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# Criton Tomazos and Underground Art in the 1960s

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**CRITON TOMAZOS AND**  
**UNDERGROUND ART IN THE 1960s**

**Dr. Stephen Carruthers**

**Based on a Dissertation originally submitted in partial fulfillment of a Diploma in Art and Design studies at the Sir John Cass Faculty of Arts, Design and Manufacture, City of London Polytechnic. Dr. Stephen Carruthers is a lecturer in the College of Arts and Tourism at the Dublin Institute of Technology ([www.dit.ie](http://www.dit.ie)).**

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# **CRITON TOMAZOS AND UNDERGROUND ART** **IN THE 1960s**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Criton Tomazos (b.1940) is an artist of Greek-Cypriot origin who has been living in England since 1956. He formed part of a circle of artists in the 1960s loosely associated around a number of informal groupings, including Arts Together, Writers Forum, Sigma, Group H and Environmental Forum. In examining his work in the 1960s in the context of the artists with whom he collaborated, the originality and prescience of his contribution to a variety of sixties and seventies art movements becomes apparent.

Although often working in relative isolation, Criton Tomazos' work reflects many of the most important themes and artistic movements current in the sixties and early seventies. His environmental installations, devised either by himself or in collaboration with artists such as John Latham, Bruce Lacey, Jeff Nuttall, and Keith Musgrove, reveal similar concerns to those expressed by such diverse groups as the Situationists, Auto-Destructive Art and Fluxus and would be taken up by a number of installation artists in the 1970s and 1980s. His experimentation with 'cut-up' techniques using words and images reveal the influence of the American writer William Burroughs, and in particular his 1962 novel *'The Ticket That Exploded'*, and led to a wide range of works in the field of photomontage, mail art and collage which again reflected similar concerns expressed in movements such as Mail Art, Concrete Poetry, and, more generally, what became known in the Sixties as the

Underground.<sup>1</sup>

Criton Tomazos also carried out in the 1960s spontaneous public performances that linked both with the Happenings of artists such as Wolf Vostell and Jean-Jacques Lebel and Viennese Actionists Otto Mühl, Günter Brus and Hermann Nitsch<sup>2</sup> and the work of the Living Theatre, founded by Julian Beck and Judith Melina, and the ideas for a Theatre of the Oppressed developed by Augusto Boal. In his paintings and drawings, the work of Criton Tomazos is less directly related to contemporary movements such as Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism, but more influenced by the Surrealist movement and the work of the English painter Cyril Mann (1911-1980) with whom he had a close friendship over many years.

In examining the work of Criton Tomazos, and that of the artists with whom he was most closely associated, certain key influences become apparent, first and foremost of which was the Ban the Bomb movement. It was through this movement that Criton Tomazos and Jeff Nuttall first met and it provided the impetus for the sTigma exhibition in March 1965.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the work of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, and in particular the latter's use of the 'cut-up', was of seminal importance culminating in the visit of Ginsberg to London in May 1965 with a public performance at the Albert Hall, and heavily influenced Jeff Nuttall's publication '*My Own Mag*' and Criton Tomazos' publication

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Viennese Actionism 1960-1975 (Vol. 1) and 1960-1971 (Vo. 2), edited by Museum Fridericianum, Kassel; Kunstmuseum Winterthur; and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (Ritter Verlag, Klagenfurt 1988 and 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Criton Tomazos unpublished interview with Stephen Carruthers, 28th October 1989.

