

# Duke magazine interviews

## RICHARD OF OZ

A few months back, during a late-night fit of despair over the financial state of the DUKE Corporation (i.e. no capital with which to produce the next issue) we decided it was time to find a mentor of sorts. Someone in the magazine business with enough clout, who could mould and shape our directionless vessel into a formidable tour de force (with a bonus for prior criminal convictions). With nothing to lose, we wired the one man we knew would have the cojones and wit to indulge our misguided fancies - Richard Neville: the founder and publisher of the satirical 60's/70's magazine OZ. Yes, indeed. The very same radical whose controversial forum for politics and culture saw him tried at the Old Bailey and sentenced to 15 months hard labour, under charges of obscenity and 'corrupting public morals'. With such an impressive CV, we knew this was the man for us! After months of back and forth correspondence, we finally nailed an interview with the man, and over a quiet afternoon tea, we proceeded to grill him on his life's work. What was he up to these days? Would he have time to act as our very own Maharishi? Our sage? Our guide? With his spiritual guidance, we could surely conquer the media market as he had decades earlier. But after all those years of psychedelic haziness, would he be up to the task? Read on and find out...

*An extract from the Duke interview, savagely edited by Richard*

DUKE: So they're making a movie about your life huh? Hippie Hippie Shake. How do you feel about that? Is it weird?

Richard Neville: Well look, I wrote the book eons ago. It didn't make a lot of money because books sort of don't - especially books about hippies. There was a lot of interest from different film companies and I got excited, but it's been 12 years since publication and there've been so many different scripts. I was wondering what was taking them so long and it turned out all the scripts were crap.

D: Did they need your approval?

R: They didn't need it contractually, but they seemed to care a lot. I read the first script, which was going around on the web and it was so gross. Everyone was saying 'Fucken this' and 'Fucken that'. I was depressed about it, but knew in my heart of hearts that it wasn't final. We were very disappointed so I sent some emails and the next thing we know, the director, Beban Kidron flies out here with her video cam and interviews Louise Ferrier, Martin Sharp, all the OZ characters.

D: She did her own research then.

R: Yeah. The difference between the book and the movie is that the book tried to be truthful to dates of events and the circumstances. With the movie, they've liberated themselves and gone for the essence of the era, which I think is much better. You can't pack 10 years into a movie and pretend it's 2.

D: Well we know Sienna Miller's playing your love interest: we saw the photos on the net.

R: So you've seen the pictures of her naked? I haven't seen them yet.

D: Who's playing you?

R: Ah, a guy called Cillian Murphy.

D: Yeah, he's great. Sienna's been around; she played Edie Sedgwick recently.

R: Well I didn't go see it.

D: Did you meet Warhol?

R: Yeah.

D: What was he like?

R: Very quiet ... and I'm noisy. It was at Max's Kansas City, I went there several times ... He was probably just keeping his inner self to himself. He was like a vacuum.

D: Wow! Did you meet anyone else in his camp? Candy Darling?

R: Umm, probably. I met: Fran Lebowitz. We got on really well and she gave me her book the last time I was in New York. When I got back to Sydney, she'd written 'Fantastic seeing you again since Max's Kansas City'. So I had met her back then, but being a stoned hippie, I'd forgotten.

D: ha ha yeah, she's great. I saw her at New York Fashion week and she was like 'Oh god, this is so boring. Oh god I hate it.'

R: I once interviewed her for the Mike Walsh show... She's fabulous. I had a friend called Lillian Roxon, an Australian journalist who wrote the very first Encyclopaedia of Rock 'n Roll. She was this short, dumpy, asthmatic, brilliant journalist and she was the one who was always invited Aussie visitors Max's and of course I wasn't cutting a lot of mustard in New York at that stage.

## **ENTER THE FUTURIST**

D: So what are other projects have you got bubbling along besides the movie?

R: Well the main game is trying to introduce people to the idea that the future's something you can engage with. Being a 'futurist' is how I pay the rent. Footprints of the Future is a booklet I published in 2002, so now you can you can make your own judgement on what I got right or what I got wrong.

D: Can you give our readers a prediction?

R: It's a little more complicated than giving a prediction. People like me find early adopters, and think 'What are these people doing that will catch on?'

