

progressive views wish not only to smash Buddhism (alongside Christianity and all other residues of medieval superstition), but also to destroy commodity capitalism in all its forms - including the art market. ART IS DEAD, BURN THE MUSEUMS BABY!

Here We Dance: March/May 08

On 12 July 1789 Camille Desmoulins famously jumped on a caf table outside the Palais Royal in Paris to incite the assembled crowd to take up arms because King Louis had dismissed Jacques Necker and it was therefore to be feared that those reforming the French state were about to be massacred. Brandishing pistols Desmoulins announced he would not let the police capture him alive. The insurrection that followed led to the storming of the Bastille two days later, and ultimately to full blown revolution.

To accompany his neon sculpture "Ici on Danse", Ian Hamilton Finlay employs a printed quote from Camille Desmoulins about the festival held on the site of the Bastille one year after the fall of the prison:

'While the spectators, who imagined themselves in the gardens on Alcinous, were unable to tear

made at the same time as you are alive, and it has all the requisites of a work of art, which is to make, and your contemporaries are making works of art. They are works of art at the time you live, but once you are dead they die too."
Taking a cue from Duchamp, the radical 1960s New York collective Up Against The Wall Motherfucker summed his views up rather more spectacularly with the slogan: "Art is dead, burn the museums baby!" Religion is dead too, and those who claim to be opposing the deleterious effects of Chinese capitalism in Tibet by supporting the Dalai Lama merely end up serving the agenda of Anglo-American imperialism. The latter is, of course, no better than its Chinese variant. Tibet was for centuries a centre from which Buddhist theology and texts were disseminated, and these often had a destabilising effect on neighbouring territories (which is why the Chinese bourgeoisie wishes to smash Tibetan Buddhism, and so many Europeans and Americans support the Dalai Lama, whose still semi-feudal gangbangers they perceive as playing a role in retarding the development of their capitalist competitors in the Far East). It should go without saying that those of us with more

To me The Level 2 Gallery is the most interesting space in the Tate Modern. It was designed to be a shop and is architecturally extremely challenging to curators installing shows within it. The shop was moved into what was originally the foyer beyond it, because in its initial location this retail outlet failed to attract sufficient passing trade to make it financially viable. Although a part of the Tate Modern, the Level 2 Gallery feels as if it is separated from the rest of the building.
I missed the first work one encounters in "The Irresistible Force" when I went to the private view, not noticing it until I went back for a second look a few days later. This is a smoke painting by the Paris based collective Claire Fontaine; it has been burnt into the ceiling immediately before one enters the gallery, in a dead space near the doors into both the main foyer and the Level 2 shop. The work is circular in form and reads: "The Educated Consumer Is Our Best Customer". The text is reflected in reverse through the glass entrance to the Level 2 Gallery, and this creates the illusion of it having been burnt into the ceiling inside the gallery as well as outside. It thereby echoes the work of Tim Davis, also included in

Irresistible Force: September/November 07

Negotiating the Level 2 Project Space at Tate Modern

Stewart Home

predetermined meaning on viewers, such ensembles invite us to bring our own experiences into play as we respond to the individual pieces and their collective effect. To me this is post-modernism in its 'post'-ideological' phase, a post-modernism that feels no need to name or identify itself.

Michael Stevensons piece "The Fountain of Prosperity" consists of hydraulics designed to push coloured water around clear plastic tubes in order to illustrate the complex ways in which the economy operates. The sculpture was working during the private view, but since fluid leaked out of it and onto the floor, it had been switched off when I revisited the show. A hastily installed sign next to "The Fountain of Prosperity" read: "This machine is not operational. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause." The leak that precipitated the shutting down of this piece is indicative of the dialectical way in which 'reality' and 'fiction' produce and mediate each other. Thus the most obviously illustrative work in an exhibition about economy 'failed' at the same time as British bankers Northern Rock and the American sub-prime lending market faced financial meltdown, and many commentators are