‘*Amaranth*’. The work of Ronald Laing and David Cooper was also a major influence, with many of the key artists, including Criton Tomazos, involved in the Philadelphia Association and the Kingsley Hall experiment and attending the Dialectics of Liberation conference at the Round House in July 1967. Finally, the concept of de-struction (de-structuring) provided a common reference point for many of the Underground artists. This concept was most fully elaborated by Gustav Metzger, founder of Auto-Destructive Art<sup>4</sup>, and culminated in the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) in London in September 1966.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of Criton Tomazos, his Greek-Cypriot background provided an additional fundamental influence. The political situation in both Cyprus and mainland Greece during the late 1950s and 1960s, spanning the grant of Cypriot independence in August 1960 and the Colonels' military coup in Greece in April 1967, was extremely tense and often violent. In addition, his family background was marked by traditional Greek Orthodox values. These influences provided a constant counterpoint to the explosion of moral taboos and libertarian philosophy that confronted him in England in the early 1960s. This cauldron of ideas provided a richness and balance to his work, but also an element of conflict that was absent from the work of other contemporary artists who were often more fully integrated into the prevailing culture.

Criton Tomazos was brought up in Larnaca and Famagusta in the

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<sup>4</sup> Gustav Metzger, *Auto-Destructive Art - Metzger at AA* (Architectural Association, London, 1965). See also: Gustav Metzger, *damaged nature, auto-destructive art* (London, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Kristine Stiles, *Sticks and Stones: The Destruction in Art Symposium*, in *Arts Magazine* (January 1989), pp.54-60.

Greek-speaking part of Cyprus. The country was at the time under colonial rule and marked by outbreaks of violence and civil disobedience. His mother was a strict Greek Orthodox while his father was an intellectual with progressive left-wing views. Between their two worlds, there was no point of common contact except for their fear of anything that went outside their respective vision of the world, including any form of artistic activity. Criton Tomazos had a successful school career and from an early age developed an interest in writing and art and a passionate relationship with nature. This interest developed as a means of escaping from the often harsh reality of contemporary society and family conflicts and expressed itself by the creation from his imagination and dreams of an individual world free from many of these conflicts. It also represented, unconsciously at the time, an attempt to bridge the polarity of the views of his parents by opposing the simple alternatives offered by their orthodoxies with the myriad possibilities offered by art and nature.

In 1956, Criton Tomazos' father sent his family to London to continue their education, despite the opposition of his son, and to escape from the increasingly violent and oppressive situation in Cyprus during the military struggle for independence from British rule. On his arrival, Criton Tomazos suffered from the climate of hostility directed at immigrant communities from countries seeking independence from British colonial rule. While studying for his GCE at Kingsway College, Criton Tomazos met the painter Cyril Mann as his art tutor. Cyril Mann became a formative influence on his development as a painter and a close friendship developed over the following years. Criton Tomazos also enrolled for life drawing and still life classes at St. Martins College of Art and Design in London. It was at this stage



that he started to draw and paint directly from nature rather than, as before, from his imagination.

Despite his burgeoning interest in the arts, and at the insistence of his parents who wished a more secure career for their son, Criton Tomazos enrolled in 1957 to study architecture at the School of Architecture at the Regent Street Polytechnic. The seven years from 1957 to 1964 spent studying architecture proved of fundamental importance in his later development as an artist, and in particular in explaining the rich synthesis of natural and scientific form that characterise his installation projects in the 1960s. One of his visual art teachers at the Polytechnic was the sculptor and painter Geoffrey Wickham (1919-2005), who was lecturer in charge of the Visual Studies Department. Geoffrey Wickham and Cyril Mann introduced Criton Tomazos to the London art world and by the early 1960s he had joined and was exhibiting with the Islington Arts Circle of which both were members. The study of architecture also encouraged his conviction that an artist's work needed to be considered in the social context in which it was produced and in its relation to society, science and art itself. This concern mirrored contemporary artists' involvement with CND and the establishment of groups such as sigma and the sTigma exhibition, with both of which Criton Tomazos was involved.

