

Pseud Corner

They are very, very different...spiritually, politically, physically, emotionally, ideologically.

SARAH JESSICA PARKER on her two year-old twins, Jonathan Ross Show

My style icon today is Paul Newman circa 1966. But I have a feeling tomorrow it'll be Picasso of the Breton stripe from the Robert Doisneau photo (1952). Thursday David Bowie as Ziggy Stardust; and casual Friday Ned Rorem during the Paris years. None of those men were followers of fashion; rather, they appreciated style. They were all vain to some degree, and genius to a greater degree. It's a model to which I aspire.

JOSHUA DAVID STEIN,
Departures Magazine



Cooking is not only a response to the basic human need of feeding ourselves, and is also more than the search for happiness. Cooking is a powerful, transformative tool that, through the joint effort of co-producers – whether we be chefs, producers or eaters – can change the way the world nourishes itself. We dream of a future in which the chef is socially engaged, conscious of and responsible for his or her contribution to a just and sustainable society.

Statement issued by a 'G9 summit meeting' of the world's chefs, meeting in Lima, Peru, quoted in the *Guardian*

Another motif is the human body, symbolised in patterns on windows, cupboards and doors. Ancient architects apparently designed temples and cathedrals according to human proportions. Jencks has gone one better and anthropomorphised the doors, giving them both a left handle and a right handle. 'Normal doors are deprived of one of their hands,' he says. 'A door wants to have both.'

At home with **CHARLES JENCKS**, *Sunday Times*

Breakfast is a finely tuned, precision operation in our household...it tends to be a spare, brisk affair. Last weekend in St Moritz breakfast involved cappuccinos served in cosy yellow Dibbern mugs and Gipfeli (German Switzerland's less buttery and more fluffy answer to the croissant) with apricot jam served on maple plates from the Tokyo retailer Play Mountain. When we're in Sweden it's cappuccinos in white Iittala mugs and egg, chive and Kallas kaviar open-face sandwiches on toasted Finnish rye bread served on small rectangular teak plates. With a bit of luck all of this is consumed on the jetty in the morning sun followed by a dip in the Baltic.

On Wednesday the breakfast routine in London started with coffees served in mugs from One Kiln ceramics in Kagoshima, but there was a problem in the kitchen. The Poilane bread that had been purchased the evening before at our local branch of Waitrose was still mushy in the middle...[continues]

TYLER BRULE, 'Life in the fast lane', *FT Weekend*

CONTRIBUTORS: Julie Tosh, Eugen Beer, Richard Lumb, Phil Carter, John Laird.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

POST OFFICE AUTOMATION

Computer says no

AS Britain's multi-billion pound public IT programmes hit the next stage in the lifecycle of botched computer projects – malfunction – alarming repercussions are being felt in Britain's post offices.

Over the last few years the Horizon system that 11,500 sub-postmasters are forced to use has thrown up a rash of apparent financial "shortfalls", prompting dozens of prosecutions and financial ruin for businessmen and women with previously spotless records. Fifty-five of them last week launched a "class action" against the Post Office, arguing their troubles owe more to computer error than dishonesty.

In a standard week a sub-post office performs thousands of transactions – many such as pension payments and lottery and foreign currency purchases, in cash. When the computer says the till is short, the sub-postmaster (or mistress) has to cough up the difference; and the computer is always right apparently. If the sub-postmaster or mistress can't pay up, the Post Office's fraud investigators swiftly descend.

Typical is the case of Jo Hamilton from South Warrborough in Hampshire, who one week was £2,000 down. After the helpdesk told her to press a few buttons the total doubled, and the Post Office took £4,000 off her. When the problem kept repeating, her mistake was to claim that everything was fine so she could at least keep trading in the hope the errors would correct themselves and she'd get her £4,000 back. Then the total hit £36,000, the auditors swooped and she was convicted for false accounting (without ever being accused of taking any money) and forced to pay the £36,000 back with the help of supportive villagers.

