THE MIRROR STEAMED OVER

LOVE AND POP IN LONDON, 1962

ANTHONY BYRT


OTER

PART I
THE CONNECTION

1 a.m. Tues. morning

Darling,

Man are my eyeballs stinging and boy am I seeing everything yellow well maybe I ought to try slashing something off my flesh it weighs heavily — fingers like stalks soaked with mighty tempests — after a weekend drought . . . . . Christ could I get really sloshed right now and be laid by you a dozen and a half times with Sandra somewhere over the edge . . . reminds me I wouldn't mind a trip to down under wearing my 'Bizarre' dress and SOFT (clinging) black-black leather coms and outerwear etcetera etcetera — though Dorse would do?

— ANN QUIN TO BARRIE BATES, EARLY 1962

IN SUCH a crowded room, the paintings aren't really visible at a distance. Instead, you have to shunt your way forward, politely but assertively, shoulders wide enough to establish contemplative space, because this is Hockney's 2017 blockbuster retrospective and Tate always lets too many people in for its big exhibitions. It's also a bottleneck, one of the earliest rooms – the one filled with the paintings that made Hockney's name in 1961 and 1962: works that established him as one of the most significant painters to emerge in Britain since Francis Bacon. In 1962 Bacon was the existential Establishment, and Hockney was the hot, young, Poppy thing. Fifty-five years later, Hockney is as Establishment as Establishment comes: arguably the most popular 'serious' British artist of the past half-century, if not of all time, even if he has spent much of his life on the other side of the Atlantic.

That popularity is down to his work, of course. But it is also down to the man himself: the Yorkshire-inflected affability and straight-talking; the legacy of that peroxided blonde hair; and, as he ages, the cloth caps and cardigans and canes and signature specs. Hockney isn't just a great artist but an embodiment of what much of the British public imagines an artist nearing the end of his career should be: like someone's kooky granddad, losing his hearing but maintaining his humour and charm, painting dog portraits and Yorkshire landscapes and doodling on an iPad.

It's a far cry from Bacon's tortured-genius persona, which stuck with him until his death in 1992. But perhaps the way each man aged in the public's mind's eye isn't so surprising, because the twenty years between them were more like a century. Towards the end of World War II, Bacon

began to make what became some of his best work, and masterpiece after masterpiece came in the brutal decade of austerity that followed the war. By the time Hockney got to the RCA in 1959, the British economic gloom had started to lift. Two years later, everything was pure potential: both in British society, which was going through a series of cultural and sexual changes that would find their full expression later in the decade, and in Hockney's own work.

The transformation in Hockney's work, when viewed chronologically at the Tate exhibition and in the accompanying catalogue, is swift and profound. The slightly humdrum semi-abstractions of *Love Painting* and *Shame*, both 1960, quickly give way to the altogether more promising *The Third Love Painting*, 1960, in which a lumpy torso with wisps of paint like hair springing from it is surrounded by phrases resembling bathroom graffiti, both ominous and erotic: 'my brother is only 17'; 'ring me anytime at home'; 'I am he that aches with amorous love'. Love and shame have matured quickly into a deeper articulation of the space between physical desire, danger – both legal and violent – and care. That lumpy torso is then doubled, articulated and joined with limbs the following year in *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, 1961: Hockney's tribute to Walt Whitman, Cliff Richard and his outed self.

The paintings tumble out of him: *The Cha Cha That Was Danced in the Early Hours of 24th March 1961*, 1961, in which he paints his crush, Peter Crutch, holding a handbag; *Cleaning Teeth, Early Evening (10PM) W11*, 1962, in which two giant heads with legs and Colgate tubes for cocks, one of them chained down, squirt toothpaste into each other's mouths; and the 'Demonstrations of Versatility': *A Grand Procession of Dignitaries in the Semi-Egyptian Style*, 1961; *Tea Painting in an Illusionistic Style*, 1961, *Figure in a Flat Style*, 1961; and *Flight into Italy – Swiss Landscape*, 1962, in which a Mini van with three figures races through the Alps, the words 'thats [*sic*] Switzerland that was' trailing in its wake. Works that made not just Hockney but a generation, changing the terms of conversation for British painting.

