

contact

Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Scotney, Stewart. 1976. 'Review of *'Wallpaper' Magazine: No. 2; No. 3*'. *Contact*, 13. pp. 40.
ISSN 0308-5066.

Scores and Books

'WALLPAPER' MAGAZINE: No. 2 (December 1974); No. 3 (April 1975). A quarterly published in London (11 Ascham Street, NW5) and New York (437 Springtown Road, New Paltz, NY 12561) (£1.00 or \$2.40 each)

STEWART SCOTNEY

Wallpaper is not a score or a book, but neither is it really a magazine. It's a limited edition issue of art-works, published on a quarterly basis, in far too small a quantity to make a real impact on its potential audiences. The issues are composed of tantalising glimpses of works in progress, but give us no biographical details about the artists. These omissions will, I hope, be remedied in future issues. I know nothing of their distribution methods, but a selling price of £1 with a limited issue of 260 copies is obviously not designed to give the artists involved much of a financial return for their efforts. As all the contributing artists are also contributing editors, one senses a modicum of artistic anarchy. But the works lie together quite well. *Wallpaper* also publishes cassette recordings by their contributors. Unfortunately they didn't send me one, so a lot has been missed out, and I can't attempt a complete review.

The general impression I have of issues 2 and 3 is that they could be invaluable aids to the cassette sound recordings. They don't completely stand, artistically, on their own. They show no evidence of being completely finished works, which gives a certain spurious spontaneity to the pages. By the way, the cassettes are priced at £2.50 each, (plus 20p VAT and p.&p.), so knowing something of the costs involved in making recordings, I can see that these too won't make anyone involved with *Wallpaper* into petty bourgeoisie.

While issues are dated (December 1974 and April 1975), the individual works only show a year date, and thus give us no clue as to gestation periods or eventual plans for further development, if any. So presumably the dates of issues are near the dates of artistic birth; but one cannot be certain. This is very important, both to the artists' own individual motivation plans and to us. I note that Richard Bernas has chosen to mention some rather vague details about the performance of his composition *Almanac for October*, but one's natural curiosity demands more. It is surely a part of the communication process.

Both issues are wrapped in the most godawful patterned, coloured wallpaper I've ever seen. It's a very kitsch method of presentation, and the only excuse for it would appear to be the title; but it could be an eloquent idea with a bit more work. (Poor communications again?) This is where anarchic editorship is shown at its worst. Looking at them shut, they reminded me rather of Habitat scrap-books. But when one opens the pages, the art-works take over. A thing I like is that there are quite a few blank pages, which gives one lots of space to record personal reactions, thoughts and impressions.

All the individual pieces are worthy of study, some more than others. None, however, show a fully rounded originality. Because of space I can only record my first impressions of some of them. Andrew Eden's 'Man in a Room' is a conceptual piece of view plotting; it's also a plan for D.I.Y. self-sculpture. Olivetti have done similar kinds of plans, in a much more complete, complex and dreadful form, in their 'man future' type of exhibitions. However, Eden's piece does raise the question of how much room man (why not woman too? — they live alone) really needs to live in. We are given no evidence of how autobiographical, or biographical, this piece is. The views are too narrow, and we are not allowed to see what *kind* of person the viewer is. The views are eventually shown as separate pieces, becoming pyramids. This segmented view is one which has been in use in art schools, to my knowledge, for at least 30 years. The views are also strictly limited, and only one person's view(s) is/are considered. So what happens when the man moves, when he introduces friends, even when he is truly along? 'Man in a Room' is, I feel, an expression of a vacuum and of 'the waiting' therein: a kind of schematic view of a Beckett play, but a limited view.

Richard Bernas, the pianist and member of the now defunct group Gentle Fire, has provided the only two pieces of music that

the magazine has published so far: *Almanac for October* (in issue 2) and *Almanac for March* (in issue 3). They are, of course, both designed for performance. Here is, quite clearly, a case where one needs the cassettes. Visually the works look absolutely fascinating: rather in the tradition of those 'launching pad' pieces much beloved by such composers as Terry Riley and Philip Glass. (The kind of thing that makes my eyes water, as I try so desperately hard *not* to allow myself to be hypnotised!) Both *Almanacs* are, to a great degree, dependent on numerical systems for defining rhythmic scenarios. I sometimes wonder just how much creativity these kind of works give to performing artists, or am I asking questions that musicians don't bother with? It would be interesting to hear *your* views on this subject. The reason I ask is that in Bernas's musical talents and Bill Shepherd's *Two Works* (in issue 2) we have a perfect case for cross-fertilisation of art forms. If the two artists were to work together, I feel that they could stage the essential 'stepping stones' necessary in order that we may journey on to the next stage of avantgarde music making. For, as I know from my own preliminary work on transforming my poetry into (electronic) pulse voice music, if one uses letters instead of numbers one can weld two art forms together. Bill Shepherd's works are a kind of fractured poetry, or word puzzles, and deserve the closest attention of composers and singers.

In issue 3 are a series of *Narratives* written by Anthony Howell, 13 in all. The writing is strangely style-less. Each of the episodes states bare facts, and leaves one feeling incomplete. As an example of what I mean, here is the third narrative:

"There is one more charming than he ever was talented who will come into a fortune when he produces an heir. He loves boys and has been withheld his inheritance. Having enough to drink on, he hardly craves any fortune. He most loves boys who have been convicts. Getting on, he has decided that he could use a fortune to better the chances of convicts. He has found a wife and sent her off abroad with instructions to conceive."

This is, indeed, work in progress! One wonders why it was not fleshed out a lot more.

Amikam Toren's *Blindfold* and *Trio* are not so much works in progress as bare notes to aid him in preparation for basic research. They are a record of a walk round a room, blindfolded, and three scribbles done with eyes closed, open and closed again. Very basic work, and not particularly interesting.

I feel that I should offer the editors a couple of suggestions: they should consider using one editor per issue, and one artist per issue too. At the moment it's all rather superfluous and too light: there's no evidence of continuous development. One should have seen something, because real art demands real efforts that should be evident in the standards and choice of works on show. These two issues fail because of this. But time is on the editors' side: they must use it to good effect.

John Welch has given us the mood of *Wallpaper* in the opening lines to his short piece called *White Eggs*:

"The mind away, it's exciting. Good wing mirrors essential. Eggs, wing are the mind. Its good essential. Are wings? Eggs attractions at beavers. Essential mirrors good, exciting, it's away, the mind."

Wallpaper starts off as a good idea, but it's too lightweight, too insubstantial, to hold my attention. The format needs a lot of work and so do the contributions. Policy needs firmly working out. Art is hard: these issues commit the crime of trying to make the creative effort look easy.