



# PERFORMANCE MAGAZINE

February/March

The Review of Live Art

No. 22 90p \$2.50

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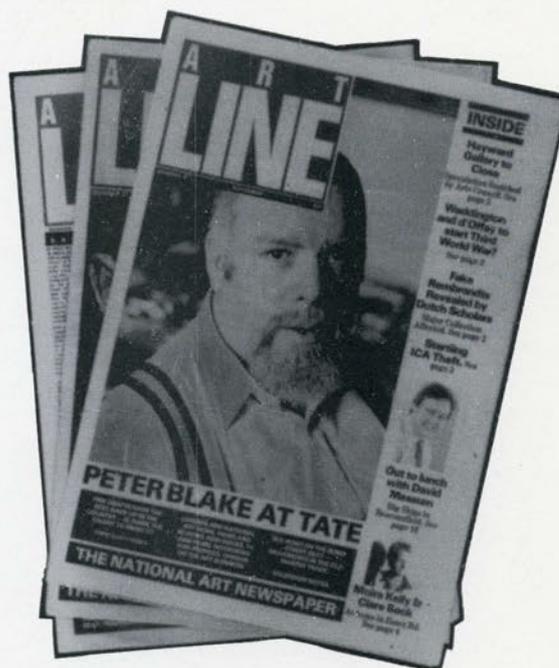


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# PERFORMANCE MAGAZINE

## The Review of Live Art

Performance Magazine  
14 Peto Place, London NW1  
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Cover design by Robert Carter  
Cover photo of Impact Theatre by Steve Shill

Ken Gill sharing a joke with a pair of cushions

# Letters

Write to Performance Magazine at 14 Peto Place London NW1, keeping it relatively short.

Dear Performance Magazine,

Flat on my back with the flu I have had the opportunity to peruse your latest issue and find myself utterly delighted. I don't know why I hadn't realised until now what comrades we are when it comes to performance art. I was particularly pleased with the attention you gave to the Neo-Naturists and Art on the Run. This is what the world needs more of and can, I believe, be the salvation of, if not all mankind, at least of *L'Art Pur*. To hell with the avant garde.

'Art should be uplifting. If it doesn't make you feel better, piss on it!' — Ken Kesey in *High Performance* 17/18.

Best of luck and congratulations. Keep the faith.

Sincerely,

Linda Burnham, Editor.

High Performance, 240 S. Broadway  
Los Angeles

Statement in reference to the series of performance akshuns by Andre Stitt/Tara Babel under the functioning title 'Terra Inc.'

Ritual akshuns are symbolic metaphors of relationships in/out of context.

Terra Inc., is the duality of image in a positive therapy:

We Are All Schizo.

Terra Inc., is part of a personalised ongoing system, it is part of the activity, the activity that is the enemy of the state of things. The main themes are not, as has been incorrectly stated and misrepresented by one critic, about Northern Ireland or the war there or even about war in general. Although we carry the stain and scar we do not see that it should follow that all our work would be automatically about the situation in our native land, labelling creates a vacuum of conformity, there are no literal explanations.

In Terra Inc., we do not present meaning or explanations, it is up to the observer/spectator/voyeur/vampire to seek their own through the ambience and energy of akshun.

Those who have understood, understand the truth unto themselves. In Terra Inc., we seek our own truth thru trash and pulp. Our truth is cliché, a condition that permeates our existence as functioning social/anti-social beings.

'... who is being controlled here... just who is being hypnotised?'

Babel: 'Little Devils are chattering to Great Ones'

Stitt: 'There are rumours without walls... time fer akshun... slash of life... mask of mask.'

Babel: 'This is Babylon'.

WE ARE NOT REAL.

Stitt/Babel/Exiles Studio/Dec.82.

## OPEN LETTER ON PERFORMANCE

Cliches have arisen in 'performance' today that are not only a waste of time but are generally ineffective and instrumental in creating an image of self indulgence and mysticism that turn potential viewers/spectators away in hordes.

Among these clichés I would include the use of endless repetition, painful volume levels and uncommunicative 'mysterious' actions that serve principally to create overwhelming tedium and secondly to alienate, confuse and generally distress the viewer for all the wrong reasons. The right reasons are to make a point or create something out of the confusion. The wrong reasons are to use the practice as a cover for the artist's basic lack of substance, lack of originality, and need to humiliate those who 'don't understand'. It is basically his/her job to make people understand.

Expressing a point clearly and concisely in a form that has impact via excitement and/or stimulation of the audience is refreshing and progressive.

I fully appreciate the need to explore the fringes of tolerance and to sometimes use methods that alter the viewer's perception in order to create subtleties of mood, atmosphere and response in the viewer. This approach belongs mainly to the Fine Art wing of 'performance' rather than the mid-range area that incorporates the use of drama, theatre and sometimes even elements of that apparently dirty word 'entertainment'. It is disappointing when a performer, obviously trying to reach a wider mid-range 'audience' apes the aforementioned conceptual clichés of the Fine Art gallery performers in the vain hope that by so doing he/she is adding intellectual credibility to the work. Such a performer is usually faking it and invariably ends up wallowing in a performance nightmare of non-communication before an increasingly hostile audience, doing *nobody* any good.

They do not know what they're doing or why (no questions please, we're artists) and apparently don't care, whilst the audi-

ence *certainly* don't care. So what is happening? Nothing. A complete waste of time resulting only in a few more fairly open minds closing down.

I do not accept that these well-worn tedious approaches are at all necessary any more. Even the most sophisticated piece of work cannot be harmed by a little explana-



tion and de-mystification, even in the form of a short introduction or conclusion that might to the artist seem to be stressing the obvious, but may be the viewer's only key to the whole situation.

Personally, I propose a rebirth of exuberance, an approach designed to excite and provoke INTEREST (approval or hostility) and a boost in self respect for the *individual*, the performer who, rather than be aligned with whatever groups and labels are flung his/her way, retains dignity and the strength and ability to put forward a *personal* viewpoint by which others can assess their own.

Ian Smith

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# Profile

One of the most fascinating books that is yet to be written must surely be an explanation of why so many influential artists should have come out of West Yorkshire in the late 60s and 1970s. Welfare State, DDART, and Hesitate and Demonstrate to name but three, and more recently Impact Theatre Co-operative, all have their origins in the Leeds/Bradford area. John Fox started Welfare State in 1968, and Impact got together in 1978. If 1968 marked one cultural revolution, 1978 followed the year of punk and Impact are very much a cultural environment radically changed by a new, aggressive political and aesthetic movement.