'Ten or eleven years ago,' the RCA's principal Robin Darwin wrote in the college's 1959 Annual Report,

> students were older than they are now, the sequence of their education had been interrupted by war or national service; they had known experiences and discharged responsibilities far outside the orbit of their interests, and returning to them they were primarily concerned in the rediscovery of themselves as individuals. As artists they were less self-confident, but in all other ways they were more mature. By these same tokens perhaps they were less experimental in their ideas. The student of today is less easy to teach because the chips on his shoulder, which in some instances are virtually professional epaulettes, make him less ready to learn; yet this refusal to take ideas on trust, though it may not be congenial to the tutor, may in the long run prove to be a valuable characteristic.

It's unclear whether Darwin knew exactly what he and his faculty had recruited for the 1959 student intake when he wrote this. But the likes of Bates and Hockney were unquestionably part of a new pattern in the RCA's most gifted recruits. The college had recently produced the Pop pioneers Peter Blake and Joe Tilson, and the abstractionists Robyn Denny and Richard 'Dick' Smith. All four were key figures in a new and progressive London art scene that took its inspiration from America. Smith was the first visual artist to receive a Harkness Fellowship, in 1959, which gave him two years in the States, where he made connections with the New York art scene that would help his own career as well as the eventual trajectories of some of the 1959 RCA intake.

Marco Livingstone has argued that this group – and Smith in particular – represented a significant change in British painting. 'In severing the links with landscape still so prevalent in British art,' he wrote in 1992, 'replacing such references with allusions to the built environment and the man-made world of the mass media, Smith and his colleagues laid the basis for an essentially urban avant-garde art that constituted a real

break with native tradition. The one thing Smith was not prepared to sacrifice, however, was the intimacy of the personal mark.'

That so much new thinking emerged around this time at the RCA initially seems surprising, given some of the faculty teaching there. The Painting School, for example, was run by Carel Weight, a gifted painter of suburban scenes and portraits who had also served as an official war artist. Despite the seemingly conservative subject matter, Derek Boshier (one of the 1959 painting intake) remembered Weight and his work fondly: 'I was a great fan of Carel Weight's paintings,' he said in a 2013 interview, 'we all were, all the faculty and all the students admired his work I think . . .' Weight's teaching team, though, was dominated by a figurative, post-war stuffiness: landscape enthusiasts Roger de Grey and Robert Buhler, and Ruskin Spear, a painter of portraits and London pub scenes. In technical terms, they were all immensely talented. In terms of subject matter and execution, though, their work already belonged to a bygone era.

The much younger Sandra Blow, who joined the faculty in 1961, was a welcome relief: she was an important figure in contemporary British abstraction, as well as a seriously fashionable figure within the London art world. At the start of the sixties Blow's work still showed the influence of the year she'd spent in Rome in 1947–48 with her lover Alberto Burri. As Michael McNay wrote in a 2006 obituary for Blow, 'Burri remade Blow in his image.' Paintings like Blow's *Composition II*, 1960, clearly illustrate this, its black, white and muddy colour scheme, with just a hint of red, owing much to Burri's similarly hued works from the 1950s. She was, though, developing her own voice and reputation: she'd been exhibiting in London since 1951 and New York since 1957, and in 1958 she was included in the Central Pavilion exhibition at the Venice Biennale. It appears she'd made an impression on Ann Quin, too: 'Christ could I get really sloshed right now and be laid by you a dozen and a half times,' she wrote to Bates in early 1962, 'with Sandra somewhere over the edge . . .' It seems likely that the glamorous Blow,

then working in the department where Quin was secretary, is the 'Sandra' she was referring to.