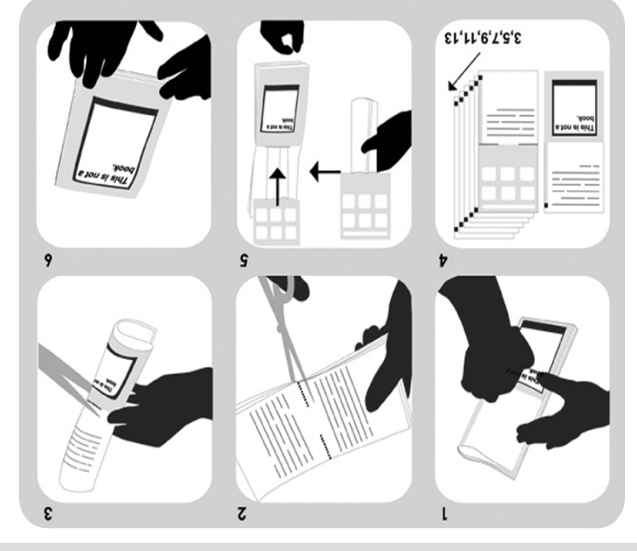
pigeon-hole it in an aesthetic category I'd opt for comic picturesque; the way it depicts the

movement of bodies through states brings to my mind the slow trudge of a deep sea diver along an ocean floor. The show left me wondering when we'll finally move beyond contemplation of the festival held on the ruins of the Bastille and instead kick off our shoes to dance on the grave of

of the state. I don't mean here just the grave of the British or the French state, but all states. Our movements will no longer resemble a slow motion replay of something that's already happened, they will be free flowing. Throwing off the chains of national borders and the onerous restrictions associated with citizenship and the state, we will enjoy a world of ever growing ecstasy in which the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine' no longer exists.

In September 2007 Tate Modern announced Stewart Home had begun a year long

engagement as writer-in-residence at their Level 2 Gallery. His brief was to write texts responding to exhibitions showcasing new emerging international artists. For links to all eight of the pieces that constitute this project go to: <http://www.stewarthomesociety.org/level2/level2.htm>



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Stewart Home

Negotiating the Level 2 Project Space at Tate Modern

"The Irresistible Force", photographs of corporate signs reflected in house windows. The other work in "The Irresistible Force" by the Claire Fontaine collective is STRIKE (K font V.11) which is installed in the window of the gallery; a series of bright fluorescent bulbs spelling out the word 'Strike'; these switch off whenever sensors detect movement nearby. To me this signals not simply post-modern exhaustion, but also the fact that notions of inside and outside are socially constructed rather than real. Inside and outside interpenetrate each other. "STRIKE" was aimed at an audience that consisted as much of those City workers who could see it through the windows of their office blocks, as it was at those visiting Tate Modern.

The curatorial model for "The Irresistible Force" is very much middle European in origin (and it is both exciting and unusual to see it used in its pure form at an institution like Tate Modern). Loosely themed around what might be described as an 'ideological' category (in this case the notion of 'economy'), the works in this type of show are always in a variety of media, come from all over the world, and share few formal characteristics; instead of attempting to impose a

Edmund Burke's "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" (1757). Burke defines the beautiful as well-formed and pleasing, with the sublime by contrast having the power to compel and destroy us. The shift from an aesthetic taste for the beautiful to a preference for the sublime is often viewed as marking the onset of Romanticism. Later, in his best known book "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (1790), Burke stupidly denounced the French Revolution as a revolt against tradition, and this tract earned him the posthumous reputation as the founding father of modern British conservatism.

While an attraction to the sublime does not invariably mean a post-Romantic artist has a right-wing political outlook, there does seem to be a relationship between these two things that goes beyond mere coincidence. That said, Ian Hamilton Finlay doesn't necessarily fit into this schema; he presents the French Revolution in a positive light although he is clearly most attracted to those elements connected to The Terror, which can be viewed as its sublime aspect.

The "Here We Dance" exhibition as a whole is neither sublime nor beautiful, and if I had to

asking whether we are heading for the biggest recession since the 1930s.

