

Endless Supply

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On Reflection

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane... (1)

The protagonist of Richard Prince's short story, "The Perfect Tense", has an aversion not just to mirrors, but any reflective surfaces that might make him confront his own reflected image. He has no mirrors in his apartment, and ditches any objects that can't be rendered dull. He is careful to avoid even the darkened glass of windows. This eisoptrophobia is not generated by the possible reminder of ugliness or deformity, quite the opposite, in fact. For he is the ideal man incarnate, and as such, he literally "stops traffic." He is an image made real, a model reminiscent of Prince's own appropriated men: upright, flanked by submissive women, looking determinedly into the middle distance. The constant whispers, pointing etc, make him feel vulnerable, "fearing a possible lynch mob free-for-all."

How tormented, then, would this character feel in the nighttime incarnation of Philip Johnson's glass house? By day the house has the double effect of fulfilling a desire for closeness to nature and the absorbed contemplation of it. The occupant can both admire the view rendered picturesque by the frame of the huge glass walls, and contemplate their status of being able to survey this landscape as their property (particularly the scale that such a 'public' property demands to retain 'privacy'.) They are free from prying eyes. But by night artificial light renders the walls mirror-like, and any attempt to view the exterior is masked by the occupant's self-reflection.

Jeff Wall (in "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel") draws out an implicit vampiric resonance of such a scenario. For during the day, the sole occupant (the house was designed for one) is rendered virtually invisible by the reflective exterior of the glass wall (and, of course, by the tree-lined boundary of the property). Whereas at night, when the house is artificially lit, the occupant becomes the isolated figure of a stage-set-like scenario, constantly confronted by reflective surfaces that obscure the view and engender vulnerability to irrational fears of the dark and possible assault on the property. The glass house, Wall attests, with its necessary seclusion and consequent 'power-protected' openness, has parallels with aristocratic retreats, but also evokes the "abandoned crypts of Gothic tales."

The myth of the vampire symbolizes the excess generated by a society dedicated to transparency through science and rationality, i.e. one dedicated to total 'understanding' without recourse to 'magical' thinking, and also an anxiety that the feudal system of the old order has refused to die and that modernity is built around an 'evil' core.

Take the symbol of corporate power, the glass skyscraper. It is an inversion of its architects' original intent: a monument to the modern, open society, as opposed to the opaque aristocratic and religious societies of old. Its re-evaluation in the light of revolutionary collapse

reveals it to be a monument to technological and hierarchical control, particularly lacking in the old architectural symbols of power that might give one confronted by it some purchase on its function. It rises up vertiginously and impersonally, physically and mentally dominating 'the-man-in-the-street.' There is no transparency, only reflection. The executive, high up in his glass box, is as invisible as his alter ego in the glass house and can survey the city in a form of panoptic surveillance (the two-way mirror) that is the age-old privilege of power.

The glass skyscraper is, of course, home to the corporation. The corporation is as inscrutable as its home and its implication in nefarious activities, as part of the military-industrial complex, intensifies conspiratorial associations that have bloomed from the late fifties. The executive, unlike in hereditary or holy orders, is expendable, and of course, metaphorically faceless.

And what of Prince's anxious ideal man? His true state is photographic (a consciously contrived reflection), which is why his incarnation is so problematic. As a model without context, he lacks subjectivity, he is the ideal stand-in or extra. Like the vampire, he is a fiction, a symptom of malaise. His function is to induce desire, but he is empty, soulless. (Polarising sunglasses would have assuaged his anxieties, at least in combating the possibility of being ambushed by reflections in those darkened windows).

Photographers (particularly studio photographers) find reflective surfaces problematic. They have the potential to reveal the construction of the image, its fictional status. But reflective surfaces are the sirens of the commodity image, and a vast range of products is made or finished with them. In the past, photographers have resorted, like Prince's protagonist, to rendering surfaces matt (in the photographers' case, using dulling spray) but such a technique changed the nature of the product and could no longer be considered an accurate depiction (e.g. a stainless steel product may come in both brushed and chrome finish, and the use of dulling spray would render the chrome brushed). Photographers had to embrace the challenge and came up with ingenious ways of combining the bright rectangular reflection of the softbox with the blackness of the studio and the polystyrene or card reflectors, to produce pleasingly graphic shapes that delineated the volume of the object. There was (and is) a pleasure in the production of such reflections that reveal the construction of the image, but in a manner that is, to the untrained eye, essentially indecipherable, abstract.

