

ISSUE 01

THE NEW STREET GUIDE

£0.00



FEATURING:

The New Soho
My Summer Feud
London's Anonymous Writers
The Hellish World of Fashion Internships
&MORE...

Editor's Letter

Welcome to the first issue of The New Street Guide, a biannual print magazine that is deeply curious about how culture is formed. Clunky and amateurish, this is my take on Baudrillard's theory of simulacra merged with my marginally better knowledge on London, entirely propped up by those that I interviewed.

In this issue, I turn to London's most elusive writers who share their words under a pseudonym in order to investigate the age-old question: what's in a name? Later I tell the story of that time I called out my neighbour for her fast fashion habit and began a cork-board-based battle, and Beth Jones chimes in with her thoughts on polite politics.

In terms of columns, The First Draught is off to a flying start with the help of an anonymous womenswear student who lets us in on the mad world of fashion internships. I take a wander through Soho to explore the bizarre detritus of modern commerce with the help of anti-ad activist Stephanie Cartridge.

We're also going to take a sharp turn up north to Harrogate with local tour guide Harry Satloka to investigate if London's true body double isn't the Big Apple, but rather an idyllic spa town tucked into the Yorkshire countryside. To round it all off, a — completely unbiased — exploration of why print is top.

Finally, when deliberating over illustrations I decided to keep it in the family. So, not to brag, but every charming doodle in these pages is courtesy of my sister and father, Lucy Ellis and Eduardo Benito. Aren't we a talented bunch?

Thank you for reading

Founder and Editor Rosa Benito
Contributor Ivory Pijin
Illustrated by Lucy Ellis and Eduardo
Benito

Contents

3
*What's in a
Name?*

6
Map's All, Folks

7
On Soho...

9
The First Draught

13
A Tale of Two Towns

16
Foyer Activism

20
Digital Decay

What's in a Name?

Maps and other lies

In order to adequately explain his theory, Baudrillard refers to the Borges fable to better illustrate his postmodern musings. The fable is set in a kingdom of which a map is constructed using a 1:1 scale and so the cartographer is able to play into the false nature of the map, heightening details such as the colours of the trees and flowers. The duplicate gradually supersedes the kingdom itself, its absolute takeover and superior experience transforming it from an example of simulation, into simulacra.

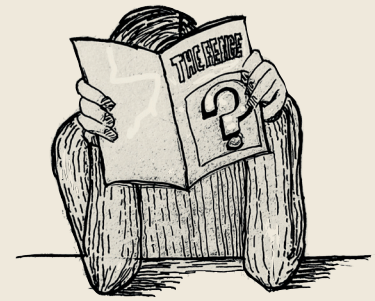
The New Street Guide is a magazine about simulacra and simulation, so the various nods to maps throughout the mag were a no-brainer. But what makes this whole thing doubly clever is that thirty odd years ago my Yayo (grandfather, informal) set up a map business operating under the name of Benson's MapGuides. An unassuming title at first glance, but sharp eyed readers may have noticed that our family name is in fact Benito. Yayo believed that no tourist would buy a map of England's capital from a foreign sounding vendor, and so the name was anglicised. He had a background in both tourism and light crime however, so this minor deception was entirely welcome.

This begs the question: what's in a name? The New Street Guide investigates the age old question, speaking to some of London's most exciting writers who happen to share their words under a nom du plume.



Snake Denton: The name is everything. When you're starting out as a writer and your confidence is a little shaky, a good pseudonym protects you like a suit of armour. The great rock 'n' rollers of the 20th century understood this – which is why sensitive young dreamers like David Robert Jones and John Graham Mellor transformed themselves into David Bowie and Joe Strummer.

Reinvention is the birthright of the artist. Then again, I'm really the wrong person to ask about this sort of thing as my government name is – and obviously always has been – Snake.



Charlie Baker: I started *The Fence* under the name Freddie Marsh as I thought doing something pseudonymous would look clandestine and cool. Rather, it looked silly and quite pathetic. Unless you have a very compelling reason not to, you should always put your name to your written work.

Casper Kelly: A name is both a tombstone and a renewal. Our names are simultaneously inescapable and escapable. It's a type of art and along with that brings cultural and political purposes. As people choose their own names to label a new self, a new era or a persona, it ushers in a new landscape of individual autonomy.

Think of how carefully one chooses a username, a profile picture or an aesthetic. My pen name gives me freedom in expression, allowing a new character to form. The unpredictability of the blank slate gives me the confidence to explore creatively. It's an exercise in reinvention that I think everyone should flirt with at some point in their life.



Victoria Comstock-Kershaw: A name is an etymological congruence of national and linguistic priorities, a desire to have a singular and historic identity distilled into a word. It is an expression of class and religious alignments. A name exists in the tension of expressing both break and continuum.

Post-war, my grandmother and her sister changed their Hebrew surname to one more typical of a Yorkshireman. Immediately after this, they named their respective sons — born just a year apart — the same name, Michael. I think this was some sort of psychological attempt at reclaiming the loss of unity a name can bring to a family. They may not have had the same name as their parents anymore, but they adapted by giving their own children the same name.

On Soho

Sigh...

In 1985 the BBC sent journalist John Pitman out into Soho, which he introduces as “the wicked lady that everybody is familiar with.” What started as farmland has since become a place rife with entertainment of varying legalities. There you will find ancient institutions stuffed with young boys in suits, stacks of stolen art hung in great halls, old boozers neighbouring new theatres, and jazz rising like steam from basement bars — nowhere will you find empty ad space. Adfree Cities explains that “for many of us, adverts are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives,” and Soho is no different. Its prime location means that every Londoner has likely ended up in the capital’s crooked square mile whether they like it or not, making it the perfect neighbourhood to put under the microscope in our inaugural issue.

The Golden Mile of Vinyl has never shied away from advancements, but we aren’t convinced that they are always necessary — or even beneficial. Oftentimes so-called ‘progress’ in technology specifically is blindly accepted as a good thing despite its analogue counterpart having operated perfectly for years prior.

