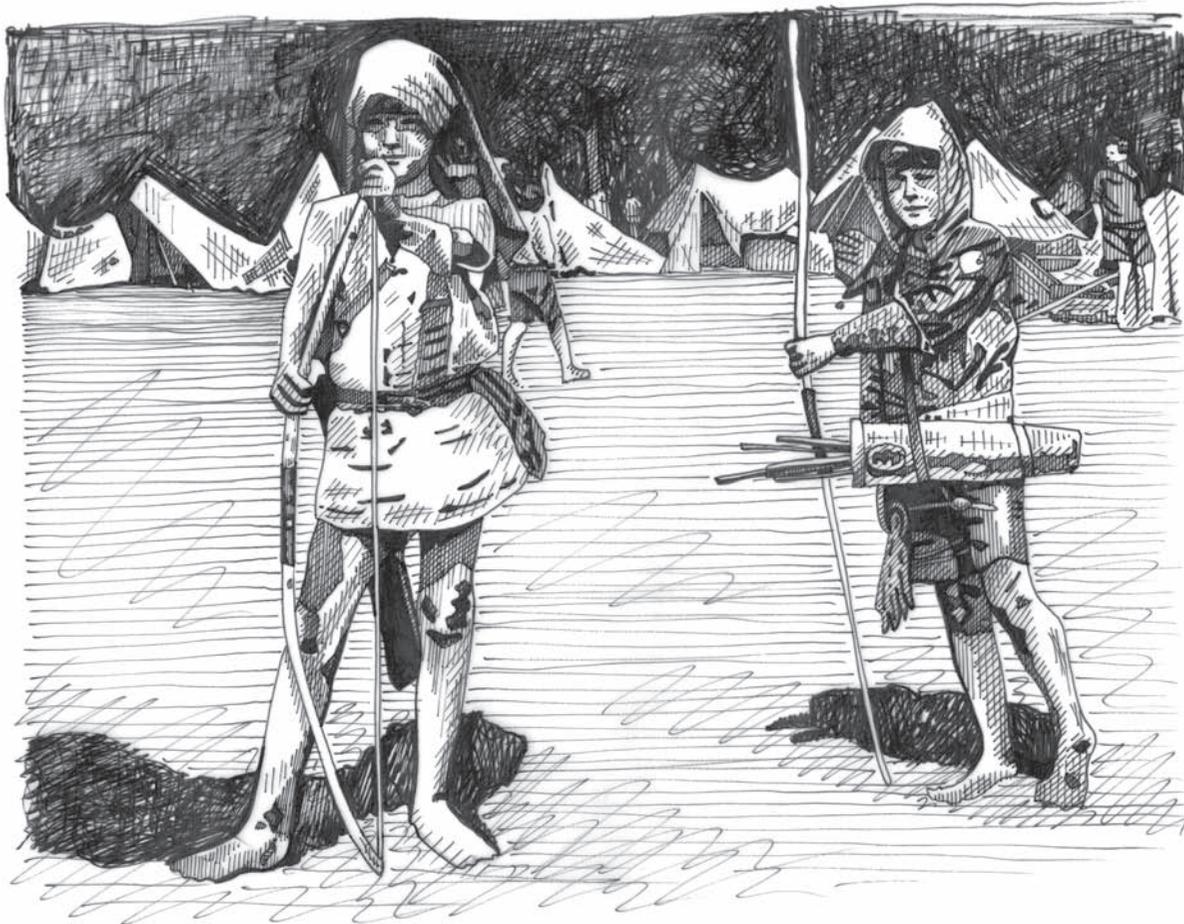


OLIVIA

PLENDER



Olivia Plender, *Bring Back Robin Hood*,
video still, 2008.

