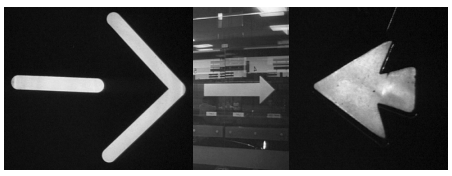
Designed by Experimental Jetset
Limited edition of 50
Numbered: Signed:

Screenprinted by SMLX (Studio HS)
on fair-trade Earth Positive shirts
Thanks to Sophie Krier / Dawn Ray

THIS STILL IS THE MODERN WORLD

Page 1

Cinematic prologue. Fragment from Godard’s ‘Alphaville’ (1965). Shown are images of neon arrows, while the voices of Lemmy Caution and Alpha 60 exchange truisms on the nature of history and future. “The past is a reflection of the future”, Alpha 60 remarks...



Then the lecture starts:

This is still the modern world
Some loose and random notes by
Experimental Jetset

Thinking about the title of this symposium, ‘I Don’t Know Where I’m Going But I Want to Be There’, the first image that came to mind was that of an highway. The title seems to encapsulate notions of progress and optimism, of speeding forward – a state of being hungry for the future. As Kraftwerk would express it, in their masterpiece ‘Autobahn’:
“Wir fahren fahren fahren auf der Autobahn / Vor uns liegt ein weites Tal / Die Sonne scheint mit Glitzerstrahl”...



Progress, speed, future... ideas that are often associated with modernism, and rightly so.
In fact, Marinetti (shown here in his car, in 1912) built one of the most prototypical modernist movements on the foundation of these single ideas. To chant with him: “The splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed”.

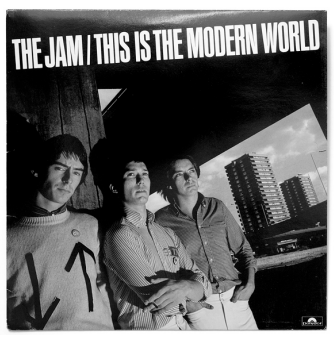
Page 2



And yet, this ‘hungriness for the future’ only represents one side of the coin. In our opinion, modernism can be seen as a multitude of movements, pointing backwards and forwards at the same time: moving towards the future while looking at the past. In other words, a two-way street rather than a highway.



This idea, of modernism being a synthesis of the future and the past, is already enclosed in the word ‘modernism’ itself.
In Frederic Jameson’s ‘A Singular Modernity’, the word is traced back to the fifth century AD, its etymology rooted in the Latin ‘modernus’ which simply means ‘now’ or ‘the time of now’. And it’s safe to say that the notion of ‘now’ is as much about the past as it is about the future. We always liked this idea, of the present as a zone where the past and the future are forever collapsing, folding into each other constantly. And similarly, we like the notion of modernism as something that is pointing both to the future and the past.
Which conveniently brings us to the next image, the main subject of our micro-lecture...



I Don’t Know Where I’m Going But I Want to Be There

Page 3

...the sleeve of ‘This is the Modern World’, the 1977 album by UK band The Jam. Photographed by famous ’60s photographer Gered Mankowitz (perhaps best known for shooting the cover of The Rolling Stones’ ‘December Children’), the image shows The Jam standing under a highway (The A40, also known as the Westway, heading out of London). Taped to frontman Paul Weller’s sweater are a pair of arrows, in a two-way traffic position.

Here, Paul Weller seems to be referring to The Who, in particular the mod image this band projected in the Sixties, a decade before The Jam. During this period, The Who incorporated elements from Op- and Pop-art into their vocabulary, such as in the case of these Peter Blake-inspired traffic sign shirts:



On the sleeve of ‘This is the Modern World’, Paul Weller seals this reference by wearing a red The Who badge, right above the arrows:

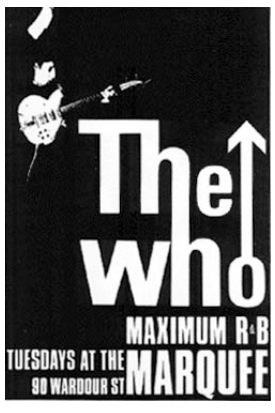


What make Weller’s gesture particularly interesting is the DIY quality of the arrows: what we see is black ‘gaffer tape’, material that is common for bands to use during live performances, securing cables to the stage floor and keeping instruments in place. The sort of tape every rock band comes equipped with. The fact that Weller used this low-tech material, in such an impromptu way, to recreate a piece from the past, adds a significant layer to this story. To us, it shows that the act of recreation always involves a technical translation; and it is exactly within this translation where true expression takes place.



