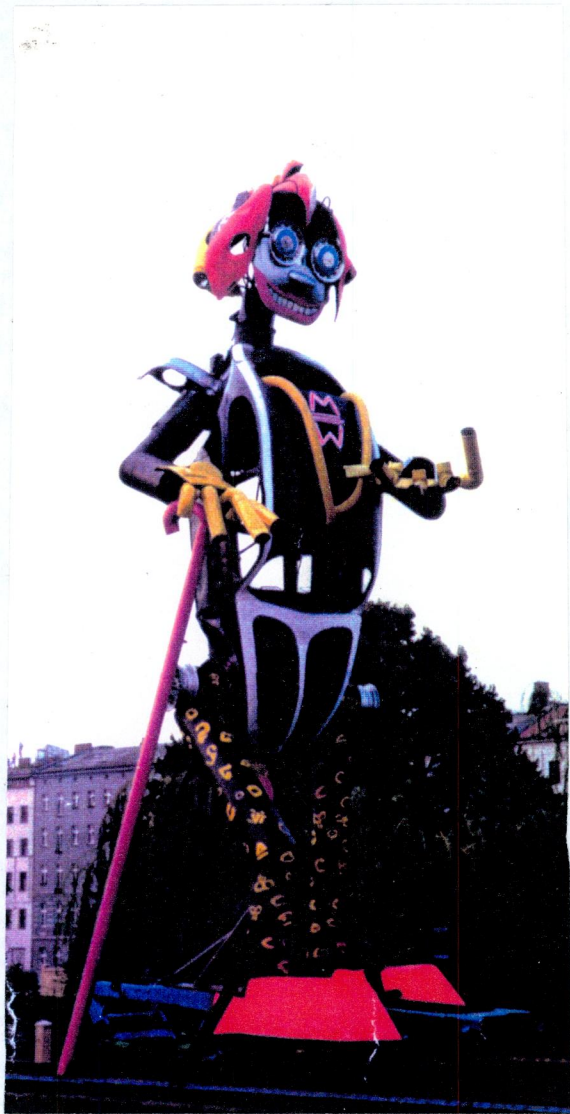
In June 1989, the mutoid waste company left England for the more relaxed atmosphere of mainland Europe. They headed first to Amsterdam, probably attracted by the relaxed laws on drugs and squatting. They went to Osthaven and built another car henge to celebrate the summer solstice.

They did not stay in Holland long however, after so much sitting about in London, they were anxious to keep moving, the convoy which consisted of ten trucks and trailers and was nearly 200 metres in length, rolled down to Berlin, another centre of squat activity. They arrived in July and staged two concerts to introduce themselves, one in a squat club and one in a hired hall. The mutoids held a one day exhibition in a park near the wall in Goerlitzerbahnhof with the collaboration of Berlin artists, in the park was built a 'Rock and Roll Graveyard'. They also constructed a thirty foot man, called the Kaeferman, and a bird of peace. The body of the figure was constructed using a Volks Wagon beetle (nicknamed Kaefers in Berlin, hence the title) and it was welded to some disused tram tracks. Eight people then pushed the piece along the tracks up to the Berlin Wall, which stood right across the tracks. The bird of peace, on a 30 foot pole, was raised out of the Kaefermans hands and carried aloft towards the wall as token of peace and friendship. It was not accepted. The wall did come down in October of that year however.

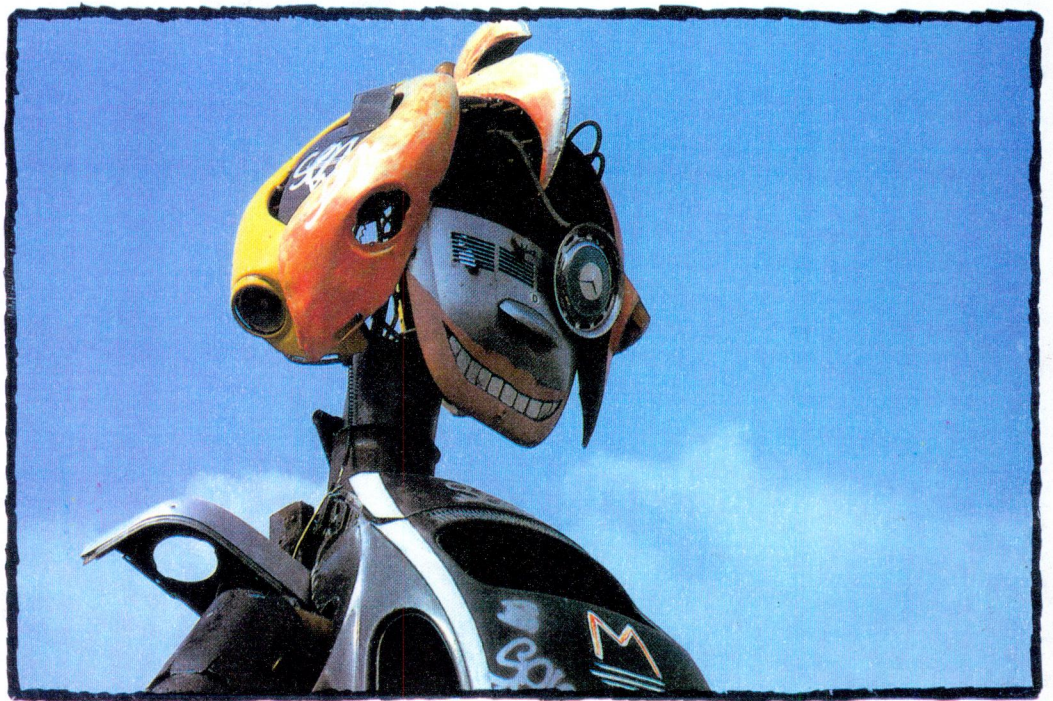
The mutoids stayed in Berlin until August when they were invited back to Holland, this time to Wijk Aan zee a small sea-side town, to help organise an Anti Toxic waste festival. The group constructed a 3 metre high fist holding a fish skeleton which they paraded through the town and installed on the highest sand dune in the area in an attempt to publicise their campaign to stop the dumping of toxic waste on the beach.



The Kaeferman Being Pushed Towards The Berlin Wall



The Kaeferman, Front Back And Detail



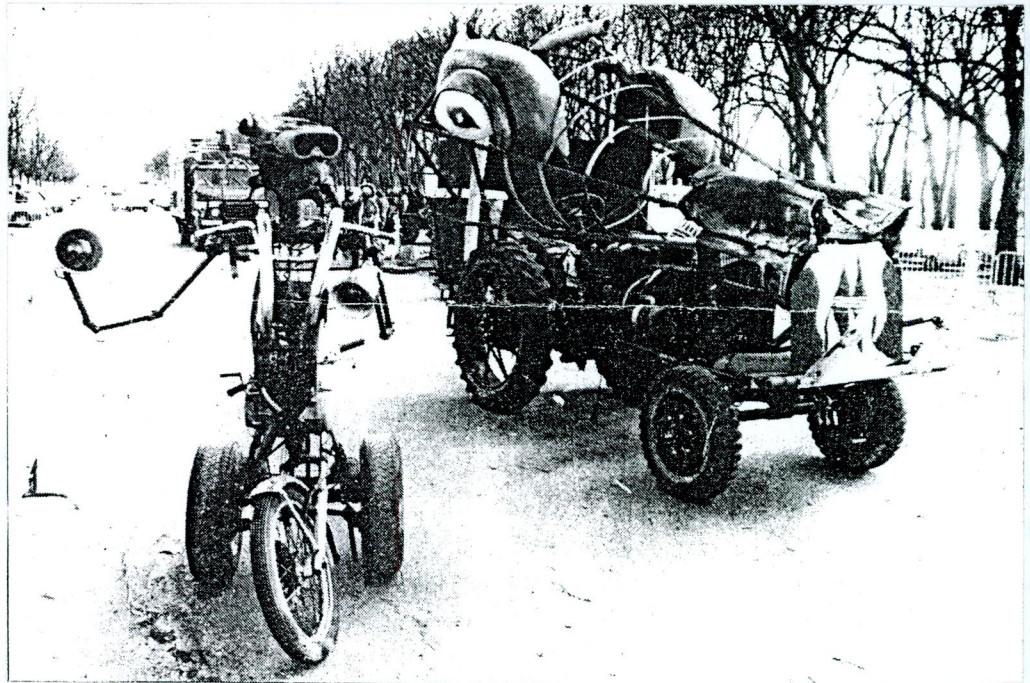


September of that year saw the mutoids arrive in Paris. they commemorated tressenkos death this year with a night time parade down the champs Elysee, ten trucks and various motorised creations covered in drumming muties. Unfortunately their procession interrupted a late night meeting of western heads of state debating the economic aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall and that night the mutoids ended up being escorted home by irate French police.

Despite this less than tactful start, the mutoids soon settled in and organised a huge performance with fellow, Anarcho Circuses ARCHODS from France and Barcelonas LA FURA DELS BAUS. They opened a gallery in their squat, a long thin railways warehouse.

By means of a farewell to Paris, the mutoids threw an epic party on the 27th of January 1990. They built a stage on top of a mound of car wrecks on which several bands played including Witches Valley from France, London's World Domination Enterprise and Irish Itinerant punks, The seven Kevins a band which has played at many mutoids parties.

Two London Djs, Fuse and Ricky blared their sounds from a mutated rover 3500. Upstairs was the auto pilot bar where crazed mutoids beat huge drums all night. A Zombie parachuter and an industrial pterodactyl hung from the roof. A huge pyre burned in the centre of the hall whilst some of the group walked through the crowd dressed in post-nuclear costumes and painted in ultra violet body paint.