Olivia Plender for Kiosk

Olivia Plender's fascination with Gustave Flaubert's unfinished novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet* may prove a useful anecdote to start a text on the artist's practice. Moving to the countryside after fifty unfruitful years of urban living, Bouvard and Pécuchet first set out to learn about agriculture. Soon defeated, they move on to chemistry, then to archeology, literature, philosophy, society, politics, occultism, religion, education and urban planning. The first phase of their research consists of learning through reading, and the second of applying their reading to real life experiments. But their attempts to farm, to cure the injured, to create a museum, to politicise their neighbours or to teach badly behaved children consistently culminate in a failure. Flaubert's satire tells us about the futility of human knowledge and about the relativity of truth.

preview kiosk 15

Like Flaubert's characters, Olivia Plender is perhaps an autodidact trying to make sense of society – and more specifically of British society, of which the artist is part – its foundations and ruling structures, and to apprehend its contradictions and deficiencies. Drawing on social history and historiography, Plender intends to interrogate the ideological framework around the narration of history and the way in which society produces knowledge. The forms her work has taken include lectures, performances, installations, videos and publications, which deliberately contrast an authoritative and didactic mode of presentation with non-establishment voices such as that of the amateur historian. Plender is drawn towards self-education, non-conformism and utopian experiments, as are Bouvard and Pécuchet. Some of the areas the artist has spent time researching and which have sur-