D: So it's a little bit like forecasting?

R: Well I suppose that's the straight way of thinking about it, but it's also personal as well. It's about foresight. It's social, technology, environmental, economic, political and psychological. It's pretty broad. I don't just talk about the future of gadgets; I leave that to Wired magazine or Fast Company. But the future of war, that's interesting; the future of communities. Being a futurist is getting people to think across boundaries, to think like a generalist. What's the emotion of the future? Most people are locked into their own speciality. The Industrial Revolution gave us specialisation: 'I'm a hairdresser, I bake cakes, I'm an accountant...' All these job titles. We need to stretch how we think, how we

live and adapt to the speed of change. The cartoonist Robert Crumb did the best futurist forecast ever. Have you seen the 3 panels?

D: Yeah we love Robert Crumb! Are you talking about the one where it starts in the 1800s and the environment changes with advancement?

R: It's an excellent example of future scenarios: Catastrophe, the Jetsons hi-tech fantasy and a hippie eco-topia.

D: Crumb got burnt over Felix the Cat right?

R: Yeah. It was a copyright dispute. He lost the court case on that. D: Well speaking of court cases, let's get into talking about OZ. From the beginning I guess, what made you want to start it?

R: Strangely enough, rather like the essence in the world today. I read the Sydney Morning Herald this morning and you know, criminals are running the show; no doubt about that. And with APEG, I really like was The Chaser did cause I thought, 'Finally, the public are laughing on the side of good'. So it's a very interesting parallel. We started OZ in 1963 and it was Richard Walsh and Martin Sharp and all these people around us who didn't quite know what to do. There was no film industry, the people who were the most creative were people in advertising and we all seemed to want to have an arts degree because there was no HECS then. When we left school, we started seeing stuff. People would march on ANZAC day and talk about freedom, but if you tried to buy Lolita it was banned. There were books you couldn't read. I was thinking, 'Gosh, this is weird'. French films were banned ... even pop songs were banned. I think it was Manfred Mann who sang 'If you gotta stay, you gotta stay all night'. And the radio wouldn't play it because it was about a woman who might stay over at his house.

D: Ha ha, that's ridiculous!

R: Yeah, and gradually everything started seeming absurd. 'Hang on, where is Vietnam? Who are we fighting?' And you couldn't find out what was going on. This was Australia at the dawn of the sixties. At university I got involved with the student magazine, which was published by the Sydney Morning Herald presses, so we knew our way around the place. We'd call up and say 'We're doing a story on Vietnam and we need some pictures'. They'd send all these photos of US soldiers torturing the Vietnamese, you know, putting them in vats of boiling water, extracting their entrails, etc. It was just so disgusting; it was like Abu Ghraib. And just like today, the media didn't want to print it, didn't want to taint our noble mission with pics of atrocities. So we put it in OZ.

D: It sounds like Australia was very unaware of international happenings; very closed off.

R: All sorts of things were happening politically and socially. Lenny Bruce weirdly arrived to perform at a Sydney pub. I didn't end up going, but the next day the headlines were something like 'Disc Jockey Walks Out On Smut Merchant'. Lenny Bruce had said 'Fuck' on stage and was pulled off. So I phoned him up and got onto his minders: these mafia showbiz heavies. I went for a meeting with these guys to try to get him to perform at the university ... It was at a nightclub. I walked in wearing my duffel coat and they asked me what I wanted to drink and I didn't really know. I said 'a gin and tonic' ha ha.

D: That's probably what I would've ordered. Ha ha.

R: It's because my mother probably mentioned it.

D: How old were you at the time?

R: Really young. I left school at 18, so I would've been about 20. But more like 14 - I was an immature child, very young.

D: But you had some idea of what you were doing. You knew what you liked.

R: Well I love freedom of speech. I was born with that DNA. I cannot stand people not being able to say or write what they want. Paedophilia, we obviously have to quarantine.

D: Yeah that one's by itself.

R: Anyway, Lenny was thrilled.

D: Of course, now he had a chance to play to students, who probably craving this sort of thing.

