



ELEPHANT

THE ART & VISUAL CULTURE MAGAZINE



CHRISTOPHER DOYLE
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by Marc Valli

VAUGHAN

Vaughan Oliver's Extreme Regions

**THE
MINOTAUR
IN
THE
LABYRINTH**

OLIVER

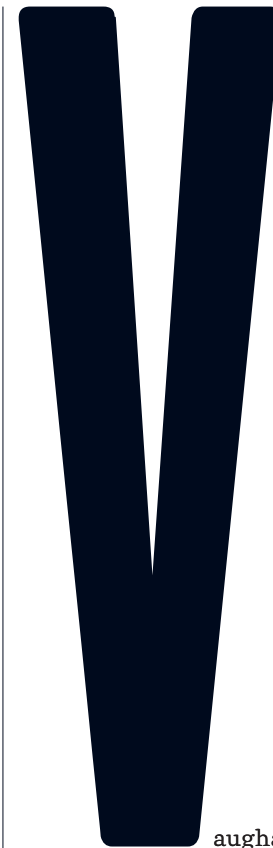
Portrait by Giles Revell

'Fame requires every kind of excess. I mean true fame, a devouring neon... I mean danger, the edge of every void, the circumstance of one man imparting an erotic terror to the dreams of the republic. Understand the man who must inhabit these extreme regions, monstrous and vulval, damp with memories of violation. Even if half-mad he is absorbed into the public's total madness: even if fully rational, a bureaucrat in hell, a secret genius of survival, he is sure to be destroyed by the public's contempt for survivors... (Is it clear I was a hero of rock'n'roll?)'

— Don DeLillo, 'Great Jones Street'

It is difficult to think of Vaughan Oliver without making the connection to music. His story seems to belong to the music rather than the design world, following a path that's closer to that of a legend of rock'n'roll than a visual art one. Early success, through seemingly irresistible, natural stylistic experimentation, followed by the creation of haunting, iconic works that capture the mood of a particular period, followed by cult status, followed by silence. A burning planet flashing across the night sky, though in the case of Vaughan Oliver, a volcano is probably a more apt metaphor, erupting at night, dangerous, confounding explosions followed by even brighter conflagrations, followed by an unquiet silence.

From getting the break of a lifetime, a dream job as art director and first employee of emerging independent record label 4AD (Cocteau Twins, Pixies, Lush, GusGus), to seeing his posters covering the walls of every tunnel entrance in London, earning six-figure sums through the eighties and being the subject of major exhibitions abroad – to seeing the arrival of CDs, computers and digital music, witnessing the implosion of 4AD and the music industry as a whole, and ending up with six-figure debts by the turn of the millennium. But beware: the Vaughan Oliver volcano is still active, and we've come this way rather in the hope of some new eruptions.



Vaughan Oliver is making coffee with a digital radio playing in the background. It is an unlikely setting: the clean and perfectly fitted kitchen of his tidy and tastefully decorated new house in suburban Epsom. He refers to it as a form of 'scaling down', though it still looks pretty nice to me. The kitchen and the living room open onto a back garden, with a book-lined office on the other side of the entrance hall. The only sign that this house is inhabited by the man behind V23 is the typeface of the house number on the frosted glass window above the entrance door.

'I seemed to settle in straight away. You must have passed the university. I do some bits there. I enjoy teaching. I also do a day a week at Kingston with the MA students. In the last few years, I have been working on my own most of the time. Teaching helps you get out. And once you start, you realise how much you picked up over the years and how much there is to pass on. It generally energizes me.' He says, pouring milk and stirring our coffee cups, 'Is that colour alright, fellas?'

I have come to Epsom with our art director, Matt Willey, a diehard Pixies fan, and an even greater Vaughan Oliver one. He still remembers harassing record shop staff all over London trying to get hold of a *Here Comes Your Man* poster, going from shop to shop, without being able to get hold of one. He even tried a record shop in Sydney, while on an art school exchange later on.