Hockney claimed in 1976 that '[t]he staff said that the students in that year were the worst they'd had for many, many years. They didn't like us; they thought we were a little bolshy, or something . . .' Events towards the end of their first year seemed to bear out this animosity. That collective bolshiness was apparently too much for Darwin, and, demanding the Painting School make an example, Allen Jones – who would become such an important figure in British Pop – was booted out of the RCA. 'They stuck a pin in the list,' Jones recalled in 2013, 'and it was my name that came out of that.' Jones says that it was a dreadful moment for him – because he'd done nothing to deserve such treatment, but also because it could have had a major impact on his future livelihood. Artists who graduated from the Slade, the Royal Academy or the RCA were instantly placed on a graduate pay scale for teaching jobs, which is what many had to do to make a living. Jones says it was like having his 'legs cut off'. He went and did a teaching diploma instead, but stayed closely connected to the RCA painters he'd briefly studied alongside, and to the emerging London scene they were starting to shape.

But neither Jones's expulsion nor Hockney's recollections of the faculty's antipathy towards his cohort capture the dramatic way the Darwin-era RCA had transformed post-war art education in Britain. Darwin had become the RCA's principal in 1948, and immediately set about modernising it by hiring professional artists and designers. The idea was to create a postgraduate college with strong links to industry (particularly in design), where students could specialise in narrow fields – typography, say, or silversmithing and jewellery – that prepared them for a life of work in their chosen disciplines. While this doesn't seem particularly radical now, it was a major shift from the comparatively fusty pre-war years during which the RCA had a reputation as a training ground for art teachers and not much else. Implicitly, it was an acknowledgement of a new British creative economy, in a world of mass

communication and new technologies that had been supercharged by wartime innovations.

Arguably the clearest and most successful example was the school Bates entered in 1959: Graphic Design, run by Richard Guyatt. Under Guyatt's guidance, the school had leapt to the forefront of transatlantic design, and was notable for its industry-leading publication, *ARK*. Guyatt was also sufficiently attuned to his students to recognise the New Zealander Bates's singular, unusual gifts – and would become a central figure in Bates's early development.

As Hockney biographer Christopher Simon Sykes points out, Hockney and his British classmates were also among the first to benefit from the 1944 Education Act. Towards the end of the war, this new legislation transformed primary and secondary education in the UK, making higher levels of education more accessible to the working classes and requiring the provision of school meals. It raised the school leaving age to fifteen and put in place the 11-plus exam, which determined the secondary pathways children would follow. Crucially, this was a meritocratic system: in principle, smart kids who did well, no matter their economic background, ended up going to grammar schools. Hockney was one of those smart kids, earning a scholarship to Bradford Grammar – one of the oldest and best schools of its type in England – in 1948.

Bradford is an essential part of the Hockney mythology. While it's easy to emphasise the wartime grimness he grew up in (the Hockney household had narrowly missed being bombed by the Germans), it's also significant that the Hockneys valued education. Hockney grew up in a house with books, and went to the theatre (including to see the opera) and to museums – albeit the ones in and around Bradford and Leeds (he didn't visit London until he was sixteen). His parents Laura and Kenneth were bright, and both knew that schooling was the key to their children's future success. Hockney's older brother Paul had also won a scholarship to Bradford Grammar.

Even at this early stage in his biography writers run into an issue, which Chris Stephens, the curator of Hockney's 2017 Tate retrospective, describes diplomatically: 'The Hockney literature,' he writes, 'has . . . been dominated by [Hockney's] own view of his art and its development, and this has naturally served to isolate it from broader accounts.' Hockney, in other words, has cast his own shadow over how we might understand his early evolution. And this stretches all the way back to the boy entering grammar school for the first time. It unfurls to its full length in Hockney's 1976 'autobiography' – in reality, a story of his early years edited from conversations with Nikos Stangos – published when he was just thirty-nine, a book that cements the view of him as the avuncular Yorkshireman, and creates a kind of *Beano*-esque English aura around his adolescence.