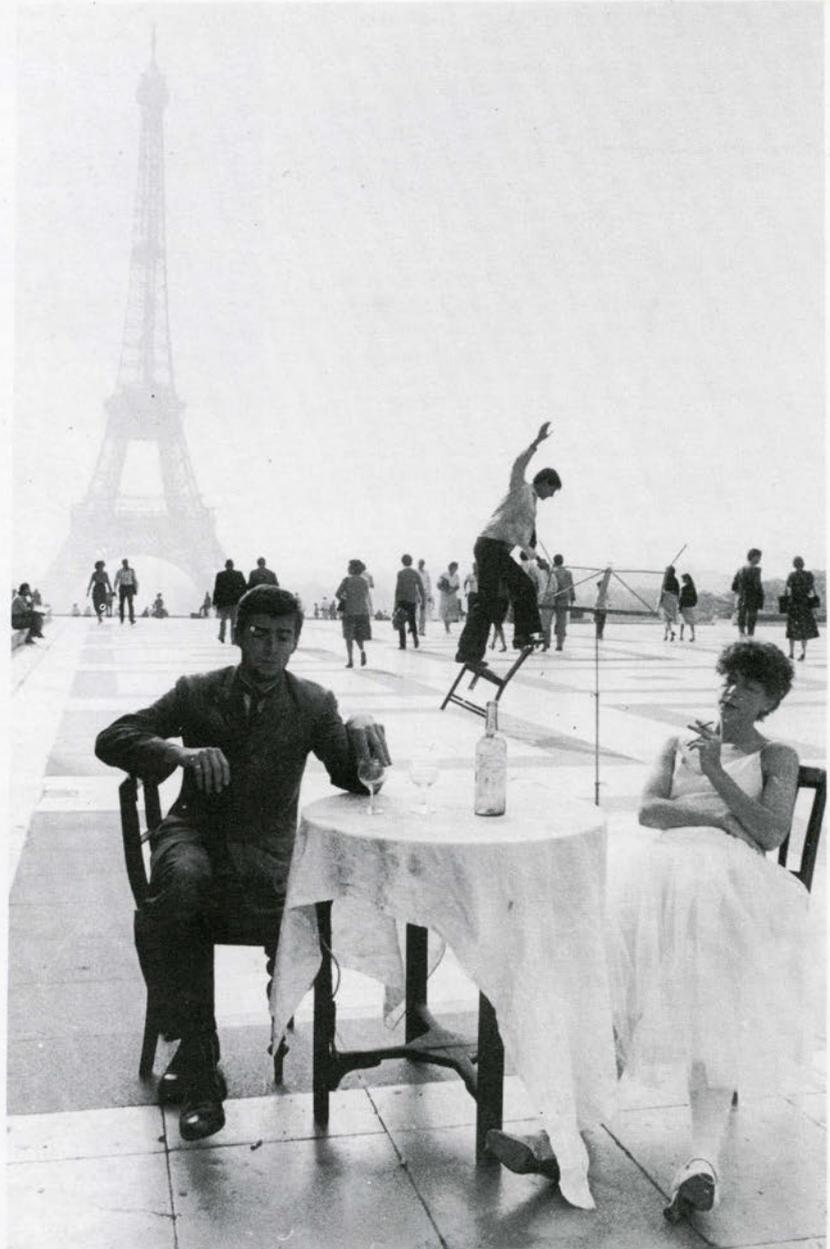
Impact are very conscious of the role played by the tradition of the Leeds/Bradford art schools in their own development and they would be the first to acknowledge their debt to this. But in 1978 many of Impact's contemporaries were directing their energies into the new, politically aware and radical rock music. In fact in their early days Impact shared a warehouse with the Gang of Four, the Mekons, and Delta 5. It was as much the initiatives of young musicians in Leeds in 1978 as the inspiration of their predecessors in radical performance in West Yorkshire that formed the cultural environment in which Impact got started and quite naturally their work clearly reflects that environment.

A third and less easily described influence on their work is the social, political and aesthetic environment of Leeds itself. It is perhaps an impossible and unnecessary task to see this as anything more than a quite natural influence that any environment has on any artists work but whenever I see an Impact show, whether it is the whimsical 'Undersea World of Erik Satie' or the more aggressive new work 'Useful Vices', there is a raw, expressionist quality that always reminds me of the dank world of unmodernised, Victorian terraces of northern industrial towns.

For anyone who is at all familiar with that world will know that it contains a bohemian element of backyard nettles, brown ale and fiercely intellectual and radical politics. Impact, more clearly than almost anyone else, represent this vital, discreet and peculiarly northern element of English intellectual life.

These three formative influences add up to an uncompromising and committed political and theatrical radicalism that is so intense that it can sometimes look like youthful naivety but which is nevertheless always aesthetically, and intellectually rigorously disciplined.

This kind of discipline has been made possible by the stability of the central core group of Impact members who have been together since the beginning. This stability has allowed them to develop their own org-



Steve Shill

## Impact Theatre

anic methods of working and at the same time absorb the creative input of a large circle of artists who contribute to each show so that each show, despite changes of designer or performers remains distinctively an Impact show.

The process of developing a new work involves three strands of imaginative investigation. Firstly they establish a cultural milieu, whether historical post-war Berlin (as in Dammerngstrasse 55) or imaginary (the big-brother future of Certain Scenes). They also establish a philosophy, what it is they want to say, and lastly they determine the performance style, whether it is to be verbal or non-verbal, physical or visual or a combination of

styles. Having established these criteria they develop the performance through group improvisation and discussion. This method of working ensures equal importance is given to all aspects of the performance and that nothing is superfluous or purely decorative. The purpose of the performance is always kept uppermost and it is probably Impact's greatest strength that every element of design, sound and performance are vital to the explication. It has also led to some criticism that their work does not follow any systematic development from show to show, one show will be verbal and the next non-verbal, but Impact's development has been quite clearly in refinement of their skills and their

Between 1978 and 1980 Impact concentrated on developing their own methods of working and on finding their own aesthetic language by producing a number of more conventional 'plays'; Barrie Keefe's 'Abide With Me', Poliakov's 'Hitting Town'. Then in 1980 Impact produced their first major self-devised work, 'The Undersea World of Eric Satie', and it was 'Satie' that first brought them to national attention at the 1980 'Edinburgh Festival' and by transferring to the ICA as part of a 'hits of the festival' package. 'Satie' was set in the bohemian Paris of the 1890s and was a mesmerising collage of post-impressionist images animated by a whimsical and comic dialogue entirely in cod-French. In a street cafe Satie sits at a table dreaming his music. At the back of the cafe a waiter watches the latest exploits of that other famous Frenchman Jacques Costeau on the television. The cafe itself is then transformed into an aquarium and the intensely private, neurotic inner life of the artist is seen as the antics of some shy and bizarrely plummaged fish. The metaphors of fish and aquarium surge in and out from the mind of Satie, as slowly, rhythmically and strangely logically as both the tide and the music. Here Impact struck upon the perfect relationship of metaphor and image to describe the psychological and cultural conditions in which art is created. In the discreet, confining world of the aquarium, each inhabitant has to fight to find some highly individual personal expression or else just become a part of the shoal.