The other problem with reflective surfaces is that any mark or flaw on their surface is highlighted. Such imperfections detract from the commodity's newness. Narrative in advertising is strictly controlled, and requires the blank slate of newness. The breaching of these conditions allowed Ernst Hedler to politically charge his images of East German

products in the Taschen volume “Stunning Eastern Design.” For the highlights on the bottles of wine, jam and sauce revealed fingerprints and drew the eye towards torn and badly printed labels. The book itself played on its ambiguous status as somewhere between anthropological document and product catalogue. The closeness in content in “Stunning Eastern Design” to a typical western catalogue exposed the lack in sophistication in the products of the GDR. This was compounded by the anachronistic presentation: products were placed on paper backgrounds reminiscent of the 50s and 60s, and harshly lit. Some backgrounds were divided diagonally, in a not-so-subtle invocation of constructivism. These photographs imply that the failure of the country was prefigured in its products.

Consider the mirror, particularly the round bathroom mirror, the ne plus ultra of reflective surfaces. Reflecting the dark studio, it is a black circle in the picture. It is a faintly chilling image as it is evidence that there is nothing outside the image, again, that the image is a fiction. It also invokes the vampire and his soulless inability to be seen in mirrors, and, of course, the absence that is death. But one could read this absence as a return of the transcendent blackness in the work of the Spanish still life painter and lay Carthusian monk, Juan Sánchez Cotán. His most famous painting, “Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber” (1602), depicts the eponymous comestibles hanging by strings in a chilled pantry. Hanging them separately suspended the onset of decay, but also allowed Cotán to describe a three dimensional parabola with their forms. For not only did he want to suggest that God can be found in the contemplation of these items' quotidian nature, but also in the sublime consideration of heavenly geometry in their positioning before the black infinity of the background. The transcendent opportunity evoked by Cotán's still lives is typical of Catholic painting, and stands in contrast to the later Dutch vanitas, which paradoxically celebrate wordly goods whilst moralising on the inevitability of death and its leveling characteristics. There is no transcendence afforded in these works, for, as Calvin pronounced: “We are

(1) From Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabakov

(2) From Norman Bryson's book on still life painting: “Looking at the Overlooked”

action

all condemned by the Fall and our depravity to inhabit a material world that can never be transcended; and images will not help us escape this fate.”

At the heart of Dutch still life painting of this period is a very modern anxiety concerning consumption. The pre-industrial cycle of scarcity and plenty according to the seasons was replaced by a year round surplus supplied by a proto-capitalist trade. In the early to mid 17th C, the Dutch became the wealthiest nation on earth, but lacked the rapacious appetite of the ancien régime. Still lives by Willem Claesz Heda depicted knocked-over pitchers and spilled and smashed glasses, the debris of half-consumed food lies scattered on plates precariously close to the edge of the table. The quality of craftsmanship of the tableware contrasts with the indiscriminate and avaricious consumption; only the beautifully produced painting can restore the balance of the delicately wrought items.

The glass house can be seen as the epitome of modern[ist] reaction to the embarrassment of overproduction and its counterpart, consumption, which capitalist industrialisation inaugurated. Unlike the Wunderkammer that was the Victorian abode, for example, the glass house is stripped, “carving out from the general profusion a secluded emptiness that marks an escape from the teeming and seething pool of commodities.” **(2)** The occupant of the glass house has a disdain for the outcome of the ideology of perpetual growth.

To the contemporary product photographer, the generating of such associations is verboten. The standard convention in depicting the bathroom mirror (which, in the glass house, is situated in the private area, screened from the glass walls) is to contrive a reflection that is a spectral grey graduation. However, in the 1968 Möbel furniture catalogue, the mirror in the set for bedroom model “Birgit” is completely black, apart from the reflection of an orange vase directly in front of it.