Notwithstanding his contact with artists such as Cyril Mann and Geoffrey Wickham, Criton Tomazos' artistic development in London was in relative isolation until in 1961 he joined the Hampstead branch of the CND. As a result of a letter in Peace News from the writer Peter Currell Brown in 1962 suggesting a joint exhibition of CND committed

artists, he met Jeff Nuttall who was well connected and active in the Underground.<sup>6</sup> Jeff Nuttall formed part of a number of interconnected groups of artists, including Arts Together - a branch of the Finchley Society of Arts - which was divided into Writers' Forum and Group H - the visual arts' section.<sup>7</sup> Artists involved in these groups included the concrete poet Bob Cobbing, Keith Musgrove and Heather Richardson, John Latham, Bruce Lacey, Dick Wilcocks, Jeff Nuttall and Criton Tomazos.<sup>8</sup> These groups frequently met and exhibited at Better Books, a bookshop in Charing Cross Road, which was run by the American poet and member of Writers' Forum Bill Butler and then by Bob Cobbing. Another influential and related group was sigma. Sigma was founded in 1964 by Alexander Trocchi and had as loose affiliates many of the same artists involved in Group H but also through the affiliation of Dr. Joseph Berke, David Cooper, and Ronald Laing provided the bridge to the Philadelphia Association and the Kingsley Hall experiment in which many artists, including Criton Tomazos and Tom McGrath (1940-2009), would be involved and also through its diverse membership provided links with other avant-garde groups such as *Lettriste International* and *Fluxus*.<sup>9</sup>

Criton Tomazos' relationship with these various artists and groups was never to be unproblematic. His traditional Greek Cypriot background

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<sup>6</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, pp.148-150; Criton Tomazos unpublished interview with Stephen Carruthers, 28th October 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, pp.158ff.; Criton Tomazos unpublished interview with Stephen Carruthers, 12th November 1989.

<sup>8</sup> For a complete list see Nuttall, *op. cit.*, pp.158-159.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Trocchi: *The Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds*; published as 'Technique du coupe du monde', Internationale Situationniste #8 (January 1963) and *sigma, a Tactical Blueprint*, in City Lights Journal No. 2 (1968), ed. Lawrence Ferlinghetti; see also Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture - Utopian Currents From Lettrisme to Class War* (London, 1988), pp.20, 37; and Stiles, *op.cit, passim*.

meant that his contact with the Underground, where social conventions were being tested to their limits, was traumatic both in a personal and artistic sense. He was a double outsider who had to break through both his own taboos and barriers and also those of society erected against a person outside the Establishment. It is a tribute to his inquiring and open spirit that he resolved nevertheless to participate and contribute his own particular sense of proportion and rationality to this essentially anarchic movement.

### **STIGMA TO THE CAGE: CHAOS INTO ORDER**

The first concrete expression of the meeting between Jeff Nuttall and Criton Tomazos was to follow up Peter Currell Brown's idea and plan for an anti-bomb exhibition. The two artists prepared sketches, plans and letters proposing an environmental installation and submitted them first to the Vicar of St Martins-in-the-Fields. Criton Tomazos prepared a fully developed proposal for a baroque-type installation combined with modern images for the crypt of the church. The ideas were also submitted to Bryan Robertson at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. In both cases their ideas proved too provocative and their application was unsuccessful.<sup>10</sup> However, through Bob Cobbing and Bill Butler, the basement of Better Books was made available for the project. Better Books was already used as a venue by artists such as John Latham, Charles Marowitz of the LAMDA Theatre, Ken Dewey and Jeff Nuttall for happenings: John Latham spreading marmalade on books and offering them to the audience and Jeff Nuttall engaging in happenings involving animal offal and the audience in a way reminiscent of the work of the Viennese

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<sup>10</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, p. 137; Criton Tomazos Interview of 28th October 1989.

