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SCRAPS OF THIS and that

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TARIQ ALVI at Whitechapel Gallery

THE importance of a text, or a work of art, is not to be found in its "meaning", but in what it does, that is, what it incites us to do. So begins Jean Fisher's eloquent defence of the work of Tariq Alvi in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition. Alvi is indeed lucky to have had such a justification penned on his behalf, for many will find only chaos and confusion in his work.

Along the walls of the spacious lower gallery of the Whitechapel, Alvi has casually stuck or pinned a large amount of ephemera from his studio in Rotterdam (he's an Englishman resident in Holland). Screens protrude from the wall, which display club flyers, shopping lists, personal letters and newspaper articles in haphazard arrangements. Further on we find a lifesize photograph of a wall in his studio, that too covered with scraps of this and that. Elsewhere we find collages executed on simple A4 paper. Lines from newspaper articles have been cut out and arranged to form beetle shapes.

On a table in the centre of the gallery, pages torn from anally fixated porn mags jostle for attention with more club flyers and a selection of phallic objects: candles, screws, etc.

Another piece consists of 1,000 photos recording random objects and events in Rotterdam - one features a dog turd with a plastic fork stuck temptingly in it. All around, tiny shreds of glossy magazine pages litter the floor of the gallery.

Fischer makes great claims for this celebration of the random and the arbitrary, seeing in these qualities some sort of resistance to the forces of global capitalism which demand order and efficiency. Others, however, will find that this interpretation stretches credibility, indeed is an insult to the intelligence of the viewer, and it is doubtful that this work will incite many to fight the power.

Looking around, one is left merely with a feeling of emptiness in response to these ugly, banal and egotistical works, and wonder at the depth of self-delusion that surrounds such creative work.

Until 4 March