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Kurl up 'n' dye

Rae, Ines

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Wild Pansy Press, Leeds

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“I am sentimental about the old neighbourhoods associated with football grounds and variety theatres....where you find the characteristic sparks of individual eccentricity and urban energy, advertising themselves in back-street businesses with names as impromptu and hussled together as the clapped-out premises to which they’re tacked; Kumincyde, Bed-E-Buys, Vidz 4 U...”

Gordon Burn Alma Cogan Minerva, 1992

Kurl Up n Dye explores the vernacular in British high street culture. The typography and photographs focus on backstreet hair salons and the culture of these small businesses, revealing moments of creativity and playfulness.

Photography INES RAE
‘Permutations’ SIMON GRENNAN

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Permutations

Simon Greenan

The photographs and pieces of type that make up Ines Rae's 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' cover a lot of ground and the relationships between them are complex, difficult to settle upon and perhaps a little overwhelming in their accumulation of possible thoughts and readings. 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' is not a documentary work, in the sense that documentation aspires to passivity in simply recording what it there. Further, thoughts that contradict this documentary paradigm without redrawing its boundaries (in arguing that the documentary eye is never passive, for example) don't really encompass 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' either: the relationships that make it up are more anarchic, more puzzling and less susceptible to the corral of established systems of thought.

It is important that 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' is made of three types of work – a few peopled interiors, facades and type-styled titles, extracted or impressed from the same set of situations. These three varieties of view have a mutually catalytic effect on the relatively clear rules that govern each of them, creating an anarchy of reading. In collecting and curating these images, it is as if Rae expresses a fundamental lack of faith in one or other way of looking or, at least, she establishes and uses one convention (of documentary portrait photography, say) only to undermine it with another in pursuit of a wider, richer and more representative vision.

However, a key to understanding these positive contradictions in 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' lies, I believe, in one of documentary photography's traditional motivations – a kind of historical adjunct to the activity of recording – the desire to map and maybe analyse social differences through the mute action of picturing. Extending this impulse beyond the picture, in a way Rae subjects the type-styles and shop names to the same view. There is as much information to gain about social relationships from type and names themselves as from pictures made to record the lives and activities of the people who choose to use them or submit to their attraction.

This impulse to visual inclusion in turn expresses an aspect of Rae's position as maker of this book. Photography is a filtering medium, making sense by pretending that meaning lies exclusively within the frame of the image. Beyond, the world is incomprehensible, mixed-up, messy and unclear. In looking at type-styles with a documentary gaze, 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' also unleashes Rae's apparently documentary images from their frames and allows a reciprocal reading of world and image that creates, on one hand, a sense of anarchy and, on the other, a feeling that a larger range is in view – a wider social picture.

Ideas of Pleasure and Ease | I'd like to look briefly at the idea of glamour. All of the elements of 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' have a relationship with aspects of glamour. Although it seems easy to imagine what glamour is and to place it quickly in relation to other, perhaps weightier, more essential and more important senses (happiness, loss, love, guilt), it is actually not an easy sense to grasp or unpack at all.

On one hand, glamour is a representation of a feeling of pleasure, but this seems only to apply to certain varieties of pleasure (not, for example, the pleasure that might be had digging the garden). Indeed, the appearance of those pleasures that have glamour seems absolutely fixed. They belong to a static list that admits no others. Pleasurable activities that are not on this fixed list might be visible, or visualised, in other ways, but not through the appearance of glamour. If some pleasures appear glamorous and some do not, then other key elements must be in play. What might it take to make digging in the garden into a glamorous activity? Interestingly, the answer springs immediately to mind as a complete image. This ease of visualization might indicate a familiar, consensual operation – the image is easy to conjure. The image has the appearance of achievement without effort, in fact with profound ease – it is the image of a lovely show garden

(not a vegetable garden) presided over by someone who only needs to make a show of digging: whose pleasure is in the appearance of effort rather than effort itself, or rather whose pleasure is possibly all appearance. Digging as a pleasure only becomes glamorous when effort is removed from the picture.

In many ways I find this image of achievement without effort an attractive one (as an image, not to be confused with the possible pleasure of digging itself), although the way in which I have been thinking about it leads to a less attractive conclusion. For we consume images as much as we make relationships, perhaps now more than ever, so a good definition of glamour might be the appearance of pleasure and ease where the appearance is a substitute for the pleasure and ease itself. Instead of a specific, personal and pleasurable relationship with the activity of digging in the garden, glamour offers a general, consensual and available image of that pleasure, one size fits all. All we have to do is look, not dig.