Lingering murkily on Wardour Street is Japanese restaurant, Inamo. Drenched in black paint, I almost confused the restaurant for Hollister in the 2010s after experiencing a nostalgic spot of vertigo upon entering the inky eatery. In what I can only assume is an attempt at combating the darkness, Managing Director Lee Skinner, came up with the idea of kitting the place out with gigantic screens posing as tables. Loaded with the menu and games galore, this restaurateur has somehow upsold the humble TV dinner across three different locations.

However, the General Manager accidentally confirmed the needlessness of the touch-screen-tables when he told The New Street Guide that they are “a surprise to the majority of people.” Whilst self-serve check-outs are preferred by almost 80% of customers, clearly a service so ubiquitous cannot also act as a USP — especially one in which knives and forks could accidentally order a dozen portions of edamame beans to the table, instantly charged in the name of convenience, of course.

Over on Charing Cross Road stands Outer-net which is exactly as dumb as it sounds. Essentially a big billboard which you can immerse yourself in, the advertorial hell is best described by Guardian reporter Grace Dent as an “instagram content fulfilment hub.” In January, Bar Italia plopped a grab-and-go kiosk in the corner of the dystopian building, despite the original institution having existed a five minute walk away for three quarters of a century. Perhaps the aggressive wind that gets channelled through the open plan

structure had affected the mood of the pair working onsite that day, but the staff was not exactly what you’d expect of an old, family run establishment. Half cold, half disinterested, my foray into method acting as a deli enthusiast was met with nothing more than PR answers. They muttered something about customers being grateful for a second spot where they could support their beloved Bar Italia, and nothing of the glaringly obvious bow to laziness.

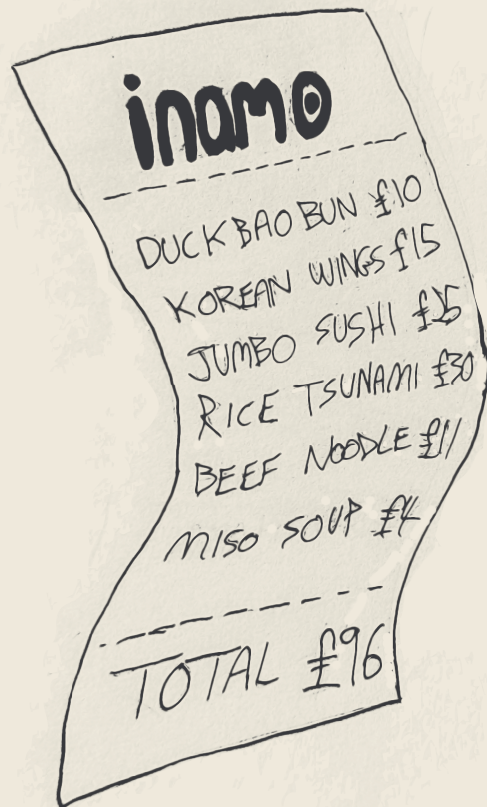
Penned in by Regent Street, Piccadilly Circus rests on the border of Soho. The patchwork parade of adverts has lit up the junction since 1904, initially displaying adverts for Mellins Food and Perier water. Since then we have largely surpassed the basics, with most people in England now pissing indoors, so advertisers have had to shift gears, focusing on perceived value in order to get a leg up on competitors.

Intricate stone buildings reminiscent of a time before glass towers became the edifice du jour are cloaked in gigantic screens that may have once been comparable to The Olde Poster, but have now acquired a definition of their own, even “[paving] the way for full-motion content including 3D anamorphic effects,” according to independent agency, Excite OOH.

Though conveniently not everybody has kept their finger on the pulse of modern marketing. “National planning law for advertisements hasn’t kept up with the transition to digital. On digital billboards, more ads can be shown per minute,” according to anti-ad charity, Adfree Cities.

Essentially a big billboard which you can immerse yourself in, the advertorial hell is best described by Guardian reporter Grace Dent as an “instagram content fulfilment hub.”

As naff as these capitalistic ventures are, “Out-of-home advertising is worth roughly £1.3 billion, meaning that even if you believe advertising does not impact you in your day-to-day life, the advertising industry believes it does” says Stephanie Cartledge, former member of anti-ad campaign group, Ad-Block Bristol. This statistic has invited a gaggle of gimmicks to the party with no booze. Soho has always worn its contradictions well because there has always been balance, but with advert screens almost quadrupling in the UK between 2015 and 2021, clearly a dominant force has emerged. Opposing the eradication of variety is not about preserving The Old Soho, it’s about actively defining today.



Culture Through Code

Going back to basics

On New Year’s Day any chance of naive optimism was squashed by clouds of rain hosing down the nation’s capital. Rejecting this fate, I strolled around an almost empty St James’ Park in an attempt to find some sense of rejuvenation before hearing the faint beat of full drums and synchronised marching.

The noise revealed itself to be London’s New Year’s Day parade and I was quickly funnelled into a crowd of ponchos blockaded by cold metal railings. Unable to escape the sonic torture parading down Parliament Street, I sped up my pace hoping to be greeted by a tube station, only to find the next slice of the city’s free fiesta.

The mobile stages had been a mere prequel to the main event which was made up of ump-teen dancers hailing from the Philippines. Decked out in traditional dress and wearing huge smiles, I began to feel the vibe lift. The facade of fun felt in the previous section was crushed by sincere spirit, genuine talent, and a comical amount of flags — my curiosity had not betrayed me after all.

I weaved through clumps of drenched spectators groaning from headaches earned the night before in a feverish attempt to see more, but I was brought to a halt by a banner leading the march.

GO TO THE PHILIPPINES 2025!

Burgeoning inside of me was the distressing feeling that the year I had welcomed in so readily had already been planned out for me by marketing executives and social media moguls in shiny skyscrapers. I became quite conscious of the brand new diary in my bag, christened with a list of goals, and began to consider if it had all been in vain.

I wondered if every weekend over the next twelve months was already planned in full, pre-determined to run alongside the calculated social media strategy of various food stands, pop-up shops, and virtual exhibitions. My hangover set in and I began to take in the bigger picture, debating if the hot new holiday destination, internet heartthrob, or posh pup of 2025 had already been set in stone this early.

