

Tribute from Nick Holliman

During the 46 years of our friendship Michel always addressed me as Lord Snooty, Guv'nor or even Snoot. Although surprising for someone who appreciated the idea of égalité it revealed the playfulness and spontaneity of the man, which tended to get the better of him sometimes.

Throughout our friendship he never got angry with me. This was no sang-froid, for others knew of his gathering wrath and ire. He recognised our common threads: London, Francophilia, the 60s. "You have never ever shafted me Nik because you're a libertarian." Michel was forgetting fraternité.

We first met in my kitchen in a flat in Lancaster Road, North Kensington. He lived nearby with Karoline where they were producing "Sub" magazine and visited regularly. Many months later, he joined one of our regular kitchen soirées where a group of us were planning to disrupt the International Motor Show in October 1973.

We focused on the recent killing of five striking car workers in a SEAT factory in Spain and on a factsheet I had written about the environmental and human costs of the motorcar. We distributed thousands of leaflets at the show that we printed on the back of press releases from car companies and managed to disrupt a lecture for executives from Europe's car manufacturers given by Giovanni Agnelli, the head of FIAT.

Michel wrote about this to Guy Debord who thought we were breaking a bit of new ground – ecologically.

After that we joined in numerous disruptions, demonstrations and distributed all kinds of leaflets over the years. In retrospect some of it was a bit facile although few seemed to have 'clocked it' at the time that in London the Spectacle was getting off lightly.

We joined Reclaim the Streets, Stop the City and No War in Iraq demos. We co-operated on talks in pubs, translation, leaflets, letters-to-the-editor, producing cassette tapes, attending exhibitions, lectures and cinema. Michel's plan was to "Pepper around the target".

Michel warmed to the déclassés and marginots. He had a warm handshake too. Invariably he had time for a tête-a-tête, even when en route to a meeting. He was a supporter of social housing – against the odds of a housing market skewed in favour of keeping flats empty, as an investment, rather than occupying them as homes. Voluntarily he helped to get people housed.

His library included books about Arabic proverbs, French cinematic terms, Cockney rhyming slang, Iranian swearwords, mariner's and convicts slang and numerous dictionaries, all of which showed his genuine, informal interest in language and languages. Slang was a fascination of his and he loved the talks on radio.

He grew to understand the seriousness of the environmental crisis, to love Ealing comedies, "Private Eye", the Goons and a cup of rosie li. He learned too to cite references and annotate a text. In return he introduced me to more issues of "Le Monde", "Charlie Hebdo" and "Le Canard Enchaîné" than I could manage, a genre of French chansons, writers and texts, which were fed to him by friends such as Luc and Olivier. How else would I have found out about Manolo Solo, dying of AIDS in Paris, who howled his radical songs at live gigs or Vaneigem's "Les Hérésies"? Here was an autodidact passing on material that never gets an airing in school, university or mainstream media.

Michel's imagining was that the Situationist's critique, which was partly written to heal the rift between Marx and the anarchists, would be superseded and that the modern re-assessment of Marx's writings, coupled with the value critic, would deliver the coup-de-grâce to the modern

commodity economy. His other imagining was that Raoul Vanageim's idea that modern, popular music could be a conduit to young people for critical ideas would work because most modern art forms had abandoned the historical role of art in favour of vulgar recuperation. Groups such as "the Censored Few" were part of this project.

Although a confirmed Londoner he was profoundly worried about the air pollution generated by traffic on the Euston Road, the decline in behaviour in the streets and the latest crop of arrivistes who now work as professionals and execs in London.

In the early noughties, when I returned to live near the Lancaster Road gaff, I introduced Michel to a journalist. He could have been her beau, her escort. Then it fizzled out.

"Stone the crows Michel, what happened?"

"Well, she's not a London bird."

"What do you mean by a London bird?"

"Well, she doesn't pay for her own drinks!"

Here is a pot-pourri of further quotes – a kind of cheery aide-memoire about my old china Michel.

"You would, wouldn't you."

"You dun well my son."

"I'm interested in everything."

"I can follow the dialectic in two languages now."

"Pass it around!"

"Give it a plug."

"I'm against all -isms."

"If I had the money, I would only buy hand-made, made-to-measure shoes." (He liked the idea of preserving pre-industrial life.)

"I believe in love."

"I like the idea of living over 100 years."

"I don't do death."

Well mon bras, here we are, although your ISBN numbers confer something of immortality.