

BAUHAUS IMAGINISTA + STILL UNDEAD





Type of output:
Exhibitions

by
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Bauhaus Imaginista, Haus der
Kulturen der Welt, 2019.

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**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE

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SUMMARY

Butt was Research Curator on the international Bauhaus Imaginista project devising material on Leeds art education for two exhibitions: *Bauhaus Imaginista* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, March 15 – June 10 2019) and *Still Undead: Popular Culture in Britain Beyond the Bauhaus* (Nottingham Contemporary, September 21 2019 – January 12 2020).

Bauhaus Imaginista marked the centenary of the founding of the Bauhaus by critically reassessing the reach and significance of the institution's ideas and practices across multiple transnational contexts. Different themes were explored across four “chapters.” Butt was involved in the “Still Undead” chapter addressing experiments in light design, sound art, expanded cinema, performance and popular culture in Bauhaus-influenced colleges in the US and UK after WWII. The exhibitions restored Leeds as an important regional centre for art school experiment within the globalist purview of Bauhaus internationalism.

Butt's work on this project was informed by his research into regional UK art education and the decisive role played by punk rock in revising the priorities of Fine Art students in the 1970s and 1980s, part of a broader revisionist assessment of the importance of experimental art education within art history and popular music studies (Bracewell 2007; Tickner 2008, Wilkinson 2016).

Butt was research-lead in curating works of art, sound samples and ephemera related to the Leeds Polytechnic sound studio and performance space, and collaborated with project curators in determining the design, narrative trajectory, and intellectual underpinnings of Leeds-based exhibits.

Bauhaus Imaginista and *Still Undead* were realised in partnership between Goethe Institute, Bauhaus Kooperation, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, and Nottingham Contemporary. Funding was provided by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Foreign Office, and Kulturstiftung des Bundes. Butt also contributed essays to the project publication and online journal and participated in its symposium and education programmes.

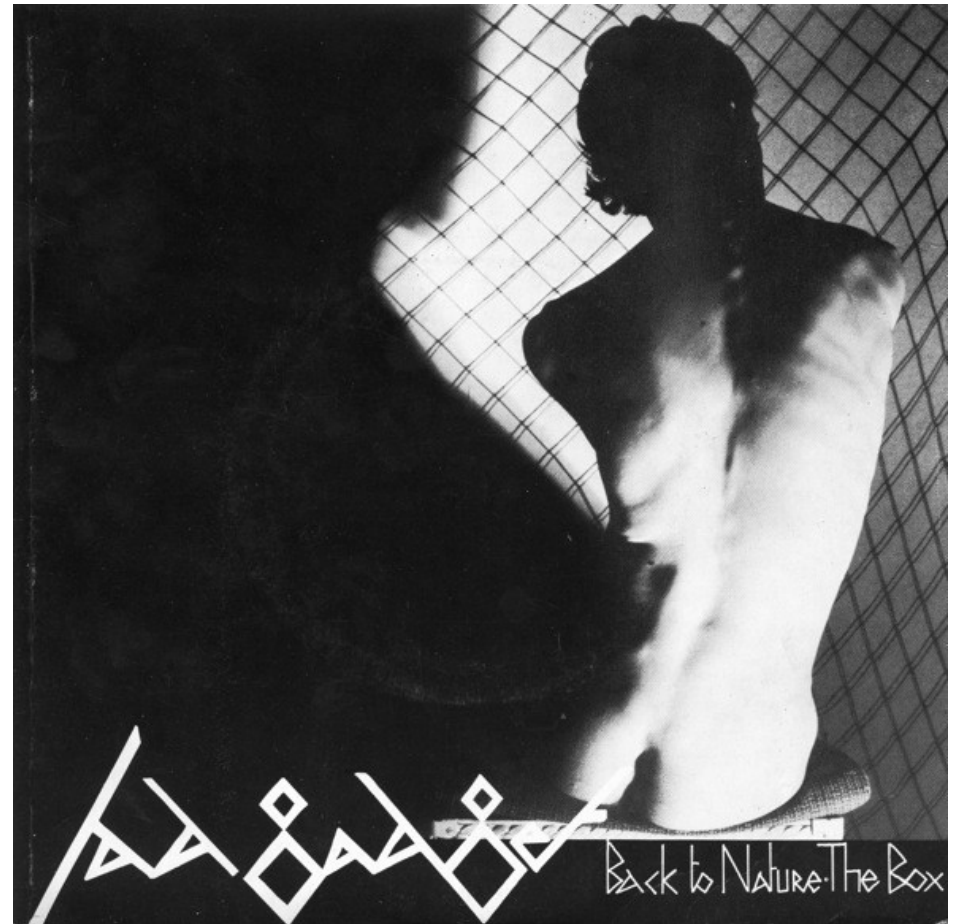


Left and right: *Still Undead: Popular Culture in Britain Beyond the Bauhaus*, Nottingham Contemporary, 2019.