My journey home was plagued by this unsettling sensation but I, like many others, found comfort in a forest green awning neatly tucked away on Bethnal Green Road. Crowned with a neon sign, every east-ender would recognise this shop front as E.Pellicci's cafe. Admittedly, the first time I heard about the caff I ignorantly chucked it into the category of trendy London food spots that'll be turned out by soaring rent prices before you can say: "Top Jaw." I couldn't have been more wrong. For those uninitiated, E.Pellicci's is not just a cafe, it's a true establishment revered by everybody from crooks and kids to ambassadors and actors.

Proudly donning the cafe's merchandise long after the cafe had closed for the day, Nevio Jr — owner and grandson of founder P.Pellicci — kindly pulled me up a chair before musing on the city's infatuation with old school charm.

"I think people sometimes get fed up of all the new stuff... You come somewhere like this and it's like going back in time." Unchanged since 1946, this cafe is a real time capsule. But whilst their fry ups and home-made pesto are world famous now, the menu has had a few refurbishments throughout the years. "In the early eighties my mum started doing spaghetti Bolognese. You wouldn't have had internet, and on the telly you might have seen a few travel shows, but unless you knew someone who was Italian, you might not have even heard of spaghetti Bolognese," explained Nevio.

Nevio paints a picture of pure simplicity impossible to fathom in an age of endless fusion restaurants desperately trying to claim an ounce of the city's attention via TikTok endorsements. But during a time when Londoners couldn't even buy garlic or dry pasta, Maria Pellicci unknowingly introduced Bethnal Green to one of the nation's favourite cuisines. In November, their influence was acknowledged beyond the UK when the Italian embassy invited both Maria and Nevio to sit alongside Michelin star chefs to answer questions about their culinary journey. However, the real testament to their impact lays in the room above the cafe.

Perhaps the most famous Pellicci punters of all were the notorious Kray twins whose famed faces sit behind glass watching over the cafe. I'd read that the cafe received a Christmas card from the Krays, and when asked about what else the cafe had received from their community over the years, Nevio could barely take a breath. "We've had Christmas cards from the British ambassador in India who came in and we didn't even know, we have people who have sent Christ-

mas cards for the last 50 years. One regular of ours came in one day and he had drawn us a picture of my dad, a picture of my mum, and these lovely oil paintings that we've got upstairs." He wasn't done there.

"Irene likes to go out clubbing, and we have a couple of regulars who are DJs who get her tickets, or get her on guest lists. When my little girl was born, one of my friends said it was being in like a mafia family, because people were bringing in all these presents, it's not why we do it, but it is nice." Nevio needlessly confirms that his favourite part of the cafe has undoubtedly always been the people.

In between the chaos of the closing shift around us, Nevio casts his mind back to his first shifts as a ten year old boy, saying: "I loved meeting people, I enjoyed telling a few jokes and the old girls would give me a pound~." Just like the wooden clad walls, not much has changed in this department. "You know what else I love most about the caff? You might get someone on their own and there might be somebody else there on their own, and you'll say: "do you mind sharing tables?" and they go "no" — most people don't mind sharing — and the amount of times someone has sat next to someone and ended up striking up conversation, starting a little friendship, or even just having a little chat, that is my favourite thing about the caff."

The promotional parade marching though London made clear the advertisement overload often found in urban spaces, and whilst E.Pellicci's does have a social media presence, it's not in any way calculated. Thanks to greedy landlords, most people treat London as a temporary home. Advertisers are certainly aware of this, successfully capitalising on the "I'm here for a good time not a long time" mentality by inundating London's latest residents with videos of entire roast dinners shoved into gigantic Yorkshire

puddings in overcrowded outdoor venues, amongst other things nobody wants.

Newcomers have little choice but to embark on pre-prescribed weekend plans courtesy of social media slideshows detailing the happenings in the city this weekend. As a result, wide-eyed freshers, such as myself, are too often let down by fad food fairs, pop-up shops, and 'retro' games night across the capital, but feel too overwhelmed by the scale — and cost — of the city to give anywhere else a chance.

Luckily, if you reclaim the power of attorney over your weekends, you will find that unexpected encounters still exist on the tabletops of your local caffs.

Though, I am also willing to admit that decision making is the biggest damper on having fun, so perhaps we should all occasionally make like sheep and...

GO TO THE PHILIPPINES 2025.



The First Draught

Sew fast, die young

“My internship was not the glamorous side of fashion” announced one guy nursing a pint and a bag full of toiles “I don’t know if anyones is.”

Some months back during the depths of December, I was sitting canal-side with a group of journalists pouring free booze into plastic cups alongside tipsy tutors to celebrate the end of term. For months, the design students and laptop warriors had been separated by slabs of concrete characteristic of London College of Fashion’s (LCF) hip, new building in East Bank — and this student was checking in, testing the health of our journalistic antennas by hanging the dark underbelly of fashion internships under our collective nose.

Having completed internships ourselves at various magazines around London, what we expected to be a familiar tale of free labour and general disillusionment was quickly trumped by class A drugs and an unbelievable lack of boundaries. Naturally the entire table leaned in, furiously hitting the wall-mounted button to reignite the heater and prolong the conversation which, when transcribed, read like a series of red top headlines — an unsurprising fate since neither fashion nor The Sun are strangers to shock factor. In both cases this manifests as dramatised retellings of events.

“People love to think that they know what’s going on and therefore will say crazy shit like ‘Jonathan Anderson killed a dog’ because that’s not in the press. I just heard that he kicked a dog.” Evidently, the air of exclusivity that surrounds the industry doesn’t fade once you’re in, with insiders continuing to extrapolate hearsay in an attempt to feel tied to the untameable. This insecurity perhaps stems from the banal tasks often handed to interns at the start of their careers, simply because the business won’t pay somebody else to do it. “There was one internship where it was just packing orders. Another designer’s whole thing is that they don’t waste anything, so they can’t have an intern make something in case they fuck it up. There was a different guy who had a rota for his interns to clean the toilet. My girlfriend’s internship actually made her clean mould in the studio with bleach,” the student revealed.