Previous page:

Poster (detail) from *Minotaur*
Pixies
2009
Photography: Simon Larbalestier

Below:

Poster from *Minotaur*
Pixies
2009
Photography: Simon Larbalestier



Opposite:

Book spreads from *Minotaur*
Pixies
2009
Photography: Simon Larbalestier
& Rosie Upright (UCA, Epsom)

‘Would you like to see my Minotaur?’ Vaughan Oliver asks, before dragging out the gigantic box-set. We came here in the hope of some volcanic activity and we are not disappointed. This new box set is like something that could have come out from the centre of the earth, strange, complex, dense with layers of compressed images and distorted meanings, burning with visual energy.

‘It contains just the five albums, no new music. This pissed everybody off in the blogs. But that also meant the fans could actually take it or leave it. If we’d stuck a couple of extra tracks in, they might have felt themselves obliged, as hardcore Pixies fans, to buy it. My first response to the idea of the new box set was: Yes, this is a great project, but can we start from scratch? Throw away all the previous art work and give it a more homogenous feel. Going back and picking on things like the surrealism, the dark sense of humour, religion, and the sex and the lust and the lust and the sex... And the nails...’

‘The project didn’t come from 4AD itself, but from a guy who licensed everything from 4AD. He’s interested in the collector’s end of the market, with high production values. In our first meeting, he told me he didn’t want to make any money on it. He just wanted to do a beautiful object. (In the second meeting, I asked him, “well, if you don’t want to make any money on it, could I maybe make some money?”) You don’t get many clients like that. To a large degree, he reminded me of Ivo, [Ivo Watts-Russell, joint-founder of 4AD Records], and of Ivo’s philosophy. He would think, “Let’s do a calendar... Let’s do posters...” And I would say, “Let’s do a wooden box!” And he would go for it. Because these were rare things. That’s one of the lessons I’ve learnt: it shouldn’t look like a CD record sleeve, it should look like packaging.’

He would have taken this image that day, in that particular place, and this other image, that other day, and has never seen them in context together. Then I say, 'Oh, that's got a hole in it, and that has also a hole in it, so why don't we put them together?' And a narrative develops

'The name was a reference to the surrealist magazine, *Minotaur*. I suggested it, and the band went for it. It must be a first instance of a graphic-designer deciding on the name of a band's whole catalogue! But the more I thought about the name, the more it made sense for me. There is something quite animalistic in their music.'

And about his designs too – I suggest.

'Yeah? I like that. The first album was a guy with a hairy back, half man, half beast. In the fifth album, I used bulls' eyes. I went back to Simon Larbalestier (who had taken a lot of the photographs for previous albums), and in one of his photographs, there was a bull. It made sense.'

'All these graphics in here', he says pointing at the pages of the large-format book in the box set, 'were done with this team of students I put together at Epsom. Part of my job was to get them to relax and just do stuff, with the idea of expressive type, spacial type, type as image. I just said to them: don't worry about what it will look like, or whether it's going to fit in. It will feel like found graphics, a big scrapbook of feelings and atmospheres. It doesn't have a linear narrative, just images that relate to images, spreads that relate to spreads. I could easily have taken Simon's images as they stood. There were about three hundred. I picked about sixty. It would have been a lovely picture book, with a nice bit of reserve type. But I wanted to be a bit more ambitious and create graphic images. I call them *graphic responses* to the images. I started with the book and the photographs, then went on overprinting them to build this texture, turning one thing into something else, then got to the posters, and started taking the overprint sheets, turning and twisting them, rephotographing them, one journey turning into an ingredient for another journey.'



4AD

Presents

the 13 year

ITCH

AT THE ICA, LONDON

July

- 19 **Monday** kristin hersh | pale saints
- 20 **Tuesday** unrest | his name is alive
- 21 **Wednesday** betty serveert | underground lovers
- 22 **Thursday** red house painters | insiders
- 23 **Friday** the breeders | the wolfgang press
- 24 **Saturday** brendan perry | heidi berry

SPECIAL GUESTS APPEAR EACH EVENING

(shuttle)

Left:
The 13 Year Itch
 4AD festival poster
 Institute of Contemporary
 Arts, London
 1993
 Photography: Tony Gibson

Below:
Exhibition/Exposition
 Exhibition poster
 Espace Graslin, Nantes
 1990

Below right:
This Rîmy River
 Exhibition poster
 Murray Feldman Gallery, LA
 1994



'I hadn't worked with Simon since the Pixies' days. After his marriage broke down he went away to Bangkok for about eight years. The project was very much a reunion.'