TIMELINE

2018 - 2019	2019 MAR-JUN	2019 JUN-SEP	2019 OCT	2019 DEC
<p>Butt invited to participate by Haus Der Kulturen der Welt. Research begins and Leeds exhibits identified and sourced.</p>	<p>Chapter in book. “Polytechnics and Punks” by Butt in Von Osten and Watson (eds.), (Thames & Hudson).</p> <p>Exhibition. <i>Bauhaus Imaginista</i>, Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, Berlin. 15th March-10th June 2019.</p> <p>Conference paper/ presentation. “Bedsit Art in the Leeds Experiment” at “A New School” conference, Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, Berlin. 11th May 2019.</p>	<p>Butt employed by HKW, Berlin and Nottingham Contemporary as Research Curator.</p> <p>Further development of Leeds exhibits for Nottingham Contemporary.</p> <p>Journal article. Online publication of “Bedsit Art in the Leeds Experiment.”</p> <p>Exhibition. <i>Still Undead: Popular Culture in Britain Beyond the Bauhaus</i>, Nottingham Contemporary. 21st September-12th January 2020.</p>	<p>Public workshop. “Being in a Band: When the Leeds Art Experiment Went Pop” study session, Nottingham Contemporary.</p>	<p>Article. “Polytechnika und Punks. Das Fortleben des Bauhauses im UK der Seventies,” <i>Stadt Bauwelt</i>, No. 224.</p>

The exhibitions showed how art students turned to music-making to break out of the elite art world and create new sounds and styles of selfhood for record-buying publics and within nightclubs.



Above: Fad Gadget, *Back to Nature*,
Mute Records, 1979.

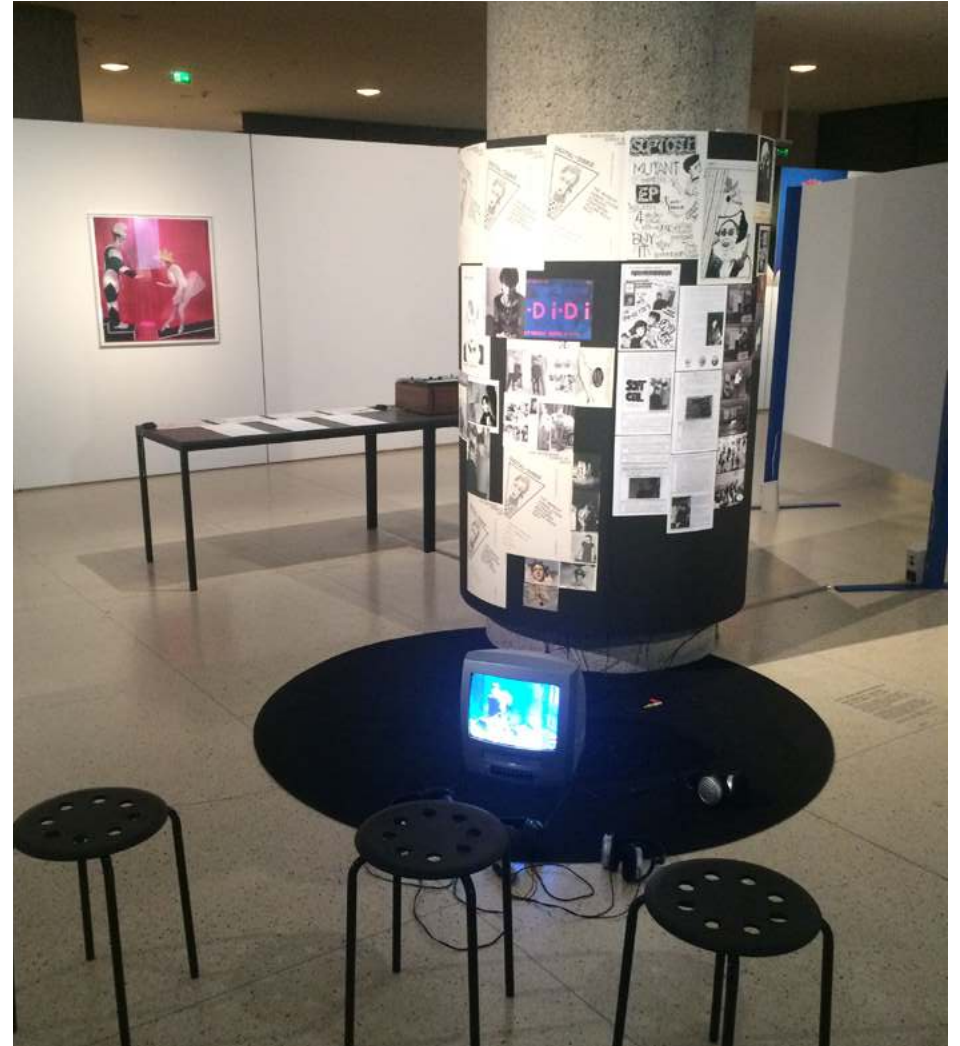
RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Butt was invited by *Bauhaus Imaginista* chief curators Marion Von Osten and Grant Watson to help assess the legacy of the Bauhaus in post-war UK art education and to chart the impact of modernist experimentalism in visual arts and design more broadly within British popular culture. Leeds was chosen as a key location because the city's College of Art was a UK pioneer of the Bauhaus-inspired pedagogy of Basic Design in the post-war decades, and Leeds Polytechnic was renowned for student work in performance art and post-punk music in the 1970s and 1980s. The aim of Butt's contributions was to show how performance and sound recording facilities at Leeds Polytechnic, alongside avant-gardist studio discourses, facilitated the creation of 1980s pop and electro-pop music and their associated theatrical and subcultural street-styles.