Parade On The Champs Elysee, Paris And A Flyer Advertising

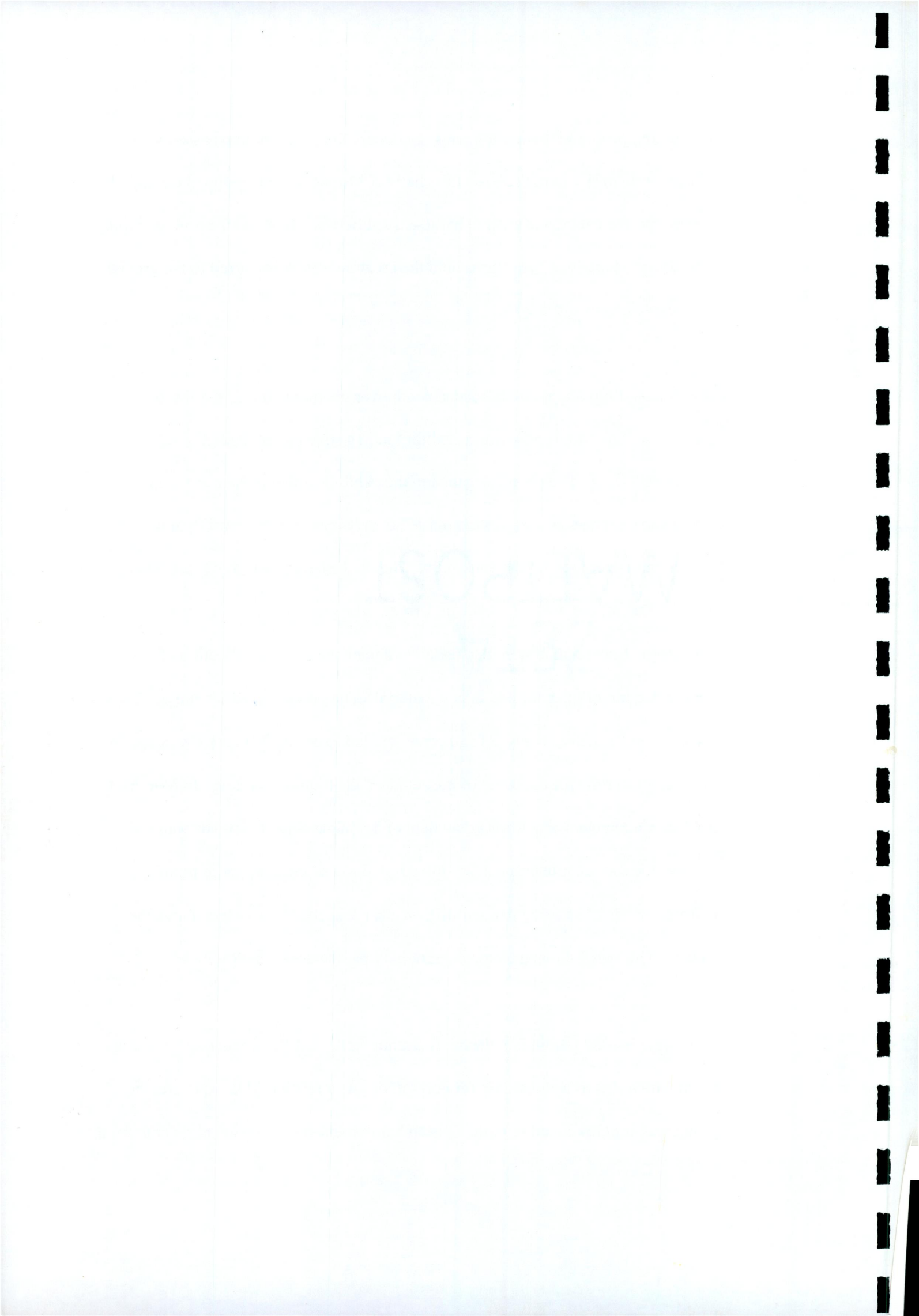
The Mutoids Arrival In The City

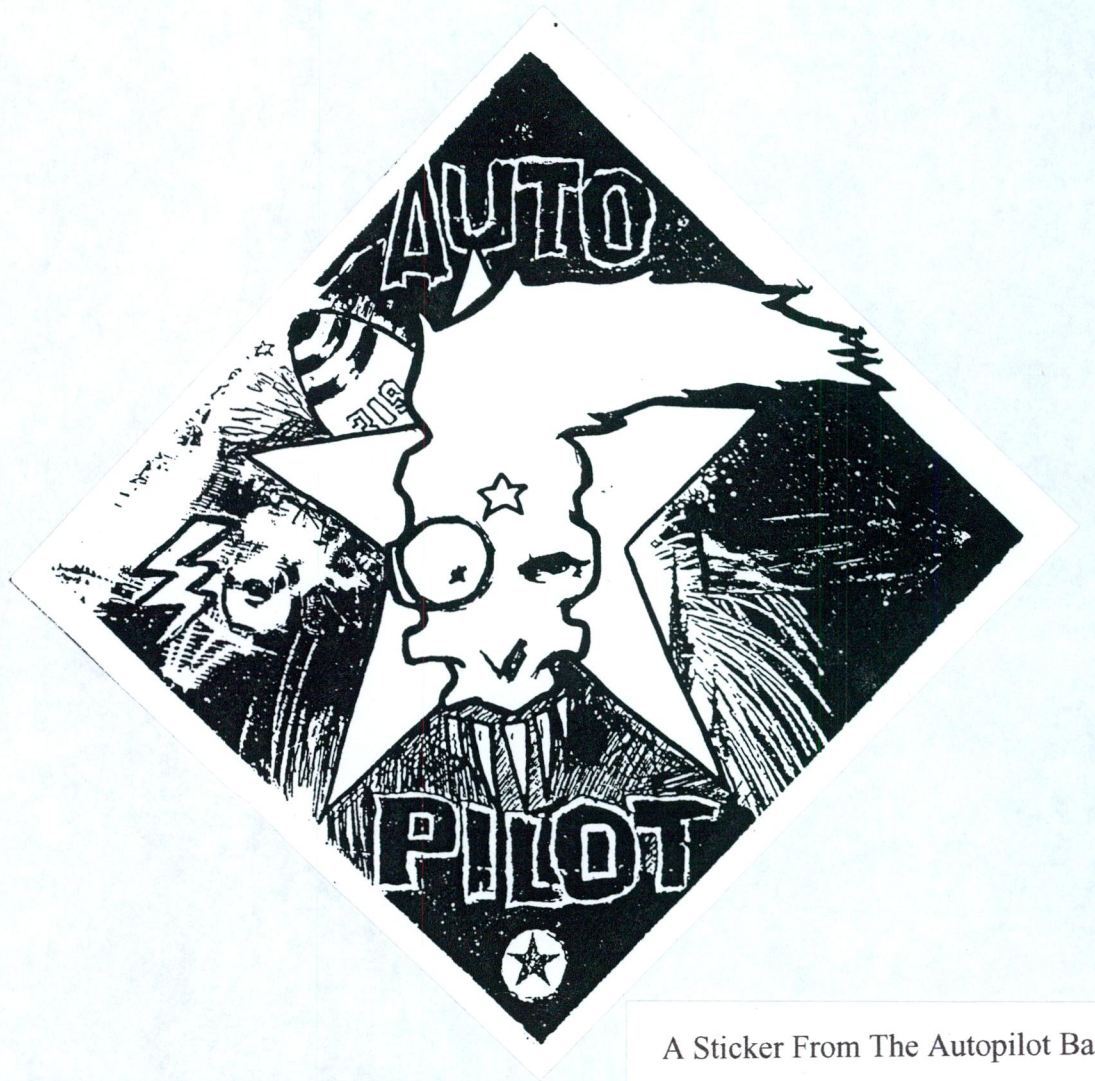


Terrorizing people with their toy guns. Suddenly the music stopped as some one lit a huge circle of fire in the centre of the hall. A Mutoid Warrior jumped through the flames into the centre and an epic battle ensued between him and the now swooping pterodactyl. Finally, a spear thrust and the creature was slain. It fell to the ground in an explosion of fire works.

In February 1990, the mutoids headed south over the mountains and down to Barcelona. Their first show was as exhibition in a state gallery called Transformadores. The people organising the exhibition also presented the mutoids with a site on the Mont Juic, a sand blasted quarry opposite the new Olympic stadium and over looking the entire city. The Spanish people weren't sure what to make of the mutoid waste company at first and the group used this to their advantage. Local police were persuaded to donate their entire collection of impounded motorbikes for use as raw material. The group staged several wild shows in clubs such as the KGB and centre ciudad to establish a reckless image for themselves in time for the event of the summer, the mutoid wedding. In March 31st in Placa Catalunya, Barcelonas equivalent of Trafalgar Square, crowds watched as the rev. Joe Rat the mutant preacher joined Mad Mags and strapper in mutoid matrimony whilst swaying dangerously on a car suspended thirty feet above the square. This was followed by a celebratory parade down the Rambcas.

They were invited to join in a theatre marathon in the old flower market, an annual event which acts as a show-case for new talent. As a result of this exposure, the group was commissioned to build a beach bar in the form of a giant silver crab for a

