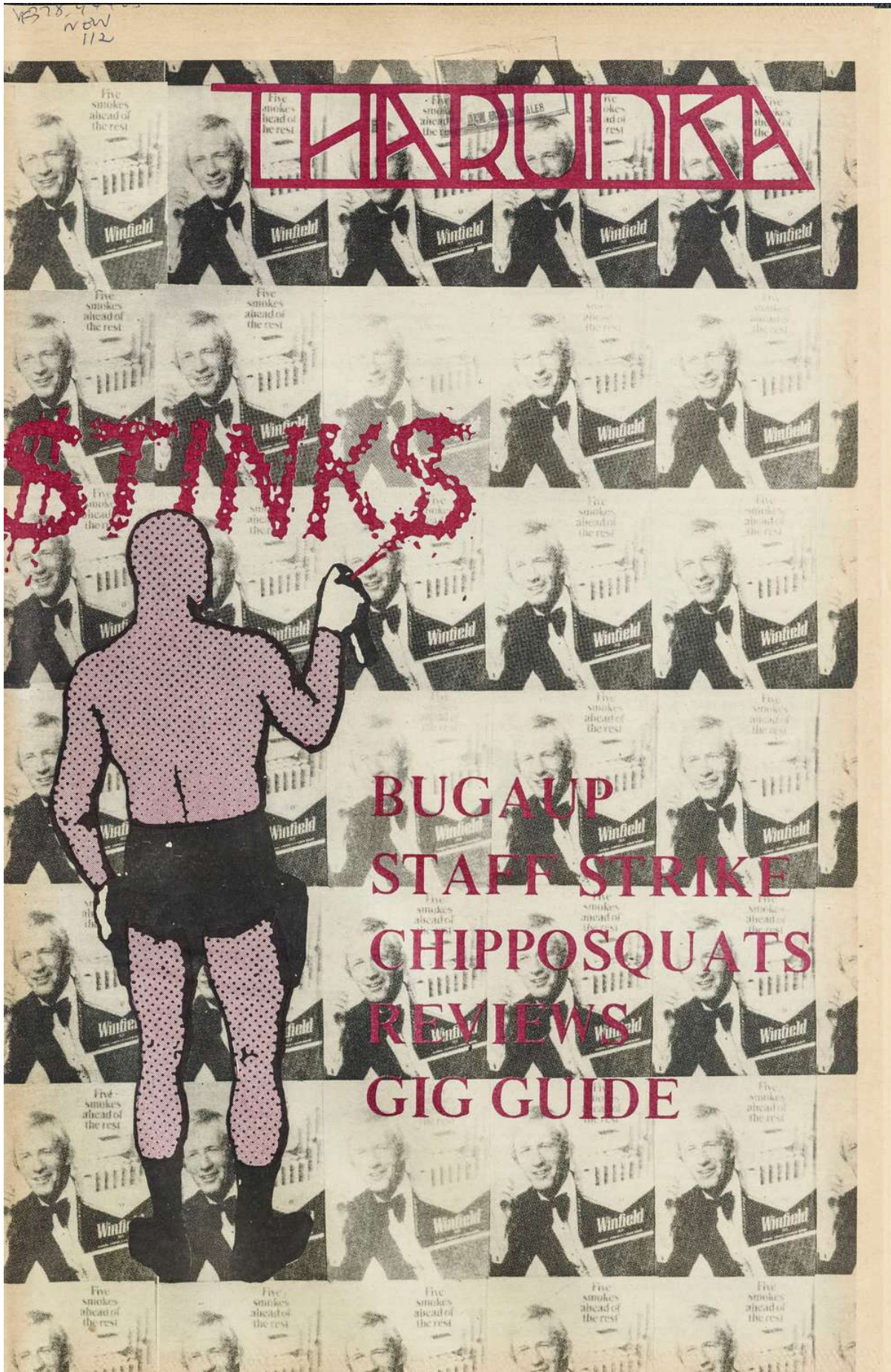


Tharunka Volume 26 No 01



Tharunka Volume 26 No 01



Bill, "G" & "R" are members of "BUGAUP" : Billboard- Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions.