The Hockney-as-cheeky-teen narrative goes something like this: David enters Bradford Grammar with a scholarship, which means he's placed in one of the top forms. To his dismay, he discovers that he's able to study art for only about ninety minutes a week. The bottom class, by contrast, gets far more time in the art rooms. So he comes up with a cunning plan to fail his way down the forms. This is much to the alarm of the school, and his parents, but it works, and he turns himself into a decidedly average academic achiever. We do, though, get flashes of the future great artist: the posters he makes for school events, some early paintings. And, most of all, caricatures: exercise books filled with daydreamy doodles and comical portraits which, combined with his status as class clown, hatred of sports days and love of slapstick-style self-deprecation, keep his classmates endlessly entertained.

There's no reason to doubt this is based in truth. But in its distillation, and its repetition by his later biographers, it's become a winking shorthand, hindsight perfectly revealing the obscenely gifted, precocious, gay (there are comical accounts of his time in the Boy Scouts) superstar he'll become in the early sixties. More complex is what happens after he leaves Bradford Grammar for Bradford School of Art in September 1953.

Hockney had actually sought permission to leave grammar school much earlier to join the junior arm of the art school. But the Director of Schools in Bradford turned him down, insisting, much to Hockney's distress, that he finish his secondary education first.

At Bradford School of Art he begins his serious training as an artist, particularly in conventional drawing techniques. This would become foundational to his place as one of the great draughtsmen of twentieth-century British art. He also became part of a close group of talented painters, including John Loker, Peter Kaye, Dave Oxtoby and, most of all, Norman Stevens, who would go to the RCA ahead of Hockney, warning his own classmate, Adrian Berg, about the talented kid who was on his way in 1959.

Hockney was taught at Bradford by Derek Stafford, a recent graduate of the RCA and still in his twenties. Stafford encouraged Hockney and his classmates to travel outside of Bradford to see as much art as they could: to Wakefield and to Leeds, and particularly to London. The group would either hitchhike or get cheap day-return tickets and stretch that day as far as they could, leaving just after midnight and coming back on the last train before the clock ticked over twenty-four hours later. It was on these trips that Hockney first encountered London's gallery scene, and the Tate Gallery, and, perhaps most importantly in terms of his future development, the National Gallery.

Hockney's performative self-awareness found an early manifestation in Bradford. For a time, he modelled himself on Stanley Spencer, at that moment the archetypally eccentric English artist. According to biographer Peter Webb, Hockney 'imitated the painter by walking about wearing a bowler hat and long woolly scarf, in a heavy black overcoat with drooping shoulders, carrying an old umbrella and pushing a pram containing his painting materials'. It was a look topped off by Hockney's signature National Health Service spectacles. Though it may have been a passing phase, it's evidence of a very young artist already thinking not just about his work but about how to manifest his presence as an artist in public.

Hockney took his exams for the National Diploma in Design in the summer of 1957 and, unsurprisingly, smashed them, receiving a first-class diploma with honours. At the encouragement of Stafford, he had applied to the RCA and Slade postgraduate programmes. He travelled to London to take the entrance exams, and met Derek Boshier there. Both young men were accepted to the RCA. The Slade had given Hockney the nod, too. Stafford encouraged him to choose the RCA.

But before he could take up his place, he had the small matter of his National Service to complete. Like his father, Hockney registered as a conscientious objector, and completed most of his service working in hospitals, delaying his entry to the RCA until the 1959/60 academic year.

There are strong parallels between Hockney's backstory and that of the young man who would, at the end of 1962, disappear forever and be replaced by Billy Apple: Barrie Bates.

