



**MC Spex, one of the
Invasion rappers who
emerged from an ADFED
workshop, takes the mike.**

Gary Stewart's capsule biography, created for the spring 2001 online dialogue among the authors of this anthology, offers a particularly vivid description of the new-media territory he has chosen as the focus for his community cultural development work:

I occupy a fascinating space between cutting-edge, sometimes bleeding-edge technology and direct community action, with many years' experience in electronic media as a tutor, designer and producer with a special interest in the relationship between culture, technology and creativity.

Currently, Gary is Head of Multimedia at the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA) in London, a group that offers exhibitions, publications, multimedia, education and research projects designed to bring the work of artists from culturally diverse backgrounds to the widest possible public. He is also a consultant to the European Multicultural Media Agency (EMMA), which promotes youth advocacy, cultural animation and new technologies. Much of the work discussed in this interview was done for ADF Education (ADFED), the educational wing of Asian Dub¹ Foundation, a London-based music group.

The main subject of this interview is Gary's work with young people, exploring technical and cultural issues by creating music and developing computer games. It would be fair to say such work is on the "bleeding edge" of a hot debate for the community cultural development field. Breaking down the one-way relationship between young people and the media seems essential: learning to use these tools for their own ends is obviously a major improvement over the given relationship, based on the much narrower roles as consumers of what is marketed by others. Questions posed by other community artists as they have heard about this work indicate the nature of the debate: Can the same high-tech tools that have advanced globalization be effectively used to advance liberty and democracy? Can the marketplace really support cultural development? How does work created with the techniques and technologies of marketplace media differ from commercial music or commercial computer games?

Beyond these questions, the way that Gary's work is predicated on a mix of cultural influences is very different from some other essays' focus on protecting cultures from alien influences. It asserts a cultural fluidity, a positive dimension to the dynamic interaction of cultures in developed multicultural societies. It is challenging—and to some, a little daunting—to consider that the goals of community cultural development can be advanced by the strategic use of computer games as much as by Forum Theater or community dance, but this interview makes a strong argument to that effect.

The interview with Gary Stewart was conducted by Arlene Goldbard on October 19, 2001. Interspersed with some sections of Gary's interview, readers will find additional material on the ADFED workshops based on an interview Gary himself conducted on November 5, 2001, with Anirudda Das, bass player with ADF, and Lisa Das, who is responsible for running ADFED.

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¹ "Dub" describes a studio-based music methodology originating in Jamaica in the 1970s, in which a song's backing tracks are treated with studio effects to create new versions.

Digital Diaspora

YOUNG PEOPLE, TECHNOLOGY
AND CONTESTED SPACES

An Interview With Gary Stewart

We've always believed that the most effective campaigning method is through great art. If you are making progressive statements, the form has to be progressive too.

CHANDRASONIC, ASIAN DUB FOUNDATION

We began this interview by talking about the Music Technology Workshops that Gary has been involved with for ADFED. Here's how they are described on ADFED's Web site (www.asiandubfoundation.com):

THE MUSIC TECHNOLOGY WORKSHOPS

The major aims of the workshop are:

- To nurture the desire to create music.
- To encourage the creation of original and innovative music.
- To teach the participants skills in Music Technology and, using their own musical experiences as a starting point, develop their music and lyric writing.
- To promote the use of relatively inexpensive, user-friendly equipment that gives high quality sounds.
- To encourage performance, develop performance skills and promote attitudes of mutual support.

Over each ten-week block of workshops the participants will learn about MIDI, Sampling, Sequencing, Programming and Recording, as well as learning to use their own instruments with music technology instruments, developing turntable skills, vocal skills and microphone techniques. The trainees have the opportunity to perform their work in the Showcase Events.

Ongoing assessment is given by our tutors to students and throughout our projects we encourage students to fundraise to buy their own equipment and consider studying further music courses.

Arlene Goldbard: Please start by describing the project.