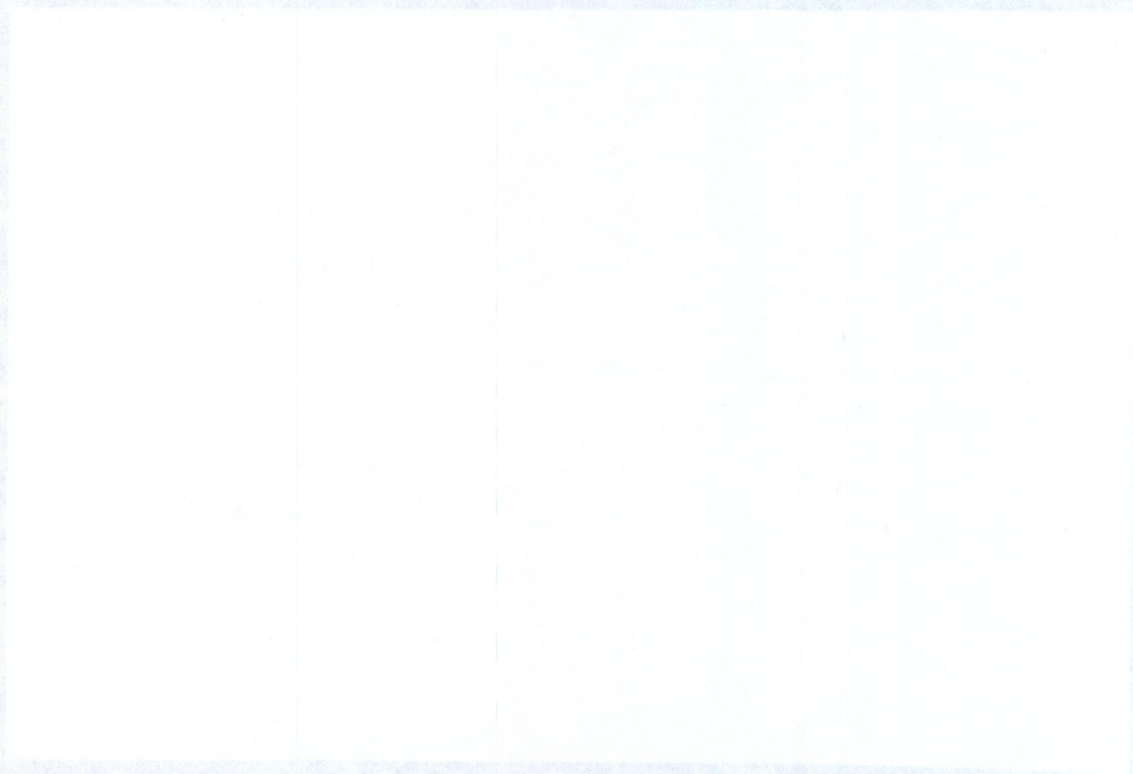
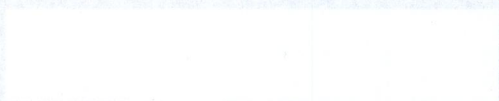
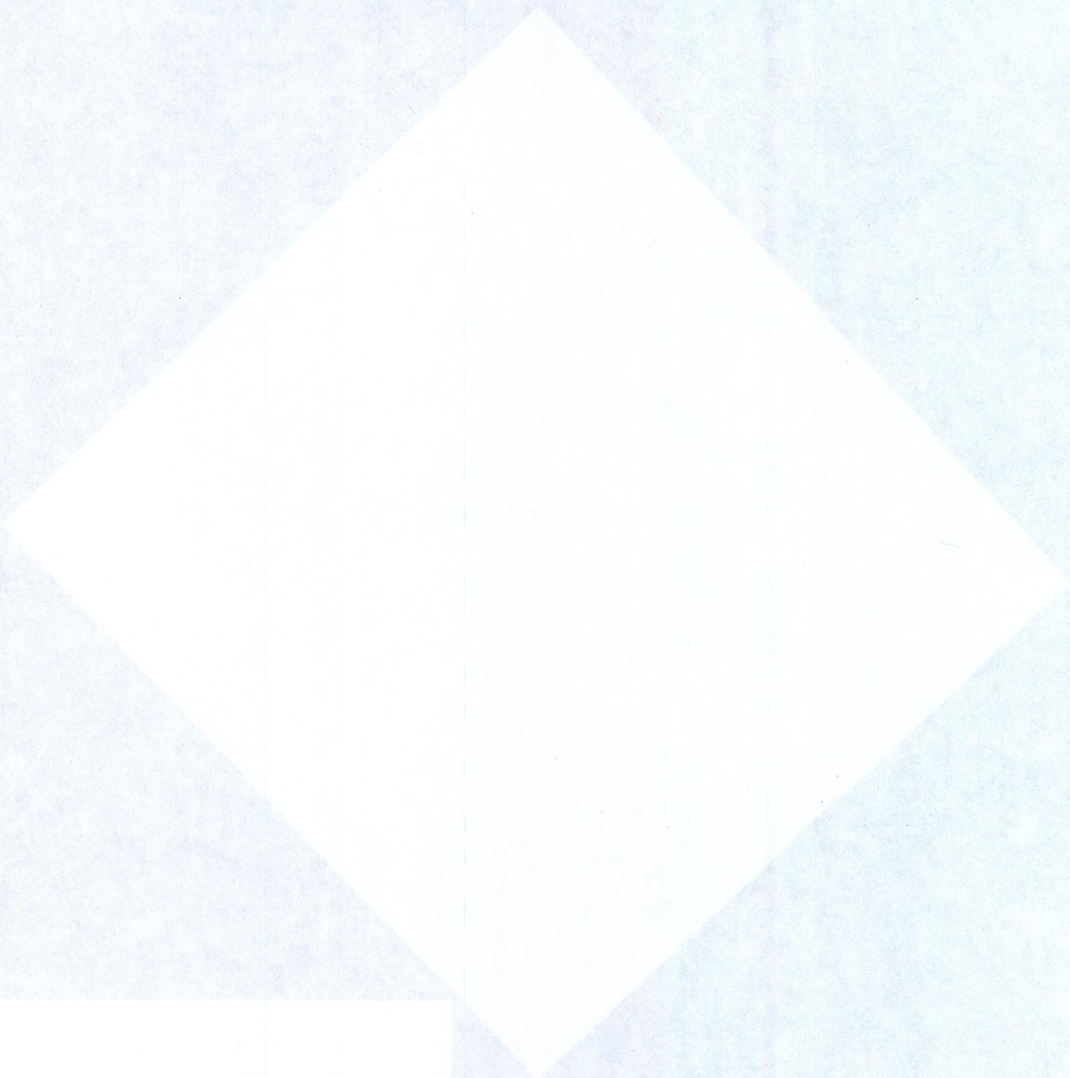




A Sticker From The Autopilot Bar



A Mechanised Bull Fight In Barcelona



camp site called The Ballena Allegra. More street theatre followed, this time in viccadecana, and then the mutoids decided to move on, they staged two farewell parties in the huge basement of a squat in the city. According to one of their newsletters, the second party caused the end of the squat.

"Mutant music shook the very foundations of the massive building until the entire structure surrendered to a whirlwind of dust, rubble and demolition trucks. Riot police and the army looked on a smug satisfaction".¹⁷

Exiled from the city, the mutoids waited around long to repair their squat-damaged sculptures before heading off to Italy in July.

They went first to Santarcangelo where they had been invited to participate in an international theatre festival. A regular event in the town for the last twenty four years. Once again, after a successful show, they were granted land, in the form of a disused quarry, on which to live and work. Using this as a base, they set off on tour of Tuscany, Florence and Rome.

In February 91 the Mutoids, much to the annoyance of the Italian squatters, performed on a National commercial T.V station (RAI 2) in Rome. They were on "Rafaelia Carra".¹⁸ A programme with 12 million viewers. The mutoids were delighted with the chance to spread the gospel of mutation to so many unconverted but Italian Anarchists did not agree, accusing them of compromising their ideals and opting for a more commercial road to success. However the squatters were soon appeased.

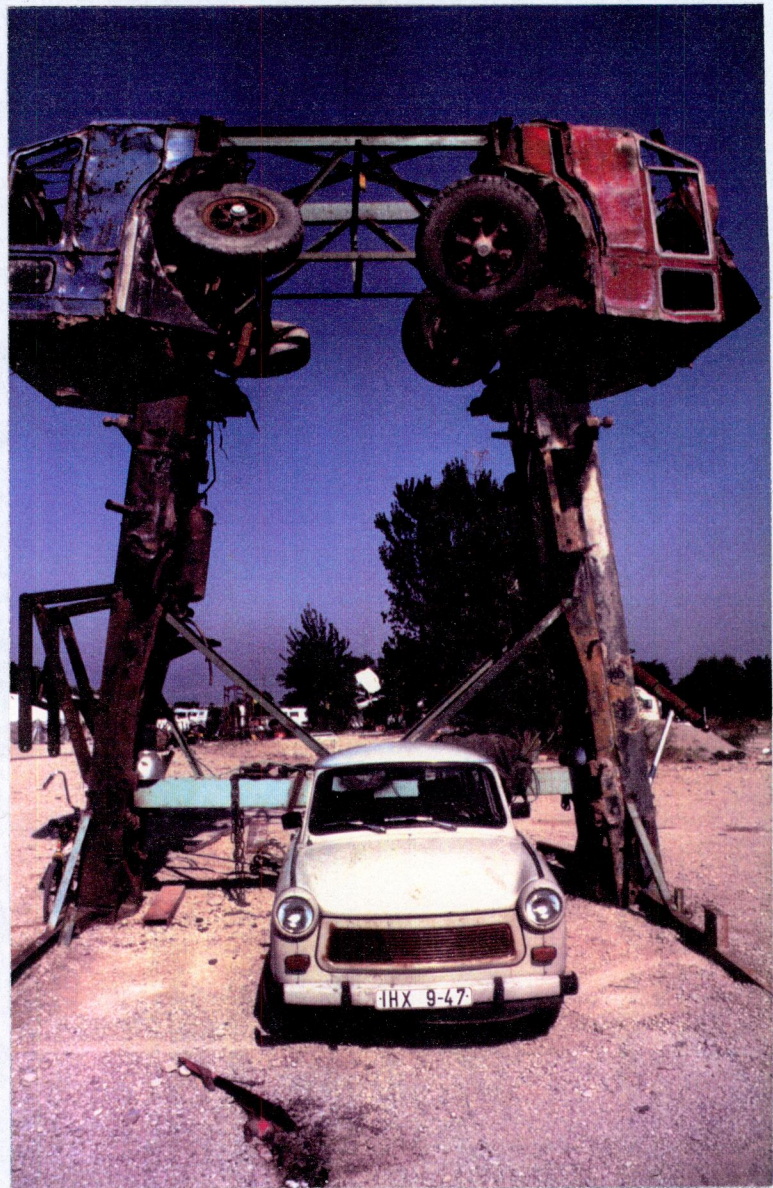
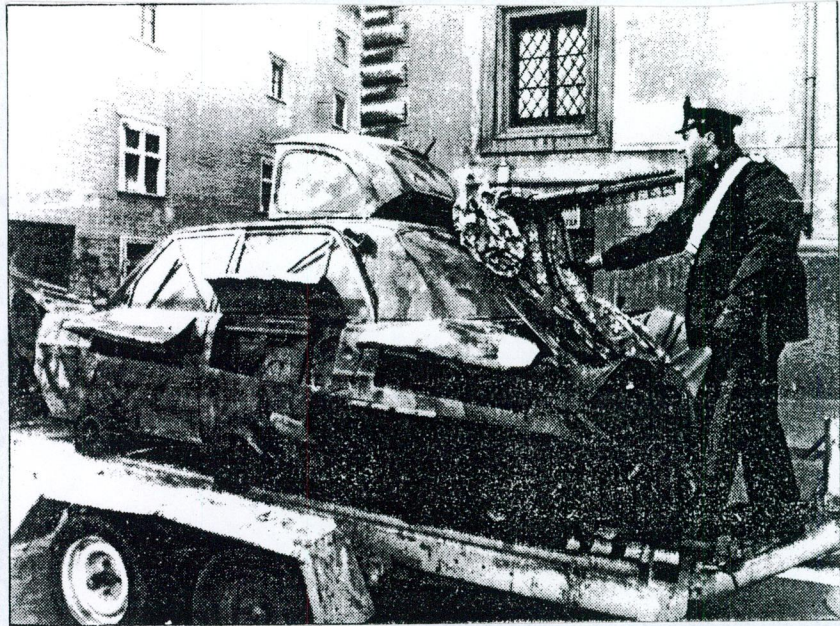
Two days later a mutoid tank appeared in St. Peters square outside the Vatican. It was the day of the Pope's first speech since the declaration of the Gulf War so the Worlds press were there to record the tank's removal. The mutoid waste company wrote a letter to the most prominent Italian Newspaper claiming that they used to be a performance group but now, because so many festivals have had their budgets halved in favour of the war budget, they had decided to make military hardware instead. They finally got the tank back and it now guards the fortified gate of forte predestined , a heavily defended squat in Rome.

Also in July they held a ten day 'scrap skip culture' festival in the quarry, now named mutonia. A truck henge was erected and several bands played. Auto-mech Robin Cooke returned from a pilgrimage to Australia where he had organised a car-henge at confest, the Australian equivalent of Glastonbury, and built a giant chain-saw wielding droid for an anti- logging festival in Tasmania.

The mutoid waste company had a busy summer with many shows and commissions including a stage set for the launch of Italian M.T.V. about which the muties have this to say;

"The event was boring and flat but the venue was handsomely dressed" .¹⁹

Autumn 1991 was slow. Joe Rush left for Berlin to open a club, the mutoid waste bar, in an east sector squat. The group turned their hands to producing smaller sculptures, stoves , mirrors and furniture for street fares to raise money which it seems was a big success from a monetary and exposure aspect.