Conrad Bakker's work for this show was a block of wood carved and painted to look like a recent edition of "Das Kapital". For me this piece symbolises recent blockages in attempts to transform the world, but in light of current events it seems obsolete, since with the ongoing breakdown of the capitalist system we are apparently crossing a line which opens up new opportunities for social transformation. Two separate ensembles of work in "The Irresistible Force" by Matei Bejenaru and Judi Werthein explicitly address the issue of national borders, and these simultaneously serve as a metaphor for a less visible political border that we are currently negotiating our way around. Finally there is a video installation by Mika Rottenberg which shows female wrestlers caught in an endless cycle of what appears to be pointless labour. The cleavage shots of the large women in Rottenberg's film made me think of what I had in my knapsack when I came to "The Irresistible Force" private view; a DVD of director Luigi Batzella's 1974 sleaze epic "Nude For Satan", which I'd found earlier that day in a bargain bin in Soho. When

Back in the 1960s the group Action Against Cultural Imperialism (headed by one time Fluxus artist Henry Flynt) picketed New York concerts by the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen because they viewed him as racist and reactionary, but it was the opinions this musician expressed about the 9/11 attack that finally led to a spate of concert cancellations. When asked about the destruction of the Twin Towers, Stockhausen replied: "Well, what happened there is, of course - now all of you must adjust your brains - the biggest work of art there has ever been. The fact that spirits achieve with one act something which we in music could never dream of, that people practise ten years madly, fanatically for a concert. And then die. (Pause.) And that is the greatest work of art that exists for the whole cosmos. Just imagine what happened there. There are people who are so concentrated on this single performance, and then five thousand people are driven to the afterlife. In one moment. I couldn't do that. Compared to that we composers are nothing."

What Stockhausen was fumbling with in this statement was the concept of the sublime, a notion that found its best known exposition in

there was a shot up the skirt of one of the wrestlers, showing her black knickers, this clinched the connection for me. The protagonists in "Nude For Satan" appear to have died in a car crash and find themselves in a chateau where they meet their doubles, the bad parts of themselves which have somehow been separated from the good in an evil plot to lure the virtuous into debauchery. Needless to say this gives Batzella (working under the pseudonym Paolo Solay) and his audience the perfect excuse to indulge in 83 minutes of psychodelic softcore sex (there was a version of the film with hardcore inserts but that appears to be lost) and trashy Satanic ritual complete with flaming skulls, whippings and plenty of lesbianism. The film is emblematic of the type of pop culture many contemporary artists grew up with, and its influence can be seen in the work of the Chapman brothers and Mark Waller (to give just two examples)..

That said, while "Nude For Satan" might still at first glance appear very far removed from the curatorial practice and interests of the institution hosting "Irresistible Force", in fact it isn't. As Curator of Film and Live Events at Tate Modern,

police investigation into the case.

Although the fascist sympathies of the avant-garde Futurists clustered around F. T. Marinetti are well known, the far-Right extremism of Italys leading Dadaist has elicited less comment from art historians. Julius Evola (1888-1974) was no more than a fringe member of Marinetti's Futurist movement, but his extended correspondence with Tristan Tzara and involvement with the publication "Revue Bleu" placed his poetry and visual doodles at the centre of Italian Dadaism. Finding the avant-garde insufficiently elitist for his aristocratic tastes, from 1923 onwards Evola switched his attention to esoteric studies and the ideological development of fascist politics. Evola was savagely anti-Semitic and championed a form of traditionalism grounded in what he called pagan imperialism. Because Evola viewed Germanic Nazism as ideologically inferior to his equally barmy brand of racism, he was often side-lined in far-Right circles prior to the defeat of the Axis powers; but after 1945 he became the high priest of Italian neo-fascism and inspired the terrorists convicted of the Bologna train station bombing to take up arms.

Stuart Comer runs an exciting and innovative moving image programme in the main auditorium, and a couple of years ago he hosted a season of Italian B movies (mainly from the seventies) to coincide with an exhibition of twentieth-century Italian art elsewhere in the building. "Nude For Satan" wasnt one of the movies Comer included in his Italian Bs programme, but it could have been, since the directors this pioneering curator chose to showcase included Mario Bava, Fernando di Leo and Lucio Fulci, men who not only share a popular audience with Luigi Batzella, but are all too often every bit as misunderstood. So while the Level 2 Gallery appears separated from the rest of Tate Modern, it isn't; inside and outside interpenetrate each other, there is a process of 'exchange' at 'work' here...