Gary Stewart: It's going to be quite interesting talking about it, because I'll have to distinguish between two things: we have Asian Dub Foundation, the group, which is an internationally known group who came out of what was known as the Community Music Workshop (www.cmonline.org.uk) in the mid-'90s. Because of the cultural ethos behind that—in other words, because they were a kind of collective group—when Asian Dub Foundation came together, they themselves were passionate and determined to establish an educational wing, and ADFED emerged.

AG: What is the Community Music Workshop?

GS: About 10 years ago, it was founded in London as a sort of improvisation and experimental music group by a jazz drummer; his name was John Stevens. What was really good about it was that he was particularly keen to challenge the way roles were perceived in some bands. He was encouraging all individuals to take responsibility for what they do, so there wasn't your traditional sort of drummer, your lead person or whatever. So that's the starting point. Two members from Asian Dub Foundation used to teach at Community Music, and it informed their methodology for working.

And then we have ADFED, the educational wing of Asian Dub Foundation who, although they embrace technology, embrace what you might call cheaper, obsolete technology. And that is quite deliberate in many respects, because the workshops are orientated in such a way as to try and ensure that people will continue to work with some kind of music making; it would be nonsense to encourage the adoption of so-called latest, greatest technology—I guess you might say “technological masturbation.” So it's crucial to understand that when I make references to technology, what I'm really talking about is cheap or obsolete technology and, in particular, sampling² technology. That's crucial, because the workshops themselves are orchestrated in such a way as to encourage participants to manipulate samples, quoting from musical found-imagery.

What happens during these workshops, first and foremost, is the term that Asian Dub Foundation came up with: “conscious party mode.” It echoes many historical references to celebratory expression. It's a careful balancing act in terms of encouraging these young people's participation, to be able to sustain that participation so that they learn the tools themselves, but also importantly, working with developing their awareness of particular issues of inequality. None of these workshops happen in a vacuum. They don't just come in and start making noises, though we work with that as well, of course.

²Sampling technology enables musicians to make digital recordings, borrowing portions of existing music to create derivative work with or without further electronic manipulation.

AG: So in conscious party mode, the emphasis is on *conscious*?

GS: Exactly. Everybody there has a belief that music is the ultimate form of communication because it has life-changing potential, even if they don't say it exactly that way. The workshops are very much about participants defining a public image of themselves.

AG: As committed to changing lives through music?

GS: No. These predominantly Asian young people, the way that they're viewed in this society is really quite dismal, the way that they continually see references to themselves in a distorted way in magazines, on television and in the media. An example might be the uncritical way the music industry talks about what they term "second-generation Asians." They make reference to fusion, a word that is despised by ADFED.

From Gary's interview with Anirudda Das:

Gary: ADF have been described in terms of fusion. What are your thoughts?

Ani: Yeah, a lot of people say that. But to us fusion is more about a deliberate bringing together of disparate elements for the sake of it—the tourist mentality. For us, we have supposedly disparate sounds or things that you are not supposed to put together, but all of it is different sounds that we happen to hear. It's like we always used to say in the early days of community music, there was awful sound-proofing so you would hear someone programming jungle³ in one room, a percussion workshop in another room and a horn workshop in another, and occasionally you would hear the three of them together and just for an instant it would work, which is really good. Or we would be working on an ADF track and outside, people were doing a vocal workshop in the courtyard, and the next thing you know they had all their faces pressed against the window singing. Or another time I was programming stuff, and people could hear the bass line through the walls, and they were doing an acoustic workshop, and they said their rhythm kept being drawn toward the bass line.

Ours is more about cultural leakage. Because I had been brought up with Indian folk music and classical music and also being exposed to everything else that everybody else hears, it's kind of normal to incorporate those elements. It's as simple as that: it really isn't fusion; it's more like

³Urban, nonlinear, poly-rhythmic music at extremely high tempo—160 beats per minute—originating in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s

allowing the different voices. There are certain musical forms which become vehicles, notably hip-hop⁴ with its social commentary and to an extent dub and reggae because of the DJ⁵ vocals. I've heard of Native American people using hip-hop and also dub as well, but they are incorporating their own sounds, so to me again that is not a fusion; it's more like you are using a musical vehicle but putting your own experience to it. I think we have to turn the question on its head and realize that all music and all culture and language is a consequence of cross-fertilization and a meeting of peoples; that's one of the main things that ADF draws attention to.

