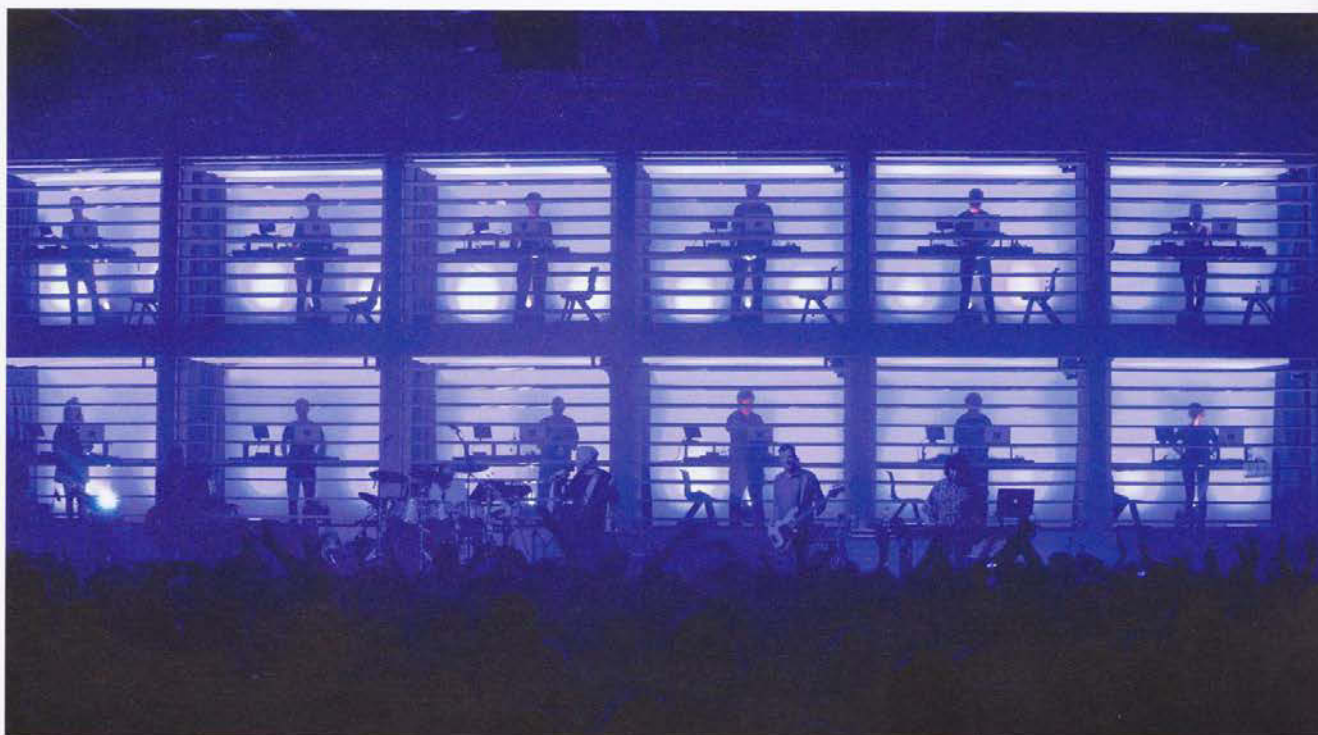


MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL



Various venues, Manchester, UK

There's a point in Slater B. Bradley's grainy, pixelated video *Factory Archives* (2001–02) when the ghostly figure of Joy Division singer Ian Curtis – played by an actor – briefly takes shape, only to quickly dissolve again as the bleakly beautiful strains of 'Decades', the final track on the band's 1980 album, *Closer*, fade out. Weighted as it is with the knowledge of Curtis's suicide that same year, at the age of 23, the image captures a sense of the past as an untouchable but ever-present influence, a blurry mark that won't wash out. *Factory Archives* features in the Matthew Higgs/Jon Savage-curated 'True Faith', an exhibition celebrating the legacy of Joy Division and New Order, presented at Manchester Art Gallery for the sixth edition of the biennial Manchester International Festival (MIF). Its relevance to the band's story is clear; the move from Joy Division's gothic darkness to New Order's

light-touch, melancholy-tinged pop has forever been read through the prism of Curtis's passing. Yet, it also feels pertinent to the short history of this festival, which, since launching in 2007, has sought to navigate a path between its commitment to newness and its recognition of artistic tradition – not least the period defined by Factory Records and the canon of hugely influential music and graphic design that the label produced.