SC: I know a lot of people think that your work is possibly the most important antismoking campaign running in Australia. What sort of effects do you think that you are having?

Bill: We must be having an effect at lots- of different levels because the feedback that we get back - if I can use that awful word - is at lots of different levels also. Most of it is positive. Most of it is "*gee, I'm glad that somebody's doing it – it's good to see*". The only people who aren't pleased to see it are those with vested interests: the tobacco companies and their advertisers. The public Transport Commission, their security and the police have sometimes said to me that they wish they didn't have to go about arresting me. A number of people have said to me over the years that "*it might have been our graffiti that stopped me smoking*". When I'm talking people I'm sometimes introduced "*Oh, this is the mad graffitiist - the phantom sprayer*". They say "*You're the one! I used to go past White Bay and see it there. It used really make me realise what I was doing to myself*". That sort of feedback makes me keep on going. The effect against advertising in general is strong. It makes people realise that they're having unhealthy stuff foisted upon em wherever they go.

The part that worries me is when they say "*I'm glad somebody's doing it. I'd like to be doing it but I can't quite get around to it*". Sometimes I just wish more would do it. But that's what it's leading to now. There are more people doing it.

SC: You seem to be covering a very wide area of Sydney and the country. How do you get such a good coverage?

Bill: We work hard at it. We go for hours and hours. The more you do, the better you get at it. Obviously using ray cans is part of it - knowing how to keep them going. Knowing how to get them cheap - Target stores and the ones there, they're so much cheaper than regular places.

Tharunka Volume 26 No 01

SC: How many people do you know who are active sprayers at the moment?

Bill: Personally, five. But there are ones who we don't know who do occasional ones. And those who come in and out. Five doesn't sound many, but with any movement that involves putting people on the line at their own expense, perhaps getting a criminal record, the possibility going to gaol, it's lucky we've got this many. Deciding if you're willing to go to gaol, as I've done, I think is very, very important.

SC: Obviously a lot of thought is put into what you write. Many remember the funnier ones - the "masturbation fantasy" series on the KB ads all over Sydney. People say it makes sense, the combination of the picture with your slogan. What sort of things do you consider in using a slogan?

Bill: It's really changed. We all affect each other. "*Masturbation fantasy*" is R's and the first time he did that I thought it would alienate a few. But obviously it's strong, it's great. As you say, it lends itself perfectly to it. The first time I saw it, it said "*shake hands with a phallus*". It was good to see and no one I know did it. I'd love to know. It was perfect.

"R": Many of the specific messages we do are very much directed by the billboard itself, the space available for writing, the words and how they lend themselves to distortion and addition. For example, Escort had a young long-haired person dressed in a teacher's mortar-board hat. I think this is obviously directed at school children - it has this authoritarian air about it, while being somehow mischievous. This is a good example of the inherent contradictions you can find in many ads. Escort now has on the bottom in small letters "*Give yourself 25 of the best*" which relates ambiguously back to the school environment, referring to it in an indirect manner. That caption lends itself to good graffiti so we have "*Give yourself 25 of the best ways to prove your insecurity*" or "*25 of the best ways to quit smoking*".

I feel advertisers use two main ways to effectively promote a product. One is a sexual attraction and the second is to play on their insecurity. They do this by setting up a situation where the person is made to feel somehow insecure or inadequate and then suggest that by using the product it somehow manages to save them from this terrible place they've found themselves in. So all we're trying to do with that type of graffiti is to expose the devices that the advertisers are using. Demystifying their processes.

"G": We're trying to make them aware of what the psychology behind the advertising is. We're trying to show that ads are trying to sell to people what's denied to them in everyday life. The billboards say all you've got to do is buy this product and you'll enter this terrific fantasy, which in this case is based on things that are bad for you — cigarettes.

SC: Recently I've been noticing graffiti on billboards advertising other products like cars. Is there any reason for this diversification?