Illuminations: December 07/February 08

"Illuminations brings together five film and video works that explore gestures, objects and spaces that shape or express belief. The title refers both to the light generated by projected images in a darkened gallery and to metaphorical states of enlightenment attainable through faith. Belief be it spiritual, philosophical or scientific is a means

programme the German Red Army Faction (RAF) and those who combated them each get to speak in their own voices, and are thus revealed as mirror images of each other. The political incendiaries of the RAF clearly believed themselves to constitute an elite who had the right to lead and shape the world, their self-image of having risen above the common mass of humanity was a vanguardist delusion they shared with top state officials. Many western urban guerrillas of the 1960s and 1970s claimed they were fighting the organised-for-profit ways of the capitalist world, but beyond the greater destructiveness of regular armies, there is little to differentiate the methodology of terrorists from that of the military-industrial complex they allegedly opposed. Indeed, national security services have been implicated in much nineteenth and twentieth-century terrorism, and nowhere more so that Italy. For example the 1980 Bologna train station bombing which killed 85 people was initially blamed on left-wing terrorists, then far-Right activists were convicted for the atrocity, with members of Italian military intelligence receiving legal sentences for maliciously impeding

through which individuals recognise and make sense of the world. It can be resolute or instinctive, questioning or blind, reasoned or irrational, individual or collective. In this exhibition, artists Lida Abdul, Dan Acosta, Sanford Biggers, caraballo-farman and Valrie Myren explore how belief is articulated through places, symbols, words and actions. Their work captures incidents and gestures that relate to rituals of commitment and revelation. Viewed through the media of video and film, belief is presented as an intrinsic feature of daily life, which can provoke reflection and transformation. Through a range of strategies, including documentary and observation, the artists examine the position of the individual within communal frameworks that order moral and social behaviour. "Lucy Asked and Ben Borthwick Can art last? Does faith endure? These were questions the "Illuminations" exhibition led me to ask despite the accompanying curatorial material speaking of belief in its 'spiritual, philosophical or scientific' forms. Without doubt my reaction stemmed from the fact that four of the five works on display directly addressed religious belief, and even caraballo-farman's "Contours of Staying"

appeal of terrorist images to a certain type of artist is obvious. Currently describing himself as a 'gold card anarchist', fashion millionaire Toby Mott used to be a member of the now defunct Grey Organisation and in this capacity he was involved in various actions against cultural institutions. The best known Grey Organisation stunt took place in 1984, when its members painted the windows of all the art galleries in Cork Street grey. Mott isn't nostalgic about his days as an art terrorist: "I wouldn't do what we did in the eighties again. Everything has changed since then, it would be pointless. A lot of people today, like those responsible for messing up Tracey Emin's bed at the Tate, are just wanting in on the art world. That isn't interesting. But I'm all for bringing down bourgeois idols. If there is a point to what people do, then I'm all for it. Destroying art works misses the point, it just provides work for someone making a replacement or replica."

Gail Pickering's contributions to "Here We Dance" were as far removed from art terrorism as it is possible to get. The performances in which she recites the actual words of terrorists among other things, bring to mind "Generation Terror", a 2002 BBC documentary by Ben Lewis. In this

which is premised on endurance, foregrounds spiritual rather than scientific questions when repositioned as a work about belief. *"Contours of Staying"* is a film of protestors meditating outside the Chinese consulate in New York during a blizzard until finally the harsh weather conditions force them to abandon their demonstration. What struck me most about this piece was that in order to document the disintegration of the protest, the artists making it endured the intemperate weather for longer than those whose 'spiritual' beliefs had brought them into conflict with the Chinese government. Looking at *"Contours of Staying"* from the perspective of belief thus creates the impression that art is stronger than religion.

That said, art is every bit as redundant as religion. Art can no longer be viewed a substitute for spirituality, since while art may have functioned as surrogate form of mystical cretinism for aesthetes in the past, it cannot possibly do so now. With the rise of post-modernism in the late twentieth-century it became impossible to believe that art signified anything spiritual, or that it might offer an alternative to the grubbing commerciality of capitalism. Today art is for

galleries and at festivals demonstrates a desire on the part of the art world to deal with terrorism as an issue. Precisely because Grimmonprez's work is neither analytical nor particularly linear it is well suited to gallery installation. The American company Other Cinema have issued "Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y" on DVD and pitch it with the following promotional blurb: "Buckle up for DIAL H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, the acclaimed hijacking documentary that eerily foreshadowed 9/11. We meet the romantic skyjackers who fought their revolutions and won a lifetime on the passenger planes of the 1960's and 1970's. By the 1990's, such characters were apparently no more, replaced on our TV screens by stories of anonymous bombs in suitcases."