⁴A musical form incorporating a disc jockey manipulating recordings, rapping, break dancing and graffiti writing that originated in New York in the mid-1970s.

⁵Disc jockey, the person responsible for playing records.

GS: You've spoken of the "dynamic interaction of cultures" as a positive thing. In terms of their musical expression, there's a particular definition of second-generation Asians as being a product of cultural fusion, and that's seen as diluting culture. But the point is, culture constantly moves very fast and doesn't have to dilute anything. The kind of music that comes out is a natural consequence of being brought up in this country with all its different influences and diverse elements. It's not part of fusion, it's just normal.

AG: In the century-old discourse of American cultural policy, one idea is the melting pot, which is an old version of fusion, where all cultures melt together into something gray and American. This is put up against other metaphors—a gumbo, a patchwork—things where the ingredients come together, but they remain distinct as well. Is that the contrast that you're talking about?

GS: Yes, that goes down the right road. During the workshops, they talk about how music can be constructed in a way that contains specific references to other pieces of musical composition, so it's a kind of intervention into the surrounding musical culture. What is being encouraged is the process of remaking and reordering, recontextualizing other materials, so that they can comment on their meaning by changing them—what I said about quoting from musical found-imagery. It isn't the melting pot. A sophisticated yet subtle process energizes the act of audio sampling—it's not merely a shortcut to production. Juxtaposing audio "quotes," which themselves are often fragments and/or abstracted, serves to add irony to the extracted material. The workshop participants also create sonically pleasurable "sound worlds" or environments made up of selected fragments informed by their own cultural history and experiences for their own sake.



MC Swift-E, MC Goldie Bling and Lady Shis-Tee (left to right) from Roundwood Youth Club show off performance skills learned through ADFED, the educational wing of Asian Dub Foundation.

AG: Are you a workshop leader? In a typical workshop, how many kids? How do they learn about it? How do they get there?

GS: I worked with the workshop leader “Spike” (Alan Strochan) with between 12 and 16 participants. Some of these young people are under cultural attack, and they’re not actually allowed to go and do extra activities. Their parents or guardians have to be convinced that a safe place for them can be provided so that they can interact with other people without being at risk.

It’s worked out as a 10-week block, and so there are specific technical headings that enable them to learn the specifics of music making. But in addition to that, other issues around racism and antideportation campaigns are discussed—they also bring up issues themselves, obviously. There are opportunities for them to talk about issues that affect them personally such as immigration legislation and more global issues, the links between racism and corporate power and Third World countries.

Basically, the music is used as a kind of metaphor. The workshops themselves are about exploring the rhythms of different sounds and exposing participants to connections. It’s a bit like an extended metaphor for the connections between people, economics and history.

AG: Boys and girls? Is it free?

GS: Predominantly boys, three quarters at least. There have been specific workshops for girls to encourage their expression. It is absolutely free.

AG: What happens at the end?

GS: At the end, they can get entry to gain a specific certificate as part of Community Music. The whole purpose behind the educational wing of Asian Dub Foundation—it's equipping and training, but it's also genuine empowerment and independence for these students. If they do wish to pursue some kind of role in the industry, they can go on, they've got an insight into it.

AG: Is this supported by income from Asian Dub Foundation's music?

GS: ADFED itself now gets some support from London Arts and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, so it's getting support as an independent organization.

AG: You said the workshops use "obsolete technologies." What do you mean?