Their next project in the same year was the powerful and disturbing 'Certain Scenes'. Set in a terrifying, apocalyptic future the show charts a mythic descent into hell, but here hell is seen as the metallic gladiatorial arena in the bowels of some tyrannical machine. The ideals of individual freedom and responsibility are pitted against a soulless mechanical system, represented by a disembodied voice and two gladiators in a fight to the death. Whilst the themes of 'Certain Scenes' were perhaps a little too familiar, the atmosphere created in the performance of unseen and unseeable dangers was overwhelming and was a triumph of economical but precise use of light and shadows, sound and smoke effects as well as committed performances.

Many of the theatrical techniques of 'Eric Satie' and of 'Certain Scenes' were brought together in Impact's major 1981 project 'Dammerungstrasse 55'. The atmospheric and humorous possibilities of using cod-French in 'Satie' are used to similar effect in Dammerungstrasse, except now we are in post war Berlin, it is cod-German we hear and there is nothing whimsical about this show. The techniques of shadows and half-glimpsed faces and events of Certain Scenes is used again in Dammerungstrasse to brilliantly communicate a world where nothing is certain. All sense of normal activity has been blasted to pieces and in its place is only suspicion and doubt. The work is often funny, but it is the comedy that embarrasses as we see ordinary people forced by circumstances to behave like lunatics. An ounce of coffee be-





Steve Shill



Steve Shill

### Certain Scenes

comes a prize precious enough to kill for, a packet of cigarettes is enough to persuade an ordinary woman to prostitute herself. Survival is the uppermost consideration and morals and human values have become mortal traps. Without resort to cliché it brilliantly reveals the cliché that just below the facade of civilisation lies a brutal animal.

In the four years of their life they have produced eleven shows, four of which were for children. They have lived the almost inevitable life of gruelling onenighters, with minimal public subsidy, but they have developed a large and extremely loyal following across the country. They have performed in London rarely and with little visibility but now they have just completed a very successful two week run of their current show 'Useful Vices' at the ICA. This must appear as some kind of recognition and it comes at a time when the company are feeling the need, as most companies at some point do, to take a major step forward and stop the constant onenighting and to find ways of working in a larger and less pressured way.

'Useful Vices' is a typically bold and rigorous work. Set in the tribal milieu of East End gangland of the 1950s the show is loosely based on Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'. It concerns a 'family' of three brothers and a sister one of whom has committed a murder, a killing that is justified within the ethical code of this rigidly structured world. The family escape on a boat up Thames, which, through a process of inventive and simple theatrical devices brings the killing and the ethical code that endorses it into confrontation with the ethical codes of South American Headhunters, contemporary suburbia and a clinical, technological future. These comparisons are reinforced by the varying phenomenologies of the different cultures. A constant motif of a red bird occurs in each world, and in each it is given a different value. The same bird is given either an aesthetic, a symbolic or an ornithological value according to the world it is in. The relativity of the act of killing to the ethical code in which it occurs as it is revealed by the journey forces the responsible brother to doubt the nature of his own ethics which he had believed to be absolute. The boat journey becomes a metaphor of the psychological journey to the soul, the Heart of Darkness, which is the only real judge of our actions. There he finds the truth, that the killing was a crime against humanity, and punishes himself with guilt and fear and in the admission of his sin he finds forgiveness.

'Useful Vices' is a complex multi-layering of ethical and phenomenological philosophies. It confronts the very contemporary nightmare, that in a fragmented world, where all philosophies are available to us, how should I behave? It is intensely intellectual, ranging across sometimes clear sometimes obscure historical, art historical and philosophical quotations. Yet the performance is sustained through its complexity and obscurity by the strength

of the visual and verbal images, their own precisely evocative music and the aggressively energetic performances.

'Useful Vices' gives the impression that Impact have reached the absolute limits of how much questioning and theatrical inventiveness can be crammed into the limiting restraints imposed by small scale touring requirements and too little money. As though the canvas is now too small to contain their talents and energies, their next project is planned to be a large scale musical work which will involve live music and professional singers. Many of the more inventive companies in the world today seem to be moving in the direction of larger, more theatrically rich work. Yet the

constant complaint is that they can barely survive as small scale companies and that given the current situation of the arts and especially now with the inauspicious appointment of Luke Rittner as head boy at the Arts Council there is no way that the step forward can be made. We will undoubtedly see more artists following Pip Simmons and Mike Figgis in working more and more in the financially more sympathetic environment of France, Italy, Holland and Germany. It will be a very sad day if Impact go that way too as they almost alone represent a younger generation of innovators in the theatre.

Steve Rogers

## Profile

# Bloodgroup

My first encounter with Bloodgroup was during the Women Live celebrations of 1982 when I was part of an expectant Manchester audience gathered to see what was, for many, their first introduction to live performance art. Various fascinated, disturbed, moved and repelled, no-one went away disappointed.

A Barricade of Flowers was one of the most compelling shows I saw last year. Bloodgroup's choice of images, at once strongly theatrical and intensely personal demonstrated a working method that had succeeded in linking those inner and outer worlds. At that stage the company was just two women, Anna Furse and Suzy Gilmore, and, although now expanded to five members, it is they who have developed their particular style of approach.

Bloodgroup was established in 1980, but the working partnership between Anna and Suzy had begun several years earlier. From 1977-1979 as members of Helen Jives both performed at X6 with, amongst others, Jackie Lansley and Maureen O'Brien (O'Farrell). Periodically workshops developed into performances and 'The Fast Supper', 'Bagwash' and 'Edge City' were all to come out at that period. The work was loose, modular, drawing strongly on the dance and movement backgrounds of individual members.

In 1979 Suzy again worked with Jackie Lansley in 'I, Giselle'; a feminist reworking of the classical ballet using both dance and theatre techniques overlaid with music, slides and film. Seeing this inspired Anna to approach Suzy with the aim of working more closely together. What she saw as the conservatism of the British fringe was being challenged by women's theatre of all complexions, most notably in the field of comedy, but she had become very much aware of the need for serious, researched women's performance, particularly on a non-textual basis. So Winter 1980 saw the beginning of work on their first piece, 'A Barricade of Flowers'.