Black and white reproductions of
THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS

B. Kennon



CINDY SHERMAN



The Cindy Shermans I'd like to fuck

BRIAN KENNON

Daniel Foggo and Martin Foley

A TEENAGE boy from Yorkshire succeeded in persuading British aviation executives that he was a tycoon about to launch his own airline. Using the pseudonym Adam Tait, the smooth-talking 17-year-old told airport and airline executives that he had a fleet of jets.

Tait, who said he was in his twenties, even flew to Jersey to attend a 1½-hour long meeting with the director of its airport. Their talks were considered promising enough for a further meeting to be arranged for the following week.

Other air industry bosses found themselves dealing by telephone or e-mail with Tait's fellow executives, David Rich and Anita Dash, who proposed to launch a cut-price Channel Islands-based airline servicing most of Europe.

What no one realised was that Tait, Rich and Dash were all the same person: an aircraft buff with the gift of the gab and an overactive imagination.

His exploits are reminiscent of those of Frank Abagnale Jr, who convinced the Pan Am airline that he was a pilot while still a teenager (see panel).

The Yorkshire teenager's six-month-long ruse, which included placing articles in industry magazines, foundered only after one publication, *Airliner World*, became suspicious. It started to unravel the complex network that Tait had set up of fake websites, "virtual offices" complete with a real telephone receptionist and bogus names.

Last Monday he was questioned by Essex police while trying to gain access to a 93-seater jet at Southend airport, having convinced the plane's marketing agent that his "company" wanted to lease it.

The police, who had intervened after being tipped off by *Airliner World*, discovered the boy's true identity. Although no further action was taken, his fantasy was finally grounded.

The Sunday Times has agreed not to use Tait's real name at the request of his father, who did not know of his son's exploits until he was contacted last week.

He said that his son suffered from a form of autism and was "a phenomenal individual who is enterprising and creative" with an ability to recall the exact detail of every airline's flight schedules. But the autism also made his behaviour highly challenging.

"He has been passionate about aeroplanes for about two years and his whole bedroom is plastered with them," he said.

"Before that he came within two days of bringing the US cast of *High School Musical* to a 300-seat theatre in Shropshire by cutting and pasting mastheads from one company to another, masquerading as this or that.

"It would have happened, except when booking the hotel some queries were thrown up. I don't know why he did it. He is not nasty or vindictive or malicious."

The case has parallels with that of Gary McKinnon, 43, the Asperger's syndrome sufferer who is facing extradition to the United States, accused of hacking into the Pentagon's comput-

ers to look for evidence of UFOs (unidentified flying objects).

Tait began his elaborate hoax by buying up websites in the name of American Global Group and Island Airways. He then approached various established airlines to ask whether they wanted to give him a franchise agreement.

He claimed that the American parent company had a readily available fleet of 12 jets of varying size. His e-mails, like his telephone patter, were impressively well informed and

persuasive. Each ended with the sign-off "American Global Group, 35 Countries, 22 Languages, One Team", followed by a list of all the states in which it supposedly had offices.

Malcolm Coupar, the commercial manager of Aurigny, the airline owned by the Guernsey government, said he and Malcolm Hart, his managing director, had conducted discussions over a period of months with Tait, who was using the name David Rich.

"Some of the things he said

Sky-high poser

Between the ages of 16 and 21, Frank Abagnale Jr posed as an airline pilot, a lawyer, a college professor and a paediatrician, fraudulently earning millions of dollars. After serving time in jail,

Abagnale has since worked for 35 years as a security consultant, advising companies on fraud. His youthful exploits were made the subject of a Hollywood film, *Catch Me If You Can*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

were the sort of things that were indicative that there might have been some substance to his claims," said Coupar.

"If they were real then there would have been opportunities for us to expand our business and that's not the sort of thing we are going to ignore."

Tait also made approaches, with varying levels of success, to other airlines, including Titan Airways and Aer Arann.

When he made contact with Jersey airport, his patter was convincing enough to effect a 90-minute face-to-face meeting with Julian Green, the airport's director, who said last night: "Jersey airport can confirm it has had discussions with Adam Tait over recent weeks about an ambitious network of services between Jersey, the UK and Europe."

"As further information has come to light in recent days we can now confirm negotiations on the proposal have ceased."

