

The Case Of The Six-Sided Man

There are courses to help us become more self-aware, they help us to push our boundaries, challenging us to confront our lives with renewed vigour. On his website of 'wilderness bush craft' Ray Mears deadpans, 'I want to enable others to drink at the well of bush craft' (1). It sounds a bit unpleasant, but a man who had a TV series called, 'The Essential Guide To Rocks', probably poses little or no threat. A desire to find a primitive vision of our everyday world or to experience it afresh is an impulse that surely exists. Sometimes backwoods craft might be the answer but a lot of people might want something a little more municipal, perhaps a foundation that can inspire anything from speaking in a strange voice for days on end to attempting to kill a colleague, all using the same brutally simple rationale.

Two dice apparently have a set number of faces however during 'dice play' an almost inconceivable amount of variations can be born of chance with the roll of the pair. It's the simple human element, the desire for new experiences, which leads away from the continued boredom to some kind of outré act. The trappings of exterior decor might as well be determined in the same way. 'My pink half of the drainpipe', sang Vivian Stanshall, 'separates next door from me' (2). It's a song which sends up the dreary and tiny details of the pathetic struggle for individuality in suburbia, the kind of obsessive behaviour which leads to all out wars over planning permission for hedges. It is this demented normality which informs the psychological space that David Sherry's work inhabits. The person who commits obsessive acts, which are rendered stranger by their prosaic context, drives his performance work.

He describes his works as mild altercations with his everyday life; a kind of tweaking that creates the pathos of in videos. Sherry often appears in what can be described as a home made television format, a kind of cable access channel aesthetic which

ch, so far, is not a widespread medium for small-town insanity in the UK. The straight-faced delivery is vital as the subject matter ranges from topics as diverse as tribal initiation rites to the imminent death of the sun. Most things seem tied to some kind of external source, the underpinning of chance situations set against factual nuggets assimilated from newspaper clippings. The 'stats' that often crop up in the work are short hand pseudo science, tinkering in the garden shed, clever but in the end amusing because they are obscure and removed from their original context.

On Cheech and Chong albums they have a character called Dave. Dave is someone who knocks on the door sending the occupants of the room scurrying around in panic. Dave is the dealer, responsible for their addled state of mind whilst ultimately remaining sober at all times. Just as much as he represents the invasion of the ordinary outside world he also reflects the anxieties of countercultural seventies Ame

rica. Luke Rheinhardt's novel, *The Dice Man* hit its audience through a kind of vogue for psychiatry of the Woody Allen kind (3). On this level it took an

escalation of what happens behind closed doors, the idea of control and paranoia. It's something that goes beyond Cheech and Chong's smoke shrouded slapstick and confronts a latent paranoia. Movie references contemporary with the Dice man abound. When Sherry dressed up as an old woman, in his performance *Advancement Into Retreat*, he compared his expression to Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*; the famous still where he is grins maniacally through a shattered door.

In Sherry's work we get a sense of an almost unconsciously assembled set of pre-conditions having been constructed prior to the commencement of any art-making activity. His interactions with what he calls 'everyday life' are through parallels with the most bizarre and abject of its conditions. In many of his videos the notion of pastiche always seems far from Sherry's mind,

the method is often casual as if parody has hardly any importance. The fact is, medium aside, what all the works have in common is a narrative based around the artist in the most mundane possible surroundings delivering what amounts to observations on existence from the comfort of being sat down, he rarely exerts himself and walking in a lot of the films is often just a means to reach his seat.

His headless man runs, though it looks like he will ultimately end up in a collision or else as in Monty Python's *Holy Grail* the loss of other body parts will render him incapable of further movement (4). A modern day flagellant, he must follow things through to their conclusion. Brutality and absentmindedness exist in these works in equal measure. In *The Diceman* the narrator is always in some way bound to his job as a psychiatric doctor, a mundane prerequisite to being able to exist in a the modern world. He circles and subsequently returns in ever-increasingly parodic and demented ways to a ctions that resemble his previously sober existence. The dice man suggests that one of the six outcomes must be unpleasant for example attacking someone or in another incident allowing his son to crawl all the way down the road to get a milkshake. Sherry's headless man stumbles down a similar kind of street, Willy Nelson's cover of *You Were Always On My Mind* plays in the background (5). It's like the Elvis original only the lines tail off to a melancholy mumble whilst the audience applauds and cheers as if they're listening to the real thing. The music seems to mirror the figure as it slows and bumps into a wall and then accelerates onto open ground once more. Rousseau linked walking directly with thinking, a process that Sherry has pulled apart, quite literally, in these new works.

'I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs'. (6)