The Vatican Tank Being Removed By Puzzled Police

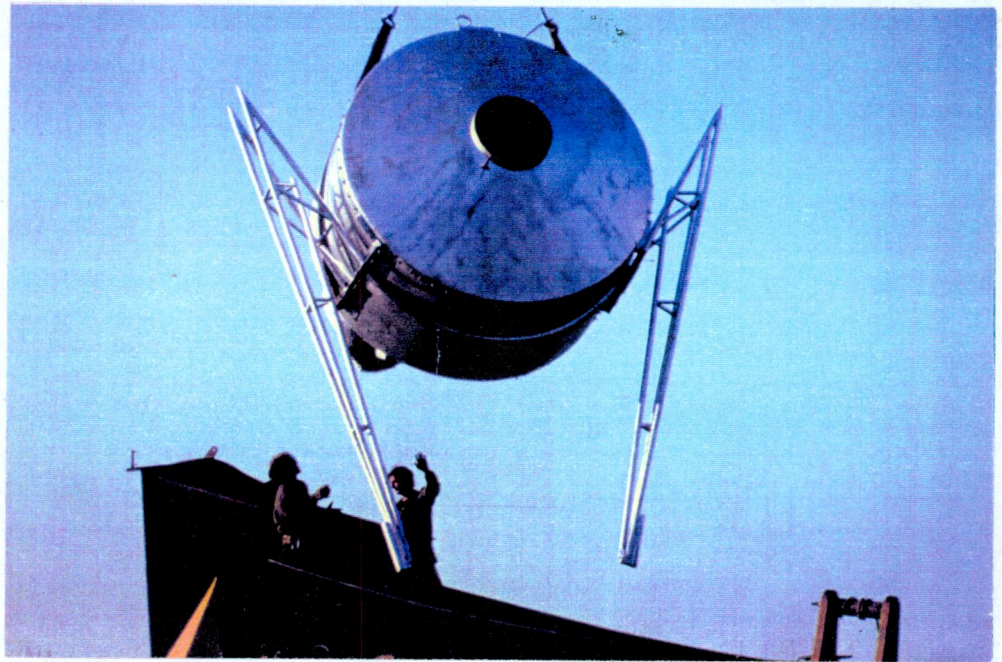
The Truck Henge In Mutonia, Santarcangelo



That November the highlight of the "Night of the Grand Facó", a bonfire performance, was a blazing fire sculpture in the shape of the mutoid skull emblem burning beneath the truck henge.

The 7 kevins moved onto Mutonia for the winter and helped to organise the Christmas shows in which the group drove a convoy of drummers through Santarcangelo whilst the mutoids, honouring the tradition of Bethana a witch equivalent to Father Christmas, ran about distributing wheelbarrows full of sweets to the children.

1992 began with an adventurous commission. The mutoids were asked to mutate a ship which sat on a shallow pool in "Fiabialandia", a children's, Disney-like theme park on the Italian Riviera. A small plane was taken apart and added here and there to the ship, a large spider ran up and down the mast as the ship's wheel was spun, a space capsule made from a grain silo sat on the deck and other mutoid features such as a wind driven propeller made the piece "a gratifying mutation".²⁰ The ship was reached by a bridge that lead from a giant skull's mouth. This skull was also mutated inside and out by the 7 Kevins faction. The ship, called "Aero Ship Dredd" (showing an obvious influence from the comic 2000 A.D.) was the setting for the second mutoid marriage, this time Stephan and Allegra, in May '92.



Building The Aeroship Dredd

Faint, illegible text on a rectangular piece of paper.

Large rectangular piece of paper with very faint, illegible text.

Large rectangular piece of paper with very faint, illegible text.

Small rectangular piece of paper at the bottom center.





The Finished Article

MUTOID WASTE CO.



MUTOID WASTE COMPANY
VIA CALATOID PONTE
SANTARCANGILO DI ROMAGNA
47038 (FO) ITALIA
MUTONIA
TEL/FAX 0541 626721

Chapter 3

Mutating Berlin - Tank Henge

When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 the strip of land on which it once stood became a no man's land, a dumping ground running through the city. This area became quite a well-known halting site for European Travellers. The "Wasteland", as it was christened by travellers, is a bleak site. Someone I once met described it as like nothing on earth. It is a mile wide strip of land dissecting the city, filled with waste of all kinds. Ruptured gas mains burn day and night, water is available from burst mains and electricity is stolen from the over head power lines. Occasionally, Russian or Allied Forces fly huge helicopters overhead and drop military scrap onto mounting pieces of broken machines seemingly oblivious to the people living below. This man I met lasted just three days on this site before leaving for safer pastures.

In the summer of '92, when the Mutoid Waste Company arrived, they didn't see the urban hell my friend saw, they say Mutoid Heaven; free electricity, a concealed and rarely visited place in which to live and work and a seemingly endless supply of raw materials with more being dropped in, albeit in a somewhat dangerous manner, every week.

During the summer of 1992, the group set up camp opposite Hitlers Reichstag and built a tank henge, or "peace circle" as it was called, from abandoned military hardware.

STATE
MATTPOST

The piece circle, a progression of the car henge constructed half a decade previously, was comprised of pieces that differed in size and complexity. The first four pieces were quite basic, their forms remaining pretty much as they were found. One piece was an armoured car without any wheels on its back with all its hatches open, resembling a twenty foot long dying insect, trapped and vulnerable. Another similar armoured car was stood on its end like a huge standing stone. Two more similar vehicles were placed on end side by side with a third one on top like a giant dolmen. These vehicles were painted white with intricate black designs added later. There was an armoured car painted a bright green with red stripes and patterns, totally opposite to its original black and olive green camouflage colour schemes.

The other four pieces were much more complex. The top turret of a tank, complete with gun barrel, was attached to a fabricated tank-shaped body of welded steel plates. The body was quite crude; just two sides, a top with sloping front and back sections, no wheels or surface decorations. This "tank" was then stood on its end and supported and braced by steel rods attached firmly to the ground ensuring it didn't fall foreword. The whole piece was painted bright pink and written across the top of the turret were the words "The Pink Panzer".

Some manner of military truck was mutated into a giant mechanised scorpion. A mouth was constructed at the front of the truck by removing the radiator grille and placing two serrated sawblades above and below the resulting hole to act as teeth.

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The Pink Panzer



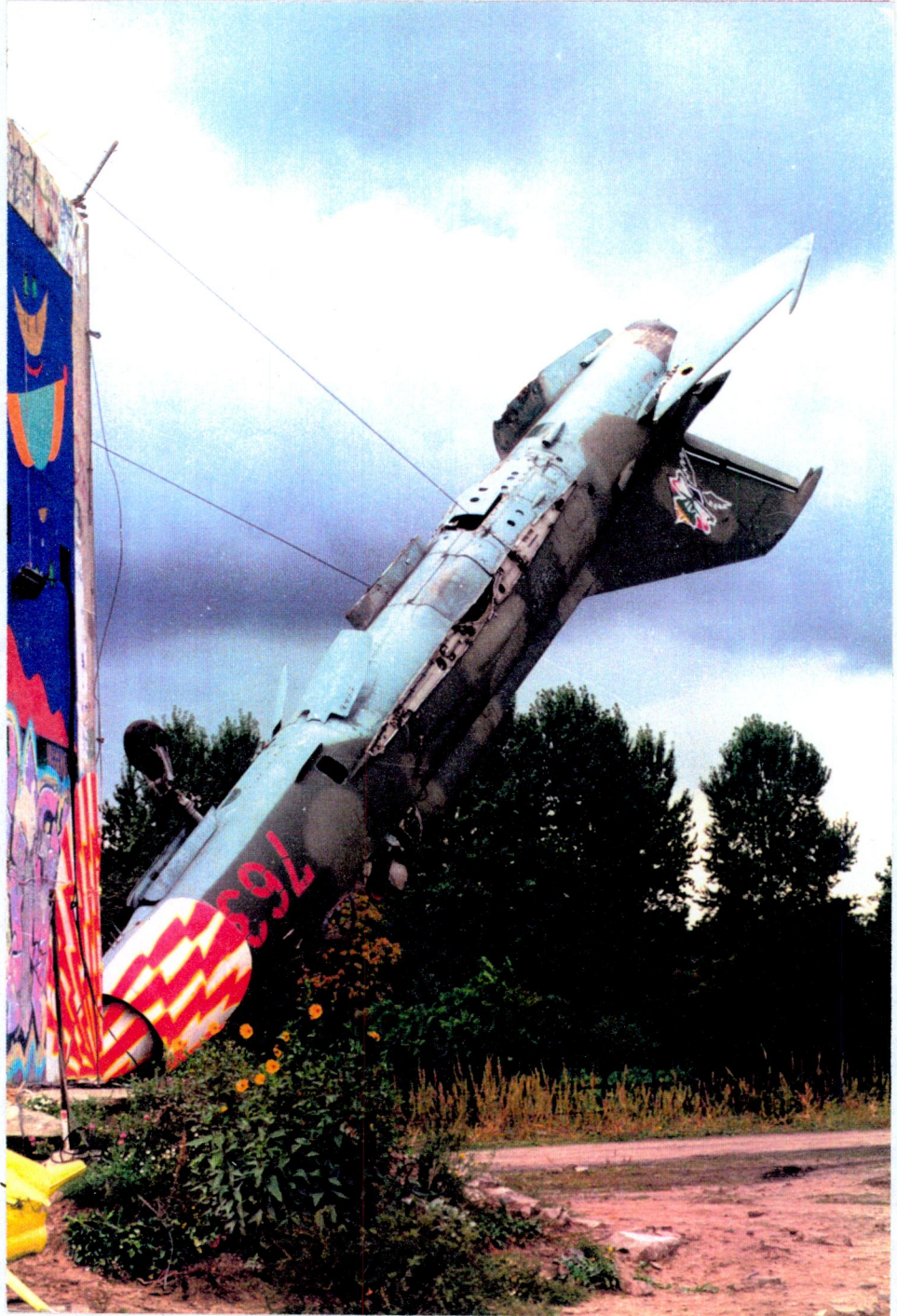


The Capstone Of The Tank Henge

The top of the cab was cut away so the front of the truck was only about four feet high and from the side came two long arms ending in claws. The arms were about eight feet long and ended in claws comprised of several evil looking hooks and serrated blades behind the cab, the truck had been totally altered. The body of the truck had been removed leaving just the bare chassis. To this had been added a series of oil drum cylinders, reducing in length and diameter as they ran along the back of the vehicle. The drums ran off the end of the chassis and flowed back up and over the front of the truck, just like a scorpion's tail.

The other two pieces were planes. One was set with its rear wheels on the road and its front wheel raised about ten feet off the ground as though it was about to take off. The plane was left wholly intact and unchanged except for its colour scheme. One whole side of the plane was painted bright yellow with a spiralled green serpent running down the length of it. The other side was white with flame-effect spray painted artwork. The design on the tail fin on this side of the aircraft was very intricate pattern created by continuous overlays of a simple stencil pattern, repeated in different colours. All fin and wing tips on both sides of the plane had mock insignia painted onto them incorporating chains, nuts and bolts and spanners, all symbols identifiable with the mutoids.