Bates was a year and a half older than Hockney, born in Auckland on 31 December 1935. Bates's parents also had middle-class ambitions for their kids. In fact, his mother Marija, who had aspired to be a ballerina, was already middle class, but married Bates's more working-class father Albert, a telephone mechanician who worked for the post and telegraph service. Like Hockney's father Kenneth, Albert was also a hobbyist artist: a part-time watercolourist who recognised his boy had some talent and encouraged him to attend Saturday morning art classes. There are parallels between their mothers, too: where Laura Hockney was a religious, teetotalling vegetarian, Marija was meticulous to the point of neurosis, insisting on the utmost cleanliness in herself and her children. Both families were large: Bates was one of four siblings, Hockney was one of five.

For Hockney, grammar school offered a way up and out of his blue-collar surrounds. In Auckland, Mount Albert Grammar, which Bates

attended, was more egalitarian but offered similar opportunities. The two boys' experiences at secondary school were, however, very different. Hockney was clearly an over-achiever who, as he tells it, began to wilfully under-achieve so he could spend more time in the art room. He was also popular with his schoolmates. Bates, by contrast, hated school, and as Apple tells it, was bullied so much that he convinced the school's principal he should be allowed to arrive late and leave early. Even with this accommodation, he didn't see things through, leaving the school after three years, at age fifteen, without a qualification.

For many young New Zealand men of his era, leaving school young wasn't the end of the world. In the early fifties, New Zealand was a wealthy country that had modelled itself as a kind of classless utopia: still unmistakably tied to Britain, but without all the pesky societal stratification. Bates lived with his grandparents for a while, helping them around their property, then got a job in 1953 as a lab assistant in a paint factory. Soon after, he got his first break in Auckland's advertising industry, as a messenger. And in 1956 he was taken on as a trainee graphic designer for the department store chain, the Farmers Trading Company. While there he redesigned the company's logo, which Farmers kept for three decades – a strange ghost of Bates himself, well and truly outlasting the man who disappeared in 1962.

Bates took evening art classes at Auckland City Art Gallery and Elam School of Fine Arts. This gave him a dual life, bouncing between the advertising and art worlds, which he would carry with him to the RCA, and which would continue, after he became Apple, until 1990 when he finally returned to New Zealand. This is also where the parallels with Hockney pick up again, because, as with Derek Stafford, it was an RCA graduate who first gave Bates the desire to study at the London institution. The RCA-trained artist Robert Ellis joined the teaching staff at Elam in 1957. Prior to that, he'd taught at Yeovil School of Art, where one of his students had been a young painter called Derek Boshier.

In 1958, Ellis encouraged Bates to put together a portfolio for submission to the RCA, despite the fact he had no formal qualifications. This wasn't a particularly unusual pathway for talented New Zealand artists: William 'Bill' Culbert was nearing the end of his own time at the RCA just as Bates was applying. The New Zealand government supported these students with travelling scholarships of £500 per year – a pretty generous sum compared to what the likes of Hockney and Boshier, as domestic students, received. Bates applied for the scholarship but was turned down. It wasn't until the RCA – and in particular Richard Guyatt – saw the portfolio and was so impressed by it that Bates got the money, albeit a lesser amount of £400.

This augured well for the twenty-three-year-old Aucklander: he had the recommendation of a gifted RCA graduate in Robert Ellis; he had a direct contact with Boshier and his family; and, perhaps most significantly, his work had already made an impact on Guyatt, who would become so important to his early trajectory as an artist and designer, both as a defender and mentor.

Although there's no question Auckland was almost as far away from London as one could get, it wasn't, in the 1950s, a complete backwater. In terms of modern art, the city had experienced a major overhaul through both the influx of British staff to Elam – not just Ellis, but others like Michael Nicholson – and the Auckland City Art Gallery's engagement with, and collection of, European and British modernism under the leadership of Peter Tomory, who took up the directorship in 1956. Local painters were also beginning to make their presence felt as genuine modernists – most notably Colin McCahon, who would become the giant of New Zealand art over the next three decades until his death in 1987.