GS: Superseded sampling machines are the core.⁶ There are two particular areas: the programming of the sampling machine and composition. The process of composition is really interesting. It isn't just a technical issue, because it carries emotional weight—certain sounds and certain themes and lyrics. A group of young people might be encouraged to sit around with pieces of paper, scribbling down ideas. But even at that point, they're treating scraps of paper in a way that might be manipulated as data within the computer as well. The computer is in effect a sampler itself: it provides a way of looking at sound, the weight and authority of lyrics and words themselves as a compositional tool.

⁶Often the Akia MPC 2000, a portable audio-sampling production studio that is a favorite of hip-hop producers in general.

AG: How do the kids experience this? Do they get the metaphor? Do you follow them to see what impact this has had?

GS: I don't think evaluation happens in a formal way. I think they're critical of each other, but in a kind of peer-to-peer way. The question of how they determine whether it's good or not—that is really an excellent question. They're pretty brutal critics. They are encouraged to analyze in a far more explicit way, rather than just say, "Well, it didn't sound very good," or "The lyrics sucked." As part of the workshops, they're asked to elaborate on their chosen topic, their chosen issue, how the form of presentation relates to the subject matter. But it's fairly hit-or-miss.

I've worked in situations where there's a conscious attempt to introduce a cultural and media studies aspect to the workshops, and I'd say in a group of 10 to 12, maybe two or three get it and extend that to much wider experiences of media, magazines and television.

That's one of the primary aims of the workshops, but there's no way over the course of 10 weeks that you can achieve everything.

From Gary's interview with Lisa Das:

Lisa: We run 20-week courses now, so we have expanded it quite a lot. But if we are working with, say, young people who have been involved in formal music education courses before, we generally start off where our tutor will do an induction session and in that session he will talk to them and find out what music they are into and he will go away and build tracks; so he's basically trying to pull them in by showing them that on the equipment we have here, you can build a track that you really love. We try to work with people who perhaps are ostracized from education, so they wouldn't feel comfortable in a formal setting. So although we try and teach the same quantifiable skills, we try and do it informally, and the tutor is really important to that because he is a musician himself with the same kind of interests.

Then he breaks the track down so they can hear each component, and then they go back to basics and begin to sample and learn how to sequence. It's very simple, but they are drawn into doing something that they really like and endorse in the first place. Most of them are into rap and stuff, so they want to develop their lyric-writing and performance skills. So we talk to them about what a track is about, what feeling it has, or pick up on something they might be talking about in the session. They might come in talking about somebody who has been knifed in the street or something. We pick up on that and talk about the wider issues surrounding it. Basically if they start saying, "Big up all the ladies" and stuff, we don't say, "No, don't do that," but we encourage them to talk about it, to discuss what does that mean and why are you saying that, what do you think about the people who say that. So we try and point them, but we can't dictate because we're not there to do that.

GS: Some issues are fairly immediate and their initial responses might be to hit out, or to articulate this in their lyrics as negative ways of moving forward—by that I mean either instigating violence against violence, or retribution. A lot of the battle of these workshops is in trying to find concrete examples of where we believe some difference has been made through nonviolent political action, for instance, or through the life-changing potential of music. It doesn't always work. But that's inevitable and appropriate; at times, I'm quite doubtful myself.

MC Aktarvata, another ADFED workshop participant, performs at Harlsden Community Center.



AG: If you were an advocate of violence, you'd be doubtful about whether that worked. All ways have their questions.

GS: Yes. The workshops are taking a slightly different direction since April, when Asian Dub Foundation went to Brazil and did a workshop there. You can read an account of their experiences at the Web site (www.asiandubfoundation.com).

AG: Is there some way they've brought that experience back to London and integrated it?

GS: The workshops are trying to move a little bit away from the idea that the course is solely about sampling and remixing as the core competency, so to speak. Participants were using it as a kind of shortcut. There's a balance with original authorship. I guess it's like if you're teaching visual literacy, you're trying to teach some of the historical basics such as color, composition and so on—enabling people to then go off and confidently express themselves.

AG: So there's more emphasis now on individual creation?