By the 1990s the image of the terrorist had been appropriated by artists such as Matthew McCarthy of The Molotov Organisation, who did things like run into the toilets at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London to install a 'guerrilla exhibition' circa 1999, as well as pelting the painting "Larger Than Life" by Angela de la Cruz with bananas when it was on display at The Royal Festival Hall in 1998. Art terrorism was a popular media term that fell out of use after 9/11. The

everyone, and the arts of hip-hop and football are valued as highly as the paintings found in art museums by politicians and 'captains of industry', as well as by fans of music and sport. Indeed popular culture now occupies a prominent place in the curating practices of many museums.

But let's return for a moment to faith and religion, and specifically to what Marx famously had to say about it in *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions."

Implicit in this argument is the notion that religion not only won't but can't endure. Seen from this perspective, the apparent resurgence of religious faith around the world in recent years is a response to global immiseration, and rather than representing a straightforward continuation of the religious beliefs of the past, it is instead

tragi-comedy of fascism was a much later and more cancerous product of modernity than the French Revolution, but the growth of nationalist sentiment which accompanied both has often played a role in the politics of terrorism (the world of the 'urban guerrilla' is addressed directly by Gail Pickering in her contributions to "Here We Dance" and echoes of it are to be found in a number of other works in the show).

Richard E. Rubenstein assesses the political consequences of pre-9/11 terrorism in his book "Alchemists Of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World" (1987): 'Compare the Nazis' sanctification of their terrorist forerunners with the Bolsheviks' insistence that leftist terrorism, however understandable, had always been a mistake... the historical evidence suggests, terrorism is rarely effective as a mode of class struggle. On the contrary, its use by the partisans of a mixed movement generally signifies either that a serious mistake of timing has occurred or that nationalist impulses have replaced social-revolutionary expectations.'

Although it wasn't included in "Here We Dance", the endless re-screening of Johan Grimonprez's scratch video "Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y" (1998) in

indicative of their ongoing transformation and destruction. In other words, the traditionalism of Christian and Muslim fundamentalists is a revolt against capitalist modernity and post-modernity; a revolt which despite the conservatism of those rallied under its banners, is destroying the very things it claims to preserve, since 'traditionalism' itself is a product of modernity (i.e. it is a modern invention) and thus serves to erase any real knowledge of the past. Traditionalism did not and could not exist in pre-modern societies for the simple reason that these societies had not experienced modernity. Traditionalism thus contributes to the eradication of all pre-modern systems of belief.

The works selected for inclusion in "Illuminations" self-consciously avoid addressing 'belief' in any of the guises that are readily identifiable as problematic to secular liberals. For example Christian fundamentalism is associated with Protestant sects, and that isn't touched upon here, although Dan Acotionaei's "Crossroads" is an impressive work which among other things draws its power from the ways in which the manipulation of the external trappings of Orthodox Christian belief in Romania have been

manipulated to such a degree that they now significantly consumerist belligence more than anything else. Acotionaei has filmed pedestrians on a busy city street making the sign of the cross and the viewer has no way of knowing whether this is simply to signal their opposition to the deposed Bolshevik regime and belief in a corporate new world order, or a sign of faith (or a combination of both). Acotionaei's work documents the destruction of 'orthodox' Christian belief and its replacement by capitalism as a practical religion of money worship. Likewise, in Valrie Mjren's "Dieu" eight former Orthodox Jews describe the ways in which they lost their faith. Lida Abdui's "Dome" does touch on Islam (alongside Buddhism and Hinduism), but it most immediately invokes Sufi dervishes through its repeated imagery of a boy turning in circles, and this is not one of the Islamic sects readily associated with fundamentalism. Moving on, in "Hip Hop Ni Sasagu" Sanford Biggers succeeds in simultaneously embracing and parodying Zen Buddhism. For a variety of historical reasons, many of which are tied to the history of the British empire and the deleterious effects of British colonialism, the image of the

in places he might be productively misread as doing this. Take, for instance, the opening to "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1852):

"Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historical facts and personages appear, so

to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce... the

Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the

Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew

nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95....