Jean Genet had been a major inspiration for Anna, particularly in the context of feminism. Kate Millet's analysis of the slave-mentality had thrown up remarkable parallels in his writings and rehearsals began with work round 'The Maids' with its emphasis on the inner world and inner life of two women inextricably bound up with each other. The constant shifts of power within the relationship, the changes in pecking order within the eternal triangle, the contrasts between daily routine and fantasy life and the encroachments of each



Steve Shill

Undersea World of Erik Satie



Dirt

Jill Posener

## Barricade of Flowers



Jill Posener

into the other are elements clearly visible in the final show.

After initially approaching rehearsals collectively, Anna began to take on a more directorial role, scripting work as it progressed, translating images into theatrical terms. They had found a space that allowed them to fantasise — wanting to be knee-deep in fresh flowers found its expression with the stage for *Barricade* strewn with paper roses.

Moving away from the text they worked through sequences using particular personal objects round which to base improvisations, developing what they describe as 'a complicity with the object', where the performer is a component of a larger whole, which includes each object as equally valuable.

Each item finally used for the performance belonged to the performers, building that resonance of an inner life which informed their relationships with each object. That inner story is something the performer keeps for herself.

The process was at times a painful one; personal self-exploration and mutual self-revelation is never easy, but the rewards came in performance. They had developed an intuitive awareness of each other which gave their work an overwhelming intensity of expression, leaving the audience feeling as though they were privately viewing the inside of two people's heads.

*Barricade of Flowers* starts with the two performers, faces and hair whitened as to be almost identical, gently see-sawing on a giant pink see-saw. They are linked throughout by a scarlet satin umbilical cord, a physical connection that seems to negate verbal communication, their vocal exchanges are reduced to the barest twitterings and chantings.

Images tumble over each other; the see-saw becomes a table for a feast of *La Grande Bouffe* dimensions, each slyly watching the other to see how much is devoured, a silver fish is whisked from between a madonna's thighs, a fridge is opened, grail-like for worship at the shrine; all the senses are assaulted by colour, sound, smell. Totally fluid, the whole piece is yet as taut as a high-wire.

*Barricade of Flowers* received a good deal of attention, touring England and Europe from February 1981 when it opened at the York and Albany for the Women in Theatre in London Festival, to May 1982. The company offered workshops with the performances, partly as extra revenue and partly because of the need to share the processes of their work, in order to demystify it. Anna in fact teaches movement at Rose Bruford College on a job-share basis.

Through the workshops new company members have emerged. Stephanie Pugsley has worked with *New Heart* and *Hor-*

*mone Imbalance* amongst others and fitted in well with the style of work. She began work with Anna directing and performing this time, the company was also joined by Jeanette Iljon, who would produce film and slides and Sylvia Hallet creating a musical soundtrack.

After two weeks of rehearsal, Kate Oven came in to design the production that would become *Dirt*.

This show was to continue the exploration of inner and outer lives, specifically in the context of women as performers and, even more specifically, drawing upon women who perform in bed and on the streets, prostitutes. *Dirt* would be about 'performance — the sex of theatre and the theatre of sex'. The intention was to research prostitution and develop a common viewpoint, but the issues constantly gave rise to problems of interpretation. The need to express a 'correct' viewpoint in terms of the women's movement was important, but within it were many conflicting attitudes. The material was dense, contentious, the desire to use new media at times got in the way of a clear expression.

Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) changed their line on prostitution during the rehearsal period, issuing a statement condemning prostitution, but not the women themselves. This, eventually, was the view of the company.

Sex and Militarism were major aspects

of the work in progress, with both Greenham Common and the Falklands crisis and the issues around them contributing fuel to the oppression of women.

The groups worked associatively, their intention to build states/cliches and disturb their elements. They examined on-stage/offstage roles, real and assumed personae. Together they went to Soho and recorded interviews with prostitutes about their work. Rehearsals took place at Chisenhale Dance Centre in exchange for labour in the building.

When *Dirt* opened on July 30th at the Oval it was packed each night. It provoked a great deal of discussion, especially around the inclusion of twenty minutes of a taped interview of one particular prostitute, discussing aspects of her work. Many felt that the show had become an apology for prostitution. After a break of some weeks, the company began work on restructuring, getting back to its essential theatricality, developing more freedom in the performance. The tape went entirely, plus slide material and the film which had all seemed to overbalance the work. Sylvia Hallet, who could not commit herself to touring was replaced by Sianed Jones.

The second production opened at the Cockpit this January and I was again able to see their work.

Through a series of connected, and often disconnected, 'acts' *Dirt* explores the 'pure' and 'impure' in woman. The show opens with three Victorian ladies, demurely dressed in long white gowns, indolently

stretched out on the grass watching cricket. They take tea, they play croquet; seemingly inoffensive behaviour. But between each act, and punctuated by the roar of overflying aircraft, they daintily disrobe, revealing corsets and stockings. The normal activity continues, but it has been subverted by the unexpected, the cliché, complete with *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* backdrop, is set up, then exploded. A further cliché is established, the corsets and stockings — and just when we expect total nudity, they wander off.

As they change for another scene we watch slides of the story of mankind. They change onstage, not off-stage, and we can see them very clearly in the half-light. And they know too. Suddenly a slide announces:

#### WE KNOW YOU ARE LOOKING

Should we be? Shouldn't we be? After all, they are performing. Or aren't they? Is this some kind of interval. No they're talking now. But to each other! What about us? We're here too. Eavesdropping on the backstage chat, but they're not backstage..

Bloodgroup constantly set up and knock down our notions of what is and isn't performance in the theatrical sense, replacing it with the preparation and the aftertaste, the left-out bits, the beyond-the-wings we never see.

A ballerina accepts a bouquet of flowers and slowly pulls from it a series of items of silky underwear, she curtsies, mechanically and then moves out of the spotlight. She scratches, shifts awkwardly, she's out

of the limelight but why won't she go away?

*Dirt* is a series of bits and pieces of lines strewn across the stage like the flowers in *Barricade*. A row of shoes waits patiently by the footlights to be worn; to give new impetus. Songs rise and fall as though on a whim; we vaguely recognise tunes, are they being sung to us or are they singing to each other?

We're almost pathetically grateful when the performers come out, touch us, and give us fruit, neatly wrapped in cling-film.

Sianed Jones advises us in Welsh on the operation of our lifejackets, and we're on safe ground again. But what is she really saying in such reassuring tones? They smile and smile until their faces must ache; the smile of the air hostess, the smile of the showgirl, the smile of the geisha, the smile of the prostitute. The smiles are captured in lighted picture frames they hold to their faces; in turn they switch on and light up these tiny portraits of each part of their bodies.