Tait gained some initial credibility with an article about his supposed airline which appeared in *Airliner World*.

Richard Maslen, the deputy editor, said: "We spoke to a few contacts in the industry and they had also heard whispers

about this proposed start-up and as a result we ran a small news piece in the magazine."

When Tait suggested further coverage, Maslen smelt a rat. His reporter recorded Tait talking, then played the tape to Coupar, who confirmed it was the same voice as "David Rich".

The magazine suggested Tait do some photographs and he suggested Southend airport, where he said one of his company's jets, a 93-seater BAe 146-200, was hangared.

Tait then contacted Air-

stream, the agent which markets the plane, and said his company wanted to lease it. Airstream took him at face value, even offering to pick him up and chauffeur him to the airport to inspect the plane.

The teenager's plans were about to crash, however. Concerned about his stated intention to start up the plane's engines, *Airliner World* tipped off police. Officers, who intercepted the teenager and a number of colleagues who he had brought with him, warned

Airstream that Tait was using multiple names and it should have nothing further to do with him.

When confronted by *The Sunday Times* at his family's home in York, Tait initially denied any wrongdoing. He later admitted that he had "done some things in a bad way", but said he had broken no laws and insisted he still harboured ambitions to make his "aviation business" take off.

His father argued that sufferers from autism have

great potential. He said of his son: "People like him are not criminals, they are just misguided — they don't understand what they are doing. Can someone grab hold of these people and harness their energy and use them for something that could be good?"