Right: Installation shot of Soft Cell exhibit, *Bauhaus Imaginista*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

Left: Marc Almond, *Zazou*, 1978
Right: Installation shot of Soft Cell exhibit, *Bauhaus Imaginista*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.



CONTEXT

Butt's curatorial work on *Bauhaus Imaginista* forms part of his broader research into the histories of popular music, performance and art education, including co-edited volume *Post-Punk Then and Now* (Butt, Eshun and Fisher 2016).

This work is part of a recent field of scholarship addressing the role played by post-war UK art education in effecting cultural change (Beck and Cornford 2012; Llewellyn and Williamson 2015) and renewed understandings of the relations between fine art and pop music (Frith and Horne, 1987; Roberts, 2018).

The specific local focus on Leeds, celebrated in 1971 by Patrick Heron as possessing the “most influential art school in Europe since the Bauhaus,” is designed to restore regional histories of British experimental pedagogy to the globalist purviews of art history and contemporary museology. Butt's curatorial input to both exhibitions presents electro-pop and experimental music created by Leeds art students, as well as their associated sub- and club cultural styles, as significantly marked by the libertarian experiment of British art pedagogy after Basic Design and the Bauhaus.

Butt's curatorial contributions challenge the limited knowledges of art education circulating within popular music scholarship and journalism and their customary focus on the “art pop” of heterosexual male bands (e.g. Reynolds 2006). *Bauhaus Imaginista* and *Still Undead* focus instead on the creation of dissident queer and female identities enabled by visual arts experiment in club culture, drawing on the insights of feminist and queer scholarship (Buckland 2002, Goldman 2019). The exhibitions show how art students turned to music-making to break out of the elite art world and create new sounds and styles of selfhood for the record-buying publics and within nightclubs.



Right: George Hinchcliffe and Ian Wood installation, Haus Der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

METHODS AND PROCESSES

Butt worked with a research assistant (Mariana Meneses) who undertook contextual research on Basic Design whilst he conferred with Watson and Von Osten the artists and exhibits as follows:

Frank Tovey (a.k.a. electro-pop act Fad Gadget): photography, prints, sketchbooks and audio materials pertaining to *The Loopy and Berg*; vinyl record covers, and photography by Barbara Frost and Anton Corbijn

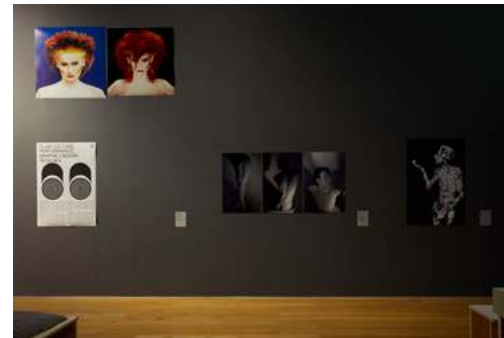
Marc Almond and **Dave Ball** (Soft Cell): press clippings, photographs and Warehouse nightclub ephemera; audio (The Bedsit Tapes); film Sally Bairstow *Glamerama*.