I point out the fact that collaborations seem to play a vital part in his work.

'Yeah, that's kind of key. In this project, I didn't do the photographs, I didn't do the graphics... *What* did I do? What I enjoy, and what Simon enjoys, is the way I take his photographs and put them together and edit them. He would have taken this image that day, in that particular place, and this other image, that other day, in another place, and he has never seen them in context together. Then I say, "Oh, that's got a hole in it, and that has also a hole in it, so why don't we put them together?" And a narrative develops, which was

never there at the time when he took the photographs. Another photographer may not like that, but he enjoys watching that evolution. I give him a lot freedom at the beginning. I don't stand over his shoulder. Most of the photographers I worked with were either at college, or just out of college. There were no agents getting in the way, no one saying, "you're only getting three shots for that budget..." I always think that if you give the photographers freedom, they give you so much more back.'

As I look at Vaughan Oliver now, I can't get the Minotaur image out of my mind. His big and bulky frame, his eyes set apart slightly, looking around for details such as holes and hairs and butterflies and paws and various other body parts... hunting down visual compositions, juxtapositions and hidden meanings amid

labyrinths of images. But Vaughan Oliver's brain is clearly far more than just an omnivorous graphic beast hungry for raw visual material. Behind the collaborative nature of Vaughan Oliver's work there seems to lie a deep interest in other people, their interests, their views, their art. He can ask confounding questions, in a direct manner, as a child would, while watching you, observing you, trying to find more about you. He talks at length about friends and mentors such as Terry Dowling (whose work was also cannibalised in *Minotaur*) and Russell Mills. He is particularly warm on the subject of his friend and collaborator, the wonderfully free and prolific Japanese artist Shinro Ohtake.

He points to a shelf filled with Ohtake's books, 'I was really inspired by his ener-

Below:
Come on Pilgrim
 Pixies
 LP front
 1987
 Photography:
 Simon Larbalestier



gy and his output. Then, after a while, he pissed me off. He made me feel lazy. He's relentless. He just does things, and only considers them afterwards.'

'This is a good example of how prolific he is', the designer says, opening one of Ohtake's many books and reading the dedication, 'Keep in mind he wrote this in 1992: "This is a book I made and printed in 1986, at the factory, and bound it in 1990. I forgot I had made this. Bound [sic] company forgot to send me a copy. I got it last week, finally. Stupid book." Imagine! He had forgotten about this beautiful book!'

'Here's another example. He had made one book. Then made another book out of the stuff he found on the printer's floor. He was feeding this stuff into a big six-colour press and bringing them back around and feeding them in again. Half his battle there was persuading the printer that he wasn't infringing copyright.'

Below and right:
Gigantic/River Euphrates
 Pixies
 EP back and front
 1988
 Photography:
 Simon Larbalestier



Vaughan Oliver then takes out *Tokyo Salamander: An American Diary*, 1989, which he designed. This clearly wasn't your usual collaboration between artist and designer. Ohtake supplied Oliver with the original Japanese text of his dream diary, a translation, a collection of assorted ephemera, a set of charcoal drawings and transparencies of his sketchbooks, paintings and watercolours. He stipulated a format, then left the designer to do what he wanted with all this material. Strict legibility did not need to be preserved. Oliver was free to introduce imagery of his own, and treat Ohtake's original artwork as raw material in the construction of new visuals. As the subject of the book was *dreams*, a traveller's dreams at that, the images could be blurred and manipulated and mixed and overprinted. The result is spontaneous and unexpected and seems as fresh today as if it had just come out of the printing press and been loosely

assembled, in a rush, by the designer before we walked in through the door.