GS: The current MCs⁷—the Invasian rappers—have come out of one of the earlier workshops: Aktarvata, Spex and Krayzie. It's a group with a big international following, and they continue to be committed to the issues and the politics; but also people are still coming out of the workshop to play a fundamental role in the group itself. On the question of how Asian Dub Foundation is different from a traditional commercial band, that is what makes them absolutely unique.

⁷Derived from Master of Ceremonies, the person who hosts a public event.

This commitment and determination on their part has sometimes led to some anxiety from their recording label. A label first and foremost is motivated by sales, and although the sales are healthy, it's not always a commercially viable recipe for making maximum profit. They have an established audience, particularly in Japan, France and England; but when a record company takes you on, they want to maximize that profit.

Here we have a group that's in a unique position of actually having a distribution network. Certainly in my own experience, each group I've worked with has had a kind of unique and potent combination of authorship and quality of production, but not distribution—certainly not where they could create what you might call critical mass. Asian Dub Foundation are doing this right now, but not without its difficulties. Like all progressive innovation, it's not a stable situation.

AG: It sounds like Asian Dub Foundation is an entity, and different people front it at different times. Is that right? Is the loyalty of the audience there, even though the same guys are not on stage?

GS: That's a constant concern really, about who the audiences are. It's a little bit like gangsta rap: when you look at the majority of the audience, it's really made up of white indie kids.⁸ There is an issue about, "Are they actually listening?" This thing about conscious partying: in live situations, sometimes there's little doubt that they're jumping up and down enjoying themselves, but there's no proof they're actually listening to the words. Cynically at times I don't think they are. But what is unique about the whole Asian Dub Foundation/ADFED group itself is that they're working on so many different fronts: the live shows, the workshops, the sound systems,⁹ the Web site, the CD-ROM which they've done with the Commission for Racial Equality, the relationship with Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF).

⁸White suburban males, mostly college-aged, who identify with the inner-city urban ghetto.

⁹A highly organized system including self-made high-power portable PA (public address) and disco equipped with sound effects.

From Gary's interview with Lisa Das:

Gary: What is the working relationship with CARF?

Lisa: We started off thinking that we wanted our students to have a real social agenda in their music. We tried a partnership with CARF for some time, but it became too dictatorial because the students have their own issues and we realized that we wanted them to bring out their own issues rather than saying look at this and look at that. So now we try and do it more organically: we are trying to get them to look at their lyrics and issues that they might have just come in and started talking about, so it's not formalized really. But obviously we are still informed by CARF.

GS: There's a certain omnipresence. I remain hopeful, as [the members of ADFED] do, that by one means or another, or through reinforcement, being exposed on so many different fronts with a consistent message, it's going to make some difference.

AG: Yeah. There is this phrase, "multiple reinforcing messages." Advertisers use it. In a way, what you're saying is that they're using approaches that have commercial application—and they have a commercial application, too, but they have a different agenda.

GS: They do have a different agenda. The group had to fulfill a number of different commitments to pay for the Brazil trip. The workshops were paid for and organized by the British Council.¹⁰ There was the contrast between being in the northern part of Rio, a quite moving experience attended by young people, some of them giving an account of the prison uprising and the consequences of that, and then on another occasion performing on a beach with a very different audience.

AG: What you're saying is they're living the contradictions.

GS: They *are* the contradiction, in microcosm. But I'm encouraged in many respects, because ADFED is an integral part of Asian Dub Foundation, and that kernel of contradiction exists, but the workshops provide an opportunity for discussion.

AG: Let's talk about this theme a little bit, because it evokes questions of purity. If you're in the midst of that web of contradictions, then you're going to be constantly tempted and put in situations where it's not going to be clear which is the right road.

GS: My take on it is, I don't see Asian Dub Foundation as being pure and uncontaminated. I don't think there's such a thing. There's a process of contamination, and it's a matter of degree. But I see such tremendous positives, just in terms of the workshops themselves, that I can reconcile it in my own mind. I've accepted a degree of uncertainty.