Women are performers, consummate performers, in every aspect of their lives. Living up to the fantasies and images that others create for them, the madonna/whore is ever-present. What Bloodgroup are telling me is that sometimes those fantasies are our fantasies, more often they're not. We've got our own fantasies to find, it just needs the courage to let go.

**Stella Hall**



**Dirt**

Jill Posener

# Spaces

'If people want to come and do something in an abbatoir or a health gym, we'll organise it' is the expansive selection policy of the Basement group, Newcastle. The smallish basement space in the city centre is, in their view merely a springboard for events which recently included live artist Kelvin Simms drawing footprints of a dole queue including the entire unemployed population of Newcastle; starting in the Basement the artists over a period of twelve hours got halfway to Hexham in this way before giving up with only half the total number of jobless silhouetted.

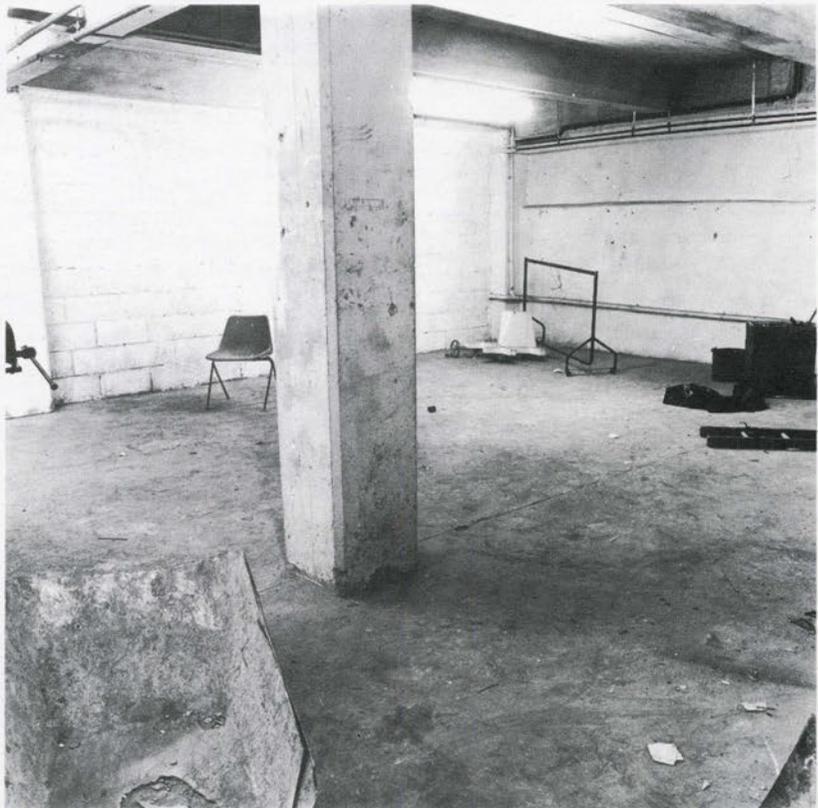
Arguments that performance art is merely a form of decadent introversion would fall on stony ground here in the north-east, where; amid conditions of social deprivation quite unknown in the prosperous south; radical art forms are thriving to say the least. A glance at the artist-run Basement Groups roster of events for the last year reveal a scale of programming that could rival, if not exceed, the total number of performances in galleries in London. Theatrical performance is not frowned on here, but they would attempt to programme such artists as Eric Bogosian, Dave Stephens etc. in pubs, clubs and music halls in the area, rather than their own venue, and they are aware that the funding and space problems preclude them from staging the larger touring performance groups.

They plan to encourage more and more artists to work round the city in unusual, often outdoor locations. Bruce Maclean is performing with 'synchro-swimmers' (formation swimming, once a fifties craze, now undergoing a current revival in the pools and lidos of the land) at Elswick Baths, and Charlie Hooker is choreographing cars in Gateshead Multi Storey Car Park (Vito Acconci on Tyneside?) with headlights and pedestrians caught in various formations.

One of the current members of the Group, John Bewley, is himself no stranger to outdoor environmental work. One of his early performances took place for six hours on top of a corporation bus. Invitation cards were sent out, but the public had to find out which bus he was actually on, as the event was entirely unprearranged, without even the driver or conductor having advance notice.

Recently their invitation to undertake the programming of just about anything was broadcast on Walters Weekly, the bizarre Radio One 'Here I am Standing...' style Whickers World of the arts fronted by the bucolically opinionated John Walters. After the broadcast they got one letter proposing bluntly, 'I will come up and work in the space.' Subsequent phone calls produced a refusal to reveal the nature of the proposed project, which has not to date taken place. Another recent perform-

## Basement Group, Newcastle.



Basement Group

ance installation, which possibly indicates one of the various reasons performance is taken so seriously in the north, was made by Peter Davie, Deputy Director, and Visual Arts officer for Northern Arts. John Bewley recalls 'He knocked a hole in the wall, and did an eight hour installation called 'Administration works'. There was his secretary in one corner, typing away, and then he would meet people, as if it was an office. There was a slide show, and he had a wall covered with the outline of his profile, with bric-abrac and rubbish; a head full of rubbish! He knocked a hole in the wall, and when you looked through, there were sounds of someone knocking a hole in the wall. When you looked through, there was a projection on the far wall of the next room of Duchamps thing in Chicago, of the hole in the wall and the girl in the pigskin. That was quite well attended, as you can imagine. He did his everyday work when there was no-one there, but when anyone came in, he had a series of books like 'The History of the World,' 'The Story of Art,' and the World,' 'The Story of Art,' and 'Geography for Beginners', and he dictated a

letter taking a paragraph from each book, so that they all ran together and each letter was just about completely incomprehensible. It was on Northern Arts headed notepaper and would end off each time with 'Please keep in touch about your most recent project. Yours sincerely, Peter Davie.' Everybody got one.

The other members of the group, John Kippin, Richard Grayson, and John Adams are also working artists and performers, and all present their work generally as a travelling group show. Whenever they can, they all tour together, although this must pose many logistic problems with two performances in the space of a week. They tour abroad, and this allows them to set up important international exchanges, with artists coming from Europe, the USA and Canada to Newcastle even before London. They see an important role in setting up tours around the country for the artists they meet, from bringing French and Belgian artists over this year to arranging a tour for the legendary poet, Dick Higgins, who has not read in Britain since 1962. (They are, incidentally looking for venues for this.)

Exploring personal themes and expressions characterise much of the performance work by members of the Basement Group themselves. At the recent series of short performances at the Midland group last Autumn, a particularly sardonic act of self-criticism called 'Alienation Piece' was delivered by Ken Gill. Standing in the open space with a plank on his head he intoned variations on the bluntly poetic theme 'My Work Is Shit' (My Work Is Dull, I live in Hull and further extrapolations of the doggerel nature) which was then fed back with delay tapes to create a backwash of negative wallpaper. For such a apparent piece of protracted self-indulgence, the final effect was in fact quite entertaining, and not just in an obvious sense.