R: Well the night before, the Vice-Chancellor banned it! I couldn't believe it. In the end, Bruce did one or two shows in Australia, a funny little place 'The Rose Bay Winter Garden', but he couldn't play at the university! That's when my heart turned to stone and I became a satirist radical. I thought 'Fuck this'. That was the event that changed my life. It was sad, one of his guys called me up and said 'Lenny is so heartbroken, can you go and meet him?' So I went with some people and he was just lying in his bed comatose.

D: Was he on hard drugs?

R: Must have been - he was practically dead. Anyway, I guess we started OZ because mainstream media back then was a lot straighter than it is now. There weren't a lot of independent magazines and the one or two around were very cerebral. We wanted pictures and humour.

D: But even now in Australia, there are hardly any true independents out there. With OZ pushing the boundaries of convention, what was one of the first things that happened that got the alarm bells going and got you guys into big trouble?

R: Yeah that was in Sydney. It went in for years ....

D: And then you went to London and it happened again with the obscenity trial...

R: It was always about obscenity, even though in Australia there was nothing obscene by any definition.

D: And it was because you pissed in a fountain?

R: It was actually with two friends from the university. It wasn't the other two Oz editors. I was the full time guy in the office in those days, Richard Walsh was still studying medicine and Martin Sharp was the artist who would come in like Leonardo Da Vinci and dash off brilliant satire. Anyway, we really didn't have our dicks out. We just kinda stood there in front of the fountain. But there was also other things that freaked out the cops. Martin did this terrific boardgame, Coppers Snakes and Ladders, so if you paid a bribe you went up, or if you kicked a suspect you went up but if you let someone off, you went down the ladder.

D: Which would be totally fine now ...

R: Completely! They'd publish it in the Herald's cartoon age. We had an article about marijuana in the same issue. A friend in advertising did a piece about marijuana curing colds. There was even a piece by Lenny Bruce, a vicious send up of a Catholic sermon. I think there's a special charge if you take the piss out of religion. What's it called?

D: You can get charged for that?

R: Oh believe me, you can. Let's see, it's treason if it's against the state, obscenity if it's sexual. Mocking religion - that's blasphemy!

D: Did you serve any jail time?

R: Yes, 3 jail terms on London, but all quite short. I think 10 days was the longest. I've been to Brixton Jail, Wormwood Scrubs and another I've forgotten

D: How did your parents feel about all this?

R: My dad was good actually. I recently found an interview the ABC did with him, which I didn't know about. He was totally straight, but he was like 'What about British justice? How dare they. His great grandfather was in the charge of the Light Brigade', etc. He was fantastic. We went much further in London than we did in Sydney, but I think he believed in due process. He was pretty cool about it. My mother was less cool because she reconverted to Catholicism later in life; a menopausal re-conversion, which is quite common, and they get a bit strict about stuff like sex. So she wasn't thrilled.

D: Do you think there's anything today with that kind of shock-value, in printed matter?

R: Well I would say child pornography. Something that is truly shocking. But what I think should be printed a lot more often than it is, is dead soldiers. Even though I'm quite squeamish, I've sometimes printed corpses on my website. People need to see this stuff, to see what troops are capable of doing when they occupy a country, even our troops. It should be shown in the mainstream press and on the evening news - but it's not. It's a form of unconscious censorship, or a misguided attempt at patriotism. Generals claim we're there to build schools and hospitals, and help the locals, but spend a few minutes on Google images and see what happened by the time the Coalition had finished with Fallujah. Disgusting beyond belief ...

In some of my 'future' presentation I show a slide of CIA Rendition in progress. That's when they kidnap people in foreign countries and put them on a planes — hooded, chained, clad in nappies, pumped with nasty drugs ....

D: And they don't know where they're go...

R: No. A lot of the things I do in my presentations are about the promises and perils of the future; and about mass media's attempt to glorify today's resource wars and to infantilize its audience. Many people don't know that. When I put up a pic of a rendition in action, I aske 'has anyone seen this photo?' There's maybe 5 hands, out of 500!

D: A lot of people don't do their own research as well. We find that a lot with people our own age. They don't want to educate themselves.

R: That's right. All you have to do is type 'Iraq', 'photos', atrocities, 'Faluja' or something and you'll get hundreds of pictures. The Net is like having a second brain, a personal library. It's an augmentation. It's so sci-fi thing. You just sit down, type a few things and you can find out anything — and you can double check!