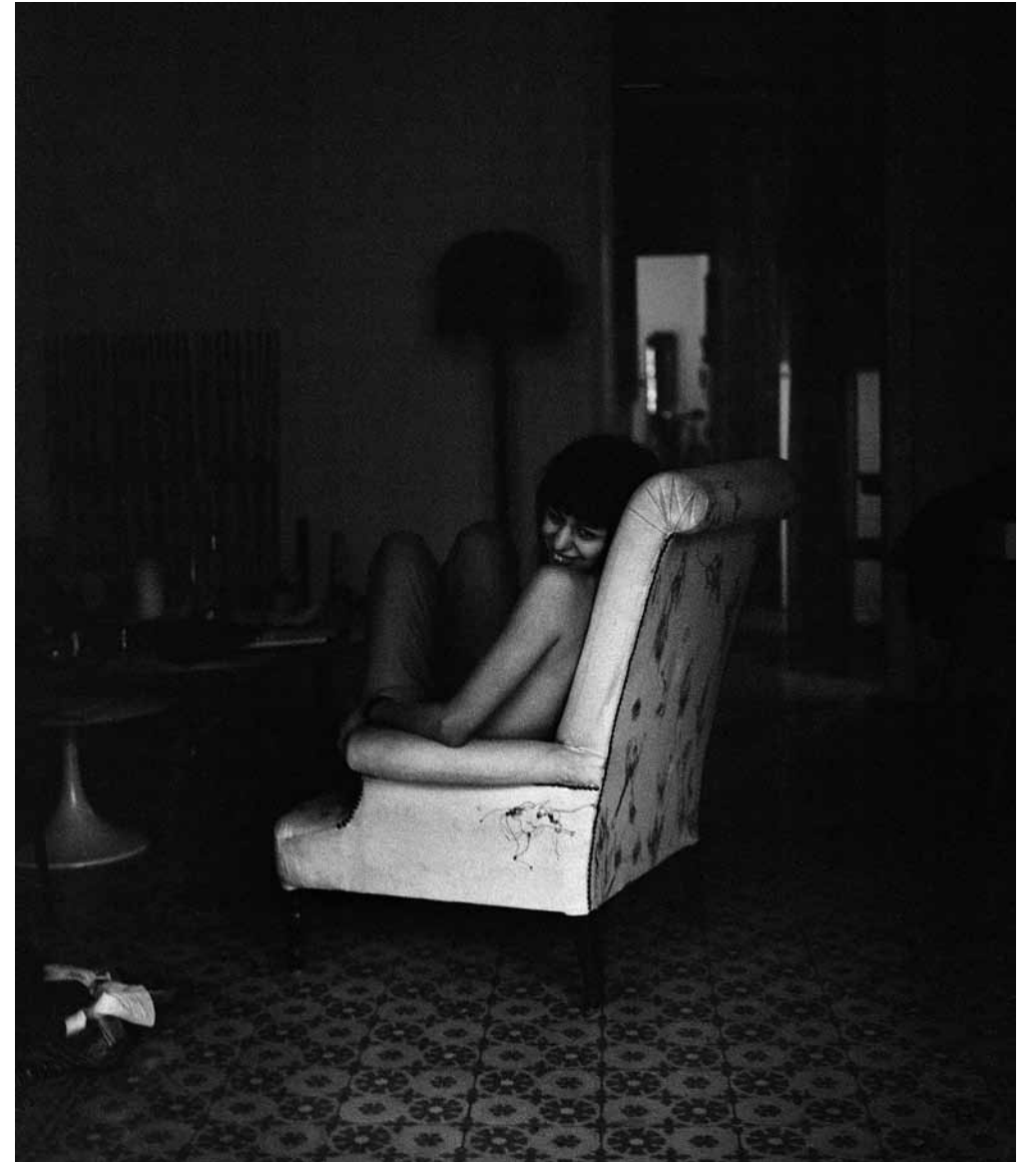




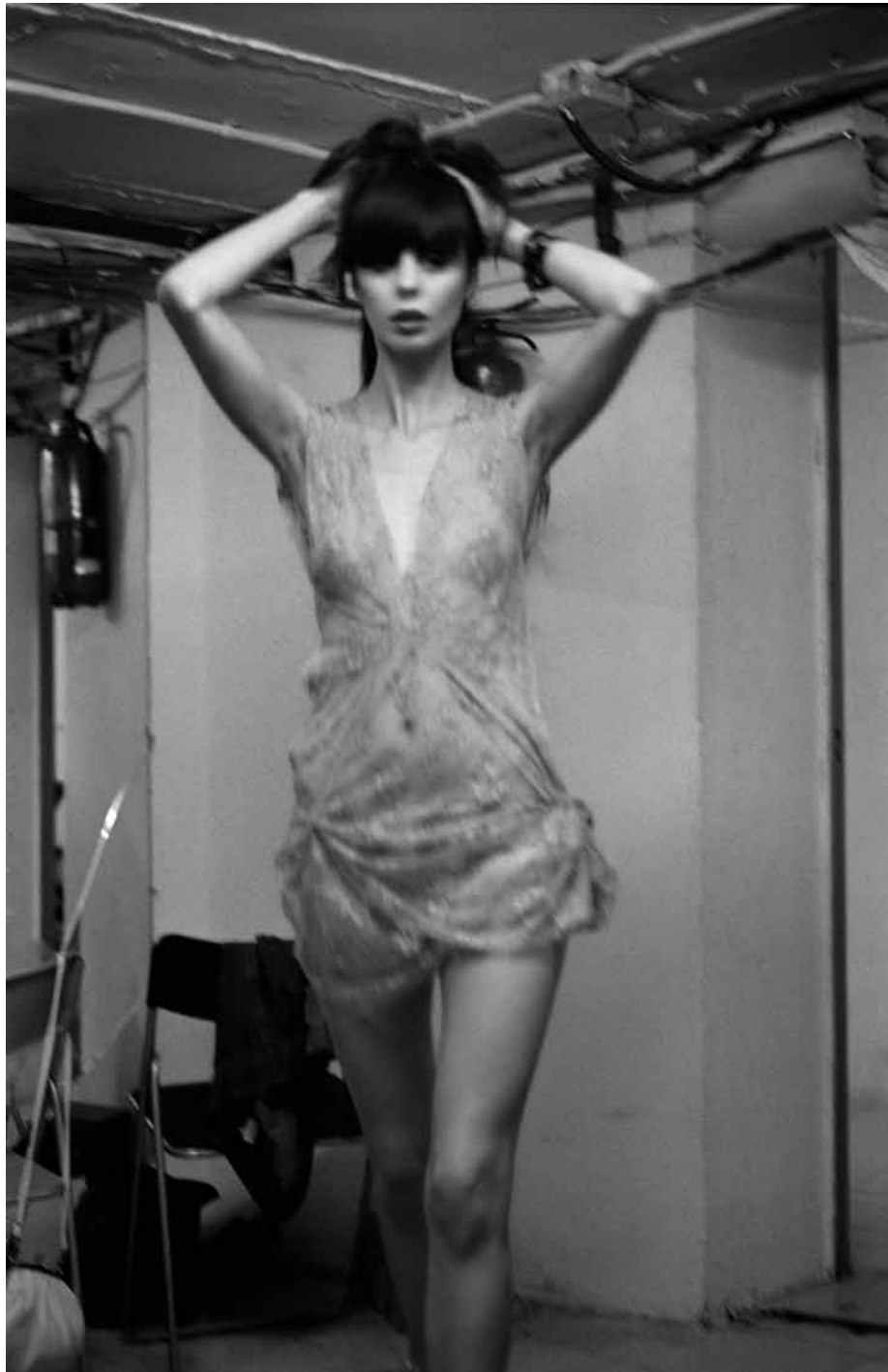












RUSSELL
HERRON



RUSSELL
HERRON



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Selection of images from *Borrowed View No. 2 – passages (or combinations)*
Heidi Vogels

INSERTS

A postcard from the Hebridean island of Eigg
(projecteigg.info) Alexander Stevenson

Russell Herron Stencil
Russell Herron