Other anecdotes alluded to more pressing issues: like the London-based studio that has been blacklisted from LCF after it came to light that the designer had offered speed to students — giving a whole new meaning to ‘fast fashion.’ Clearly short on time, the designer also allegedly instructed a throng of interns to sew in the back of a moving van on the way to a show. Creatives are not usually also business types, so the pace at which independent brands are expected to churn out entire collections drums up some stress. “So many people that are successful are crazy. Like McQueen or Galliano are known to have taken drugs to stay up working late — and there are people who still romanticise that — but I think that attitude is changing now. I don’t know because I’m not in the industry, but definitely amongst students, I don’t know

Other anecdotes alluded to more pressing issues: like the London-based studio that has been blacklisted from LCF after it came to light that the designer had offered speed to students

anyone that takes drugs to stay up and work.” Whether the prolific use of drugs amongst designers in the past was a desperate attempt to be closer to the intangible glamour of the industry, or simply a catalytic coping mechanism to keep up with fashion’s busy calendar, on some level it is certainly still around.

After recognising a prominent fashion designer at a bus stop, my informant struck up a conversation and received some unlikely advice. “[the designer] told me I should do ket in the bath. He also told me what museums I should go to because I had just moved to London. But you shouldn’t tell a 19 year old to do ket. Apparently he said that to students in his class as well. And he’s sober so, what the fucks that about?” Though to be fair, the Central Saint Martins graduate didn’t do himself any favours either after revealing that he thought he had gonorrhoea about half-way into the journey. Perhaps what has changed in regard to the use of drugs within fashion is who exactly is selling them.

My fashion friend described the unique set-up used at their last internship to keep the business afloat, saying: “Upstairs was a studio, and downstairs was a weed cafe. I never felt unsafe, but I feel like if your dream hinges on that it’s just depressing. Although there was a Labour councillor that went to the weed cafe who got turned away which was quite funny.” It’s been a bad couple of years for independents. According to Vogue Business, multiple independent clothing companies have shut their doors since mid 2023, including: Christopher Kane, Dion Lee, The Vampire’s Wife, Interior, and Calvin Luo.

Similarly, the Business of Fashion has reported that we are experiencing a global luxury slowdown, pointing to wholesale upheaval and rising geopolitical uncertainty as the reasoning behind why brands are facing a particularly tough market today. Evidently running an independent fashion label today is no easy feat, making it unsurprising to learn that studios also often double as homes.

Whilst this unnamed designer is everywhere today, apparently “when he was starting out he just had a curtain separating the studio from his apartment, and the interns could see through it and would see him having sex.” As unorthodox as it is, this overly intimate environment appears to be the norm. My informant remembers their early experiences shadowing designers, saying: “My first internship was weird because her brand is so small that her flat was her studio and I was pattern cutting on her kitchen floor which was quite strange.”

Unpaid internships in the fashion industry have been advertised as a privilege, largely due to the industry’s purposefully exclusive and aspirational image — which is upheld at every level. “The person who runs the internship unit at LCF is the same person who runs it at CSM, and she has this big list of all the insider email addresses, so that you could email the head of the design studio, but it’s only given to CSM students.” Despite LCF being ranked as the top fashion school in the world this year, the sister school retains a certain type of prestige that the industry is undeniably drawn towards. What began as a marketing strategy to attract aspirational customers has evolved into a recruitment tool — and a subtle way to discourage employee complaints.

“The common thread is that they all take the piss with hours, there’s always an unspoken

vibe that you will be there — especially if there is a show — late. I did one night that went until two in the morning two nights before the show,” the student recalls before stumbling across another memory: “Me and another intern were like ‘lets get a shot’ and she asked ‘who’s buying?’ after a month of unpaid labour.” The business of fashion will always thrive thanks to the unfaltering desire to work within it, but is it possible to reap the rewards when your boss won’t even cover your drink when it’s all over?



A Tale of Two Towns

#Twinning

“Harrogate is the queerest place with the strangest people in it, leading the oddest lives of dancing, newspaper reading, and dining.” - Charles Dickens

Like Baudrillard, Putnam too was interested in truth. At some point in the seventies, Putnam — philosopher, mathematician, probably a nightmare at parties — proposed a mind melter known as the Twin Earth thought experiment. He asks you to imagine that there is a planet named ‘Twin Earth’ which is identical to Earth, with just one exception. Whilst it is still referred to as ‘water,’ over on Twin Earth the ubiquitous liquid is composed of XYZ instead of H₂O. For all intents and purposes it floods, trickles, and gargles in the same way as our water, but chemically? The stuff is unrecognisable.

Putnam’s point was that meaning isn’t in your head, it exists independently of us in the external world. People may interpret real life differently, but ultimately language, meaning, and identity all hinge on reality. Though, if you’ll indulge in a few hundred more words on the Twin Earth theory, The New Street Guide would like to propose that London also has a twin, and her name is Harrogate.

To add some sense of legitimacy to this inkling, we spoke with local character and resident tour guide, Harry Satloka.

Hailing scandalously from Devon, Satloka has a familial connection to Yorkshire and relocated to God's County after acquiring a job at the infamous Betty's Tea Rooms. "I was looking out the window and I was amazed that nobody was doing a free walking tour. So, I found a stick and made a sign and stuck them together. Ten years later here we are. I love it, it's tremendously good fun."

Bang smack in the middle of the country, around two hundred miles north of the capital, Harrogate is a handsome and relatively young town best known for its history as a health and wellness centre upon the discovery of some lucrative little springs. This of course leads beautifully into the most glaringly obvious comparison between the Twin Earth theory and Harrogate which is that this town is all about water.

There are surely no two places better suited in comparing real life to the Twin Earth theory. Sure, London and twin London both technically have water, but the latter built an entire town off the back of theirs. Soak in it, drink it, steep (Yorkshire) tea in it — Harrogate does not care, just as long as you buy it from them. Contrastingly, the only thing I have heard about London water is how much of it was once somebody's wee.

