

what I'm putting into it. And I, for one, don't want to be considered the author of my works.

"I agree with the deconstructionists that it is the audience and the culture that interpret art, not the person who created it. Once the artist has created a work it is no longer his, in terms of what it means, because everyone brings their own luggage to a song or a piece of art. That's why some people like something and others don't.

"As I get older, I don't want to be interpreting society for others because I know less and less the older I get. The major exploration an artist can make is to present how incredibly complex life is. In fact, what we do is create more questions and more confusion than there was before. Art doesn't simplify anything, it makes it even more complex."

In the 70s, when you lived out your roles like Ziggy and the Thin White Duke beyond the stage, was that the result of youthful naivety?

"It came out of a multitude of things, naivety went into it. When you're young, and especially in those days, you really thought you were supposed to say something. If you were a singer and a writer you had to have something to write about. I was still writing in a cut-up fashion, but

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trying to put form to it. Also, I was doing quite an amount of drugs and that's not the best way to solve the situation. So, I was living in the eye of a vortex of pure and utter madness."

Was that cut-up process of scissors and glue as a songwriting process really that random?

"Absolutely, and William Burroughs, with his cut-up methods of writing, has been my mentor for 20 years. When I was a kid I had an addiction to reading, and I came across American writers like Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs, who I met in 1972. He struck a resonance with me in the way he abused reality that actually made more sense than reality itself.

"When I met him he was such a great guy and we had great talks about stream of consciousness, and he put me on course for how I was going to work in the future. I used to get down with my scissors and glue and cut up everything I was writing into two and three word phrases, and basically put them in a hat and pull them out and see what sort of animal it was. It's exciting as you never know what's going to come up."

So, you must have a giggle when critics sit

around the table and work out what your songs are supposed to be about?

"If they try and suss out what the song is according to my meaning then I have a giggle, but if they do their own interpretation, that fascinates me. Nothing gives me more pleasure than what people derive from my songs and have paralleled their lives against them.

"Everything we do in culture is to be used. If we buy a chair we buy it because it says something about us. Why does a businessman get a haircut that's a bit sticky on top? He does it because in his private fantasy he sees himself as a bit of an astronaut.

"Art is to be used, not venerated. I'm very anti-museum, anti the idea that if we stand next to a painting long enough we'll get the wisdom of the artist. That attitude to art is pathetic."

You must've been chuffed that Nirvana used your art by covering 'The Man Who Sold the World'?

"I was over the moon. I'm quite aware of what weight my writing has had in Europe (I always felt I was fairly Euro-centric), but I didn't feel that I was part of the American landscape, as they have their own thing. I kinda felt I was this eccentric limey that went and toured and

because she was on the Andy Warhol movie, and she told me that album and Low were two of the few albums he kept throughout his life. I don't think she said that to flatter because she's not that kind of girl. So, I was knocked out that those two records were a serious part of his life."

He was the equivalent of Presley, Lennon and Rotten for this generation.

"Yeah, and it's up to every generation to create it's own language and that means tearing down what was there before, and that's a sign of growth. I get mad when I hear people saying the youth of today are so indifferent. It's because they're having to adapt to a society that's so chaotic and fragmented, where it seems all power has been taken from them for making decisions in their lives.

"The world isn't allowing them the same luxury of time to look at things as we did, so they're learning to scan the surface of things. Who's to say that's worse than looking at things in depth? If you'd asked kids from the 80s what music from that period they'd take with them for the rest of their lives they'd say Kylie Minogue or Paula Abdul. You must be crazy, there's nothing in the 80s. But you ask the same question now and a lot of them will

I touched on the drug thing, but not as much as some of my contemporaries because I was bored with the endless litanies about what pains they went through. The fact is, I was pretty stoned out for nearly all of the 70s and part of the 80s."

And Suede obviously owe a lot to your music of the 70s.

"They're one of the more obvious role imitators, I just don't know what they're doing. They've certainly got substance, and for a new band they seem like quite an old band, what with Blur and Oasis scooting onto the horizon.

"I was impressed with Suede's stuff past the initial hype-gimmickry that happened in their first year — poor sods, but we all have to go through that. Brett is a very good lyricist, with a great sense of irony and quite a bit of poignancy as well. The newer artists like Suede are being extraordinarily eclectic. They're using the whole history of rock as their palate, which is very post-modernist, which is what today's society is about — picking at the whole pile of our cultural process and putting together these pieces of art, music and ways of life."

Do you see your career as one of continuity, or can it be divided into phases?

"I see it more as an obsession to change, an

people came and looked at me curiously and then I'd go away again. I didn't feel I was out there with Bobby Dylan and Bruce. It didn't feel like my place."

But what about the soul influenced Golden Years and Young Americans?

"I guess that was maybe one place we collided, but when I moved into the Euro-centric stuff with Eno, I felt we had parted ways. Yet, from the Nirvana point onwards, all of these other bands started coming out of the woodwork saying how they'd been influenced by those late 70s albums and *Scary Monsters* and *Low*. I started reading articles by Smashing Pumpkins and Stone Temple Pilots saying what an influence I'd had, and this was a revelation.

"So, suddenly in the early 90s, stuff I thought didn't have anything to do with America had actually been found by these new American bands. It's been really gratifying, really a turn on."

Is there any reason you can think of why Cobain chose to cover 'The Man Who Sold the World'?

"It's full of teenage angst. But I don't know, I'd love to have met the guy. I've met his wife

say Pearl Jam and Nirvana. They've started a music and a vocab' they can go with that will help them get through their lives. The worst we can do is deride and fail to try and understand where they're coming from.

"I've got a 24 year old son and I know about this first hand. I saw him treading water for a few years and then he blossomed when he understood what he needed out of life. Doesn't every generation go through it? What is this story we're hearing?: 'Oh, the kids today, the music they listen to.' I can't believe I'm hearing that from the same people who were so adamant they were going to change the world 20 years ago."

A couple of years ago you met Brett Anderson of Suede and you admitted to past drug excesses. Why then?

"Because I was asked about it, as simple as that. I've never been a secret man, but I've always been private and I rarely spout off about things unless somebody brings it up. At that time my whole life was entering a different phase. I'd just got married and there was a whole new buoyancy in my life, and it was wonderful getting over the 40s. I felt very fresh, so

obsession to not trap myself in one genre so I can find what it is I'm writing about. That seems to be the only continuum in my work, the maddening need to catch up with myself."

Your life is more settled than ever. Who was it who said domesticity is the enemy of creativity?

"Probably Picasso, the amount of fuck-ups he had in his private life [laughs]."

But how do age and domestic contentment affect creativity in rock 'n' roll?

"I don't think they have anything to do with it all, it's a creative drive. You're either addictively curious about the life you live or you're not. It's that simple. Your curiosity either dries up as you feel less able to cope, or it grows and your appetite gets bigger for the very basic reason: Why are we here?

"As I get older, two questions come more into focus: When will I die and why am I here? I don't look at them morbidly, but I find them fascinating. What an incredible game, what's the point of it all?"

GEORGE KAY

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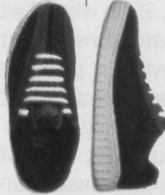
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