George Hinchcliffe and **Ian Wood** (Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain): *Dehbye*, pictorial and musical notations, and supporting documentation

Ros Allen and **Marian Lux** (of bands Delta 5 and Really): photo documentation

Photographs and documentation of Leeds Poly sound studio and performance space.

The Estate of Frank Tovey, the Soft Cell archivist, Hinchcliffe and Wood, Allen and multiple lenders of documentary materials were contacted to supply original materials.



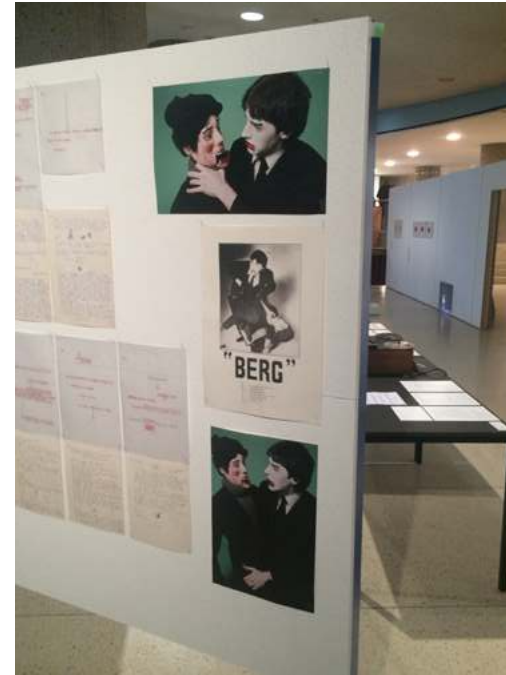
Above top: Barbara Frost, photographs of Frank Tovey, 1978.

Above: Photograph of Ros Allen, Delta 5, c. 1979.

It was decided to focus on work made in the purpose-built performance space and sound studio at Leeds Polytechnic.

The aim was to make vivid for the exhibition visitor connections between these facilities and the invention of futuristic electro-music and new street styles and forms of club culture. This was achieved by presenting audio recordings in the gallery alongside film and video works, performance documentation, club ephemera, musical notation and sketchbook material. Some channels were on headphones, others ambient in the space, and vinyl records by Fad Gadget were available for visitors to play on turntables in the final room of the exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary.

This was the first time this material was exhibited in public.



Above: Frank Tovey, *Berg*, 1978.
Publicity stills and poster, sketchbook pages, audio soundscape.

Left: Frank Tovey, *Berg*, 1978.

For the Nottingham Contemporary show Butt worked with exhibiting artists Hinchcliffe and Wood to reconstruct their 1978 experimental sound work *DEHBYE*. Adopting an approach of curatorial reanimation, a novel installation of the work was arrived at. Made from an unconventionally long, spliced tape loop, *DEHBYE* moved across spools on the gallery wall through a reel-to-reel tape recorder to produce ambient sound through a loudspeaker, accompanied by documentary materials also displayed on the surrounding wall space.

This was the first time the work had been presented for gallery exhibition since its creation.



3Dehbye2
Transcription Ian Wood and George Hinchcliffe 1978

♩ = 123.5 ♩ = 125 ♩ = 127

Piano Low Piano Orch Piano Orch The

♩ = 128

B B C Cymbalom Chord Gabbling Voice

7 A B A C E D F J or G K L

The B B C Tape Chord Piano Electronic
Rewind Rewind Trill Hum

10 J or G M N P Q R

Tape Chord Whistle Twen-ty five The B B C "just"Rock Life
Rewind Chord Chord Chord

12 100 P Q R J or G K L S

PeepPeep "just"Rock Cymbalom Tape Chord Piano Electronic Tape
RockBand Chord Rewind Trill Hum Rewind

♩ = 126

14 J or G N P Q R S

Chord Twen-ty five The B B C Life Saxophone Strings

Left: George Hinchcliffe and Ian Wood, *DEHBYE*, reconstruction, Nottingham Contemporary, 2019.

Above: George Hinchcliffe and Ian Wood, *DEHBYE*, musical transcription, 2019.

In the Berlin exhibit the Leeds materials were included in a diffuse and open presentation alongside other elements. This was to encourage historical comparisons between Leeds forms of self-fashioning, Bauhaus parties and London club culture.

Below: Installation, Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt.



In the Nottingham exhibit a dedicated gallery space was assigned to Leeds Polytechnic. Tovey exhibits were included both here and in the final gallery space 'Club Culture, Performance and Graphic Design' to help make connections between the focused Leeds presentation and the broader cultural field with which *Still Undead* concluded its curatorial narrative.