AG: Some community arts people might feel this involves too much money, too dirty; some might say they'd rather be permanently marginal. I'm sympathetic to the other side of the argument, and what you're saying impresses me, because it sounds like these people are seriously trying to live the other side of the argument. You said that the positives you see justify dealing with the dangers of co-optation.

¹⁰The British Council has offices in 230 cities in 110 countries and territories that present and support programs in six sectors—arts, literature and design; education and training; English-language teaching; governance and human rights; information exchange and knowledge management; and science, engineering, technology and the environment, aimed at "enhancing the reputation of the United Kingdom in the world as a valued partner" (www.britcoun.org).

GS: I'm happy with it because of ADFED. It all comes down to property as well, doesn't it? Another aspect of this whole initiative has been not just the one workshop, but creating and supporting other workshops that are autonomous and have their own agendas. Spin-offs: I don't want to use the word franchise, because it's not McDonald's. It will be interesting to see what will happen when ADFED buys a building, whether that significantly changes things as well with all the things that come with that. And yet it seems like a natural progression: that they can have a place, an agency, an organization for cultural production that does it on different terms, not because they're motivated just by commercial viability, and how much money they can make, but it actually has a different kind of agenda.

It's close to happening. ADFED fulfills all the criteria for an inner-city conurbation, doesn't it? Deprived area with Asian youth involved in recent disturbances in Bradford and Oldham earlier in the year. It's aimed at young people, it's associated with the whole mentoring and apprenticeship scheme and national vocational qualifications, so it even speaks the speak. It can be submerged in a kind of certified worth if somebody needs to seek approval from their funding body.

AG: How long have the ADFED workshops been going?

GS: They started about three or four years ago. Many young people have gone through. I bump into them all the time. So many have been motivated by a passion to be involved in something that could really change their lives.

AG: And has it changed their lives?

GS: Yeah. It's not just because of Asian Dub Foundation. But had they not been occupied doing something like this, they would have gotten into some serious trouble. Something characteristic about second-generation Asians is that whereas the first generation was perceived to be passive, the second generation is very active. If you do anything to them, or if they think they're under threat in any way, they are less likely to ask questions. That's the kind of backdrop we're working against, trying to ensure that they don't respond in such a trigger-happy fashion. It's unfortunate but true that some of the music that they listen to, the very genre they use as inspiration for their own work, initially emerges from a homophobic, macho, extremely violent lyrical tradition. That's the starting point. If you did a kind of time-lapse photography from the beginning of the workshop, looking at the lyrics that they might have started with and at the end, there's a tremendous difference. I don't know about sustaining that change, but I'm encouraged by it.

AG: Did your daughter, Shakia, take a workshop?

GS: No, she didn't. She was involved in the initial computer games workshop. It's based on the same principle of learning skills in a social context, but they were very different: two very sharp ends of the industry.

AG: So you've done other projects that involve young people with technology and articulating what they have to say for themselves?

GS: The project was called *New Player*, involving eight to 10 young people between 14 and 18 in partnership with an organization called the "Weekend Arts College" (www.antialiasdesign.com/wac/). It's been going for about 20 years, and provides extracurricular activities for young people on the weekend. So inIVA worked with them over the course of the 1998–99 academic year with the intention of looking at different ways of making computer games, getting young people to author those games for themselves. It was a tremendously exciting project where the participants were given the opportunity to consider games that aren't merely beat-'em-ups, and came up with a number of really interesting scenarios which obviously aren't on the market. It was structured in such a way as to provide a kind of media-studies element with visiting critical commentators. And one of the projects we used as a catalyst for this was a piece of work from the artist Keith Piper called "Caught Like a Nigger in Cyberspace."