First discovered in 1517, the natural springs — or 'the cure' — attracted posh punters from all over the world, resulting in the sudden demand for a whole town to be erected. "If you came to Harrogate four hundred years ago, you'd see a handful of farms, a few stinking bogs, and some little springs that look like nothing more than puddles coming out of the ground." Victorian houses were built in a fit of tourism, and with little history of its own, the town sought out another's her-

itage to rest upon. "Harrogate's Westminster shopping arcade, Parliament Street, The Royal Parade — it was Victorian marketing at its best! It was trying to offer an association to the aristocracy that this was another affluent area," Satloka explained. There are absolutely no prizes for guessing where Harrogate borrowed 'inspiration' from.

The town had attempted to create a home away from home for affluent tourists through relentless signposting, and the target demographic was clear — Harrogate wanted southerners. In 1926 none other than Agatha Christie took the bait and disappeared to the famous Hydro, causing a wave of commotion to sweep across the country. "A lot of people think that the reason she chose Harrogate is because she saw a poster advertising the beautiful spa town at

"Harrogate's Westminster shopping arcade, Parliament Street, The Royal Parade — it was Victorian marketing at its best!"

Kings Cross Station, because she had abandoned her car," he says. "I popped down to the Metropolitan Archives and there's a receipt from the Harrogate Borough Corporation to Kings Cross Station for advertising. We were advertising in London." The town got a lot more than they bargained for after investing in a spot of advertising down south, with the unmatched press coverage marrying the two places in the minds of the masses.

Having lived in both places Satloka understands the comparison. However, when pressed on the matter he kindly tries to adhere to my hypothesis, offering up Wimbledon Village as the most comparable borough, before remembering his roots and much more confidently saying: "The real answer should be that there is nowhere like Harrogate, of course." Good lad.

Foyer Activism

An agument for arguing

I took up smoking and became comfortable with both sweating and wearing shorts in public again as summer checked in and out of London this year. A dire list of accomplishments, admittedly.

I had planned to pick up extra shifts, get an internship, create a magazine with my equally ambitious friend, and take myself on a solo trip to France. This motivation was overridden by various factors and something I was told by an estranged suitor was beginning to knock about in my head: "you clearly have some dreamy London summer planned, but it never works out that way."

This voice rang louder when I found myself clocking out of a shift which began at 6:45 A.M. and ended with me fighting the stench of incense and urine as I walked up Brixton Road. It is a smell so unfortunately familiar to me that I'm sure if, for some bizarre reason, I was blindfolded and made to wear noise cancelling headphones, I would be able to tell you exactly where we were standing.

On my return home I was greeted by a huge unicorn clad parcel in the foyer of the building, courtesy of Pretty Little Thing. The dubiously sourced clothing was wrapped in friendly, consumer-pink plastic and slouched into a corner of the hallway, as though my very own poorly dressed doorman had returned from a night out and was overwhelmed by the prospect of stairs.

To preach about sustainability is undeniably tired, so the blatant preference for convenience over very achievable environmentalism popped my art-school-shaped bubble and prompted an idea. This was something to do to fight the persistent thoughts of my failing summer and somewhere to channel my tardy teenage angst at the world — a sort of grounded outrage. “Anger is so important, but it has to remember the place it comes from originally; anger without actionable goals is just screaming into the wind,” said Editor of activist magazine *The Lemming*, Beth Jones on polite politics.

After taking my rage down to the local library’s printer, with the half-help of an entirely disinterested receptionist, I held in my hand a photo of the parcel. I then parked myself at the kitchen table where I scribbled about the needless consumption of mesh party tops and — what they generously call — denim.

There is a pinboard on the ground floor which hosts an array of health and safety notices, various adverts for cleaners, and just one other paper-based dispute in which my neighbour requested that her fellow tenants do not throw cigarette butts off of the balconies. A completely reasonable request and one that was honoured long ago, but the laminated paper remains in the foyer as a sort of trophy, a testament that change is possible, a symbol of hope.

Indeed, there was a moment of hesitation before I plastered my far more annoying perspective on the wall, the sort of hesitation politeness often demands. But “politeness is about repression, and politics shouldn’t be about that. Politics should be honest & it should have, in many but not all cases, a

sense of humour — both of these are anti-theatrical to politeness.” Ultimately the very real possibility that the culprit could return home at any moment became to tense to bear — so up it went. Though, after I put it up I started to feel like a deranged keyboard abuser, obsessively checking the board each time I passed through the hallway, occasionally regretting the sass, but not my point.

I think it’s worth noting that the block of flats I subjected to my laments is in Clapham which — and this is not widely disputed — is populated by PR girls, finance boys, and Oxbridge alumni who are huge fans of the area’s proximity to Surrey. That is to say they have money. My audience were yuppie types, proud 9-5 workers, and the sort of people who meal prep. Their cushy lives were padded out with plenty of time for scroll-

ing on Vinted and browsing their local car boot — and yet they didn’t. This was a unique opportunity to make a point to a group of people who should hear it,

as opposed of screaming it off of the digital rooftop that is Instagram.

Though, if you are prone to the ease of fast fashion I expect you will side more with my neighbour who thoughtfully responded to my laments with “PISS OFF” before taking the note down. Nevertheless, I still had hope for a minor revolution in my corner of the grumbling city, thus I asked to interview my anonymous opponent.

Days passed by with no response to my new note reassuring the building that I wasn’t really an arsehole, and that I would buy the online shopper a coffee in exchange for a few words spoken clearly and into my phone.

But I had lost the crowd; my foyer activism had circled the plug hole and was swallowed whole when I moved out last month, losing all hope of further contact with my vertical neighbours. Each morning I scanned the wall for a reply which never came, and in the silence I thought about how I may have taken advantage of London’s enormity.

I am far from alone in my feelings towards the state of fast fashion today, but standing in the hallway face to face with my lonely note, I felt acutely in the wrong. “Political statements often revolve around shame as a fulcrum; we look to inspire shame in our audience as a way of inspiring changes of behaviour,” says Jones. The sludge of urban misery can be so heavy that often these small moments cause big reactions, and the monotony of our lives

leaves little time to be known outside of our workplaces and homes, so the idea of creating a small chaos isn’t intimidating. If moving to a big city awards newcomers

with a blanket of anonymity, I had wrapped it tightly around my body.

