

COLOSSEUM SERIES

In the late 1950s, JG Ballard created a series of literary collages titled *Project For A New Novel*. He folded in scientific reports, company brochures and advertising leaflets (what he called 'invisible literature') with written exercises in free association to create a surrealistic concoction of cryptic narratives.

Although never realised, Ballard had imagined his experiments as billboards all across London. Both mesmerised and appalled by the power of advertising and its manipulation of the unconscious mind he sought to subvert it with surrealism. He followed the surrealist painters in believing that the world could be remade by the human mind, something he described as 'the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible'. Much like William Burroughs before him, Ballard would manipulate language, twisting it out of shape to try to get to something unconscious, something truthful about our lived experience. Declan Lloyd writes in *The Guardian*:

While most billboard ads focus on quick-fire bursts of information, eye-catching imagery and memorable phrases, Ballard inverted this process: stripping them of image in favour of text, and making the message wilfully inscrutable. In doing this he urged the viewer, the consumer, to formulate their own subjective narrative through these fragmentary collages, thus empowering the consumer and reinvigorating the imagination.

It's too bad that these disquieting and dystopian provocations never got to rub shoulders with ads for Kellogg's Cornflakes and Benson & Hedges Special Filters.

Ballard's *Project For A New Novel* resonated with me and led me to thinking about a similar project utilising the billposter format. My aim was to create pieces that were, at least in part, produced by previous artworks I've made. So I deferred to THE FUTURE LEAKS OUT and THE POEM WILL RESEMBLE YOU, two interactive artworks based on the Dadaist cut-up technique, to provide some content. Like Ballard, I also referred to medical textbooks, sex manuals and all manner of other ephemera to compose a sort of cut-up flash fiction. David Hockney stated that the average punter would look at a painting for as long as it takes to peel an orange. The *Colosseum Series* is a collection of narratives, each one as brief as hell and well disposed to serve our shrinking attention spans. Hopefully, their strength lies in the infinite and subjective interpretations the viewer can make with the text based on their own experiences.

It's also interesting to me to produce these works at a time when our cities are so conspicuously bereft of billposters celebrating myriad upcoming live events, hence the decision to use the vernacular of the club night or cheap festival flyer that traditionally wallpaper our cities. The familiar has become unfamiliar.

Tim Fishlock, January 2021