This supports a common notion that glamour itself is empty. We use words about it that speak only of surface, flippancy and frivolity. As an inessential sense, applied to activities that have been transformed in appearance only, the idea of it is also wasteful, useless, trashy and without inherent value, only with borrowed value. It is cheap.

In the kaleidoscopic terrain of our social lives, however, the appearance of glamour can be more complex than this, I feel. Glamour seems not to be an accidental effect, or a sense that occurs spontaneously out of the mess of lived situations. It is an intentional effect of theatre, manipulated by people in the presentation of their lives to others and, crucially, to themselves. Who is the glamorous digger trying to kid? There is no such thing as effortless gardening, the pleasure in digging is all in the doing, so glamour acts as a visible oxymoron, presenting an image which we (and others) know not to be a true representation of the facts – an anomalous vision

of pleasure (because it is easy) that both belongs to us and is completely consumed by us and by others, as image only.

Part of this visible effect is produced by the invisible effort of others (to borrow a familiar phrase), adding another urgent, palpable social dimension to the construction of the glamorous image. The glamorous gardener does not need to dig to achieve effects because they are fortunate enough (read wealthy enough) to have others do the digging for them. Contributing to the paradox of the image/situation, the effect or value of the image is underwritten by a complicity-in-knowledge of this social dynamic. If the gardener isn't digging to achieve the perfect show, who is? In order to maintain the equilibrium of the image, this question is never asked. Nor does it ever go away or, rather, an answer is always clear, but never visible – *someone* is doing the digging, but this type of invisible digging is never glamorous.

The Maker and the Made | In 'Kurl up 'n' Dye', I think we are squarely in the sights of glamour. Or perhaps, Rae has her sights set on glamour. Either way, we seem more than anything to be looking down the barrel of a gun, which is curious, seeing as the images in "Kurl up 'n' Dye" have been made within the pleasure industry, at the salon. Nobody seems to be having much fun in the peopled interiors that contribute to the work. The salon facades also appear either dreary or shabby. The conventions of documentary photography are assaulted by Rae in 'Kurl up 'n' Dye', not discarded or ignored, so that the private views, the intimate views and the set-up images still seem motivated by a desire to reveal social relationships – it might even be fair to say that the social relationships revealed most by documentary photography are on the dour side rather than the jolly side. Social difference, as discovered by documentarists, is the cause of pain, sadness and loss, not happiness, love and laughter.





This has always seemed to me to be rooted in a primary relationship between photographers and the situations that provide them with the pictures that they make and, particularly, the people that they meet. First, the photograph is a kind of discovery of the people and things it represents. Popularly, in its universe of image, the photograph presents the visible facts. This action alone reduces people to image, relationships to image, in exactly the way a photographic subject might present a ‘best face’. Photographs are just pictures. As some *bon pensant* put it in another context, explorers don’t discover new tribes, they meet them. So in fact, the photograph is another oxymoron, pretending to show the unshowable whilst framing the world for consumption and categorisation, as image alone. We don’t meet people in a photograph, their faintest impression is offered as a single view.

Second, as we don’t meet people, or even properly see them, in photographs, neither do we see or meet the photographer. The absence of the image of the photographer is no surprise because the image does not include them as subject. The photographer lies absolutely beyond the frame of the image and, as I have argued, the frame of the image is the edge of the world in photographic terms. The photographer is unworldly. These two documentary tropes (the discovery of the subject and the absence of the photographer) develop a pre-existing sense of difference between subject and photographer which underwrites the apparent transparency of the documentary process, pushing the idea of social difference as a set of images only – as appearances of difference from which the photographer is immune and the viewer completely distanced. Here (in every photograph) are your discovered tribes. Even people just like us (the viewers) appear... somehow different. They are somehow discovered, because they can’t be met.

In squewing a number of systems of reading simultaneously, ‘Kurl up ‘n’ Dye’ presents something else, or presents the documentary tropes in a subversive way. Perhaps because of

the inclusion of an anarchy from beyond the frame, Rae seems as much subject as the people who appear in her photographs. The primary relationships feel as though they are between her and the situations in which she found herself, in hairdressing salons and outside on the street, providing visual fragments of an experience that isn't fundamentally visual and which doesn't rely on the invisibility of the author or the neutrality of the viewer.