Although, the gall to voice my ground-floor-gripe could similarly be traced back to “The increasingly ubiquitous ‘bleed’ of social media into real life” as it is referred to in the aptly titled book, *Instagram*. It’s hard to ignore the fact that social media gives everybody a meta microphone as well as the choice of anonymity, and in 2016 this was hilariously exemplified by IG user: @barbiesavior. Run by two anonymous American women in their twenties, *Instagram* goes on to explain that the page “critique[s] the self-congratulatory exercise of ‘white Westerners who travel to third world countries.’ The satirical *Instagram* accounts catalogue the adventures

of a Barbie who is ‘charting her imaginary volunteer journey’ to work with the ‘sweet, sweet orphans in the country of Africa.’”

I considered if I had absorbed more than just banal talking points from my morning scrolls, since I too elected to be a faceless user, a grey silhouette posting anonymously onto my neighbours ‘feed’ in the name of low risk activism. But it was my neighbours parting shot that formed my final thoughts on our downstairs discourse.

I eventually heard back after asking to interview them, but the reply simply asked: “who said it was a girl?” in what I assume was an attempt to out-woke me and therefore render my far lengthier note redundant in some sort of epic clap-back, more reminiscent of

a low-stakes Twitter feud than a debate surrounding the ethics of fast fashion. At first glance this absurdist interaction appears to have been ripped straight off of social media, the low effort

responses deployed by my foyer foe being the latest example of our collective inability to stop online behaviours seeping in the real world. However, as a stand alone act, the note had legs.

The decision to pin it instead of post it was not unconscious. Social media might be framed as something ruled by the masses, but that underestimates our old friend media hegemony. The term hegemony refers to the dominance of one group over another, and hegemonic formations are intangible forces which often perpetuate the status quo, as well as squash and smooth over perceived disruption, such as protest. Paired with the twenty-first century’s preference for irony over sincerity, if shared online, this genuine

“Political statements often revolve around shame as a fulcrum; we look to inspire shame in our audience as a way of inspiring changes of behaviour,” says Jones.

environmental concern would quickly be neutralised and labeled as activism hypejacking or virtue signalling. Although lingering outside of said formations means risking illegitimacy, embracing the marginalisation and leaning into disruption is a way to exist outside of this hyperreality set behind glass.

The slow lugging of each and every aspect of our lives online— from dating and shopping, to socialising and working — has made for an exceedingly transactional attitude amongst all of those who take part, and the constant competition for attention has condensed even protest into a series of slick slogans easily ignored by the intended audience. However, the humble handwritten note spares no detail. By befriending proximity and utilising an unexpected spot for protest, the note was, if not disruptive, then certainly uncomfortable. With its inherent personal touch and inconsistent lettering, a note rejects the pressure to be consumed passively, and demands engagement from even the most stubborn and poorly dressed recipient. The medium embraced the marginalisation, dissimilar but no less important than the way @barbiesavior did.

Whilst the idea of another satirical meme



page on instagram is undoubtedly eye-rolling, it is clear that @barbiesavior acknowledges that mainstream society may view protest as disruptive or unwanted, and instead of seeking legitimacy in it, embraced it as power by taking up space on the very platform that is used to share the images they mock.

Perhaps the knee jerk reaction I experienced in comparing this interaction to something as sterile as a social media feed was to neutralise the act myself. A reflex shaped by my internalisation of those same dominant narratives surrounding protest, which had me questioning my own beliefs. But they had prompted engagement, albeit briefly.

Truthfully I cannot defend the longevity of this tactic, with my woes having been torn down after a week — but perhaps endurance was never the point. “It’s about the setting up of a moral alternative, with no guarantees anyone will give a shit,” Jones shares. Still, I fantasise about it being displayed on their fridge as a kind of quirked up dinner party conversation piece, or at the very least, an annoying interruption in their inner monologue as they hover over “add to basket.”

Digital Decay

Dead links and ink

The Internet Archive — a last bastion of digital memory, dodgy PDFs, and dead links resurrected — lost its courtroom scrap with the Association of American Publishers at the back end of 2024. The decision is a clean legal win with messy cultural consequences, especially for a generation led to believe that the internet is forever.

But it isn't. According to the BBC, a quarter of all web pages that existed at some point between 2013 and 2023 now simply don't. What's more is that eight percent of websites published during 2023 were gone by October that very same year.

In a recent statement, Mark Graham, Director of the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, said: “More and more of our intellectual endeavours, more of our entertainment, more of our news, and more of our conversations exist only in the digital. But that environment is inherently fragile.” The world wide web has become a place of infinite rewrites, where mistakes don't get corrected, they get buried. Permanence is passé. The backspace preponderates.

Our collective existence is paradoxically over-documented yet entirely intangible, prompting sceners in search of fixity to return to the alternative medium of print. Craftily made and produced on shoestring budgets, these rags are not glossy coffee-table ornaments — they are spaces to forge strange ideologies, tools to find your ilk, or hide your secrets.

To explore this revival, we spoke with Bertie Brandes — indie media darling and co-founder of Mushpit — about what it takes to build a magazine that matters, lasts, and doesn't completely suck.

TNSG: I read your interview on the MagCulture blog in which you describe yourself as a ‘downer’ in regard to the future of magazines, so: what are you dissatisfied with in contemporary media?

Brandes: A lot. I don't feel like there are publications that have created a space for people to be really honest and experimental. I think part of the problem lies with the writers or the artists because I think when you stop seeing something for a long enough time you stop believing that it's possible. But we all need to be more determined. I also think that magazines have become, and this has been happening for years, just totally commodified. It's not even that they are censoring their content, it's just that they are run by really commercially minded people so they don't think about anything outside of the realms that has been done before.

TNSG: Is that what you set out to do with *Mushpit*? To create this space that is completely free of editorial influence?

Brandes: yeah *Mushpit* was much less conscious than this, I can talk about this now because I have so much hindsight, but definitely with *Mushpit* we were unable to be printed anywhere else and that forced us to create our own space. It's a decision that we made really subconsciously but we decided to just print whatever the fuck we thought was funny. I think if *Vogue* or *i-D* had said: “guys, come work for us” at the time we would've been absorbed into that, but luckily they wanted nothing to do with us.