'One aspect of Shinro's practise is taking other people's work and then doing something on top of it, or re-contextualizing it. He was then interested in me putting this stuff through *my* filter and seeing what happened. He just let go. I couldn't touch it for a couple of months as I had so much respect for him, but then he said: "get on with it. I need it. Put some of your stuff in there. If you take a square inch of one of the paintings and blow it up this big, I don't mind. I would like it if I didn't recognize my work." About one spread, I remember him saying: 'Ah, you British bastard! This is brilliant! I didn't realise that was my work.'" Not many artists would let go like that. Shinro is very much his own place, as comfortable with popular culture and kitsch as he is with high art. He's been an inspiration over the years.'



Below:
Here comes Your Man
 Pixies
 12-inch single front
 1989
 Photography:
 Simon Larbalestier



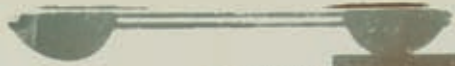
Vaughan Oliver first met Shinro Ohtake through Russell Mills, another artist Oliver is keen to point as a major influence: 'I was a big fan of Samuel Beckett. Who had done his book covers? Russell Mills. I was a big fan of Brian Eno, and Russell Mills had interpreted and illustrated his lyrics. Just before the eighties, there was a rich period for illustration, at the head of which were Russell Mills, Robert Mason, Suko. They didn't like the term, but they were known as *radical illustrators*. They had a more authorial attitude to illustration, bringing their own obsessions to bear, while deliberately blurring the boundaries, not being just an illustrator, or an artist, or a graphic designer. I respected Russell Mills for being able to make a career as a fine artist, while at the same time producing great book jackets for Picador. That's rare, to be accepted by the art world, while having a foot in the commercial world. And being

inspired by music. Plus, he is someone who likes to pass on stuff, being generous with references and anecdotes, a natural educator, if you like.'

'The radical illustrators were all ex-Royal College graduates, which, to a degree, had all been inspired by one Terry Dowling, a great screen-printer, who was my tutor too, and whose work has never really had his due. He was like a proto-punk, if you like. And he showed us other stuff. I was talking about this to my partner the other night, and she was saying, "That's why we are who we are, because we were generally taught by artists, by people who brought their artistic sensibility to bear in their tutoring." Terry's work was so out of this world for me. I didn't get it. He had all his visual material on the walls. And I was curious. It wasn't my idea of beauty, but I wanted to know what it was about. And it kind of changed my mind. That's what art college

can do for you, if you go to it with an open mind. He didn't foist his aesthetic upon us. He just opened our minds. He made us look at people like Russell Mills.'

'We were lucky to be able to ride that wave of Punk and New Wave with everyone being open to new ideas and change. And of course I was lucky to bump into 4AD just after they started. I was working with these two lads at a place called Benchmark, and they had done a couple of sleeves for Ivo, but couldn't do this one. So they introduced me to Ivo... – and they never got a look in after that. I got my foot in the door and never took it out. Ivo and I went to the same gigs and started a conversation about his covers and, after freelancing for him for three years, I became his first employee. That shows how much he cared about his graphics. He wanted me to do a bit more than that, like plugging the records at the radio stations, etc. But I never got round to that. That wasn't



Crashy Jones

Mr. Grims

The Ice Cream Man

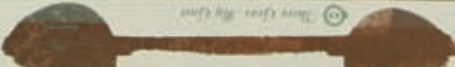


Melrose

Whisper of Death

18 & 19

They Live! My Love



DeLittle

PIXIES

Debaser

Tune

Thin of Mindless



Revving Up the Zoo

Zero Years Flow Along

Still



Left:
Doolittle
 Pixies
 LP front & back
 1989
 Photography:
 Simon Larbalestier

Below:
Surfer Rosa
 Pixies
 LP front & cover
 1988
 Photography:
 Simon Larbalestier



me. Maybe after a couple of pints in a pub I appeared more confident than I was...'