Actionists.<sup>11</sup>

Criton Tomazos made plans and a model for the sTigma exhibition at the Better Books basement and construction was started in 1965. Different sections of the basement were allocated to Criton Tomazos, Jeff Nuttall, Bruce Lacey, Keith Musgrove and Heather Richardson, John Latham, David Trace and Islwyn (Nick) Watkins; other artists involved included John Moore, Dick Wilcocks and Jean Michaelson.<sup>12</sup> While the original plan for the sTigma exhibition was devised by Criton Tomazos, each artist was responsible for their own space. For Criton Tomazos and Jeff Nuttall the idea behind the exhibition was in line with Peter Currell Brown's original letter - namely a statement of commitment by each of the artists to expose the dangers of armageddon posed by the atomic bomb and reveal the creative possibilities of the human imagination:

“It was propagandist rather than art. Its brutality, its nauseous elements were intended to enforce life and inspire compassion, an angry diagnosis intended to provoke correction.”<sup>13</sup>

In this sense they were treading in the footsteps of the dadaists and surrealists. For Criton Tomazos, it was the first time he had worked so closely with other artists and was given the opportunity to express his personal vision in such a tactile and concrete form. Nevertheless the number of artists involved, and the differing intentions of each, meant

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<sup>11</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, p.234; and see note 2. above

<sup>12</sup> Nuttall. *op. cit.*, pp.234-237; and Criton Tomazos, Interview of 28th October 1989, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, p.235.

that the final result did not fully reflect the original harmony of purpose. This would only be realised in his subsequent environmental project - The Cage.

The actual layout of sTigma is recorded by Jeff Nuttall in his book *Bomb Culture*.<sup>14</sup> The space created by Criton Tomazos was a womb-like room constructed out of plaster sheets and wood under which the audience could crawl and inside of which was an object - a doll's hand in a plastic red circle - and which was all illuminated in a flickering pulsating light.<sup>15</sup>

Several points can be made about the significance of sTigma: the first is the degree of audience participation required which linked it firmly to the burgeoning Happening movement – it was a laborious physical effort for the visitor. Secondly, the sensorial nature of the experience involving smell, sound, touch and sight was an attempt to free art from the confines of the canvas and link it to the totality of experience; a direction already taken by the Situationists and the Fluxus artists.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly, the influence of William Burroughs, Alexander Trocchi and Allen Ginsberg was prevalent with recordings of their texts being used and copies of Jeff Nuttall's Burroughs-inspired publication '*My Own Mag*' on display. The use of psychological symbols and the environmental nature of sTigma also linked to the work of Laing and others at Kingsley Hall in East London, where Criton Tomazos and

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<sup>14</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, pp.235-236; Criton Tomazos, Interview of 28th October 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Criton Tomazos Interview of 28th October 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Wiesbaden Fluxus 1962-1982, Harlekin Art (1983); Kristine Stiles, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Myriam D. Maayan, *From Aesthetic to Political Vanguard - Situationist International 1957-1968*, in *Arts Magazine* (January 1989) pp.49-53; Stewart Hane, *op. cit.*, pp.31-56.

other artists involved in sTigma were already visiting and participating in performances and lectures.

The most immediate effect of sTigma, however, was in line with its Dadaist roots, namely to shock. Both the audience and the media reacted to the environment in an often hostile and unpredictable way.<sup>17</sup> This reaction and internal dissensions between the artists, meant that sTigma ended abruptly and somewhat acrimoniously in March 1965.

Criton Tomazos had the original idea for The Cage at the time of the sTigma exhibition. It was to constitute a progression of his original – unrealized – plans for St. Martins in the Field crypt and the sTigma exhibition. sTigma had pioneered the original idea of Criton Tomazos and Jeff Nuttall for an organic exhibition leading the visitor through a number of varied experiences. In the light of the problems experienced in realizing the previous projects, Criton Tomazos in The Cage decided to develop a concept free from restrictions which could later be realized if a space could be found.<sup>18</sup>

The Cage was designed as a multi-level experience contained in a six-storey building. Criton Tomazos designed the entire building to be constructed out of tubular metal scaffolding, inspired in part by the dense scaffolding at that time erected for the complex formwork and casting in concrete of the Hayward Gallery, and to adopt a flexible flooring material for the platforms to allow for easy and cost effective construction and also permit maximum flexibility of use. Within this

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<sup>17</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, pp.236-237.