An Endless Supply is a monthly magazine published by Robin Kirkham and Harry Blackett. <http://anendlessupply.wordpress.com/>

Issue #10 of An Endless Supply is guest curated by Bruce Asbestos / Trade
Available to download as a PDF (tradegallery.org)

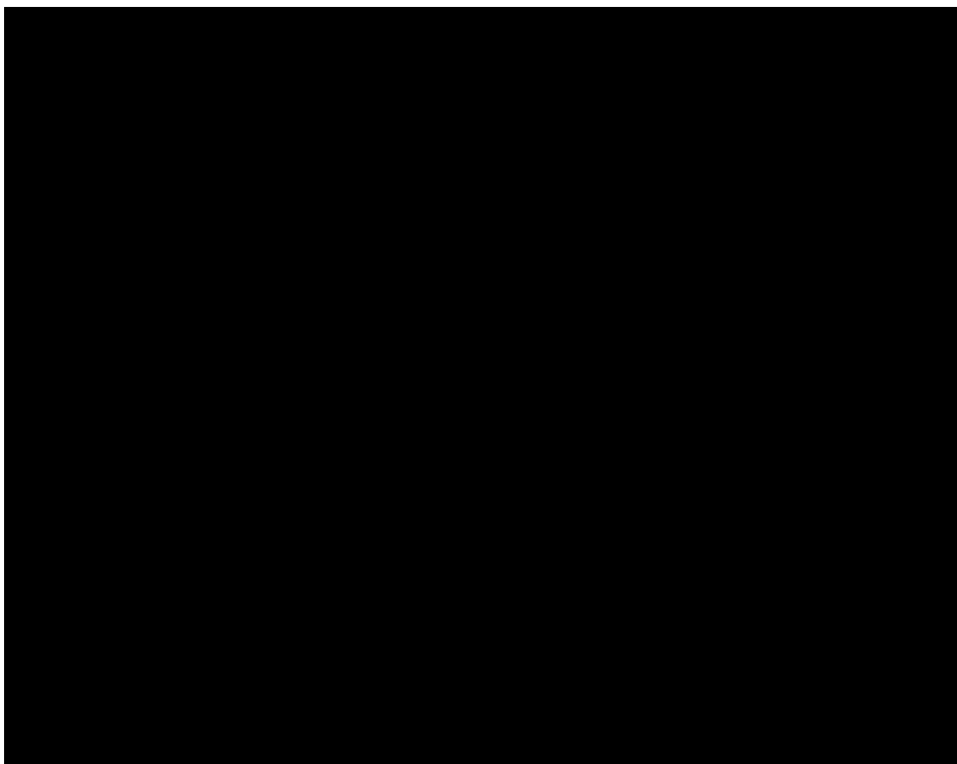
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Magazine design and Trade logo by Nicholas Chaffe www.nickchaffe.com



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