(Actual piece of ‘gaffer tape’)

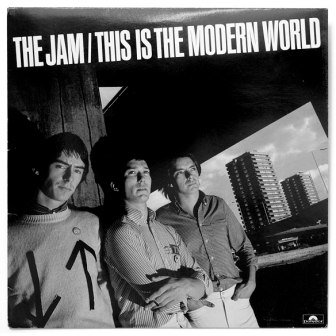
Maybe this would be a good moment to address the subject of ‘mod’. An English tendency that originated in the early ’60s, the name ‘mod’ comes from ‘modernist’, which was a term used in the late ’50s to describe lovers of modern jazz (as opposed to lovers of ‘trad’ jazz). This term became the label for several UK subcultures in the ’60s, revolving around soul, rhythm & blues, scooters, tailored suits, night clubs and Pop-Art.
Characteristic for this movement was an obsessive eye for detail, and an almost religious attachment to sharpness and cleanliness (one-time manager of The Who, Peter Meaden, once described mod as “clean living under difficult circumstances”).
Most of all, mod was a force of emancipation: an English uprising of white, working class kids. Through music and fashion, borders of class, race and gender were crossed. The use of arrows, traffic signs and targets that punctuate the ’60s mod movement seem to respond to this idea of social mobility.



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The mod movement never really faded away. Since its inception in the early ’60s, mod sustained as an underground continuum rather than that it disappeared as a fad. And it is exactly this notion of mod as an underground continuum that is interesting for this lecture. It brings to mind the archetype of a mythical underground river, a steady stream that flows below the earth, only to surface every once in a while. In the case of mod, this stream resurfaced in the late ’70s, when, in the wake of the punk rock explosion, bands like The Jam referred quite openly to their mod influences.

A continuum then, rather than a fad. What makes the idea of the continuum particularly noteworthy is that it is a prime example of a structure that points both forwards and backwards, referring to the future and the past at the same time. The continuum is the infrastructure below the highway, the catacombs where the ghosts of the past and the specters of the future intermingle, and become inseparable. Is it a coincidence then, that on the sleeve of ‘This is the Modern World’, the band is pictured *underneath* a highway?



The post-punk subculture in which bands like The Jam emerged is sometimes referred to as the ‘Mod Revival’, and as we all know, revivals are not judged mildly by the critics. Often, the phenomenon of young artists referring to past movements is seen as retrograde cynicism, as postmodern irony or reactionary nostalgia.
In the case of The Jam, this viewpoint is hard to maintain. While referring to the past, The Jam did manage to radically reinterpret the notion of mod, to re-politicize pop music, and to remain a relevant band throughout the late ’70s and early ’80s.

The Jam were revitalizing mod, rather than reviving it. On that note, it might be interesting to quote Régis Debray, who, in one of our favourite essays about graphic design (‘Socialism and Print’, from 2007), has the following to say on the subject of ‘revivre’:

“The greatest modernizers inaugurate their career with a backward leap, and a renaissance proceeds through a return to the past, a recycling, and hence a revolution (...)
Behind the ‘re’ of reformation, republic or revolution, there is a hand flicking through the pages of a book, from the end back to the beginning. Whereas the finger that pushes a button, fast-forwarding a tape or disc, will never pose a danger to the establishment”.

It is this notion of recycling and reinterpretation that brings us back to the center of this lecture; the t-shirt that is attached to this publication, as a life-size object.



We hope this shirt will suffice as a conclusion to this micro-essay. It’s first of all an object that should be seen as a side-specific piece; after all, it refers to the rock merchandise that is usually sold in venues like Paradiso, after concerts. Secondly, its arrows refer not only to the given title of the symposium, but also to our own very particular notion of modernism: as a movement pointing to both the past and future simultaneously. And lastly, we hope that the actual act of recreation will serve as a manifestation of the ‘recycling’ as described by Debray.

We thank you for your attention.

Experimental Jetset
Paradiso, Amsterdam
18 December 2010