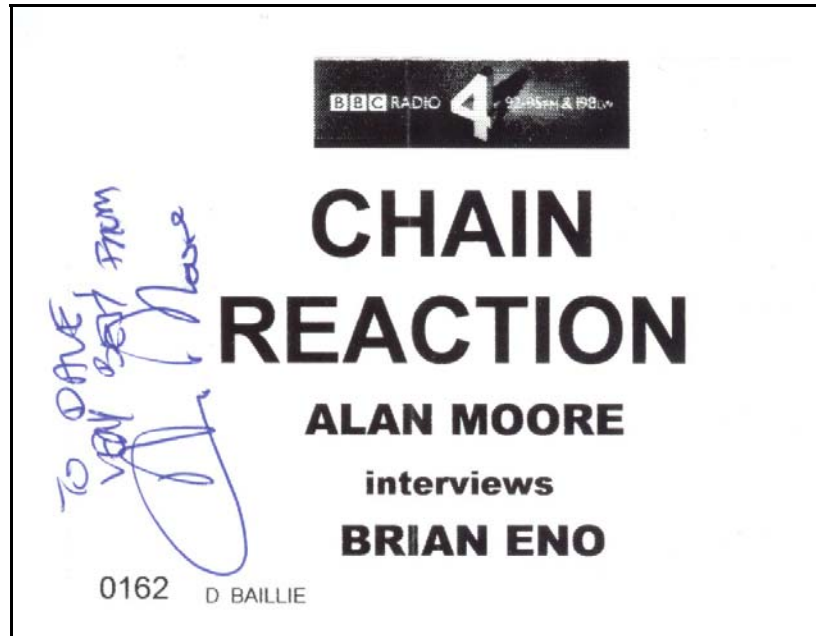


You know, I was determined not to start this report with ‘Twenty minutes ago I shook the hand of Alan Moore’, but I really can’t help myself.

In my defence there are few people I would be in awe of if I met them in person, and given that Kurt Cobain and Philip K Dick are both no longer with us, it’s unlikely to ever happen again.



Today’s event was the follow up to last week’s Stewart Lee interview with Alan, and in the spirit of Radio 4’s Chain Reaction he chose to interview Brian Eno.

Dressed more casually this time than last (a black sweatshirt instead of a black suit) Mr Moore entered the studio with Mr Eno and both took their seats and waited patiently for the recording to begin (or rather for someone to shut off the whistling air conditioning so recording could begin).

Alan introduced Brian Peter St. John Le Baptiste de la Salle Eno to the audience, explaining that repeating his own name had led to Brian developing extraordinary breath control. Since Brian had once described himself as a non-musician, and then gone on to revolutionise music, Moore suggested it’s probably just as well he didn’t decide to be a non-serial killer instead.

At this point Alan, obviously looking to ease the burden of his guilty conscience as early as possible in the proceedings, apologised to Brian for something which had occurred some thirty years ago. He told how a young twenty-something Alan Moore had sent a hero of his (Brian Eno, of course) a list of thirty questions, intending to publish the responses in a fanzine. Brian had generously responded with eight pages of very detailed answers... But Moore never got the fanzine out, and so it was all for nothing.

‘You bastard,’ whispered Eno into the mic, as the audience laughed.

Many topics were covered as the two chatted over the following hour, among them the 60s - Moore said he’d never gotten very far from that particular decade and

wondered why it was so derided in the modern day. Brian said he thought it was because that whole era was particularly anti-fundamentalist. Moore agreed, saying that fundamentalism embraces simplicity while the 60s were all about the cross breeding of ideas and philosophies, or as he eloquently put it 'a mongrel orgy'.

Alan asked about the song Babies on Fire, which consists of only two notes, making the observation that you probably couldn't make a song with any fewer. Brian told us that he thought songwriting was the greatest challenge in modern music. Writing music is no problem, he said, anyone with a cheap synthesiser can hold a note for 45 minutes and have an ambient album at the end of it, but writing an actual song with lyrics is a different matter. 'What you need' Alan suggested, 'is a lyrics generator'. 'Funny you should say that,' said Brian, 'I'm working on one at the moment'. Alan expressed worry at this, suggesting that it sort of made him redundant and ruined his plans for a peaceful retirement. 'How far along are you with the project?' he asked.

Brian talked about his recurring dread that art is ultimately pointless, or as his first mother in law said to him 'Why is someone with a brain like yours wasting it on art?' Alan agreed that the value of being a scientist is immediately obvious while you have to dig harder if your work is in the arts.

Alan then asked about Brian's response to a question he was asked on Desert Island Discs (another UK radio programme); 'Is it true that when asked what luxury item you would take onto the desert island,' (if you haven't guessed that's the premise of the show) 'you initially said a lifetime supply of drugs, and then reconsidered your answer and decided on a giant man-eating spider in order to keep you alert and force you to think of innovative ways to stay alive?'

'No that's not true at all,' laughed Brian, 'I stopped at the lifetime supply of hallucinogenic drugs!'

'Well I know that's where I would have stopped!' Alan said, prompting guffaws from the audience, 'Actually if you took the drugs you'd probably think there was a giant spider on there with you anyway'.

'That's sort of messed up my next question actually,' he continued, 'can we just pretend you said that, and then I can ask you if you think that we've all been afforded our own giant man-eating spider by recent events in global politics'. Which then prompted an intelligent discussion about whether the American and UK governments had been too ambitious in their recent attempts to scare their citizens into 'obedience', and the possibility that we're heading for a massive paradigm shift at the centre of which could be an internet-based democratic revolution.

(I'm obviously paraphrasing tremendously here, as a report which did justice to this section of the interview alone would require not just more space and time than I have but also someone far more familiar with the ideas discussed to write it.)

The young lady co-ordinating the interview for the BBC asked if Brian had cursed when Alan had earlier told him the fanzine story. He couldn't remember, but there was a murmur of confirmation from the audience. 'Could you use a milder swear word than bastard, perhaps?' she asked. Brian leaned towards his mic and growled the word 'devil,' then apologised, explaining that he didn't know any mild swear words. Probably deciding that he really didn't want 'devil' being transmitted as his response

to Alan's confession, Brian replaced it with 'twit!', to which Alan replied with 'It hurts, but I can take it,' and a shrug.

Other things discussed included; chipping away at the concept of 'God' with each new scientific discovery about the universe, Father Ted (which Brian made a guest appearance on, playing the imaginatively named character 'Father Brian Eno'), the Oblique Strategies cards and postmen. The interview concluded with Alan Moore and Brian Eno doing a spontaneous (and completely unprecedented, I would imagine) impression of British comedy double act Dudley Moore and Peter Cook.

All told, this was one of the most interesting, inspiring and broadly themed interviews I have ever had the privilege of listening to. I only hope that I managed to convey at least some of that with this report.

The majority of the interview will be broadcast on the internet for anyone living too far from a BBC transmitter to get it the old fashioned way.

Did I mention I shook Alan Moore's hand?