There were coffee bars, a growing sexual freedom, jazz records and fashion, and international influence in art and design. As Christina Barton notes, Bates himself had already started to receive recognition, having had some of his design work published internationally, in the 1958–59 edition of *Modern Publicity*, while the Dutch émigré Kees Hos

wrote a favourable article about him in the influential New Zealand magazine *Home and Building* in July 1959. Bates, then, was no hick. He was, though, an extremely complicated young man: gifted, but with no qualifications to his name and a history of being bullied at school. He set off for London with a well-established chip on his shoulder, massive ambitions and serious points to prove. The colonial wasn't going to let his colonial baggage hold him, or drag him, back.

Bates travelled to Australia in July 1959, and took an ocean liner from there to England, arriving in early September. The Boshiers picked him up and took him back to the pub they ran in Basingstoke. He and Boshier then headed up to London, and moved into a flat at 83 Warwick Road, ready for the start of their first term at the RCA – where Boshier would once again encounter the young man from Bradford he'd first met when they were both interviewed back in 1957, and whom Bates would meet for the first time.

An important cast of characters was beginning to assemble at the RCA that autumn: Bates, Hockney, Boshier, Allen Jones, Peter Phillips, R. B. Kitaj, Frank Bowling and Peter Crutch. At the college already were Hockney's Bradford colleague Norman Stevens, Adrian Berg, Pauline Boty and Ridley Scott (Scott was a year ahead of Bates in Graphic Design, and the pair struck up a friendship). And among the support staff there was Ann Quin, who started that October as Carel Weight's secretary.

Quin was until recently a relatively obscure figure in 1960s British culture. But the 2018 publication of *The Unmapped Country: Stories & Fragments*, edited by Jennifer Hodgson, has led to a resurgence of British interest in Quin, and via her estate new details have emerged about her.

Much of what is known about Quin's early life comes from a brief autobiography published in *London Magazine* in July 1966. 'Bound by perverse securities in a Convent, RC Brighton for eight years,' she wrote:

> Taking that long to get over. The Holy Ghost. The Trinity. The Reverend Mother. I was not a Catholic. I was sent to a convent to be brought up 'a lady'. To say gate and not giate – the Sussex accent I had picked up from the village school in my belly-rubbing days had to be eliminated by How Now Brown Cow, if I wanted to make my way in the world. According to Mother.

Her mother, Anne Reid, was wrong. Quin, from the time she moved to London from Brighton as a young woman in the 1950s to her death in 1973, would make her way in the world as one of the most talented writers of her generation. That way, though, was ferociously difficult: only a small group of readers, writers, critics and editors truly understood her significance in her own lifetime, and her battles with mental illness were debilitating. Still, her mother was right about one thing: a recording of Quin from the late sixties illustrates that the How Now Brown Cow worked – her deeper-than-average voice has none of the Sussex inflection the nuns were so keen to drill out of her.

As is the case with other talented women of her generation who died young (Pauline Boty, for instance, who died aged twenty-eight in 1966), Quin has, for a long time, largely been known as a footnote in other people's stories – including those of two writers with whom she had brief affairs, the American poet Robert Creeley and the British novelist Henry Williamson – or as a kind of curiosity in the history of experimental British fiction. Quin published four novels and wrote a cluster of short stories and fragments, and some of her letters have ended up in other people's archives: among them, those of her publisher Marion Boyars; the Carmelite friar Brocard Sewell, who was part of the 1960s British literary scene; and Apple, a natural hoarder who still has pieces of writing Quin sent to Bates, and wrote as Bates, while they were together in 1961/62. Her employment records at the RCA largely square with her *London Magazine* account, as well as providing specific details about her life and livelihood around the time she wrote *Berg*.

1 Barrie Bates with his work *B.E.A. Flight Over East Berlin*, 1961, at the Royal College of Art, London, 1961, photo: Frank Apthorp

2 Ann Quin, c. 1968, photo: Oswald Jones

3 David Hockney and Derek Boshier
at the Royal College of Art, London, 1961,
photo: Geoffrey Raymond Reeve