<sup>18</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12th November 1989.

structure Criton Tomazos devised a complete environmental installation. However, this proposal was seen as only one suggestion for the use of the space in which he envisaged other artists would also be invited to create their own environments - thus fulfilling the functions of a new-style of arts centre along the lines to be followed at the Pompidou Centre.

The environment designed for *The Cage* by Criton Tomazos started with the visitor descending, surrounded by noises and other sensorial experiences, through a spiral hole in the ground into the 'Numeral Machine Room', containing representations of elements of the human body, and into a long, slightly nightmarish, tunnel in the form of a corridor with doors on each side - some locked, some open - and a false perspective created through mirrors. At the end of this corridor, the visitor entered a lift which went to the top floor of the building only, the fifth floor. They then descended through each of five interconnected levels each of which was a different experience - named respectively: *Leave Nothing To The Imagination* (Level Two or fifth floor); *Train For Life* (Level Three); *Time Stomach* (Level Four); *Needs To Be Shot* (Level Five); *Get Out Of It And Be Free* (Ground Level and Exit).

Criton Tomazos produced detailed drawings for each of these Levels which, as in the case of his earlier projects, involved a multi-sensorial surrealist experience with the Levels linked by sound, smells and noises. In addition to the internal experiences, the outside of the building was used as a continuation of the internal space, as for example a corridor on Level Two continuing to the outside with the inscription 'Please Jump' and, on Level Three, an 'eyecone' with a suspended

figure hanging from the edge of the building.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to exhibiting his plans for *The Cage* at Better Books and St. Martins College of Art,<sup>20</sup> Criton Tomazos collaborated with a number of artists in producing a model of *The Cage* and a photomontage book to translate the project in the specific terms of that medium. The model of *The Cage*, which has unfortunately been lost, was made with the assistance of the architect Vassily Dimitriou. It was constructed of brass rods to scale and one side lifted off to reveal the interior.<sup>21</sup> The photomontage book was designed by Criton Tomazos and executed in collaboration with Jeff Nuttall, Dick Wilcocks, David Trace, the sculptor Evelyn Reifen, the photographer Don Priston and Vassily Dimitriou. It was conceived as an imaginative attempt to translate the experience of *The Cage* in terms of photomontage using the techniques of ‘cut-up’. Consisting of spontaneous photographs of diverse visual experiences ranging from junk yards to works of art such as Michael Angelo’s *David*, the book represented Criton Tomazos’ attempt to create continuity through diverse types of images representing something specific, i.e. the experience in *The Cage*.<sup>22</sup>

It is no exaggeration to say that *The Cage*, notwithstanding it remains unrealised in its full-scale form, is a seminal work of the 1960s Underground movement, although as yet largely unrecognised. As Jeff Nuttall says:

“It illustrates the eloquent and architectural use of space and

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<sup>19</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12th November 1989 and original plans of *The Cage* held by Criton Tomazos.

<sup>20</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, pp.155, 158.

<sup>21</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12th November 1989.

<sup>22</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12th November 1989.



proportion rather than the angry claustrophobic impositions of the sTigma.”<sup>23</sup>

In *The Cage*, Criton Tomazos transcended the chaos of sTigma and produced a concept that drew together the varied ideas prevalent in the early sixties in the Underground but balanced them with his sense of classical space and architectural form. The concept of an environmental space within which a multi-sensorial experience is created links the work of Criton Tomazos with that of a number of other artistic projects both of that period and after. Bruce Lacey, with whom Criton Tomazos had worked closely on sTigma, made an environment entitled ‘*Journey through the organs of the human body*’ in 1968 for the City of London Festival.<sup>24</sup> The Fluxus artist George Maciunas created in 1976 a *Fluxuslabyrinth* in Berlin which created a multi-sensorial environment that: ‘...is conceptually close to the aborted Situationist plan of ‘59-60 for building a labyrinth in the Stadelijk Museum, Amsterdam’.<sup>25</sup> What is extraordinary is that Criton Tanazos, who had entered contact with the Underground only four years earlier, was able to produce a work of such maturity and synthesis so early in his artistic development.