The most impressive piece on the site was a plane, minus its wings, set nose first into a small remaining section (about 10 feet long) of the Berlin Wall. The plane stuck out, upside down, at a forty five degree angle from the ground/wall, held in place only by its nose, which was imbedded into concrete, and two steel cables



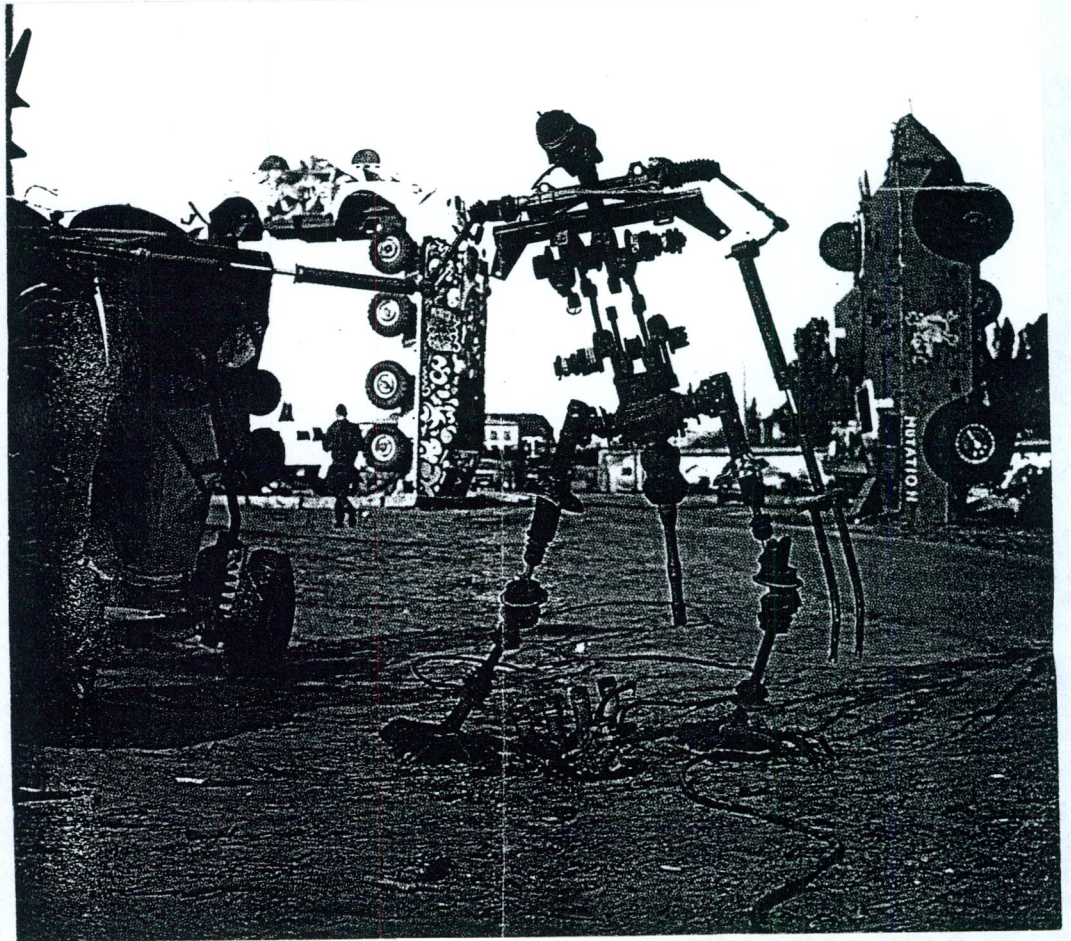
A Mig Fighter Hangs Precariously From A Section Of The Berlin Wall



which were attached to the plane and the top of the wall. The fighter was still in its original colours (Black and Olive), but all military insignia had been overpainted and replaced by the mutoids own skull and crossed spanners motif. The nose of the plane and the lower section of the wall were painted with red flashes like a styled explosion.

On first seeing the peace circle, there is a feeling of disorder and randomness to it. Beyond its basic circular, henge shape it would seem that there is very little thought behind it. However, once we take certain factors into account such as the environment, both political and geographical, in which it was constructed and the colour schemes of the pieces, there does appear to be an underlying subtlety to the piece.

The Peace Circle is situated within view of Hitler's Reichstag and on the land that once held perhaps the most infamous symbol of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall. The planes and trucks are scattered in a seemingly random fashion although the way they are placed, side by side, on end or upside down with its wheels removed conjures up images of a child at play, leaving his toys in disarray, breaking some. The paintwork on the plane and most of the armoured cars, their bright unrealistic colours and the planes' snake motif, reinforces this image and gives the vehicles the appearance of being some discarded, oversized plastic toys, the skull and crossed spanners symbol on the "crashed" plane make it look like some giant toy which the child, as every young boy does with his toys, has banged into a wall.



The Peace Circle





Here the Mutoid Waste Company have taken military hardware, tools of oppression and violence, and arranged them on a site still synonymous with both the cold war and the second world war yet have managed to produce an atmosphere of childlike innocence. What served to strengthen this peaceful ambience was the children. There were groups of them climbing on the planes, trying to push the trucks over and cycling around furiously in between the pieces on this once no man's land. The mutoids had created an adventure playground out of millions of dollars worth of equipment.

The mutoids themselves lived about 200 yards away from the peace circle in their vehicles. The Berlin children played here also, climbing in and out of the group's mutated vehicles, "Mad Max" style jeeps and trucks with huge wheels and cranes mounted on the back and a strange motorbike with a front wheel about six times larger than the back one. Metal sheets, rods and chains lay everywhere beside tools and welding equipment. Any one coming to see this exhibition (and I use the word in its most informal context) would always be aware that they were in the mutoids back yard.

The peace circle was not the only thing the mutoids did in Berlin that summer. Joe Rush's squat club was quite a success at the time, and on the strength of it, the mutoids got commissions to refurbish other clubs. In one they hung cages from the ceiling. These cages were big enough to accommodate chairs and tables for up to eight people. They were reached by catwalks so those who wished could sit inside them to drink whilst suspended precariously over the dance floor.

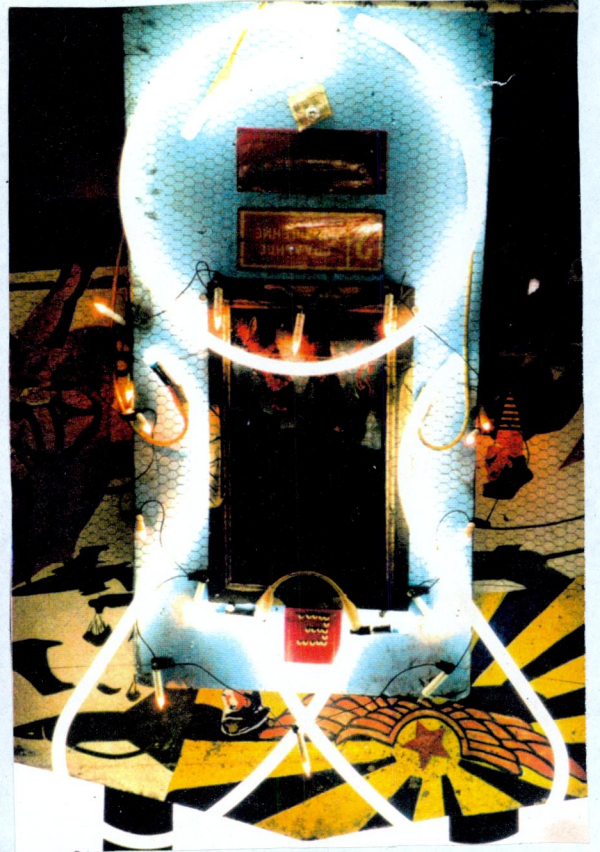


Mutant Motorbike

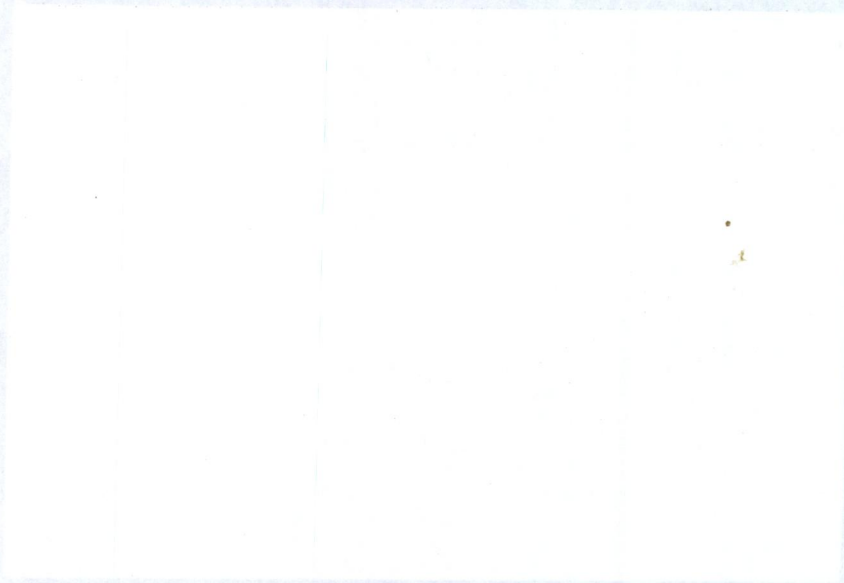
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In another club, they used running water a lot, with perhaps the best feature being the bar. It was made from welded steel and running down the centre of it was a thin meandering stream, separating the bar staff from the customers



Joe Rush's Squat Club East Berlin



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Chapter 4

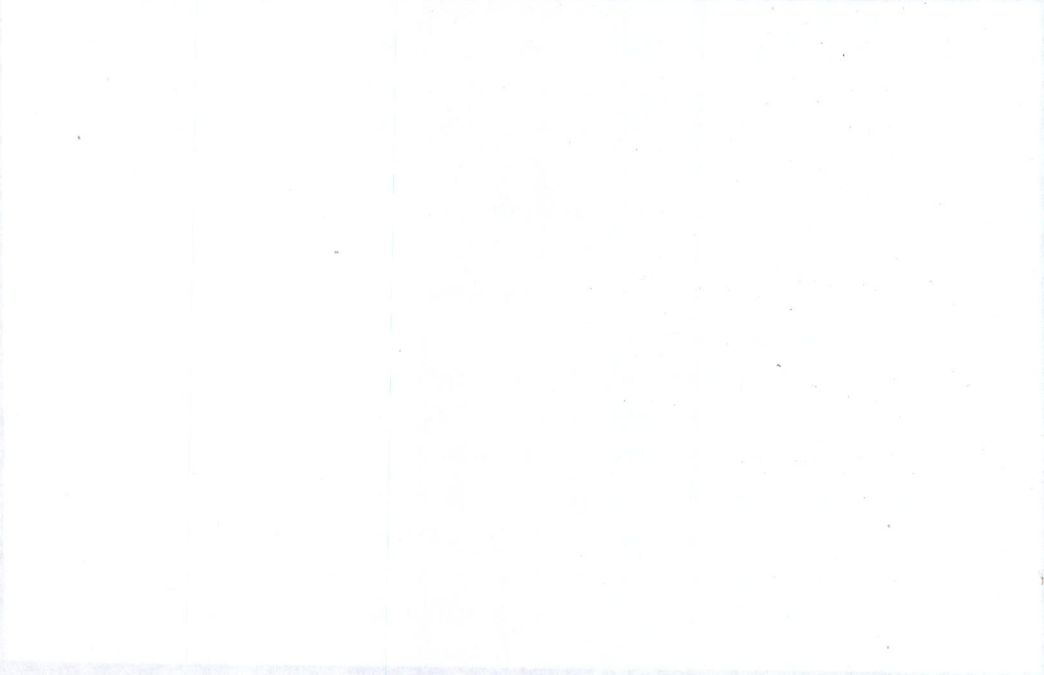
Repsyche - Mutate to Survive

As two friends of mine strolled about looking at the pieces of the tank henge in Berlin, a scruffy mutie ran over to them and informed them that they had to pay to look at the work. They obliged and gave him some Deutsch Marks. When he had gone, they decided to get their moneys worth and took out their cameras. In an instant he was back saying that if they wanted to take photographs they had to pay more. They didn't argue.