'There was 4AD, just beginning. I couldn't have had a better opportunity. A perfect client. Not always easy. You know, the drummer of the band has usually gone to art school and likes sunflowers... But Ivo was feeding me music, and it was music that turned me on. I think that was the key. It was natural inspiration. There were also the relationships with photographers and, in the early years, with Nigel Grierson. We were like that.' He says, joining two fingers, 'We had been to grammar school and college together and wanted to do this record sleeve thing together. I always had that support system. There is nothing better than having a partner who can finish your sentences, or say, "yes, that's good," especially when you work in a vacuum. Was I driven? Yes, music was driving me, that heady mix, the power of music and graphics together. The combination of both – it's bigger than the sum of its parts. I wasn't taking a cerebral approach to it. It was a gut feeling, an emotional thing. This is what I never got with Peter Saville. [Pause] Did I just mention

the Saville word? Oh, well... [Laughs] Saville likes to distance himself from the music. And, I would argue, how substantial is that piece of work if it doesn't reflect the content? A book jacket has to reflect its subject. That's basic to me. Or maybe I should say: if it connects with the music, it makes it better.'

'I also like the idea of ambiguity and mystery, leaving the work open to interpretation. It is something you need to do with music. Not to try to define it. This forces you to pick it up and explore it, and if you don't, if you leave it behind, it still has a hook in you. You go home thinking, *what the fuck was that?* In that period a lot of people were working with the visual pun, as in: *idea – bang!* – *get it* – whereas I was more interested in leaving things open to interpretation. And if you can't solve, say, passing that poster in the street, then it stays with you longer.'

More than any other, Vaughan Oliver's work succeeds in emulating the mechanisms of music. Patterns, layers, textures, rhythms, echoes, clashes, juxtapositions, superpositions, images and words constantly moving in and out of abstraction, figures suddenly shifting,

mutating and playing all kinds of tricks with us viewers. These complex compositions stay with you in the way musical harmonies do, lingering in the back of your mind for days, resurfacing every now and then, unexpectedly, often years later. They have stayed with Matt over a couple of decades and, looking at previous issues of *Elephant*, I can find numerous traces of Vaughan Oliver's influence on his designs. That young man inside him has never ceased to harass record shop staff for the poster he never got.

'In those days,' Oliver reminds us, 'your first experience of the music was those posters on the street, often pasted on corrugated iron sheets. There was a time when you could drive through the Hammersmith roundabout and you'd see a Peter Saville, a Malcolm Garrett, etc. It was part of the fabric of the city. It was vital.'

'Funny talking, now at fifty-two, about this thing that just evolved day by day, that identity, and that label... I hate to use the word organic, but that's how it happened. You never think that are going to be referencing thirty years ago on a day like today.'

Below:
Double-page spread from
Tokyo Salamander
American Dream Diary
1989
Collaboration with Shinro
Ohtake
1993
Art direction:
Vaughan Oliver
Design:
Vaughan Oliver, Chris Bigg
and Paul McMenamain

Opposite, top left:
Ultra Vivid Scene
Ultra Vivid Scene
LP front
1988
Opposite, bottom left:
Desire Lines
Lush
2004
12" single front
Art direction and design:
Vaughan Oliver and
Chris Bigg
Photography:
Richard Caldicott

Opposite, top right:
Joy 1967-1990
Ultra Vivid Scene
LP back
1990
Opposite, bottom left:
Mountain Battles
The Breeders
LP front
2008
Photography: Marc Atkins



I ask him if he sometimes felt as if he were witnessing musical history?

‘Do you know what I said when I first heard the Pixies? I said to Ivo, “What do you want to fucking sign these for? They are rubbish...” So don’t trust my ear. But it all made sense when I saw them live. The Pixies and Ultra Vivid Scene arrived in the late eighties. And the Pixies led to grunge and Nirvana, etc. And I must say I was grateful, because the Pixies were such a different band from what I had been dealing with. They were much more open and conversational. Charles [Black Francis] would talk about the ideas behind the songs. He has appeared in print recently (time and age and parenthood playing a part and mellowing things) paying great respect to the artwork. He said he remembers the first album sleeve arriving, and him and Joey, the guitarist, seeing it and realising they had a band then – this was like a proof – and packing in their jobs that day. I had a much better

dialogue with them than with the Cocteau Twins, who were very much within themselves and could only say “no”. If I asked what was wrong with it, they would usually just answer, “Shite, shite.”