Apart from his installation work, Criton Tomazos was continuing to work in a wide variety of other media. In his painting, he had, through his contact with Cyril Mann in the late 1950s, moved away from his earlier idealistic work based on imagination to a direct confrontation with reality through the study of nature. In the early 1960s, he used this new confidence in expressing reality to move from still life to surrealist

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<sup>23</sup> Jeff Nuttall, *op. cit.*, p.155.

<sup>24</sup> See: Bruce Lacey, *Forty Years of Assemblages Environments and Robots*, Main Gallery, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 25 February - 6 April 1975.

<sup>25</sup> Home, *op. cit.*, p.58; see also Note 16.

influenced representations of his dreams both in oil and watercolour-based works. Titles of the main compositions of this period, many of which have been lost, include ‘*A Time for Sowing and A Time for The Harvest*’ (1962) , ‘*With Clean Hands*’ -a representation of *Ecce Homo* which was an abstract composition based on mathematical proportions- and ‘*The Crime*’ - based on the Parable of The Good Samaritan expanded into contemporary society. By the mid-1960s, Criton Tomazos was increasingly using found materials which he transformed into objects; for example he would take relatively fragile objects like boxes, tailors’ dummies, and plastic dolls and transform their signification by deforming or adding to them. He also was experimenting with junk sculptural pieces. On the basis of this work, Criton Tomazos was invited by the auto-destructive artist Gustav Metzger to participate in the Destruction in Art Symposium in London (DIAS) which took place on 9, 10 and 11 September 1966.<sup>26</sup>

DIAS was a major gathering of international artists around the theme of destruction in art organised by Gustav Metzger and John Sharkey and was attended by many of the artists with whom Criton Tomazos had been working closely, such as John Latham, Bob Cobbing, and Jeff Nuttall. Criton Tomazos was at the time exhibiting an environmental collage and a construction at the Gallery Number Ten in Blackheath, by invitation of the artist Brian Lane, in which he used collage as a means of creating a fragmented view of the world by juxtaposing mass media images of themes such as violence and pornography.<sup>27</sup> As a result, his direct involvement in DIAS was limited to some of the conferences. However, Criton Tomazos shared many of the same concerns as the

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<sup>26</sup> See Note 5.

<sup>27</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989.

artists participating and saw the common denominator in DIAS as an attempt, in the light of the threat of nuclear destruction, to re-experience existence and revitalise the ontological relationship to oneself, nature and others rather than the elaborate existing social structures.<sup>28</sup>

## **TOWARDS A NEW COMMUNICATION**

By 1966 the financial and personal situation of Criton Tomazos was in crisis. He had given up his job in the architectural department of the GLC working on the design of the Hayward Gallery and decided to return to Cyprus to re-establish links with family and country. Criton Tomazos spent the period from the end of 1966 to July 1967 in Cyprus. In this time he attempted to resolve the alienation that had resulted from the radical confrontations with his previous value system that he encountered over the past five years.<sup>29</sup> He visited friends, familiar places and family and taped interviews with his parents in an attempt to piece together a coherent image of his life again. This intensely introspective stage was accompanied by painting and writing - two activities he had been pursuing alongside his environmental pieces. It was also the time of the Colonels' coup in Greece and this contributed to making the period exceptionally rich in terms of experience.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989.

<sup>29</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989.

In July 1967, Criton Tomazos returned to London to attend the Dialectics of Liberation Conference organised by The Philadelphia Association in connection with a number of other groups, which included debates and multi-media performances by artists such as Mark Boyle. During the conference, Criton Tomazos stayed with the U.S. activist Harold Pinkus, a member of the Philadelphia Association. However, his decision to leave regular employment combined with the cramped conditions in which he lived, was reflected in his artistic development over the next few years - from the large-scale projects of the early 1960s towards the use of collage, drawing and spontaneous happenings. This development also represented a continuation of the work he had started on his visit to Cyprus to recreate past experiences through the use of tape and other media and followed spontaneously in the line of similar research conducted by Laing and others at the time. Communication also became an increasingly central concern in Criton Tomazos' work and was eventually to lead him in the 1970s towards the media of theatre and film.