The mutoids survive by their wits, asking gullible and intimidated tourists for money is just one way of getting by. They live a very simple life. Like most nomadic folk they have no use for many possessions as their rucks would get overcrowded very quickly. They simply keep what they need and feel no obligation to accumulate status symbols in the form of expensive clothes or the latest kitchen appliance. Like most people with whom they share a similar lifestyle they are quite spiritual, though they do not conform to the restrictive rules of any recognised religion. They live their lives by a sort of Karma-based balance system - if you're good, good things happen to you, when you're hungry someone gives you food and when you're broke you find money. Likewise, if you have food or money, you give half of it away. This is the formula by which the mutoids live their lives. When they head off to a new town or city to do some works, they rarely bring much equipment with them, never more than one compressor for their power tools. Instead, when they arrive at their destination, they drive around abandoned industrial estates and find compressors, extra tools and materials.



The Reverend Joe King Rat Mutoid God O.B.E. Preaches The Gospel Of Mutation



I am told they have never been disappointed yet. The mutoids earn money from their shows, they charge admission to their raves and parties and charge local councils for staging street theatrical performances in towns. There are always donation boxes at all their public exhibitions. Another way the mutoids make money is by "scrapping", filling the back of a truck with scrap metal from skips and selling it to scrap yards. Very often, when the group are pulling off a site, they dismantle any unsold and unwanted sculptures and sell them as scrap.

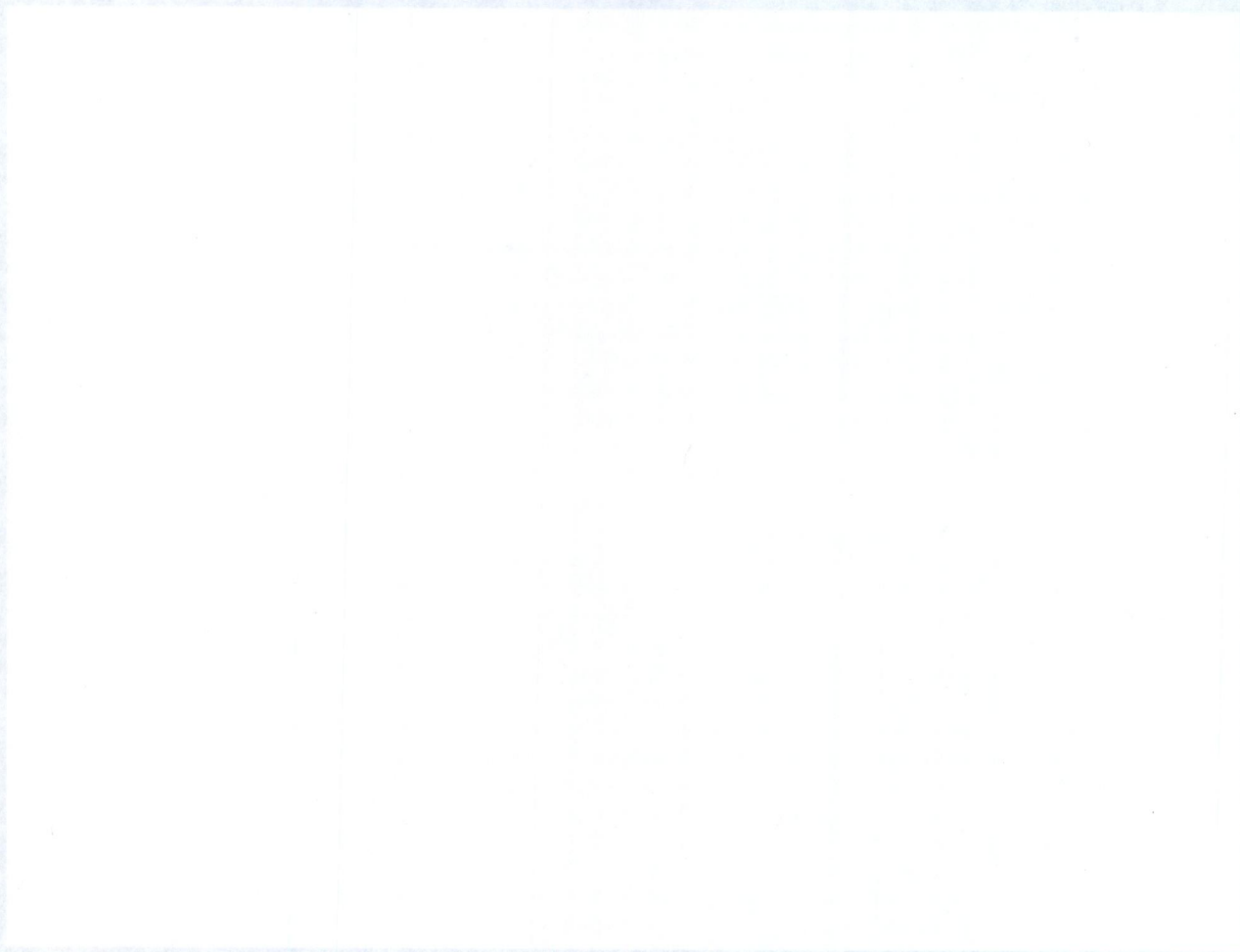
The Mutoid Waste Company is not a political group, all are anarchists who believe in self politics and mutual respect. There is no leader, no artistic controller, no one to say that one person's ideas are better than anyone else's. They are a tribal collective of strong minded individuals. There is no initiation or waiting list to join the mutoids. If you have the imagination, some sort of practical skill to offer and, more importantly, if they like you, you can consider yourself a mutoid. However, Joe comments:

"People do want to join in but we can't afford to carry anybody, so they really have to prove themselves You've got to be quite hard about it The idea is to show people the potential, get them started, then they can choose how much they want to do themselves".²¹

The Mutoid Waste Company approach recycling with an almost religious fervour. It is the basis behind all their work. Their slogan "REPSYCHE" is sprayed onto the back of the jackets of some members. To understand this word is the key to understanding the mutoids philosophies. To them recycling waste is an integral part of survival in an over-crowded world.



Recycled Sculpture: The Preying Mantis (Berlin 1992)



Their art is a public reminder that so-called waste is still useful and should not be discarded to clog up the rivers and seas. There is also a more practical side to their choice of materials;

"We use other people's waste and mutate it ... because it's the most interesting stuff around and easily available. There's a good living in waste I can tell you".²²

"Mutate to survive" is another favourite sermon of preacher Joe.

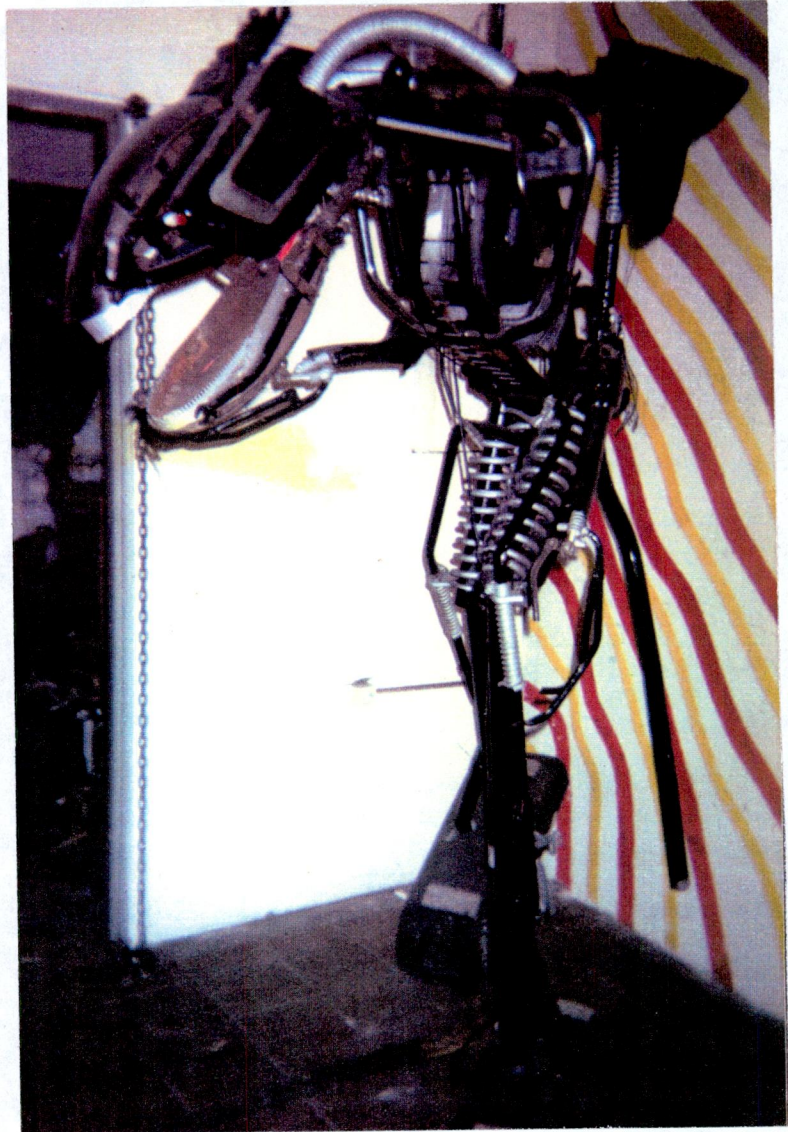
"We live by this idea of the mutation of our vehicles and our art. The idea is that you take something basic and keep extending it. Nothing is ever finished and the nature of building things out of rubbish is that if you don't keep working at them, they turn back into rubbish".²³

Joe even relates this theme of mutation to the group themselves.