TNSG: If that's what prompted the magazine, what do you think kept the flame alive?

Brandes: I guess artistic drive, not that we ever would have called it that at the time. But if something is consistently interesting to you, you just keep doing it. I think that *Mushpit* is so diverse in that it was at once utterly stupid and mindless, but also actually politically and aesthetically minded. We had a hit on a lot of different interests that we had so we kept doing it for as long as it was interesting.

TNSG: Do you still get reader feedback now?

Brandes: People love it oh my god people message me about it all the time, I need to get them [issues of *Mushpit*] online, but I kind of don't want to. It's like this mythical thing that you hear about but you don't see anywhere now.

TNSG: Why do you find yourself returning to print so much?

Brandes: Nothing else seems to have any validity to me... I don't know! I'm sure in ten years I'll be able to answer that. I hate most printed things, I don't go to magazine shops, I do not buy magazines. Something about bringing words and imagery together on print just finalises ideas for me. I can obsess over them and complete them, print them, then be done with it. The production of something printed really excites me.

TNSG: With that in mind, do you think that you approach writing differently if you know its going to be in print?

Brandes: Yes, format is really important to me. When I print words, the formatting of those words, where they sit on the page, how quickly your eye reaches them, where your eye moves, that is so important to the work that I do. So laying out a piece of text — I'm doing it at the moment — it is akin to rewriting the entire piece.

TNSG: with your actual writing process, do you ever write on paper or are you a laptop girl?

Brandes: I'm a laptop gal. I mean I do write, I have a diary that I write by hand and I'm taking notes constantly in the margins of my notebooks, you know just like shopping lists and then “I wanna kill myself” I'm constantly writing things down that hit my head.

TNSG: Which magazines do you pick up?

Brandes: I don't. I also find with magazines more and more that the number of points of views in them, I find really distressing to read. That's a me issue, that's not a thing. I'm looking for a clarity of vision in everything. There's some elements of journalism that really strike me as estate-agent-esque. Obviously I understand that you have to have bylines in certain places but fundamentally I think you need to think more about the clarity of work you're putting out, consistency in what you're trying to say, your writing is more important than where it ends up.

TNSG: Do you think this was a conscious decision to focus on your own — for lack of a better word — ‘brand’ before getting super involved in these mags?

Brandes: I think everybody starting out in this industry feels like an outsider, and I never really let that go and it has actually served me so incredibly well. I don't like the busy body social climbing element of journalism so I just sort of didn't do it, or I side tracked it, or I made the connections on my own without being reliant on other magazines.

TNSG: When so many titles within established and legacy journalism have ditched print, why do alternative writers on tight budgets choose to print their works, especially when digital publishing is so accessible?

Brandes: I think the heritage of print is you know — if you think of anarchic pamphlets, *Riot Grrrr!* and all that stuff, print has always been disruptive — I hate that word but it is true — and counter cultural and I think that is incredible and that's something that print should always be used for. Everyone should do their own thing! Their own thing ends up being more interesting and more honest anyway. Cost is one thing obviously but you can print anything on a piece of paper — I do it all the time! I like it when I'm walking down the street and someone hands me something printed and it's a bit weird. I like it when I am on the bus and I see “marxism festival” posters and nobody ever goes to it but I like that they're there. Then there's using print to forge your fucked up little random ideologies to ten people who read what you've handed them and that's what I love about print, and it will always have that.

TNSG: That you can find your niche group of people?

Brandes: Or not even find them! Just try to find them, sometimes you don't find them. I've said this before and I'll say it a million more, but the Jesus pamphlets that people hand me on the street will always be the best thing to me about publishing, they stand out as the most successful magazine in my lifetime.

TNSG: Do you think you found your people though Mushpit?

Brandes: Yeah, I think to a degree. I think I found my voice. It's a good embodiment of what I'm about, so maybe people have found me. But I also think that as a writer you're always alone.

TNSG: What do you think isn't worth being printed out?

Brandes: Maybe Ganni posters. I've gone to zine fairs before and people don't really care about them, but I'll never stop making them. They bring me the greatest level of artistic satisfaction apart from Mushpit.

TNSG: Now after speaking to you I don't know if you'll have the answer to this but: how many magazines have you kept over the years and how often do you ever return to them?

Brandes: I don't know if you've ever seen Civilisation that Richard Turley made, but I think that is the best publication other than MushPit, in fact it definitely is. Honestly the Waitrose food magazine. And Cheap Date but I don't have any copies of that. That was a huge inspiration for Mushpit, I mean we ripped a lot of it off. I was just in LA at a John Raffman and Petra Courtright Q&A and they have made this little publication called mainstream media which is kind of interesting, it's like part of a series of films. So the magazine is not by itself, it's part of a broader whole, which is cool. It was really expensive though... which I think is not cool. But I like that they use print as part of a broader vision. They had all the ideas first, and then decided to make a magazine, as opposed to being like "we should make a magazine, that'll be really cool" which I think happens all the time.

TNSG: For you, what does print have over digital in terms of user experience? Sorry about the business lingo.

Brandes: No, it's good. I think print gives you a captive audience — I mean I'm talking from a creative print perspective as opposed to commercial — print to me is you have that person's eyes, because when you looking at a page you can't also have multiple tabs open, I think the way you hold pace in language in print is more interesting, page tuning is a kind of natural pause that I'm sure you could do digitally but it wouldn't feel quite so organic. Whereas we tried a lot in the last issue of mush pit — and I'm always looking at doing— to force gaps and silences in your mind through page turning or the distribution of text over pages which you can only really do in print.

TNSG: In regard to your article on *AnotherMan* do you still think that magazines are going to save us?

Brandes: What did I say?