Belinda William's work, too, is based in images of her personal life. Her performance at the same event consisted of videotapes of her at home doing various domestic chores, while in real life she emerged from behind the video monitor clothed in a ballroom gown and extravagantly mimed a virtuoso performance with a violin.

Was there a danger of more and more ambitious projects getting in the way of their own work? No, because the Basement was a very simple, malleable kind of space, and it changed radically from week to week. Was their own work affected by constantly programming a continuous, varied programme of outside artists? Yes, there was a tendency to become saturated, and to veer between being very cynical and hypercritical about their own work. The main effect seemed to be that they keep their own work very short in duration, which apart from making it refreshingly dynamic, makes it obviously easier to put on a group show.

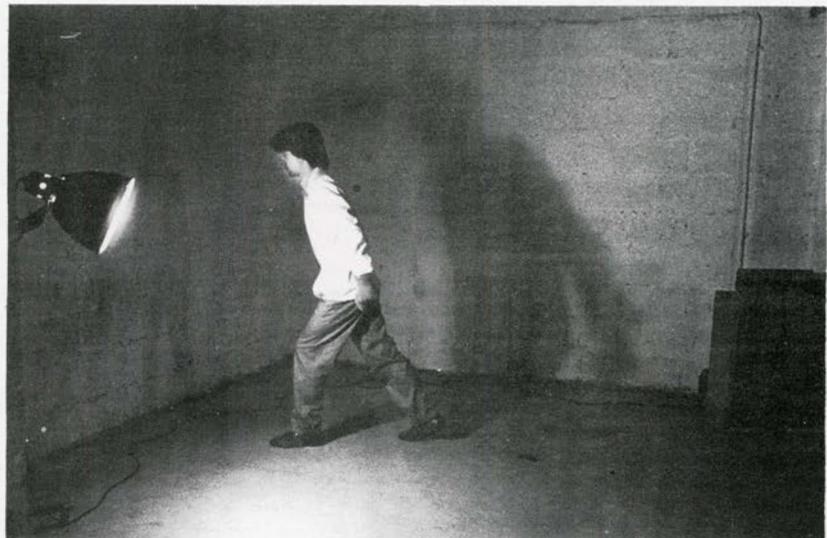
The Basement group was formed in 1976, as the Ayton Basement, down by the quayside by an earlier group of students from Newcastle Polytechnic, then relaunched in its present form with backing from Northern Arts. As the above description of 'Administration Works' suggests, there is an unusual significance given to Performance and Third area work in this region, although it is arguable that the provinces can be more generous in funding certain types of radical project. An artist-run centre could perhaps be more psychologically capable of running outside London, where the competition and potential audience have all but cleared the ground of venues not run by professional administrators.

The almost faceless image of a group with a name like 'The Basement Group' belies the fact that they comprise a number of highly different, almost idiosyncratic individuals. However, as Ken Gill quips in passing, referring to their coming group show at the Arnoltini, 'We've got some job lots of jackets, some nice little dralon numbers, we got eight for three quid. They've got three foot lapels, and they're cream, with chocolate brown piping round the cuffs and the borders..... John's going to have badges made, school badges, a shield and a little scroll on them, and a little Latin inscription which says 'Nice Piece'.

**Rob La Frenais.**



**Belinda Williams**



**Richard Layzell at the Basement**



**John Bewley-True Confessions**

Basement Group

## Media

Dear Performance magazine,

I am a London based performance artist. My latest performance at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth (2nd of October 1982) has been misrepresented by the press and the seriousness of its content largely doubted or ignored.

I have written to the Editor of 'The News' newspaper in Portsmouth, challenging the author of a particularly slanderous article (see Silver's column) and my letter was ignored.

I am writing to you because I feel that the voice of Mr Silver has been heard in a wider context than my performance could reach (the newspaper readers) and I have been denied access to that same audience therefore allowing his remarks to remain unchallenged. The fact that my work has suffered numerous calculated distortions in the hands of newspaper reporters is only a minor incident but I feel there is a need to raise certain questions to do with press reporting and the assumed authority of reporters who claim to represent public opinion and the whole question of manipulation of information not only in the small world of art but information that shapes our opinions, choices and our view of the world in general.

Mr Silver seems to have deep mistrust of the opinion of the public calling those who responded positively to my work 'far-out enthusiasts who thrive on controversy'.

The response of people who attended the performance in Portsmouth and who had not seen such an art form before (being the first performance event in Portsmouth) suggested a greater awareness of the issue the performance dealt with, namely the Palestinian issue which, ironically, has been frequently written about in the press in recent months but Mr Silver refused to give it any notice in his article.

Under the guise of evaluating the artistic merit of the work and choosing to sensationalise one aspect of the performance, Mr Silver has refused to give any importance to the content and by doing so has only reinforced the local political opinion about the issues expressed in the performance with a petty fostering of clichés and prejudices of 'modern art' and the use of ratepayers' money.

All of these issues should be dignified with greater attention and seriousness than Mr Silver's article could possibly attain. I do hope that my voice will at least be heard within the art context.

Yours sincerely,  
Mona Hatoum

# NAKED IN RED SLIME

## Row over Mona's art show

**A naked woman will "struggle" for three hours in red slime at a Southsea art gallery on Saturday in a performance backed by ratepayers' and taxpayers' cash.**

**And that is crazy, according to the Chairman of Hampshire Ratepayers' Federation (Mr. John Starling).**

"Someone wants their knuckles rapped. This is crazy at a time of financial restraint — or any other time for that matter," he said.

The performance is planned for the council-supported Art Space Gallery at Brougham Road, by artist Mona Hatoum.

Naked, and covered in red mud, she will spend three hours in a tall polythene box trying to clamber out, failing because of the slime and gradually disappearing from view as the colour is smeared over the plastic. A Palestinian, she hopes the performance will symbolize isolation and oppression.

"I am just amazed, what can I say?" said Mrs. Eileen Jones

of the Portsmouth Association of Community Standards.

A spokesman for the Gallery, Mr. Steve Chettle, said it was a serious performance. "Performance art is gaining recognition as a powerful form of expression. This is an innovative piece of work by a committed artist with something to say and we are very happy to put it on," he said.

City Arts Administrator Mr. Chris Harrison believes the performance will be less offensive than Fiona Richmond and naked girls "without any pretence of being art" posing on the stage of the Kings Theatre, Southsea, also backed by City and County Councils.

"That is deemed acceptable, but nudity in an art gallery

performance is considered controversial by some people. The nude body has been a part of art for centuries.