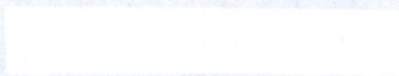
"I don't think this thing will last forever. You've got to mutate".²⁴

The group's logo, the Broken Hill Skull, is a stylized drawing of an actual skull discovered by an archaeologist who claimed it proved the existence of a missing link between Neanderthal man and homosapiens, a symbol of changing, evolving and mutating man. The skull also represents death, which to Joe is

"the only certainty in this life", and death is the perfect mutation. The beauty of your death is that your body mutates when it's buried. It fertilises the earth".²⁵



The Lizard Man (Italy 1993)



Chapter 5

Filling The Gap

When the Mutoid Waste Company left England at the end of the eighties, they left a vacuum in the country's creative subculture. England was subsequently visited by Pierrot Bidons' controversial Techno-Circus "Archaos".

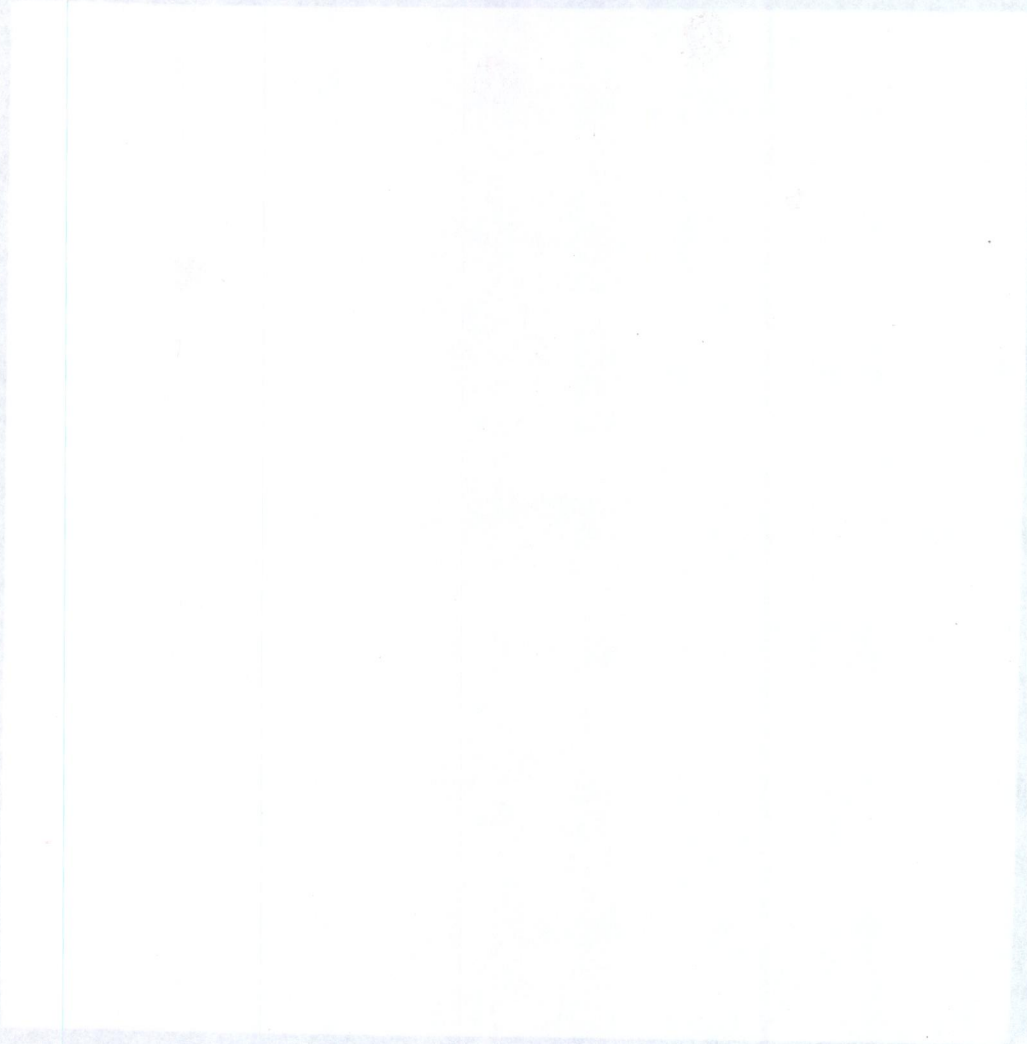
In 1975 a group of young circus fanatics got together under the name of the "Cirque Bidon" what made this troupe unique was their return to the Circus' true atavistic roots with a convoy of twenty five horses pulling nine wagons from village to village. Unfortunately, this proved to be a difficult way to travel as more and more space was given over to parking lots and less to grass, so in 1986 they changed both their name and their means of transport. "Archaos, Cirque de Caractere" was born.

By 1988, Archaos had become one of the most popular circuses in Europe but a mere two years later, the group was no more. A series of disastrous shows, in particular the Irish visit in 1990 during which one of the troupe was killed and storms prevented them from performing, had left Bidon bankrupt.

Archaos was better organised and marketed than the Mutoid Waste Company and less self consciously underground but shared the same interest in transforming industrial trash. The Archaos interpretation of circus added motorbikes, a crane and D.I.Y. flamethrowers to the more traditional mix of acrobatics and trapeze.



Offstage Archaas



2) The Mutoids and Archaos were the first groups to take theatre/performance from the traditional art venues and though often badly organised and incoherent, their work nevertheless appealed to thousands and insured a cult status for both teams.

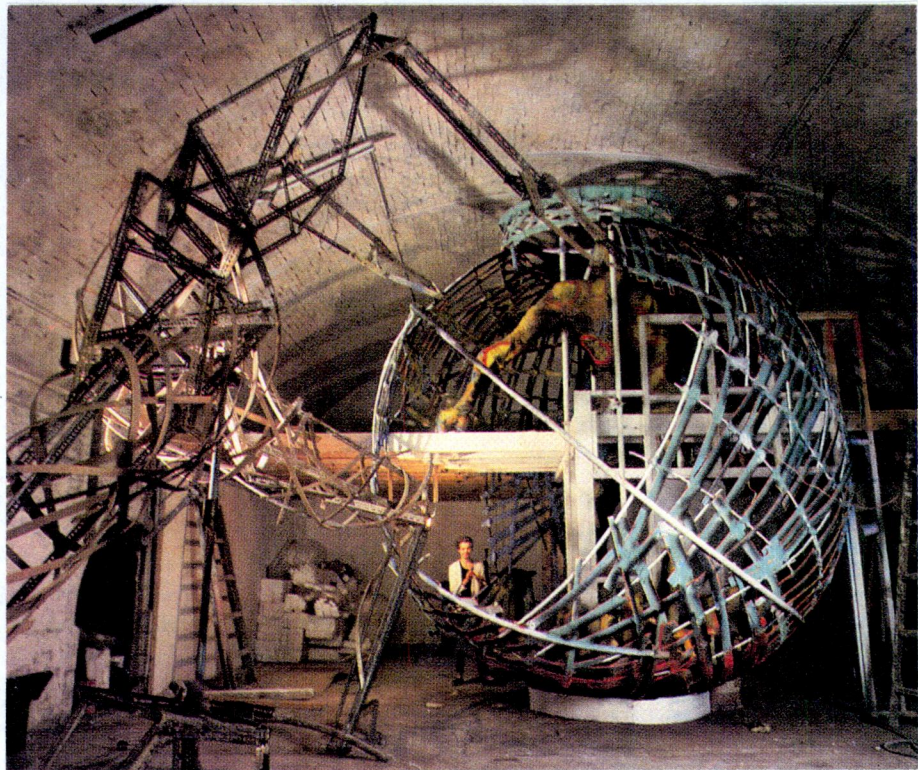
Now in the mid nineties, a new wave of performance groups has arisen from England's travelling underclass. Groups like Spiral Tribe, Bedlam and Armagedon sound systems travel England staging huge 48 hour illegal free parties on common land and in squatted warehouses attended by thousands at a time (Spiral Tribe were in attendance at and held responsible for the Free Festival on Castlemorton Common in Worcestershire in the summer of '92 and all twenty three members are currently in Spain hiding from charges of treason and breach of the peace.)

Sam Hegarty, and ex-mutoid, founded Circus Irritant in 1988 and currently makes sculptural pieces for raves and warehouse parties. Sam's work differs slightly from the mutoids in that he is starting to move away from the salvaged look/although he still uses junk, he uses it more carefully, creating.

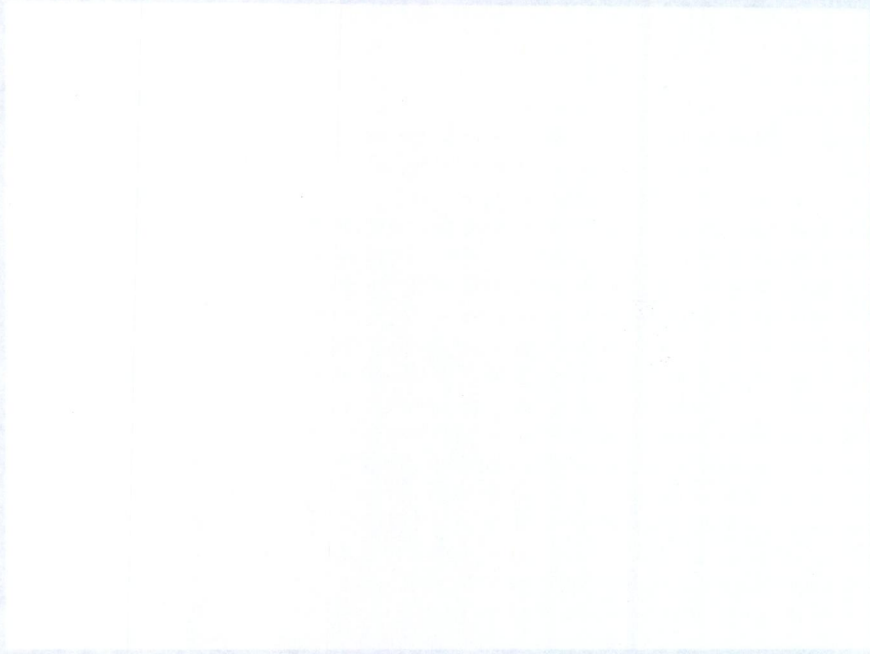
"Something which looks intended, not just throwntogether".²⁶

The deserted ghettos of inner city Manchester are the home to performance group "The Dogs of Heaven".

Though only three years old, the group have several successful projects behind them. They first gained popularity by creating and publicly burning giant replicas of the Houses of Commons and Margaret Thatcher.



Sam Hegarty Of Circus Irritant



For Bonfire Night 1991, they towed a giant Viking ship through Manchester's Hylme area before ritually burning it.