Camille Desmoullins, Danton, Robespierre, St. Just, Napoleon, the heroes as well as the parties,

performed the task of their time that of unchaining and establishing modern bourgeois society in Roman costumes and with Roman phrases...."

The twentieth-century saw its fair share of pseudo-revolutions and many were conducted as neo-classical campaigns replete with Roman salutes; in 1922 the Italian fascists even marched on Rome as a means of persuading the local political and industrial establishment to transfer state power to them. The murderous

other in English translation).

The period of the French Revolution between September 1773 and July 1774 is known as The Terror. This was a time at which both the very real threat of invasion by foreign monarchs who were opposed to the flowering of popular sovereignty in Europe, and power struggles within Republican ranks in France, led to the mass execution of those condemned (sometimes wrongly) as enemies of the people. Desmoulins was one of a number of figures guillotined during The Terror who'd played an active role in whipping up the Republican fervour that led to his own death. He was executed at the beginning of April 1794 but the culmination of The Terror came at the end of that July, with the condemnation of its leaders Maximilien Robespierre and Louis de Saint-Just (a bust of the latter occupies a key place in Hamilton Finlay's major work. his garden "Little Sparta").

The French revolution was successful and Desmoulins, Robespierre and Saint-Just, are now regarded as heroes by many people but had the repressive French monarchy survived they might have gone down in history as terrorists. Karl Marx would have had something to say about that, and

Buddhist faith is less tarnished among secular liberals in the overdeveloped world than that of other major world religions, This is despite the active role the Buddhist clergy has played in the murderous repression of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, or the fact that the theocratic Buddhist regime that ruled Tibet (with minor interruptions) until the middle of the twentieth century was despotic. The fact that Buddhism should emerge as the central focus of an exhibition about belief in one of the most important of the overdeveloped worlds art museums is hardly surprising, because religion like art has never been ideologically neutral.

Likewise, while it is untenable to view the way in which Buddhism formed the religious core of "*Illuminations*" as accidental, it would none-the-less be erroneous to treat this as a self-conscious curatorial decision laid down in advance of the works being selected. It is rather an effect of the art system as a whole, and the institutional regulation of that system. Since Buddhism serves the geo-political interests of the overwhelming majority of those buying works on the European and American art markets (and for the same reasons it is also attractive to deluded

themselves away, the site of the Bastille and its dungeons, which had been converted into groves, held other charms for those whom the passage of a single year had not yet accustomed to believe their eyes. An artificial wood, consisting of large trees, had been planted there. It was extremely well lit. In the middle of this fair of despotism there had been planted a pike with a cap of liberty stuck on top. Close by had been buried the ruins of the Bastille. Amongst its irons and gratings could be seen the bas-relief representing slaves in chains which had aptly adorned the fortress's great clock, the most surprising aspect of the sight perhaps being that the fortress could have been toppled without overwhelming in its fall the posterity of the tyrants by whom it had been raised and who had filled it with so many innocent victims. These ruins and the memories they called up were in singular contrast with the inscription that could be read at the entrance to the grove a simple inscription whose placement gave it a truly sublime beauty: ici on danse'.
So both the current Tate Modern Level 2 exhibition "Here We Dance" and the Hamilton Finlay piece it features take their titles from this historic slogan (one in the original French and the

members of the bourgeoisie looking to infuse their empty lives, and even emptier heads, with a bit of 'spirituality'), artists wanting their work seen - which given the commodification of art means being able to sell it - are more likely to make pieces drawing on Buddhist themes than say 'millitant Islam' (which would undoubtedly be harder to sell to the average merchant banker or hedge fund manager in London or New York). Thus the religious focus of "*Illuminations*" reflects a bias that already exists at the level of artistic production, and which in its turn is indicative of prejudices found throughout both the art and financial markets of the overdeveloped world. As touched upon above, what religious belief signifies has changed radically through different historical periods, and the same also holds true for art. Marcel Duchamp insisted that art works died: "So I applied this rule to all artworks, and they after twenty years are finished. Their life is over. They survive all right, because they are part of art history, and art history is not art. I don't believe in preserving, I think as I said that a work of art dies. It's a thing of contemporary life. In other words, in your life you might see things, because it's contemporary with your life, it's being