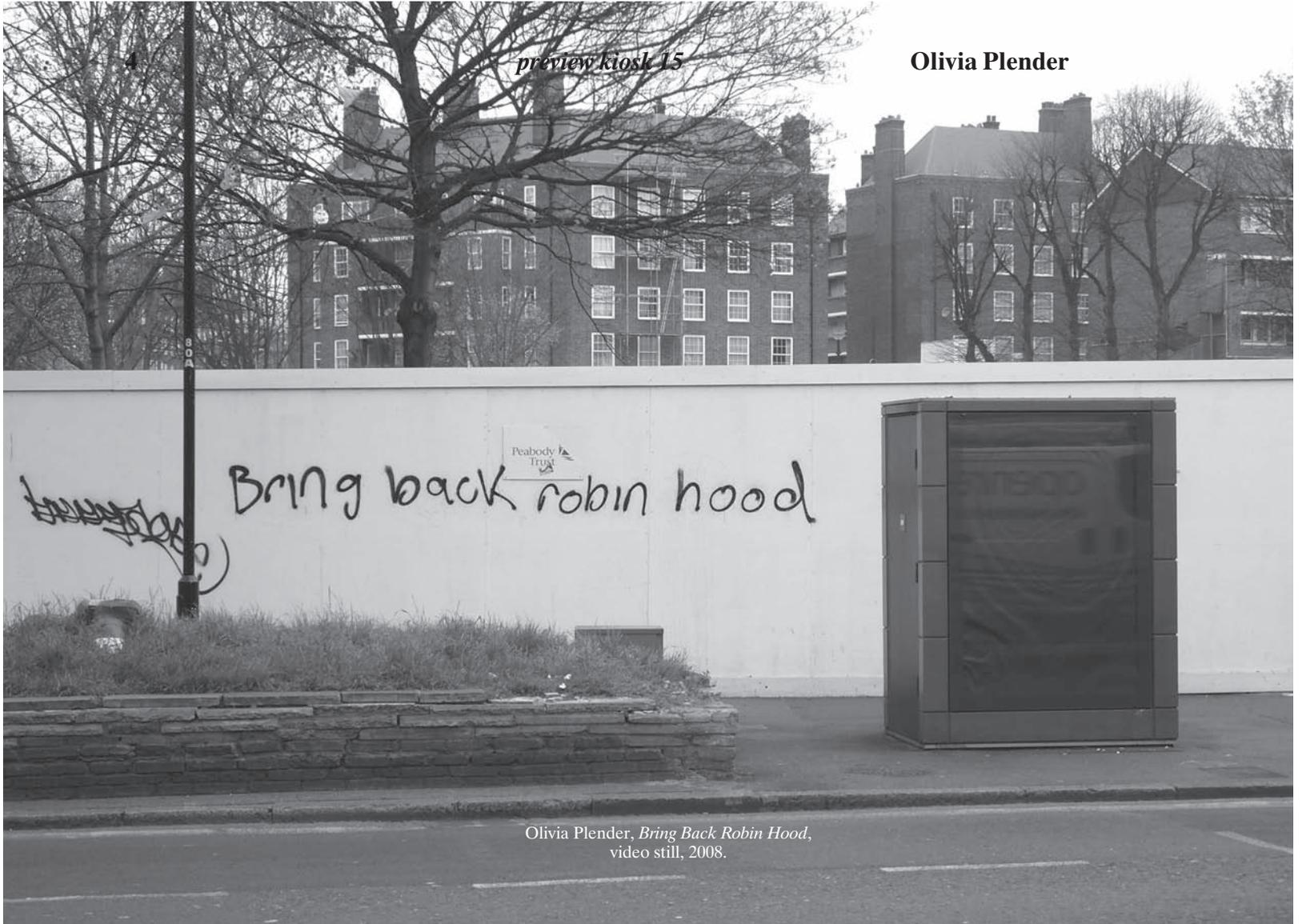
Olivia Plender

faced in a number of her projects since 2002 include the British Romantic Movement and the co-operative movement in the 19th Century, the Modern Spiritualist movement (1848-present) and the Kibbo Kift Kindred (1920-1951). What links these movements is the shared fantasy of going back to nature and/or of living self-sufficiently, communally, outside of the capitalist economy and of the established knowledge system. Taking a critical stance towards the history at hand, Plender writes that “by creating their own institutions, [the Modern Spiritualist movement and the Kibbo Kift Kindred] demonstrated, to an extent, the benefits and also the limits of self-education, as the knowledge produced within these frameworks was often pseudoscientific.”

Plender's interest in knowledge access and extracurricular education has next led her to carry out research into the early

4
preview kiosk 15

Olivia Plender



Olivia Plender, *Bring Back Robin Hood*,
video still, 2008.



Olivia Plender *Set Sail for the Levant*,
a board game, 2007.



Olivia Plender, *Set Sail for the Levant*,
 a board game, 2007.

history and aims of television broadcast in Britain. Borrowing its title from the BBC's remit "Information, Education, Entertainment", Olivia Plender's solo exhibition at Marabou Parken, Stockholm in 2007 referenced the vision of John Reith, the BBC's first director-general, to shape the BBC into a tool for social, cultural, moral and educational control. TV would not only provide education to the masses, it would also attempt to spread British bourgeois tastes and culture, thereby 'civilising' the working classes and teaching them how to be democratic citizens.

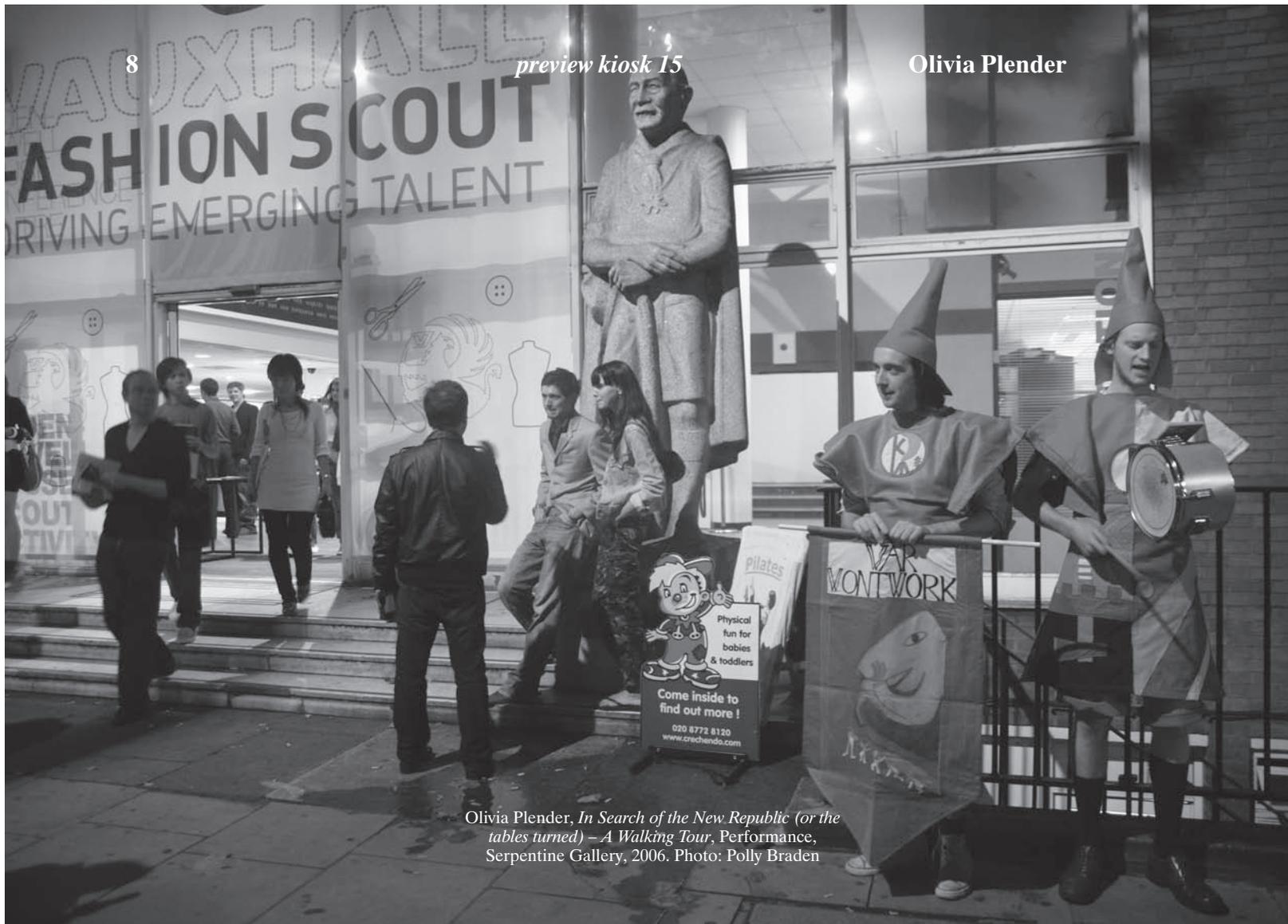
As an institution the BBC is entrenched in the British class system and was borne out of British imperialism, which the artist's more recent work has been focusing on. While increasingly using video, Plender's latest work also consistently incorporates her long lasting interest in political satire, popular printing and the