‘We were close to the bands, we went to the gigs, to the same bars, were part of the same culture. There was no marketing person, and I think that is key to the vitality in the work: it wasn’t filtered. Accidents were possible as deadlines allowed them to happen. And sometimes, after an accident happened, a deadline then forced you to go with the accident regardless. There were not so many filters. The bands generally didn’t have a manager, and if they had one, he stood in the background, so that they could have a direct dialogue with me. There was no marketing department asking for changes. All I was trying to do was to reflect the music in terms of the creative experience we had. It was very direct, vital. We just got in the mood of the music.’

We were close to the bands, we went to the gigs, to the same bars, were part of the same culture. There was no marketing person, and I think that is key to the vitality in the work: it wasn’t filtered

‘We weren’t wanting to change the world, but just do things our way. And we wanted these albums to have some degree of longevity. It is strange, if you step back and think: record sleeves? Now they have disappeared. I spent thirty years pouring everything into a piece of ephemera. It’s kind of mad. I was aware of putting heart and soul into it, and I was hoping it would live a bit longer. We thought that one way to do that was by forging our own aesthetic, independent of the individual bands, though I don’t think the sleeves are interchangeable either. Music was at the heart of what we were doing, and you couldn’t interchange a Cocteau Twins sleeve with a Colourbox, or Lush, or another sleeve. But out of that there is a thread, a cohesion within the label, from the bright, pop art of the Ultra Vivid Scene albums to the melancholia of This Mortal Coil.’

‘We didn’t want the bands to feel claustrophobic. It was part of our independent ethos. The bands were not



ultra vivid scene: joy 1967-1990



Below:
Scheer
Scheer
LP front and back
1996
Photography:
Nicola Schwartz

Opposite left:
Ten Speed Racer
Ten Speed Racer
2003
Photography:
Marc Atkins

Opposite right:
Victorialand
Cocteau Twins
LP front
1986
Photography:
Nigel Grierson



obliged to use me. If they didn't want to work with me, I would pass them onto Chris [Bigg]. Poor, old Chris... We haven't even mentioned him yet! Right-hand man for... God, he survived three marriages of mine... Twenty-eight years now. We complemented each other very well. He brought a lot to the partnership. I met Chris Bigg in 1982, when he was at art school doing a dissertation on music graphics and I myself had only designed a handful of sleeves. A friendship developed. We went to gigs together and, in 1987, I persuaded Ivo that we needed an assistant. And you did in those days, when everything was on cardboard. We went through a period then when we had a deadline every single day, whether it was a sleeve, a poster, or an advert. When did we get the computers in? 1994, I think.'

Vaughan Oliver seems to have had a troubled history with new technologies. He tells us he still doesn't really know Photoshop or Illustrator and is in the pro-

cess of trying to get the hang of InDesign. At one point in the interview, as Matt and I are frowning at a poster, struggling to tell what is actually featured on it, he tells us, 'The day the scanner arrived, I stuck an ox tongue in it!' We then move on to another poster, in which a striking colour scheme seems to have been achieved through the combination of a bad mistake when using a new piece of visual manipulation technology and a tight deadline. Vaughan Oliver seems to have thrived on the misuse of various pieces of new technology rather than on their proper use. I can't wait to see what he can do (or undo) with InDesign.

'But that was the start of a pretty scary period for me. I stopped enjoying the process of putting an album sleeve together. I used to have a drawing board, a piece of card, a scalpel and I had a coma on the tip of my scalpel and I placed that onto the artwork, and after you repeated these gestures a few times, there was a sense of

satisfaction that came from the craft. It was physically and mentally rewarding. It made you feel close to the work. When computers came in, I couldn't do that. I found it unsatisfactory for a long time...'