"Performance art is a relatively new art form. This exhibition is controversial but I don't think an art gallery is doing its job if it is never controversial, moving into new areas of art.

"This is just one exhibition among many that have not been controversial," said Mr. Harrison.

The Gallery opened in June last year and, as well as an annual £2,000 grant from the City Council to cover administration costs, it has this year been given a £6,000 grant by Southern Arts, which receives cash from the County Council and the Government supported National Arts Council.

## Row over vanishing naked artist

By KEITH NURSE  
Arts Correspondent

**THE** prospect of a naked woman artist disappearing, at public expense, within a polythene column, amid surging brown clay, brought a protest yesterday.

Mona Hatoum, a London-based Lebanese artist will be lowered tomorrow into an 11ft polythene container and gradually vanish from view as the clay obscures the plastic.

Her three-hour performance, symbolising what has been described as the oppression of women and isolation, will take place at the Aspex Gallery,

housed in a former church at Portsmouth.

At the gallery last night one official insisted that there was no question of Miss Hatoum physically writhing in the clay. She would be firmly encased in polythene.

### Strongly opposed

But Mr John Sparling, chairman of Hampshire Ratepayers Fedn., suggested that someone deserved to have his "knuckles rapped" over the project.

"If any ratepayers' money is involved, then it must be strongly opposed. I don't believe this performance is a valid art form."

Mr Steve Chettle, for the

gallery, said: "The cost to the public amounts to £70, which is paid by the Southern Arts Council and I am surprised the condemnation from someone who has never seen it

Southern Arts, the region arts association, made a grant of £6,000 to the gallery, and it was from this that Miss Hatoum's show is being paid

## And how p clay gets a

**A NAKED** woman will writhe for three hours in brown clay at an art gallery in a performance backed by £70 public cash

Five exhibitions took place in 1981 and this is the sixth this year.

"We aim to show all sorts of visual arts. This will be the second performance art work, and it is only part of a show by women artists which has already been seen in galleries in other parts of the country. It includes portraits among its paintings and other works," said Mr. Chettle.

THE SUN  
OCT 1, 82

## Nude has ticket to writhe

A NAKED woman is being paid with ratepayers' money . . . to writhe in a pile of clay at an art show.

Mona Hatoum, a Lebanese artist, will perform for three hours at the exhibition in Portsmouth, Hants.

And local ratepayers are furious they are footing the £70 bill.

Hampshire Ratepayers' Federation chairman John Starling said: "Someone wants their knuckles rapped."

### Oppression

"I don't believe this performance is a valid art form."

Art gallery spokesman Steve Chettle said: "The symbolism involved is important."

"Being naked is evidence of isolation and the clay deepens the sense of oppression she feels as a woman and possibly as a Lebanese."

## lunging into n art grant

financial restraint—or at any other time.'

Art gallery spokesman Mr Steve Chettle said the performance—which takes place

## Silver's Column

### Modern art? Yuk . . .

As an expression of art, the spectacle of a naked young woman struggling to extricate herself from a plastic box filled with red slime is about as edifying as a pig wallowing in mud.

This unsavoury exhibition, staged by Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum at a Southsea art gallery, was meant to convey the struggle for survival against tensions and oppressions in Lebanon. Or maybe it was something to do with women's problems (the performer appeared to be hedging her bets on the issue).

It did not really matter — her message was so obscure that only two or three members of her audience claimed to comprehend it. One wonders just how many art lovers would have attended the bizarre peepshow if Miss Hatoum had chosen to wriggle fully clothed in her simulated torment.

The question now for the Aspex Gallery in Brougham Road is how do they follow this canine production. With a can of worms, maybe? Or a couple of snakes writhing in a rucksack?

It might be funny if were not so ludicrous — and if the gallery in question was not paying for its eccentricities with grants funded by taxpayers and ratepayers.

Art teacher Mr. Dave Allen, of St Luke's School, hailed the slime-covered damsel as not only "splendid" but "moving and powerful." It was ever thus. Any meaningless and worthless contribution of modern art will always find a few way-out enthusiasts who thrive on controversy and who will see all sorts of significance in something which has none.

If this is the best that modern art can offer, let us bring back the Old English Masters. At least their message was clear and their talent inescapable. Who needs slime when Britain's heritage has so much genuine art and culture to offer?

John  
Silver

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I have just received an article by John Silver entitled 'Modern Art? Yuk...' (The News, Fri. 8 Oct. 1982) in which he refers to my performance at the Aspex Gallery 'as an expression of art, the spectacle... is as edifying as a pig wallowing in mud.' and dismisses it by saying that '... her message was so obscure that only two or three members of her audience claimed to comprehend it.'

I would like to challenge Mr Silver to reply to these questions in his column:

- 1) Were you present when the work took place at the Aspex gallery on the 2nd of October?
- 2) If you were present, did you interview or ask questions to the estimated 80 people who were present at different times during the performance to back up your claim? The tone of your article suggests clearly to me that you have compiled your article from other newspaper reports. This may be acceptable newspaper practice but it does nothing for truth.
- 3) Were you really so offended by the female body Mr Silver or is it really that your slanderous remarks are disguising a crude and cynical manipulation of local political issues?

I would like to point out to Mr Silver that there is nothing 'edifying' or 'savoury' in the way the Palestinian people are being treated in Lebanon and elsewhere. As a Palestinian I demand the right to express my anger, despair and horror at the unspeakable brutalities committed against my people. I have done so with the most appropriate means at my disposal — my body and the whole of myself — within the context of art.

Mona Hatoum



Synopsis of performance by Mona Hatoum, October 2nd, 6pm-9pm. sion, isolation, alienation as a Palestinian woman.

A human figure reduced to a form covered in clay, trapped, confined within a small structure, struggling to stand up again and again, slipping and falling again and again... and there is no way out...

In this live work I try to confront the audience with my experience of oppres-

The live action lasts for three hours and is accompanied by three different sound tapes continuously blasting the space from different directions creating a collage of sounds: songs, news reports, conversations in English, French, Arabic and Hebrew.

## Afterimage



Graham Young

Chic Pix, an animated cartoon for Afterimage

It is a long way from the opulence of Channel Four's broadcast centre in Charlotte Street to a couple of sheds in Brixton that house **After Image**, just as it is a long way from the hierarchies of the television studio and production system to After Image's remarkably co-operative venture, as independent producers of an arts magazine slot for Channel Four.

In the last issue of **Performance** I voiced doubts that the television medium would allow artists to 'get to grips with television technology', and that it would package artists' work with little consideration or sensitivity. I am happy to make an exception in the case of After Image. Their half-hour slot is scheduled to begin in April, under the title **Alter Image**, and will run for about three months. In any one programme you might find yourself watching work by dancers, theatre groups, artists, performers, fashion designers, musicians, the famous and the infamous in a spikey and stimulating format.

