

You got a killer scene there, man

"I believe that I understand gangs better than others. Because they're formed out of necessity. They're formed by people to keep from being suppressed." Jack Bowman

I went to see the venerable Tony Benn at The Sage in Gateshead a couple of years back, which was a great pleasure for me. I've admired Tony for many years, not only because he shares a predilection toward cable-knit cardigans as I do, but chiefly because he seems to be the only politician who is not an inveterate gobshite. For the uninitiated, Tony is the former Secretary of State for Energy and, I may be wrong in saying so, the longest serving Member of Parliament that the Labour Party has ever had. I'm pretty sure that on the other side of the fence, Kenneth Clarke has enjoyed a similarly prolonged epoch in the House. Whilst Clarke, who is quite possibly the last of the old Dinosaurs, has become a pall upon Parliament with his assertion that rape should be demarcated by 'type' and ranked in terms of 'seriousness,' Benn has avoided making such ineffectually twattish remarks and gone onto preside over the Stop the War Coalition as a talismanic bastion for left-leaning politics. What inveigles me towards Tony's point of view is that he is a fabulously articulate man, both in written language and oration and when reading his words/listening to him it becomes pretty clear that he is quite simply talking sense.

One such example of this sense-talking was during the night at The Sage, one point at which Tony was extolling on some Socialist tenet-or-other, launching into a diatribe about how exactly we the people could go about crossing swords with the powers-that-be, in an effective manner. If I recall correctly, I believe it was around about the time that Barack Obama was elected to Office in the good ol' USofA. An audience member gauged Tony on his thoughts about whether or not the newly elected President could have such an awe-inspiring effect on Global Politics. What Tony posited was that no single man or woman could have such a monumental effect on change. It turns out he was once

again talking sense. Obama may hold the hopes of so many in his hands and he may be a charismatic agent of so much that is just to so many people, but in the end he is at the mercy of the Senate and a million ancillary factors. To suppose that one person could override so much and achieve so much, singularly, is a little naïve in my opinion. Similarly, when some people raise the ire of others, let's think of an example of a complete bucknut - say George W Bush - it's too easy to place all of the vitriol on one person's shoulders. With this particular example, we all know there were many people responsible for the catastrophes, calamities and atrocities; Dick Cheney being just one of countless others involved. I think it's flawed logic to place so much hope/hatred at one person's door. There are too many facets involved and too much to consider. For me, that is life.

This point of view was echoed and expanded upon by Mr Benn when he went on to say that real change could only be effected by the collective. If my boss is acting like a fetid bollock and I decide to voice my discontent, my argument is completely undermined if I do not have the support of my colleagues. We must set aside the ball-quivering fear that we may upset our superiors and lose our much-coveted desk-jobs. Why slip meekly into the margins like rats in wainscoting? Stand up together and usurp these despotic fuckwits. Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me! Viva le Revolution!

I'd best stop there. I'm very much alone in what I'm saying right now and my boss might be reading.

The point is, far more can be achieved as a collective, which leads back to what Jack Bowman states at the beginning of this article.

Life is enormous. For every plot there is a sub-plot, for every set there is a sub-set, for every heading there is a sub-heading. It's a Minotaur's Labyrinth of compartmentalised genres, sub-genres and sub-categories. Culture may be borne of the times; cultural movements may irrupt as a reaction to culture itself. Oh, and then there are off-shoots within these cultures. Music would serve as a good

example here. New Wave came about as a distilled and commercially palatable take on Punk. Then as a reaction to New Wave, No Wave emerged. There is a constant call and response in art, culture, life itself. What annoys me is that these sub-genres tend to be so exclusive, myopic and discriminate despite being part of a wider and deeply linear scope. Take 'Alternative.' As with most genres it is awkwardly named and reeks of ambiguity. Alternative - to what? The composite of Alternative has been presented for a long time now as the response to the mainstream. To me, this is patronising to those lumped into the category, as if they're subversive lepers or just plain weird, like Chris Eubank. There again, there are some that exalt in this segregation.