And with computers, in came digital music...

'It was one thing after a-fucking-other. And before that you had CDs, and the canvas was shrunk, and those horrible plastic boxes replaced the smell of ink and paper and the metallic colours and the feel of embossing and de-bossing... To my mind, that's when the record companies shot themselves in the foot, when they started replacing sleeves with CDs, which had no tactile quality. They were actually denying us one of our senses. When I show a sleeve to my students, they sometimes say, "Oh, so that's what the original cover looked like..." That was the early nineties, with CDs and Macs coming in. It took a lot of the pleasure out of it for me.

I was lost once 4AD folded. I was offered no redundancy. I had to join the real world and rent a studio. I felt like a student walking out of there, suddenly without a home and security



I think I fell out of love with the whole graphic design business. The music business changed. Ivo himself had pulled out of 4AD and retired in California in 1992, selling his shares to Beggars Banquet in 1996. Ivo was, and is, a very special, enigmatic figure... After him the studio went through different managers and directions. Most of the bands they sign now are licensed and come with their own music graphics.'

'And a few things had happened to me... Dark days... They lasted for maybe ten years. Darker at certain points. It led to me falling out of love with graphic design and to a real sense of disenchantment. 4AD imploded in 1996, going from a staff of sixteen to just three or four people. We were the first out the door. Through the eighties, I had been on a retainer of five grand a month, and I could often double or treble that. I was making like 250K a year at one point (though I must say we earned it, working twelve hours a day, seven days a week.)'

'I was lost once 4AD folded. I was offered no redundancy. I had to join the real world and rent a studio. I felt like a student walking out of there, suddenly without a home and security. I had been cocooned there for years. Work came in automatically without me having to search for it. I never learnt the skills of how to find work. I did a lot of cold calling and got a lot of cold answers. You may be world famous amongst your peers, but not with clients.'

After leaving 4AD, having reached the peak of his artistic fame, the designer seems to have suffered commercially from his own artistic success – a common curse in the design world, in which being an important figure, artistically speaking, can scare off potential clients, who will assume you are not approachable, or too complicated, or expensive, or difficult to work with.

'Chris [Bigg] and I were maybe too similar. We were both creatively am-

bitious, but not necessarily ambitious when it came to starting business. It's not that we kind of expected the work to come in, but we didn't know how to get it. Then came a period when I really got disenchanted, after three years of trying to make it work independently and not managing. We still did some of our best work during that period. We had some big jobs, such as L'Oreal Professionnel. We got about one big job a year. But it still wasn't enough. We needed more bread and butter work. And we were spending too long on jobs. There was the same work ethos of doing the best possible thing. I found it very hard to adapt to those changes. I found it very difficult to find work outside of music graphics. I had put all my eggs into one basket. I had specialized. And then the music industry changed and moved away from me. I was also struggling with new technologies. I needed to employ a couple of assistants to help me do the work. And I had



Left:
Colourbox
 Colourbox
 1995
 A3 poster

Opposite top:
Title TK
 The Breeders
 LP front and back
 2002
 Design:
 Vaughan Oliver and Chris
 Bigg

Opposite top:
Qual
 Xmal Deutschland
 12-inch single front and
 back
 1983

all the office overheads. I just couldn't hack it. It took me three years to work out the mathematics of all this. I finished up supporting the business with my mortgage. Then we pulled the whole thing down. It was getting out of hand. Six figure debts in 2001. Chris then moved to the Isle of Wight and I saw less of him. I would try to get up there once a week, but as we hadn't seen each other for a week, we spent too much time bantering rather than doing work...'