That particular piece really is about transgressive acts. You can't proceed in this game unless you're transgressive. It's really great: when young people play, they get to the end really quickly because the "no entry" signs encourage them to proceed. When you get older people—we had it in a gallery installation once—where you have these "no entry" signs, they were reluctant to click it. You get those cross hairs in a rifle, and you have to line it up with black figures and shoot them to proceed. So many people—understandably, actually—are rather uncomfortable; but unless you do that, you can't proceed. The workshop participants came up with a series of fragments; they're not computer games, because it would be difficult in two hours a week to make a full-blown game. But they've got all the elements of interaction and everything else. More importantly, they've created these fragments that look at the historical landscape in cyberspace, looking in particular at the neighborhoods they occupy. This is what they chose to do: reflect that within cyberspace itself with a scenario called *Cyber Ai*, a game concept that takes place in 2050, where the opening of *Robo-Tube*, a brand-new Cyber Artificial Intelligence Line, is

jeopardized by a group of hackers. This enabled them to consider the moral position of hackers and themselves in relation to society now and in the future.

AG: You mentioned inIVA here, but your work with ADFED: is that inIVA or you?

GS: It is me now, but this is how it worked: the initial work with ADFED, when ADFED started, was with inIVA, because we had initiated a project called Club Mix. It relates to Keith Piper again. In the exhibition that inIVA did with him, called “Relocating the Remains,” which was a retrospective of his work, there were two particular comments that stood out: Why did we do it at the gallery in the Royal College? How will people get to see it? That was one comment, which was quite legitimate. The second one was, “This is great material. It has tremendous potential resonance for a much younger audience who do not visit art galleries.” And so we put together a project known as the Club Mix, which was about creating music and visuals that had social content, not merely abstracted visuals, to play in clubs.

We did the initial workshop, and I did some workshops independently around the country with other groups, and one of the workshops I did was with the ADFED, using Keith’s work as a catalyst. It was tremendous. It was incredibly politically charged. They were just astonished by the quality—it’s that classic thing, I’ve experienced it myself in the early ’80s, where you’re working with a community group and the process is fine but the product isn’t very good at all, and they just don’t want to claim ownership of it. But here they had something which they just thought was astonishing. They wanted an opportunity to create their own visuals, which they did in combination with a little agit-prop, slogans and visual sampling. The performance was actually one of the most emotionally moving evenings of my life—all these potent and incredible visuals, some of which were created in the workshops, happening in a club to an absolutely packed house. I don’t know that everybody else made the connection: they were probably just dancing to the music.

The ADFED workshops themselves had started about four or five months prior to that, but I think that made a tremendous difference. By itself, the political dimension of the Campaign Against Racism & Fascism might have been perceived as a rather dry entity, unpalatable for young people. But here they had something that was incredibly expressive, vibrant. It wasn’t just MTV with content; it was more than the sum of its parts. There was subtlety and a kind of communicative power in those pieces of work that translated well and required very little explanation on our part of what it was about.

AG: There's a thread that runs through all of your work.

GS: What interests me in particular is the history of contemporary youth resistance. That's the underlying common denominator of all the work. It's about how young people—particularly working class, black, female or whatever, those who've grown up under conditions of oppression—how they work with a dominant system of authority. All these projects are articulations of that cultural resistance.

AG: Is that your personal story too?

GS: Yeah, I guess so. It's very much about taking resistance in popular culture as a starting point. It's an extraordinarily powerful dynamic. Yeah, it is my story. I'd forgotten in many respects.

There's empathy happening throughout this, isn't there? It's not like I'm a benign, inert, neutral observer. If anything, I am delighted by the extraordinary expressions from these young people in such an incredibly articulate way, in a way that I was 10 years older than they are before I began to grasp the issues they are dealing with. I find that extraordinarily uplifting. It gives me hope for the future.

AG: You didn't have someone like yourself.

GS: True. It's fantastic to see how their definition of self and cultural identity is so evident and so explicit.

AG: They know who they are way before you did?

GS: Yeah. That's where you want to channel those energies and that vitality in a socially cohesive way, because what happens sometimes is that energy is misguided: you see it in nationalist ideologies being perpetuated, rather than celebrating the diversity of their communities, celebrating the energy in that and how they relate to other people. The workshops are an important means to circumvent that. It's really, really crucial.