They achieved nationwide acclaim for last year's Glastonbury Festival (The Mutoids old stage) when they built a forty foot wicker man and burned him amidst a frenzy of demons "flying" from cranes, stiltwalkers, fire breathers and mutant vehicles. Groups like these ensure there will always be an underground.

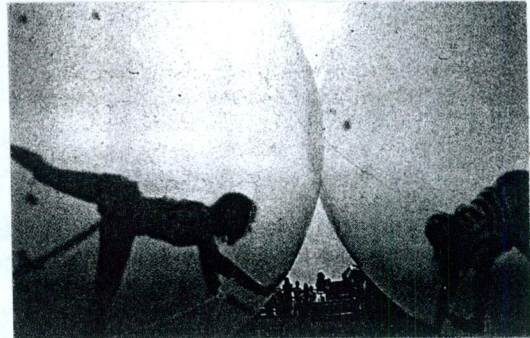
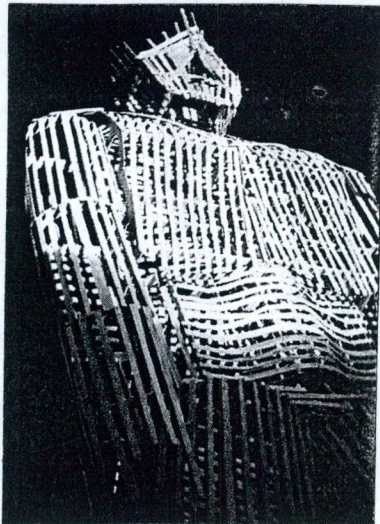
The mutoids are not the first to use junk to make art, however they are probably the only people who live with their art and their junk. Joe Rush insists that the difference between the Mutoids and groups like Catalans industrial theatre group "Fura Del Baus" is:

"They perform it, we live it. This is the way we live".²⁷

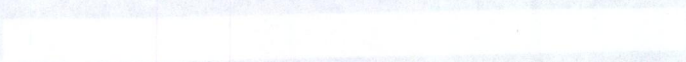
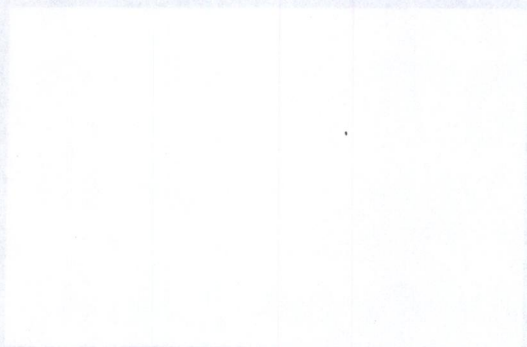
Those who came nearest to the mutoids were, I think, Architects like Steve Baer who built "Drop City", a commune near Trinidad, Colorado in 1965. Baer developed a new style of building using wooden slats to construct a frame and covering this with triangular sections cut from roofs and bonnets of junked cars.



Drop City, Trinidad, Colorado 1965



The Dogs Of Heaven Performance At Glastonbury



CONCLUSION

Since that, no one else has lived and worked in such closed proximity to scrap and rubbish as the mutoids.

The Mutoid Waste Company still live in Mutonia in Santarcangelo, near Rimini. Perhaps at this point I should say that Mutonia is not just one place, Mutonia is where ever the Mutoids park and lay their scrap, it's more of a philosophy than a place. Currently, there are four Mutonias in Europe with groups camped in Italy, Berlin, London and Amsterdam, all working independently of each other but joining together for large works.

The founders of the company, Rush, Cooke and Lee live in Santarcangelo, still religiously re-psyche-ling all around them, creating wondrous and frightening creatures whilst every Sunday afternoon they themselves are invaded by scores of day trip Italian families who go to visit and look about while their children run about and try to break things.

The Mutoids are currently arguing about a proposed trip to Japan and a possible tour of Russia and making preliminary plans for "Earth Dream 2000" a planned mega party in the central Australian desert in 1999 to see out the millenium. The Mutoids are planning to bring Mutonia to Australia and build a plane henge for the occasion.

Life is getting a lot easier for the Mutoid Waste Company.



Ermintrude The Cow

Faint, illegible text on a rectangular piece of paper pasted onto a blue background. The text is too light to read.

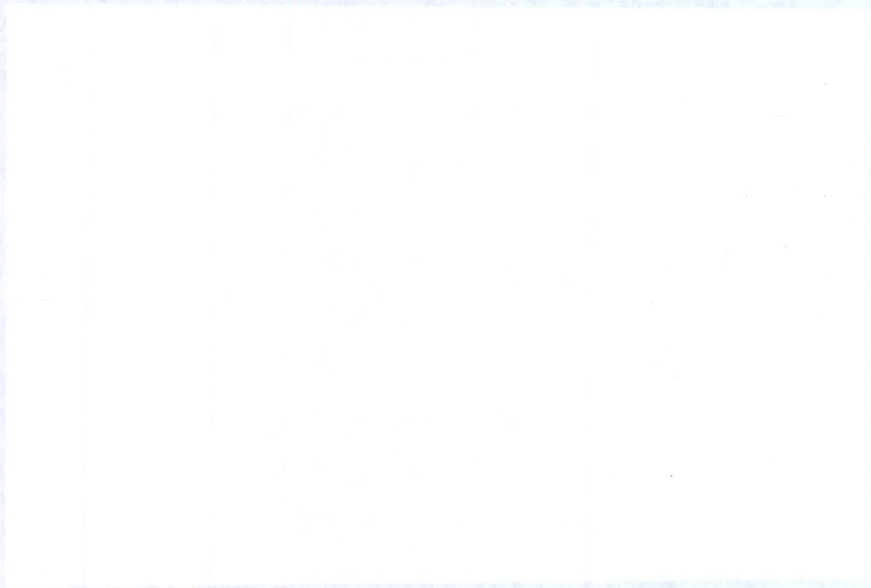
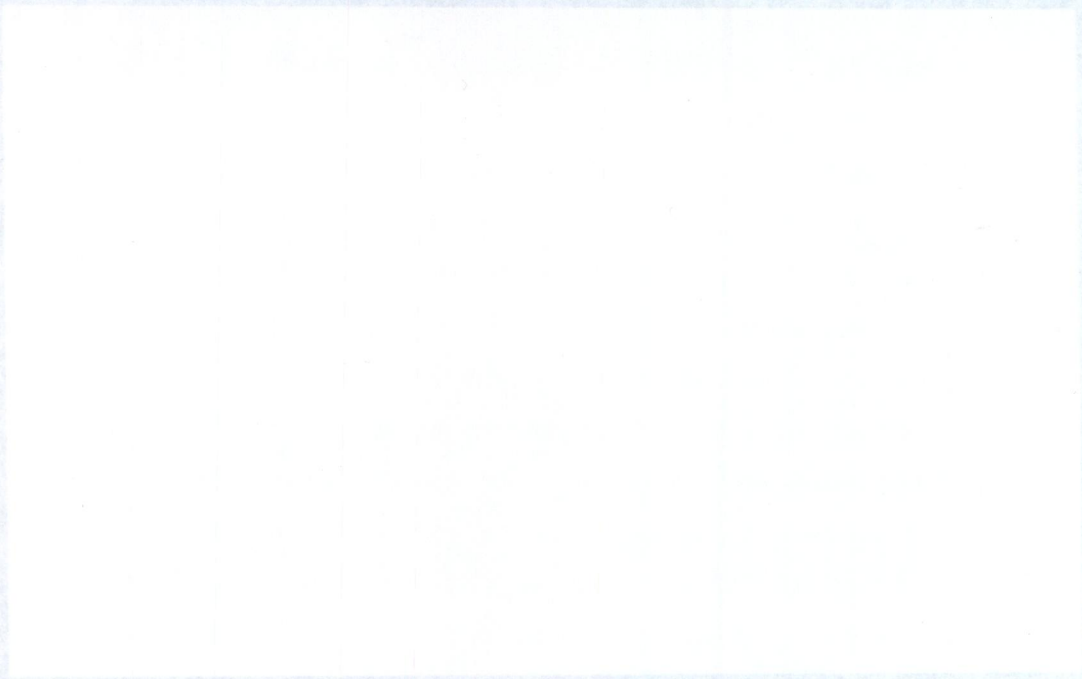
Another rectangular piece of paper with faint, illegible text, positioned below the first one. The text is also too light to read.

A small, horizontal rectangular piece of paper at the bottom center, containing faint, illegible text.





Members Of The Mutoid Waste Company



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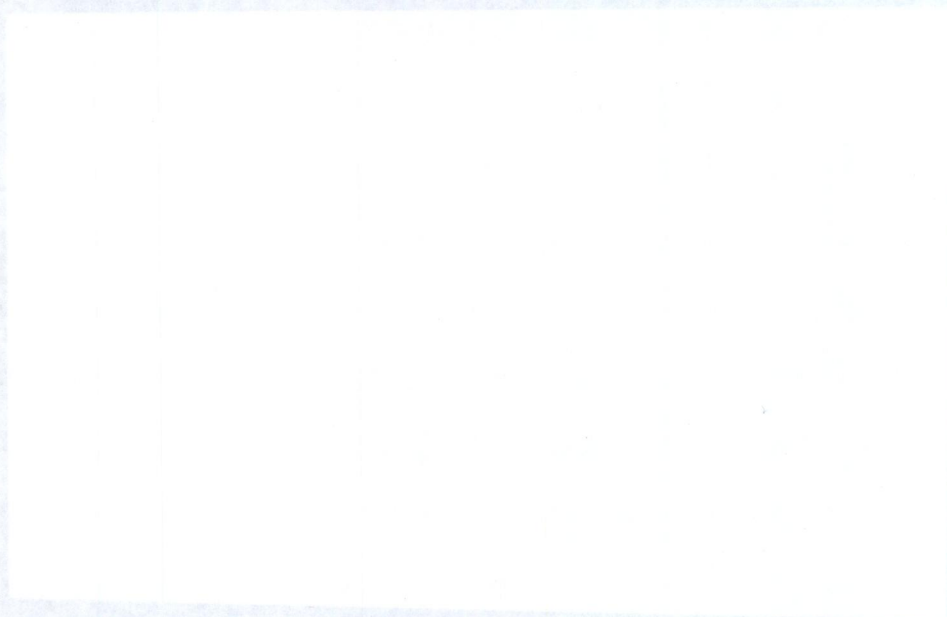


Esther From The 7 Kevins In A Red Brick Car

Using all types of industrial scrap for their raw materials the MUTOID WASTE COMPANY comprises a mobile and adaptable group of performance artists. Having the necessary equipment to allow them complete freedom, they have created an entirely new form of sculptural/musical performance crossing the boundaries of circus, theatre and art.

Initially formed in London in 1984, the Mutoids have successfully toured Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, Venice, Florence, Edinburgh and Barcelona, having performed media events, numerous street festivals and parties. With specialist construction and performance, their unique style has mutated music, feature films,

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The Mutoid's Vehicles Are An Integral Part Of Their Performances