The selection and use of type-styles and show names in this book is central to my feeling that 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' approaches a non-documentary type of representation, even as it utilises documentary forms. It is Rae's own social difference from the people she has met and worked with that is on view in her choices and exclusions, her own taste, likes, dislikes, sense of self and self-image. Whilst the documentrist chooses where to cut reality with the sharp image edge, Rae's selection of type-styles from the street stumble into the photographs they appear alongside. Suddenly, Rae is the subject, not the users and vendors of hairdressing or signage. She is utterly unlike them. As she peers at them, they peer at her. To them, a face (type or otherwise) seems to be one thing. To her it seems to be completely another.

Difference and Distinction | Most of the indices of the difference between Rae 'as subject' and the salon 'as subject' are not directly visual, or are not really knowable by sight alone. Only when the photographer becomes a subject in the image can these extra-visual signs come somewhat into view. In digressing on the subject of glamour, I was attempting to understand people's presence in the salon, the style and function of the salon, in relation to the truth or otherwise of the photographs and selection of names and styles in 'Kurl up 'n' Dye'. Truth in the sense of discernable and convincing motive – why are people in the salon? Why do the names of salons seem to be self-contradictory, permanent jokes? Why is no-one laughing?

It seems to me that the answers to these questions are subsumed in the operations of glamour. The images of people in the photographs seem to represent poor, old or powerless people. No-one's laughing. No-one looks glamorous, really, so no-one has the appearance of pleasure or of ease, just of work and struggle and a fair amount of poverty. But this isn't quite right. The salon encompasses the contradictions of glamour, it isn't destroyed by them. In fact, the salon is specifically for the creation of glamour – it is a palace of dreams, a place where gaining the appearance of pleasure and ease is an avid, a dogged pursuit and a visit to the salon equals pleasure itself, obtained (invisibly) in pursuit of an image of pleasure.

Documentary photography would, perhaps inevitably, generate images of the pleasures and aspirations of these people, fixed in relation to a neutral author and viewer who exist in some other place, not like the salon, not aspiring, not visible. This is where Rae makes her appearance as subject, specifically in introducing the shop names as integral to 'Kurl up 'n' Dye'. The shop names and typefaces signal economic status, class and taste beyond the frame as accurately as the images of people and places in 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' and they appear combative, even antagonistic in the face of, say, the type design of a book like this. The humour in the shop names is self-directed, belonging entirely to the independent trader – to the lower-rent, non-corporate, 'other mainstream' undertaste that laughs at the act of aspiring by making deprecating laughter part of the pleasure of aspiration itself. What better joke than 'Who likes ugly things when ugly things are what you like?' It seems as if the people and places where Rae has been understand the operation of glamour's oxymoron in their lives, making some use of the knife-edge between image and reality, the visible garden and the invisible digger.

In this way, Rae's position as subject also finds its feet. There is a total lack of irony in the work, where irony is a common refuge for those taking a look into the strange and difficult worlds

inhabited by other people. 'Kurl up 'n' Dye' contains no double-speak, no coded juxtapositions designed to make sense of potentially inconvenient or uncomfortable comparisons of education or personal experience, or wealth or appearance. Rae is not like the people she has met and worked with and the work reveals those differences as part of its intention. She doesn't get her hair done at Sophisticuts every fortnight, nor would she name her own business for a joke, because people in her line of business don't do that. But Rae also doesn't pretend that she is invisible in this work, even though she is using documentary traditions that habitually enforce invisibility. She chooses to appear as herself in the work, alongside its other subjects – the people she's met and the places she's been, the functions of glamour upon people from very different places, the ways in which people identify themselves as similar or different from each other and the unavoidable business of being yourself and appearing as yourself, every day.