'Simultaneously some of life's domestic issues had impacted on me. I had a very unhappy relationship at home. I need stability to be able to work. I can't work with that kind of turbulence. 4AD had been like a sanctuary. It had both carried and inspired me. When that went, I looked for support at home. But I was in an abusive relationship. I remember spending a month on the sofa watching the 2002 World Cup, before deciding to do something about it. I wanted separation

and divorce. I wasn't necessarily expecting a fight, but I got fit for it, both physically and mentally. I cleaned up my act, as it were. It was about a year and a half of hell. Then I met someone else. My previous partner couldn't understand what had happened to me because of 4AD. In her mind it was just a case of, "pull yourself together, go out and get a job." It's kind of not as simple as that. My new partner is very supportive. She rehabilitated me. Teaching helped a lot too. It has kind of rekindled my enthusiasm for graphic design. Coming here, getting rid of debt, etc. When I was in those dark days, I would get invitations from various parts of the world to go and talk, but I couldn't do it. I had no confidence in my work. The self-esteem had gone. But it's back now. I can feel it. It's flowing.'

As we're about to leave, Vaughan suddenly remembers something. He runs up the stairs. We hear heavy footsteps echoing on the floor above, doors, drawers, be-

fore he comes back down, panting, holding a poster tube, which he hands over to Matt.

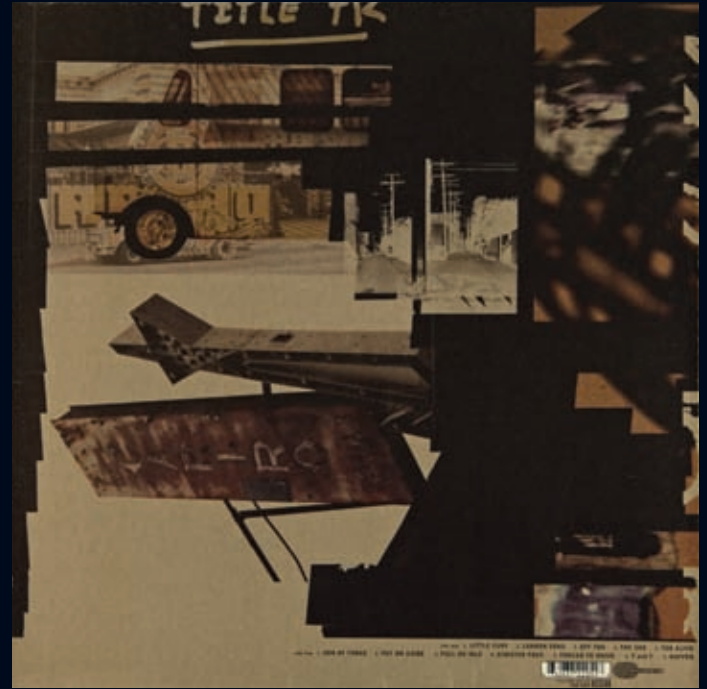
'What's that?' Matt asks.

'Your poster.'

We walk out of the house. Matt is holding his poster tube like a kid who has just been given that long awaited Christmas gift – a twenty year wait in his case. Vaughan Oliver is standing at the top of the stairs, his tall, broad figure covering almost the whole frame of the door, bending his head down, as a bull would do, at the centre of an arena, sharpening blood-spattered horns, or just trying to relieve the pressure on his shoulders. The bull's eyes, however, are friendly eyes, childishly, fiendishly playful. A Minotaur, an elusive giant in a world legend.

(Is it clear I was hero of rock'n'roll?) ●

We thank Rick Poynor for his invaluable contribution to the understanding and appreciation of Vaughan Oliver's work. His book Vaughan Oliver: Visceral Pleasures was published in 2000 by Booth-Clibborn Editions.



X MAL DEUTSCHLAND

[Qual

deine qual ist meine lust
deine qual ist meine lust
meine liebe ist dein tod

nachts wenn du schlafst bin ich lebendig
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meine liebe ist dein tod

mein tag ist deine daemmerung
mein tag ist deine daemmerung
deine qual ist meine lust

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deine qual ist meine lust
deine qual ist meine lust
deine qual ist meine lust

QUAL
recorded at blackwing, london
engineered by john freier
produced by iiv

ZEIT
SEHNSUCHT
recorded at hofentanz, hamburg
engineered by jason
mixed at blackwing, london
captured by john freier
produced by iiv and smal deutschland

MAHNE
IAD

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