TNSG: you said "we don't need to save magazines, magazines are gonna save us"

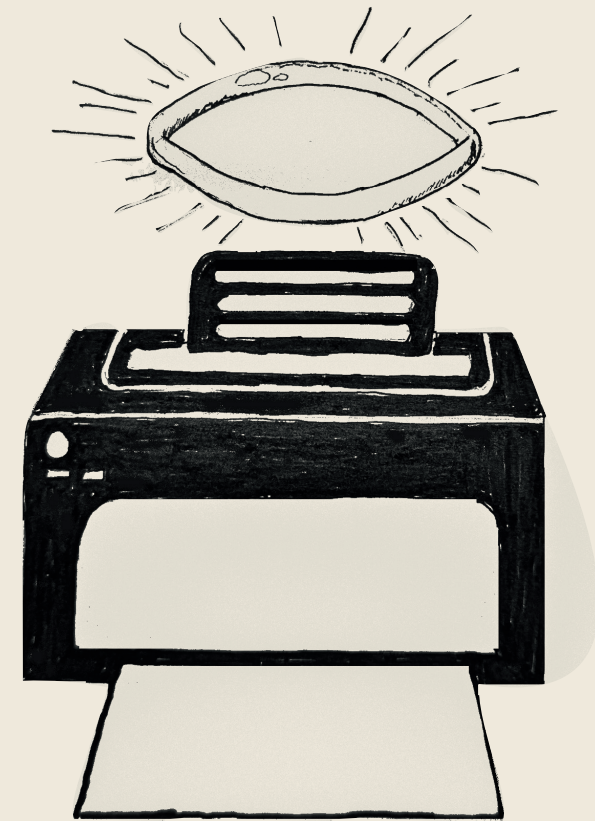
Brandes: Oh cool, that's nice. Yeah sure, I do. I'm printing, I'm never gonna stop printing. I don't know if what I'm printing now would be considered a magazine but I've had the itch more in the last 6 months than in the last five years to make another Mushpit.

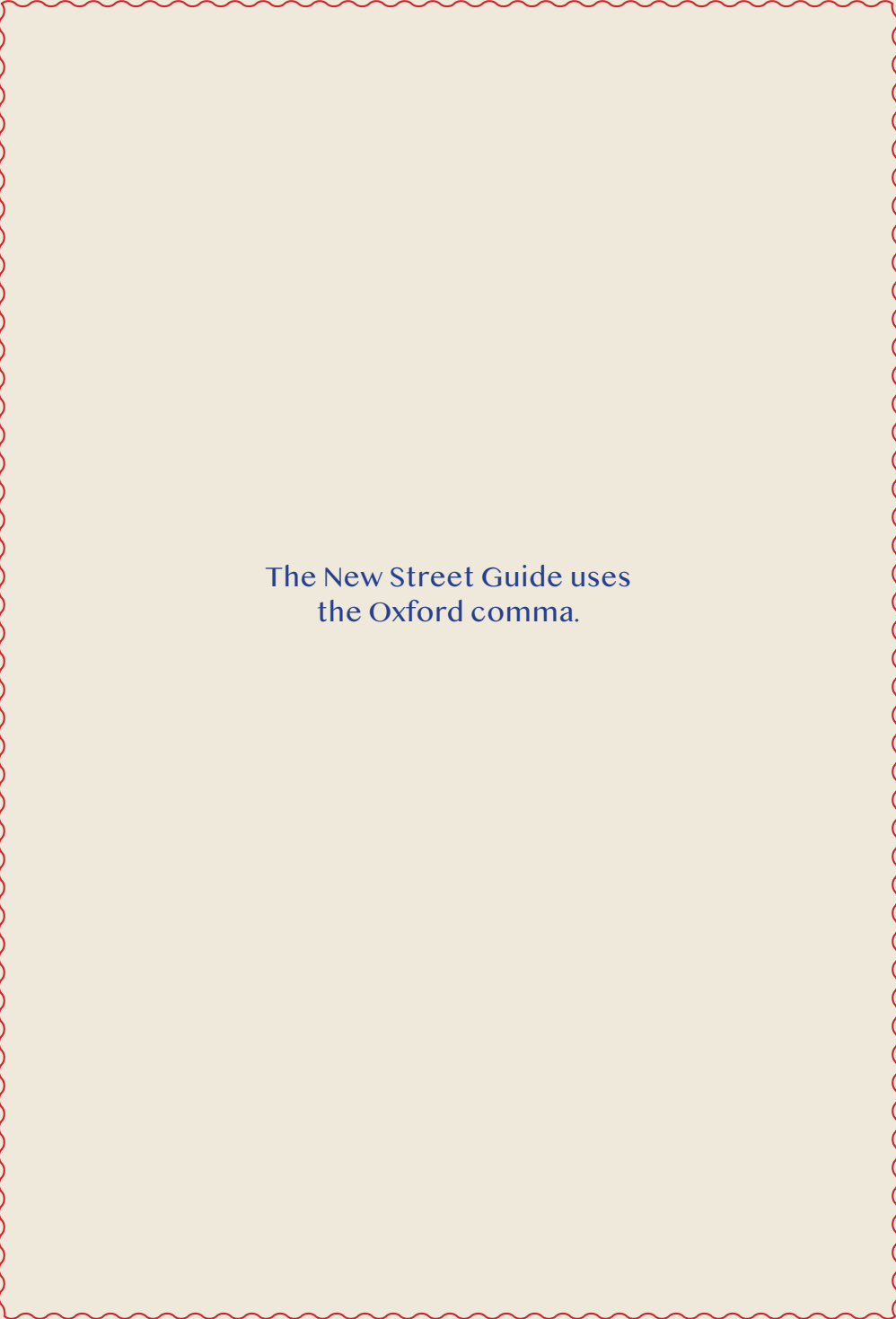
TNSG: Do you think you would ever make another magazine independently?

Brandes: Probably, I think I was quite traumatised by the end of Mushpit but having had the time to get over it, I really do think yes. It would be 1000 copies maximum, it wouldn't sell out, and it would be weird. I feel excited at the prospect of it.

TNSG: Do you think it would be similar to Mushpit?

Brandes: Super similar, because Mushpit was a distillation of me and my co-creator. But really the words, it was me, my spirit, and my soul — so it wouldn't be any different.





The New Street Guide uses
the Oxford comma.