Others have been jailed for theft simply on evidence from a computer system that seems to be misfiring, with no indication of what they are supposed to have done with the cash. One, Seema Misra, was pregnant when she was found guilty of stealing £75,000 even though no trace of the money could be found and the judge at Guildford crown court, according to supporters present, appeared to instruct the jury that the evidence was very limited. She was sentenced to 18 months.

Since her case, others have pleaded guilty simply for more lenient sentences. Many more

have coughed up thousands of pounds from their own pockets in desperate attempts to retain their livelihoods. The Justice for Sub-postmasters Alliance reckons the total affected could run into the thousands.

The Post Office remains the only body in the UK to run its own prosecutions and campaigners think that if it had to use the Crown Prosecution Service many cases would not have made it to court. The last organisation with such powers, Customs and Excise, was stripped of them almost a decade ago when it was found to have over-stepped the mark in several high-profile cases.

Mrs Hamilton's MP, James Arbuthnot, expresses a widely-held view when he says: "I find it very difficult to believe that all these sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses are suddenly found to be dishonest, if the alternative is that it may be a public sector computer system which has gone wrong. We've heard of that before." But postal services minister Ed Davey is washing his hands of the problem, simply re-directing MPs' questions to the Post Office itself.

There is no shortage of visible problems with Horizon. One sub-postmaster explained to the *Eye* how when selling stamps, for example, his terminal often either registered no stamp sale or not the class of stamp keyed in. And in July the entire Post Office banking system was shut down by a "Horizon online issue". Even the 370 large "Crown" post offices managed centrally are not immune from glitches. Latest known figures show shortfalls there of £2.2m in a year, although mysteriously these haven't produced criminal sanctions.

These are just the latest episode in Horizon's inglorious history. It originated in 1996 in a joint Department of Social Security-Post Office PFI deal for an automated benefits payment system with Pathway, part of ICL (now Fujitsu) on the back of a cheap but technically flawed bid. Four years and £1bn later it was ditched by the government, with the Post Office left to convert it into the Horizon automation project. Fujitsu still runs the technical side of things.

The lengthening list of "shortfall" cases, many in odd geographical clusters, has received little attention beyond diligent investigation by BBC South TV hack Nick Wallis and *Computer Weekly* magazine. This could be about to change, though, as solicitors Shoomsmith begin action on behalf of the 55, with another 150 cases pending.

The Post Office, fearing immense further cost if its computer system is found wanting, has its head firmly in the sand. There are, a spokeswoman told the *Eye*, "no issues" with Horizon (which is nonsense given the ones already admitted). To say anything else would be to admit that the computer on which it depends is a pig in a poke that has not only wasted billions but might now be dispensing miscarriages of justice as well.



YUNUS BAKHSH

Stalling for Tyne

THE saga of Yunus Bakhsh, the psychiatric nurse with a 23-year unblemished record who was unlawfully suspended and sacked five years ago because of trade union activity, continues.

Despite condemnation in the Commons, the Northumbria, Tyne and Wear NHS trust is still refusing to abide by an employment tribunal's order to reinstate him – so the impoverished nurse now has to go back to the courts.

At a directions hearing last week, Yunus's lawyers said they were investigating under what powers an NHS trust had the right to flout court orders. MP John McDonnell has also written to the trust, asking what right a public body has to refuse to accept the order of a court and to run up further costs to taxpayers in the process. He has also

demanding to know whether any action has been taken against trust employees who had been criticised at the tribunal for being "non-credible" and engaging in collusion to illegally get rid of Yunus.

McDonnell wrote that the trust's treatment of Yunus was "shocking", particularly in the way it had ignored medical advice about his health while he was going through the trumped-up disciplinary processes. He added: "Many would consider it deplorable that a mental health trust can treat its own staff in this way. The fact that medical advice was ignored is astounding."

● Anyone wishing to support Yunus in his legal fight for reinstatement can donate to his legal defence fund at: Defend Yunus Bakhsh Campaign, c/o 46c Lawe Road, South Shields NE33 2EN.