The band's story is a tale of reinvention and fortitude, seductively wrapped in the thrillingly opaque, fine art-inspired record sleeve designs of Peter Saville and facilitated by the maverick, anti-music-business approach of Factory boss Tony Wilson. Many artists have been influenced by the band's music and visuals, and some have directly referenced them in their work – Martin Boyce's 2002 installation, *Our Love Is Like the Flowers, the Rain, the Sea and the Hours*, for example, takes its title from a line in the New Order song, 'The Village' (1983). Boyce's tree-like fluorescent light tube sculptures, wire

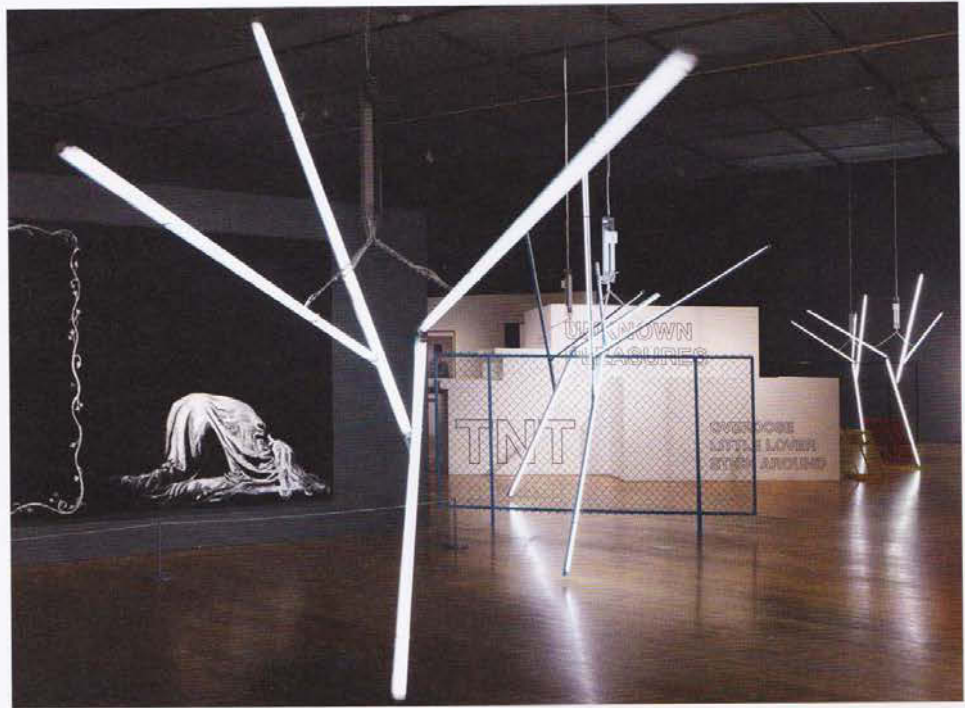
Above
New Order + Liam Gillick, 'So It Goes ...', 2017, performance documentation at Old Granada Studios, Manchester

fences and disconcertingly pristine street furniture fracture the gallery into shadowy sections, defining the space between paintings, films and sculptural works by Glenn Brown, Mark Leckey, James Pyman and Julian Schnabel; there's even Ignace Henri Théodore Fantin-Latour's *A Basket of Roses* (1890), a detail of which formed the cover of the 1983 album *Power, Corruption & Lies*. 'True Faith' is also a selective rummage through the archives: a second gallery includes intriguing curiosities such as early concert footage of both bands and New Order posters designed by John Baldessari, Barbara Kruger and Lawrence Weiner. There is a tantalizing showreel of pop videos, too, with Robert Longo's frenetic 1986 film for 'Bizarre Love Triangle' an ecstatic highlight.

Across town at the Old Granada Studios there was more New Order, this time the present-day version. Now acrimoniously split from original bass player Peter Hook, the band teamed up with Liam Gillick and a 12-strong 'synth

orchestra' for 'So It Goes ...', a series of five shows that, like 'True Faith', largely succeeded in disrupting the arc of time, re-arranging and updating songs from across a 40-year spectrum. Gillick – whose *Scale Model of a Social Centre for Teenagers for Milan 1993* (2017) featured in 'True Faith' – was responsible for the staging, creating a two-storey set for the synth players. Each storey was partitioned into six squares with wooden slats that opened and closed like Venetian blinds, allowing a glimpse of each musician as multicoloured lighting poured through the gaps.