Collage was one of the central media Criton Tomazos used to rediscover a deeper reality behind the conditioning of the images produced by the mass-media. By superimposing images, both found and created, on the printed word through a process of free association he sought to create his own space that still retained its links to the existing reality. Parallels to his work in this field can be seen in the collages of the German artist Wolf Vostell<sup>31</sup> and the work of the concrete Poet Bob Cobbing and

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<sup>31</sup> Wolf Vostell, *DeCollagen Verwischungen Schichtenbilder Bleibilder Objectbilder*, 1955-1979, Kunstverein Braunschweig, 31 August-26 October 1980.

other members of Writers' Forum as well as *Oz*, *IT* and other publications of the time. In collaboration with a small circle of friends, he also created envelope collages, which they used to communicate these ideas with each other. While these experiments had no direct connection with the various Mail Art movements,<sup>32</sup> they reveal the way Criton Tomazos' development was following many of the themes that were or would become central to sections of the avant-garde.

Criton Tomazos was also at the time practicing a technique of single line drawing, which was a development from drawings he had made on holiday in Cornwall in 1964 and at the time of the bombing of Tillyria in Cyprus in 1964 by the Turkish airforce.<sup>33</sup> His interest in communication was also revealed in cut-ups he made from different newspapers, often in different languages, which he recombined and printed as a new paper and spontaneous Happenings he carried out on public transport. These Happenings included sitting on the tube reading a newspaper opposite other people reading and slowly cutting a hole in the paper or sitting opposite people staring at an apple or a pear - which often so deranged people that they got up and left him alone in an empty carriage.<sup>34</sup>

Criton Tomazos' growing interest in issues related to communication was to lead in 1970 to the creation of Environmental Forum. The ideas behind Environmental Forum can be linked with the work of Bob Cobbing, John Rowan, and others involved in Writers' Forum and Group H. At the time of DIAS, Group H had had a show combining visual arts with sound poetry readings at the Drian Galleries and this was

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<sup>32</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989; and see Chapters 13 and 14 of *Home*, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989; and see Nuttall, *op. cit.* p.147.

<sup>34</sup> Criton Tomazos, Interview of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1989.

followed up in 1970 with a group show at the Students' Gallery in Herne Hill. Criton Tomazos participated in this show and came into contact with the gallery owner, Kenneth Swain, and together they had the idea of Environmental Forum as one month of free events which would involve anything from lectures, slide shows, music, poetry, to paintings; i.e. a free agenda. The success of this event, in which a wide range of artists participated, led Criton Tomazos and Kenneth Swain, in conjunction with the writer Ian Robinson, to continue Environmental Forum as an ongoing event with regular meetings. It was also decided to produce an anthology of work by artists, through an advertisement in *Time Out*, on the basis that the first page by any one contributor would be automatically accepted, but that subsequent pages would be subject to a decision by the Editorial Committee of Criton Tomazos, Kenneth Swain, Ian Robinson and Ria Parsons. Artists published in the anthology included, Marcel Broodthaers, Jeff Nuttall, Bob Cobbing, Ian Robinson, and Robert de Boek.