Speaking from experience, the Alt. scene falls victim to that which most scenes do in that whilst it rallies against a specific opposite (the mainstream in this instance) and offers a broadening in the musical and cultural spectrum, those involved become unequivocally precious about it. In the end, the movement contradicts itself, turns inward and becomes secular. Music after all, is so much more than the noise. For many, music and the culture that derives from it, imbues them with a sense of identity. It might sound preposterous to many, but with a band like Weezer I was personally given this whole *raison d'être* as a socially awkward misfit. I was given, via the band's self-deprecating, nerdy image, *carte blanche* and the empowerment to actually rejoice in my bookish mien. To then break it further down into less abstract terms, I was also led into an entire World of affectation; wearing Vans, horn-rimmed spectacles; gaudy sweaters. I could adopt this pose and feel confident, because this band existed under similar auspices. 'Yeah, I like looking like this you dick - I am comfortable because Rivers Cuomo likes body-warmers too.' The great beauty of taking up something so passionately is that it leads you to other interesting avenues. Continuing the theme of lineage and offshoots, say a band I am getting off on advocates a book, I can then go out and start getting off on that. In fact, Elliott Smith turned me on to Kierkegaard. How many times have you travelled through the hyperlinks of Wikipedia and found yourself at some far-flung web destination?

This is all a pleasant sort of means of acceptance and I don't think it should be underestimated. Sadly, I inevitably feel that people become far too insular inside their alcove-scenes and are reduced to nothing but a collection of affectations.

In Newcastle I have had the great (mis)fortune of languishing within an Alternative scene for many years. I do not associate myself with this scene exclusively, however. I treat life as one massive, giant fucking huge as fuck palette with too many colours to bother my arse discriminating any of them. I might pop down to the local Alt. clubs, but that doesn't mean you won't find me in a painfully trendy cocktail bar half-an-hour later. I've lost count of how many times I've heard people within the Alt. clubs deride all that is 'trendy.' I've walked into a club like Legends (sleazy, joyless cess-pit that it is) wearing - wait for it - nice clothes. Now, I realise I'm being a little hypocritical here, but before you mistake my candour for rancour, I don't mind what you fucking wear. I might walk into Legends looking utterly outstanding, but that's not to say I'm sneering at most of the rest of the male clientele who stick to jeans and a T-shirt. In fact, as is my take on life, I often dress like that too. I don't have a uniform. Unfortunately, not everybody sees things this way. 'What are you doing here?' Hmm, well actually, now that you mention it, that is a good question. What the fuck am I doing here? So a place where those ostensibly cast-off by an unforgiving and perpetually trendy mainstream convene, can afford to display zero acceptance for somebody based off image alone? I'll fuck off to the wine-bar then thanks. I stopped listening to Korn twenty years ago any way.

Across town is another club for the Alt. demographic, Krash. This is where it gets interesting because it seems there is attrition within the scene here. The Legends crowd can't abide the Krash kids and vice versa. It seems the Legends lot lazily write off the Krash-goers as foppish 'emos' (a pejorative term now) and I'm pretty sure the emo kids lazily write off the Legends lot as mostly sweaty old men who dress up like cowboys for the weekend. These are two offshoots of the Alt. scene, a scene apparently born of necessity like all gangs are, as an alternative to that evil mainstream - and it can barely co-exist. It's embarrassing.

It's also intellectually bankrupt and cowardly to cast aspersions from within your particular sect. J Mascis of Dinosaur Jr revealed to me when I interviewed him for an issue of Narc magazine that despite growing up on 'Hardcore Punk,' he rejected its uniformity. This idealised clique which touted its kernels rooted in individuality



had become everything it had set out to oust. Funnily enough, as a writer of Narc, I see the same things happen within the Hipster scene. Groups of people with similar interests coming together to then weed out everyone who suddenly starts taking other interests. The whole concept turns inside out. What is the point in decreeing what is acceptable and not acceptable to like? Cherry picking the cool and post-modern for convenience. Like Alexei Sayle, pioneer of 'Alternative' comedy said:

"People are more violently opposed to fur than leather because it's safer to harass rich women than motorcycle gangs."

I was once stood in Trillians, on Princess Square in Newcastle when the DJ played Manic Street Preachers' 'La Tristesse Durera.' I overheard a be-dreadlocked lady remark,

'For fuck's sake. This used to be a rock bar!'

emphasis on rock bar. I picked up on this immediately. I understand that if you like a niche genre of music, you're only ever going to have a limited number of places where you can go to enjoy that music. However, I challenged her on the matter and laid down my position that it would be better if all music was embraced. I'd love to hear some Gil Scott Heron crow barred between the 'rock' music, but I know I have to look to say World Head Quarters, another club in Newcastle, for music of that ilk, but I'm prepared to embrace that and go mingle there too. This lady's outrage really underpinned the secular manner in which everything other than the status quo (within the scene that is meant to oppose the very notion) is treated. Surely the Manics are a rock band anyway? Oh no, wait. They had presence in the charts. Can't have that. Give us subversion. Unless it's popular subversion.

Isn't life too enormous for all this?