PAMPHLET / 1996



THE BONFIRE ACCOUNTS

The Ashlar Fund

APOCALYPSE CULT

READING COPY AC-0142

THE BONFIRE ACCOUNTS: A STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE

The Ashlar Fund, 1996

STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE

For the year ending 30 November 1996. All figures are given in full. Nothing has been rounded.

- **Received** from the Council, in cash, in two holdalls: the whole of the prize.
- **Spent** on taxis, to carry the holdalls, because we did not trust the bus: the price of two taxis, paid from our own pockets.
- **Spent** on the hire of a boiler house for one evening: nothing. The caretaker let us in. He asked what we wanted it for and we said a private ceremony, which was true.
- **Spent** on fuel to start the furnace: one bag of kindling, one newspaper, which carried a story about us.
- **Burned:** the whole of the prize.
- **Retained:** nothing. One note, half-burned, blew out of the door and was retrieved by the caretaker, who returned it to us. We burned it the next day in a sink. We record this for completeness.
- **Balance carried forward:** nil.

The auditors have examined these accounts and find them correct. The auditors are us.

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

Note 1. On the form of payment. We asked for cash because a cheque is a promise and we wanted the thing promised. Money in a bank is a number. Money in a holdall is a weight. It is heavier than you think and it smells of other people.

Note 2. On the time taken. We had expected it to go up in a moment. It does not. Paper money is made to last; it is printed on a kind of cloth. The bundles had to be split and fed in by hand. For the first twenty minutes this was exciting. For the next twenty it was a job. For the last twenty it was the most tedious thing either of us has ever done, and we have both worked in shops.

Note 3. On the smell. Acrid, with something sweet underneath. The caretaker said it was the same as when they used to burn old ledgers. He had done it for thirty years and never once thought about what was in them.

Note 4. On what was felt. We have been asked this more than anything. The honest answer is that we felt sick, then elated, then bored, then frightened, then nothing. On the way home we bought chips and could not pay for them, having forgotten that we no longer had any money, and the man gave them to us anyway. That was the strongest feeling of the evening.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Why did you not give it to charity? Because then it would have been a donation, and the Council would have been thanked, and we would have been thanked, and everything would have gone on as before. The money would have been useful. That was the trouble with it. Everything we are offered is useful. We wanted to find out what happens to a thing when it is allowed to be useless.

Is it art? We do not know. The Council thought so when it gave us the money. It thought so less afterward. If it was art, it was art that cannot be

bought, shown, insured or owned. If it was not, then the Council paid a great deal for nothing, which is also a kind of art.

Was it a protest? Against what? People have suggested poverty, capitalism, the Council, the art world and our parents. We would be glad to have been protesting against any of them. But a protest wants something, and we wanted nothing. We wanted to see what nothing looked like. It looks orange, and then grey.

Do you regret it? Most days, yes. We are not rich. One of us has a child. We have each done the sum many times, in houses, in years, in teeth. The regret is real and it is part of the work. If we did not regret it, it would have cost us nothing.

Would you do it again? No. It can only be done once. The second time it would be a habit, and the third time a career.

What did you learn? That money is not real, and that this makes no difference to anything. We knew the first part before. We learned the second part in the boiler house, and on the way home, and every month since.

CLOSING STATEMENT

We are told that we destroyed value. We did not. We destroyed paper. The value was somewhere else all along, in an agreement between strangers, and it went on existing perfectly well without the paper, which is why the Council did not go bankrupt and nobody's bread went up.

What we destroyed was the possibility of using it. That possibility was the only thing we were ever really given. For an hour in a boiler house we held it in our hands and put it in the fire, and for the length of that hour we were the only two people in the country with no use for money. We do not recommend it. We do not think anyone else should do it. We are glad that somebody did.

These accounts are now closed.

ABOUT THIS TEXT

TITLE	The Bonfire Accounts: A Statement of Expenditure for the Year Ending 30 November 1996
AUTHOR	The Ashlar Fund (two members, unnamed)
DATE	1996
TYPE	Pamphlet
PUBLISHER	Self-published; printed at a jobbing printer on recycled ledger paper
EXTENT	16 pages, stapled, in a buff card cover
LANGUAGE	English
SOURCE	Transcribed from a copy in the archive's collection. The original prints the accounts in two columns, which the reading copy follows as closely as the format allows. The spelling of the original is kept.

In the autumn of 1995 a regional arts council awarded its largest annual prize to the Ashlar Fund, a partnership of two artists known until then for short films of demolition sites. The prize was paid in cash, at the artists' request. Three weeks later, before a single witness and a borrowed video camera, they burned all of it in the furnace of a disused municipal boiler house. It took a little over an hour.

The reaction was furious and largely predictable. The artists were called vandals, frauds and, most often, ungrateful. Several people pointed out how many hospital beds the money would have bought. The artists declined interviews. A year later, on the anniversary, they issued this pamphlet: a formal statement of accounts, laid out like a company report, followed by their answers to the questions they had been asked.

It is a strange and in places a very funny document, and it is more troubled than its deadpan surface suggests. The artists do not claim to know what they did. They claim only to have done it completely. Readers new to the theory that lies behind the act, whether or not the artists had read it, should start with The Curse of the Sun, our primer on expenditure, which describes the potlatch and the sacrifice as a society's way of disposing of what it cannot use. The Ashlar Fund performed a sacrifice for an audience that had stopped believing in them.

The partnership dissolved in 1998. Neither member has made work under that name since, and the archive has not tried to identify them.

COLOPHON

This reading copy was prepared by Lucan Hartsell for the Apocalypse Cult library and is cataloged as AC-0142. It may be copied and shared freely for study, criticism and private reading.

The same text can be read online at https://apocalypse-cult.org/library/the-bonfire-accounts/

Apocalypse Cult is an independent archive. The authors, presses and publications it catalogs are fictional, and any resemblance to actual persons or organizations is coincidental.