Bill: We are calling ourselves "BUGAUP" or Billboard- Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions. Cars are pretty unhealthy, especially those ads which encourage you to buy the latest and get into, all sorts of debt. That's unhealthy. I've concentrated on tobacco over the years, but it was clear that one day we'd diversify. "G" came along and was very strong about alcohol and he got me feeling strongly about it too.

"G": I think the common denominator held by everyone is the advertising for these products using sickening fantasies, the way these things are promoted so that their possession makes you somehow more of a human being, is what we really care about.

SC: Bill, last year you went to gaol for your activities and I believe it's possible that you may be going again. What led up to that?

Tharunka Volume 26 No 01

Bill: I got charged with malicious injury (to a billboard) and the law used its power to try to hurt me by getting compensation and hurting my pocket, which they probably imagined would be a deterrent. If the sentence had been say 300 days I don't know whether I would have gone through with it, but when I found I was on two or three warrants which brought it down to about 17 days inside, it seemed very acceptable to go. I wasn't working towards it, but when you realise that you've got control of going into gaol to the point that you can call up and say I want out and someone will pay and you're out, that gives you a control over the system and you can go in there feeling very positive, that you can continue what you've been doing inside. It seems natural to use the system against itself. The threat of going to gaol is what stops a lot of people getting into civil disobedience. But if you feel strongly that what you're doing is right and there's a lot of you opposing the destructive elements in our society — advertising is obviously one, they have no care bar the almighty dollar. Now if they can see that people are quite willing to accept fines and go to gaol, and continue the movement in gaol, they'll be in a situation where there's no way of stopping it.

SC: Was there a question of compensating the company?

Bill: Compensation - I still owe that. I'd love Australian Posters to try and get it from me. They won't dare — I've talked to them on the phone. I said "You want to get it — OK' I'll go and do another 30 boards". I said to him if you think you can intimidate people by exploiting their fears to buy the product to supposedly counter that fear, a bit of intimidation back to you might even things up a bit. You can ring them up and tell them you're going out to do 20 of their Longbeach, and how do they feel about you not caring if you're arrested? Because what you're doing has to be done. What right do they have over the rights of those of us who feel strongly about them promoting this rubbish? cont pg. 9.



Tharunka Volume 26 No 01

PAGE 9 BUGA UP. CONTINUED,

SC: The police are often criticised for over-enforcement of the law with radical groups when in fact they have a lot of discretion. I believe with you they've been particularly lenient. Have they ever come up to you in the act?

Bill: Yes, but not when there's been two together. When they're on duty and they don't know how the other one feels, they look the other way. "G" got done late at night. We've got to -remember never to do them late at night. Every policeman I talk to says *"look we told you mate, don't do them after midnight"*. They're out looking for break-and-enters. In the daytime they go right past.

SC: What about other sorts of control. Have there been any private investigators, harassment or phone tapping?

Bill: I'm pretty sure my phone is tapped. But I'm not worried. I've reached the stage where I've thought it through and have concluded what does it matter what they hear? Supposing I said *"We're going out to do billboards tonight at x, y and z, would you like to come?"* What can they gain — they know arrest doesn't worry me.

SC: What about passers-by, do they ever react?

Bill: Most of it is positive - *"Good on you mate"*, *"Good to see it"*. Kids laugh. One out of twenty might say something mildly abusive *"What are you doing that for?"* Invariably they've got their fag in their hand. The PTC security cop who got me smoked Benson and Hedges and I'd written *"Fool's gold"*. Perhaps he saw it as a bit of a hit at him.

SC: Do you ever fear for your safety?

Bill: I'm aware of it, I've got to realise there's a lot of money involved. But look at it another way. What about the guys who put them up? I feel like saying to them *"Do you know how many people die every day from smoking? And you're promoting it. Don't you ever fear for your safety? Aren't you ashamed of what you're doing?"*.

At 10 a.m. on March 10th, Bill Snow of Bugaup is going to Kogarah Court because of his spray painting crusades. He would appreciate some support from those who believe that billboards are detrimental to our visual environment and immoral in their content.