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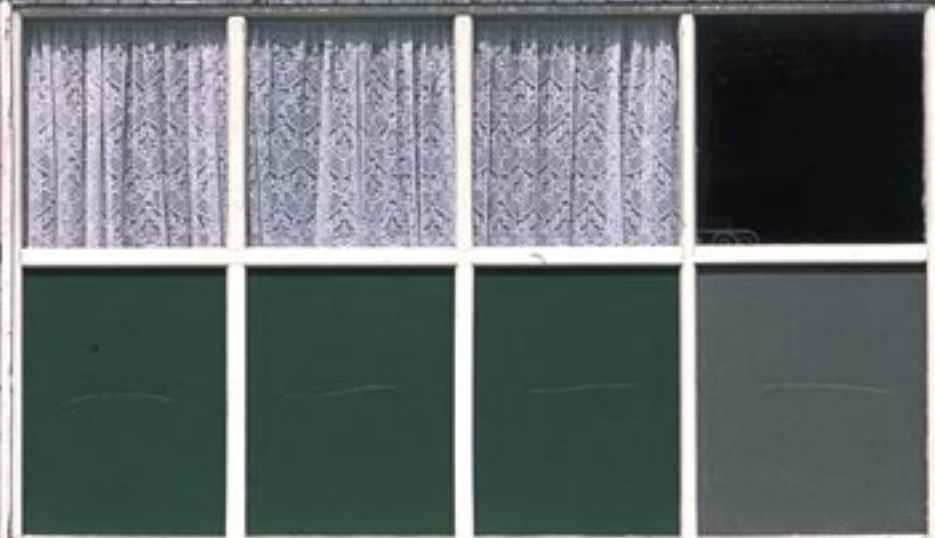
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List of locations in order of appearance

Cover: Kurl Up n Dye.....	Leeds	Jean Garwood.....	Pontypridd	Salon Solithair	Linthwaite	Cutting edge	Manchester M32	Alive n Klippin	Pontardawe	Headmaster	Hessle
Inner cover	Bury College training salon	Jean Garwood.....	Pontypridd	Hairclipse.....	Leeds	Blade Runner.....	Hull	Crimpers.....	Blackburn	Headcase	Blackburn
		New Image	Preston	Hairobics.....	Bolton	Lock n Roll	Bolton	Double Crown	Merthyr Tydfil		
		Hairizon	Bootle	Hairitage	Ammanford	Kraftwerk.....	Gorseinon	The Parting Co.....	Manchester		
Bobbits.....	Warrington	Hairport.....	Morley	Phairverts	Liverpool	Scissor Sisters	Hull	The Crop Dispenser.....	Burnley	Inner cover: Hairline	Llangyfelach
Trim n Edge	Bradford	Hairforce	Nelson	Phairfection.....	Bury	Nu Wave	Manchester M32	Beyond the Fringe.....	Llanelli	Back cover: Village gossip	Bolton
Powercut.....	Bargoed	Hairs to You.....	Liverpool	Hairy stories	Accrington	U niq cuts	Halifax	Headhunters	Bolton		
Cut n Dried	Appley Bridge	His n Hairs	Huddersfield	Shear class	Rhymney	Streaks Ahead	Hull	Skalps	Bradford		
Hair We Are	Liverpool	Hairoscope	London SE5	Exsalonce.....	Warrington	Get Set.....	Mountain Ash	Head Gardener	Hull		
Hair 4 u	Bexhill on Sea	Hairbase	Hull	Mane Attraction	Swansea	Toppcutts.....	Swansea	Chop n Change.....	Derby		
Girl Powhair	Leigh	Freshair	Hull	Above the Fringe.....	TonyPandy	Halo	Hull	Thatchairs.....	Huyton		
Hairlucinations	Liverpool	Hair Indoors.....	Preston	A Cut Above	Hull	Crowning Glory	Leeds	British Hairways	Sheffield		
Hair Flair	Ynysybwl	Airwaves.....	Pentre	Exphairteze.....	Accrington	Kurl Up n Dye	Morley	Split Ends	Llanelli		
Thairapy	Llanelli	Hairazors.....	TonyPandy	Upperkutz.....	Scarborough	Wavelength.....	Clydach	Hi Lites	Liverpool		
Barnet Fayre	Appley Bridge	Haireem	Beverley	Shear genius.....	Swansea	Brush Strokes	Blackburn	Blade	Mountain Ash		
Millionhairs.....	Wigan	Hair kraft.....	TonyPandy	Sophisticut.....	Wigan	Scissors Palace	Leeds	Crowning Glory	Leeds		
Millionhairs.....	Derby	Hair born	Liverpool	Hairs and Graces.....	Huddersfield	Comb Out in Style.....	Leeds	Trim n Proper.....	Hull		
Inharitance	Clydach	Hairline	Llangyfelach	Setting Standards	Sutton	The Behive	Morley	Talking Heads.....	Halifax		
Hairloom	Treharris	Hairlennium.....	Keighley	Rhodes ahead	Leeds	Permutations	Blackburn	Topknot	Hull		
New Image salon	Preston	Hairmongers.....	Accrington	Deb n Hair	Bexhill on Sea	Hair Dye Mention	Hull	Off Your Head.....	Manchester		



Colophon

KURL UP N DYE

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