The MIF ethos is all about new commissions and unique events, creating a sense of liveness and occasion that continues to set it apart from other UK arts festivals and biennials. Its sense of place and relationship with its host city has always been strong – perhaps most notably expressed in 2009 with Jeremy Deller's *Procession*, a parade of the city's people and their pastimes, professions and cultures. This year's festival opened with another parade of sorts, *What Is the City but the People?*, billed as 'from an idea by Jeremy Deller'. Described by new festival director, John McGrath, as 'a modern portrait of the city', it was trailed as an antidote to overly extravagant opening ceremonies. The straightforward staging consisted of a 100-metre raised walkway in the city's Piccadilly Gardens, with large video screens at each end displaying images and information about the selected Mancunians who waved and beamed as they walked. A multicultural, socially diverse love letter to and from the city, the piece included touching stories of homelessness and hardship, migration and new beginnings. Coming a little over a month after the Manchester Arena terrorist bombing that killed 22 people, *What Is the City* had an emotional charge which transcended its simplicity, making participants out of its audience and vice versa.



Above
 'True Faith', 2017, exhibition view at Manchester Art Gallery

Below
What Is the City but the People?, 2017, created by the people of Manchester, from an idea by Jeremy Deller, performance documentation at Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester



What, I wonder, would famous curmudgeon and Mancunian Anthony Burgess have made of it all – or, better still, his character Enderby: the flaccid, minor poet often described as the novelist and polymath's alter-ego? This year marks the centenary of Burgess's birth and with *No End to Enderby* (2017), their film installation at Whitworth Art Gallery, Stephen Sutcliffe and Graham Eatough have created a time-travelling exploration of posterity and the shifting nature of artistic reputations. Filmed in various outdoor locations across Manchester, as well as at the city's Royal Exchange theatre and Old Granada Studios, the pair's two-part film draws on Burgess's quartet of 'Enderby' novels (1963–84). Told via B-movie-style time travel – firstly into the 1963 flat of the snoring and flatulent Enderby and then, back further, to Shakespeare's England – and with a theatrical, 1980s TV-drama aesthetic, *No End to Enderby* is funny, absurd, serious and playful. Its tone somewhere between reverence and self-ridicule, it stays faithful to Burgess's flamboyantly expressive dialogue.

Loosely based around the final scene in Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film *Dr Strangelove*, Yael Bartana's new commission, *What If Women Ruled the World?* presented a similar combination of absurdity and seriousness. Set in an approximation of the film's Ken Adam-designed war room at the suitably apocalyptic Mayfield, a disused and derelict former railway depot, the piece featured an all-female cast – except for a scantily clad male who was occasionally called in to serve refreshments. Despite its theatrical pedigree (performance director Vicky

Featherstone, writer Abi Morgan), *What If?*'s combination of scripted interventions by professional actors and the informed accounts of invited specialists was largely unsuccessful as a piece of theatre. Featuring different experts – from human rights lawyers to philosophers to scientists and politicians – on each performance during its three-night run, it flitted and stalled between dark comedy, absurdist slapstick, stilted political discussion and Donald Trump gags. Of course, the clues to what was really going on here were provided by the presence of two film cameras as well as the A4 information sheet we were handed as we went in, which stated: 'Thank you for joining us on the set of Yael Bartana's film experiment.' Listening to a ticking Doomsday Clock and watching news-reel flashbacks to key nuclear-age moments, the audience was witnessing the daily rushes of Bartana's yet-to-be-edited film rather than a finished work.

Presented across 18 days, this year's MIF lived up to its reputation for ambitious, collaborative commissions. These included its closing event, *Ceremony* – Phil Collins's symbolic unveiling of a former Soviet-era statue of Friedrich Engels, sourced from a village in the Ukraine. It was a kind of homecoming for the co-author of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), who wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) after his experience of living in the city between 1842–44. That the event's title is also the name of a song written by Joy Division and released by New Order is hard to ignore. As is the statue's new home: Tony Wilson Place.

Chris Sharratt