While the form and content of Environmental Forum was in many cases unexceptional, it had the unique feature of avoiding the normal channels of distribution and allowing each individual artist complete control over their own product, in terms both of content and lay-out, since the only condition on the work submitted was that it was capable of being printed. It also represented the continuation and development of many of the ideas that had pre-occupied Criton Tomazos during the decade – namely the creation of multi-media experiences, the problem of communication within the existing structures of mass media dominance, the combined use of text and images to subvert established meanings, and co-operation between artists in ways that respected

their autonomy and individuality. In the mid-1970s, Criton Tomazos was to continue the idea of publishing occasional anthologies under the name of Environmental Forum, primarily as a means of communicating his own work in the field of architecture, theatre, the environment, and visual arts generally.<sup>35</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS**

One of the principal problems in assessing the work of Criton Tomazos is that, as in the case of many of his contemporary artists, financial difficulties, problems of storage and the ephemeral nature of much of his artistic production has meant that much has been lost or destroyed or never had the support necessary to progress beyond the stage of projects and proposals. In addition, while many of the visual artists most closely involved in what may loosely be described as the Environmental Installation movement, such as John Latham, Bruce Lacey and Criton Tomazos, have had individual shows they have not been recognized as a coherent movement. Unlike other contemporary artists such as the Pop Artists or the earlier Independent Group, the group has not gained such ready acceptance by art historians and the art market.

However, the difficulty of classifying Criton Tomazos' work also reflects one of its fundamental aspects; his refusal to be labeled within a particular style or technique. He believes in the complete freedom of the artist and saw the dogmatic way in which many modern movements such as abstract art were interpreted as restrictive of the artist's

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<sup>35</sup> Environmental Forum Publications; Collection of Criton Tomazos.

self-determination. He sees the role of the artist as penetrating the visible phenomena which are available for all and suggest the underlying realities. This search for complete control over every aspect of his own production also brought him into conflict with the existing means of distribution of artists' work such as galleries, patrons and sponsors, and led him to rely on his own initiatives, either individual or collective, to bring his work into the public domain.

The continuing influence of Cyprus is another key element in situating Criton Tomazos' work in relation to the other Underground artists of the 1960s. While this influence was constantly under pressure of being submerged by the weight of the novel experiences he encountered on his arrival in England and the flowering of the Underground movement, it re-emerged at crucial periods in his development, often as the result of violent contemporaneous events. Thus the development of his single line drawing technique in 1964 was given added passion and direction by the bombing in the same year with napalm of villages in Northern Cyprus, including places and people he knew from childhood and resulted in a series of personal drawings entitled *Napalm Bombs*. While Cyprus often shook Criton Tomazos with the brutal realities of the world, it also provided a place of refuge and renewal when the pressures and conflicts endemic in the Underground movement became excessive. This legacy also provided a source of inspiration for many of his paintings, such as the *Discus Thrower* and *Seismic Face*, which re-interpret traditional Greek themes in the light of modern concerns.

Another key element in the work of Criton Tomazos was the balance he sought and achieved in *The Cage*, between the Dionysian impulses that



characterised the work and interests of many of the artists with whom he worked, and his more Apollonian approach that was strengthened by his training in architecture and his early contact with Cyril Mann. This concern for balance also mirrored his emphasis on stressing that an artist's work should always be analysed in terms of the social and political context in which it was produced. This approach was typical of the artists centered around the Ban the Bomb movement who felt it was morally indefensible for artists to ignore the threat of Armageddon. As the 1960s progressed this concern for social and political context was increasingly replaced by a growing interest in subjective and inter-personal communication, resulting from the influence of the anti-psychiatry school headed by Laing and Cooper and the LSD-inspired theories of Ken Kesey and Timothy Leary. In terms of literature, the influence of Ginsberg and Burroughs was decisive while in the field of visual arts the emphasis was on Happenings and mixed media events.<sup>36</sup>

The work of Criton Tomazos in the 1960s, while in many respects incomplete, fully reflected the myriad of influences that characterised the period. At the same time, he succeeded in imposing his own particular contribution onto the period in the field of visual arts, environmental installations, performance, collage and mixed media by never letting these diverse and often alien influences overwhelm his own artistic identity founded in his Cypriot background and matured through his studies with Cyril Mann and his course of architecture, and, most significantly, his contact with the Underground movement in London in the 1960s.

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<sup>36</sup> Nuttall, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

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