Below: 'Club Culture, Performance and Graphic Design,' Nottingham Contemporary



DISSEMINATION

The exhibits in both shows were accompanied by reference material about Leeds authored by Butt on wall texts and labels and in printed gallery guides, and he participated in guided gallery tours of the Berlin exhibit. Both shows had extended periods of exhibition and brought Butt's academic research to a gallery-going public.

Attendance figures were as follows:

Berlin – 32,000

Nottingham – 60,976

Butt was also contributor to the international conference 'A New School' at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in May 2019. His paper 'Bedsit Art in the Leeds Experiment' was revised and extended and accepted for publication in the [Bauhaus Imaginista online journal](#).

At Nottingham Contemporary Butt delivered a study session as part of the Sonic Bauhaus season: '[Being in a Band: When the Leeds Art Experiment Went Pop](#)' on October 1 2019.

Butt also contributed an essay to the summary publication of the Bauhaus Imaginista project: 'Polytechnics and Punks: The 1970s After-life of the Bauhaus', Marion von Osten and Grant Watson (eds), , London: Thames & Hudson, 2019, pp. 278-282 (also in German). This was additionally republished in [Stadt Bauwelt, No. 224, 2019, pp. 40-41](#).

Butt also delivered talks related to this project at West Dean College of Arts and Conservation '[Bauhaus Art and Education in Practice](#)' conference (October 2019); and the Młode Wilki in Szczecin, Poland '[Life After Academy?](#)' event (November 2019).

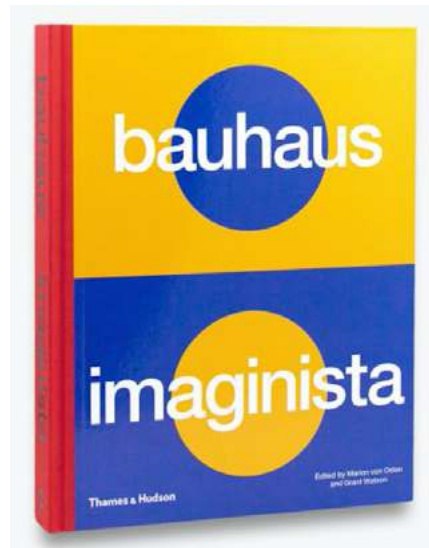
Butt's scholarship was singled out for extended approving critical engagement in Peter Suchin's 'An Experimental Education' review article in Art Monthly, March 2020. [Will Gompertz \(BBC\)](#) wrote of the Nottingham show: "The results of Basic Design course are presented in the final room of the exhibition, which is dedicated to work connected to Leeds Polytechnic in the 1970s and 80s [...] a rousing finale."

Bauhaus Imaginista project site: <http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/events/683/bauhaus-imaginista-berlin>

<https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/whats-on/undead-pop-culture-in-britain-beyond-the-bauhaus/>



Left: Bedsit Art in the Leeds Experiment, *Bauhaus Imaginista* online journal article



Above and Farthest Left: Leeds Polytechnic 1970s-1980s, Nottingham Contemporary. Left: *Bauhaus Imaginista*, Thames & Hudson.

Below: Article in *Bauwelt* journal

Polytechnika und Punks Das Nachleben des Bauhaus im Vereinigten Königreich der 70er Jahr

Text **Gavin Butt**



Gang of Four vor dem brutalistischen Roger Stevens Building der Leeds University, 1979
Foto: Adrian Boot

Nottingham Contemporary What's On Visit, Record, Exchange, About Us Q

Sonic Bauhaus: Being in a Band

Past, Study Session

Tue 1 Oct, 6.30pm - 8.30pm

[Book Now](#)

Being in a Band: When the Leeds Art Experiment Went Pop

The Study Sessions are informal discussion groups. Our season *Sonic Bauhaus* is a series of study-as-listening sessions exploring critical pedagogues of twentieth-century art schools and how these influenced developments in sound and systems of music creation.

What happens when artists get together to form a band? After punk in 1976, many students in Leeds art schools rejected the hackneyed image of the artist as a lone genius in a garret, downed paintbrushes in favour of guitars and synthesizers, and formed groups to challenge the limits of rock and pop music. Born of a progressive art education once celebrated as the "most influential in Europe since the Bauhaus," they look toward garage ideas out from the artist's studio to the record buying public, even to Top of the Pops and American Bandstand. Members of bands as diverse as Four, Delta 5, Scritti Politti.

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Still Undead: Will Gompertz reviews the Bauhaus show in Nottingham ★★★★★

Will Gompertz
Arts editor
@WillGompertzBBC

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Left: Sonic Bauhaus study session,
Nottingham Contemporary

Left: Will Gompertz review,
BBC News

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