preview kiosk 15

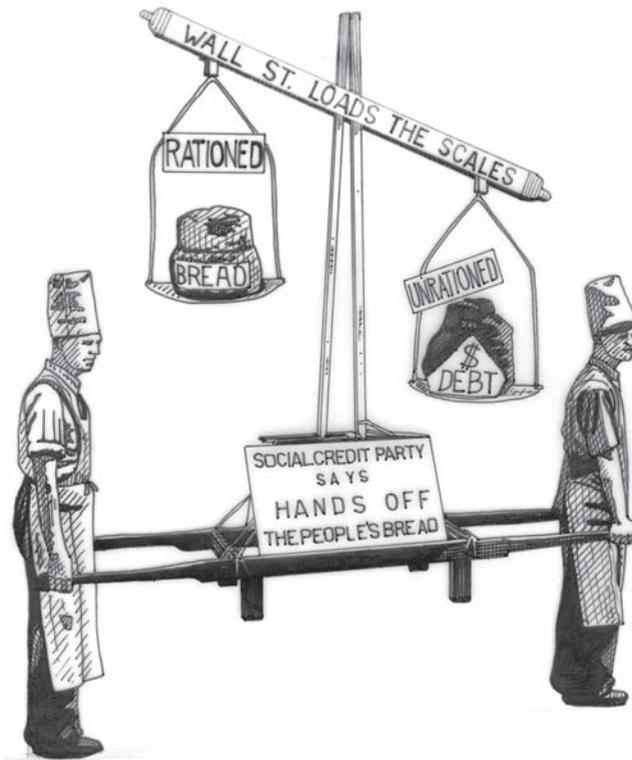
travel narrative. Like Bouvard and Pécuchet, the artist never ceases to move on to her next topic, thus creating a network of references spanning time and contexts, and questioning what it means to re-construct and re-interpret history.

Anna Colin

Olivia Plender



Olivia Plender, *In Search of the New Republic (or the tables turned) – A Walking Tour, Performance*, Serpentine Gallery, 2006. Photo: Polly Braden



Olivia Plender, *Bring Back Robin Hood*,
video still, 2008.



Louis Pasteurlaan 2 / Godshuizenlaan 9000 Gent – www.kask.be

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Polly Braden, Bert Van den
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(Gentbrugge DC) - third
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**Tentoonstelling / Exhibition: 21.05.09 – 28.06.09
Alle dagen / Daily: 9:00 - 18:00**

**Lezing door / Lecture by Olivia Plender, Auditorium Victor Horta,
Bijlokecampus J. Kluykensstraat 2, 9000 Gent 20.05.09 / 19:00**

**Kiosk 15 / Opening tentoonstelling Woensdag / Opening
of the exhibition Wednesday 20.05.09 / 20:00 – 22:00**