How have they managed to avoid the pit-falls of television, and its cosy blandness? The answer must lie partly in the fact that After Image came into life a number of years before Channel Four contracts were in the offing, started by a group of enthusi-

asts with little money, but a great desire to find a new type of magazine programme that would be able to present contemporary arts on the television screen. The fruits of their early work are clearly visible in both their well formulated policies, and in the quality of their productions.

Unlike the technocrats, they believe that there are a large number of people working in the arts who have good ideas for television. And they, quite rightly, draw a firm distinction between people with a good idea that can be televised, and an idea for an original television programme. They categorically refuse to 'point a camera' at an existing performance or piece of sculpture, rather they have encouraged artists to think about the elements of their work that might work well on TV, and to create a special television project out of them. Quite apart from the programmes they are making, they are engaged in a very important exercise in raising artists' awareness of the potential of the television medium.

The majority of items they will broadcast have originated from discussions between After Image and the artists, with the only constraints on projects being time. They can rarely afford more than one day on recording, and aim to tailor work to

five-minute items. Whilst this may sound like an unnecessary limitation, it has its advantages. Few people not conversant with television production would guess what a greedy consumer of material television is. It takes a remarkable amount of material to make five minutes of good television. Likewise, the advantages of working to a magazine format, which in its half an hour crosses a broad range of arts (and audience) interests are not to be sneezed at.

Certainly the preview material that I have seen shows no sign of limitations. From Pookiesnackenburer's Brighton-Rockish musical, through Masi's images of tribal and urban life, to Psychic TV's own inimitable polemic, each is a compact and crystal clear statement. The overall effect of a thirty minute programme may leave the viewer bruised, but certainly not in a TV stupor. Each piece shows not only a consciousness of the television medium, but a desire to fully exploit, as relevant, the potential technology. Broadcast TV is, for the most part, notoriously unimaginative in its use of technology, and it is not surprising that when artists are allowed the space to spread their wings they can show us just how much television we have been missing — which says a lot for the confi-

Graham Young

gence that After Image have created, especially as the mere mention of video has, in the past, been enough to make many artists lurch for the exit.

There is a flexibility and desire to experiment in every aspect of After Image's work that should be studied closely by those working in mass media. Only a few weeks before broadcasts begin, no decisions had been made about the contents of individual programmes. They

have thrown out the window the explanatory commentary that turns the exciting into the everyday, gone too is the deadly studio interview ('Er, yes, and what exactly did it mean...?'), and instead have decided that we viewers have some intelligence, and don't need to be told what we've just seen. In doing so they have removed television's standard barrier between the artist's intention and the viewer's response, and in doing so have liberated

new art from the frequently sneering attitudes of TV presenters.

These may all seem like theoretical benefits, but I assure you they are not. The conditions artists work under are bound to have an effect on the quality of their work. After Image have got the conditions better than ever before, and the work they broadcast should reflect this.

If you are interested in the arts featured in these pages, watch it.

Pete Shelton

## Steve Hawley

When I reviewed New York video last issue, I wondered whether its predilection for media piracy and electronic music would infiltrate the more structural work of British artists. Steve Hawley has already combined Structuralism's linguistic preoccupations with a more American interest in technology. His own brand of English irony and the occasional complexity of his ideas do not preclude a simple delight in a tune, an electronic conjuring trick or the fractured sights and sounds of an indoor swimming pool.

In 'New Laws of Chess' (1982) there is a brisk series of geometric images: skyscrapers, railway tracks, paving stones intercut with the organic disarray of blossoming trees, sea-spray and a tangled graveyard. The rational rules of chess gradually disintegrate until the 5th game removes the board. Words animate and scatter, trees close in, fields and sunsets resist the logic of systems and a soft voice tries to count its way out of a dilemma.

Order and chaos, reason and intuition, the machine and the artist, these oppositions are recurrent themes of Steve Hawley's work. 'Those Flashes of Insight Which' (give us a view of something as a whole, as opposed to reasoning which deals with parts), this tape proposes the construction of a memory as a transition from the inexpressible proximity of feeling to the distance of articulation — the image. The video is conceived along similar lines. Out of focus close-ups pan across the artist

suggesting the undifferentiation of infantile perception (only gradually do we distinguish the parts from the continuum that is mother/child). Within the limitations of spoken language, Steve Hawley begins to describe his earliest childhood memory, musing on his sense of being '... a spectator of my own memories'. Later, the sorry tale of a schoolboy humiliation takes shape while the camera slowly reveals the image as a monitor in a concrete space. The video-confessional aspect of the work interested me in that personal revelation has been a feature of much feminist art (the personal being political). Steve Hawley's piece thankfully avoided this is me/spots & all/you'd better like it touch, characteristic of male interpretations of the personal. The modesty of his performance provided exactly that degree of human contact with which he intended to lighten what could otherwise have been a highly abstruse work.

In 'Bad Reasons' (1982), he offers humour as a point of access. The limitations of formal logic are demonstrated in absurd examples of syllogisms set in a children's book: 'All farmers are kind, this man is a farmer, therefore he is kind.' The daily lives of Peter and Jane are peppered with categorical statements of the most pernicious kind. 'Peter likes to help Daddy on the car, Jane helps Mummy in the kitchen and brings the tea' or words to that effect. Life is pre-packaged into a tidy system of signs and meanings that reduce

ambiguity and ensure conformity to a narrow range of social stereotypes.

'The Extent of 3 Bells' (1981) features a musical calculator and the artist's imperfect rendition of 3 notes and all their permutations. A delightful tune is then constructed out of a boy's (embarrassed) oohs and aahs conducted with the light traces of moving candles. The new order that the video artist can create from breaking up the old order of narrative is explored in other works. Sentences are cut up, repeated, re-repeated and a fast rhythm of words and lightning associations are built up; divers criss-cross the air like a spray of bullets; a trail of wax spots measures the temporal space of a heavily fragmented dialogue — impossible to reconstruct; an unbelievable '50s advert for a washing machine is revealed to be the context of a laboratory handling radio-active material.

The pleasures of visual trickery are never denied, nor do they take precedence over the more philosophical aspects of Steve Hawley's work. The one-dimensionality of much American video is absent, so too its manic energy or laconic elegance. But being incurably European, I found myself well-disposed to Steve Hawley's breadth of vision, and his attempts to reconcile opposites (the greatest fallacies of all?). Finally, I heartily sympathised with the rough edges that betrayed a lack of decent equipment — poverty of sponsorship is not something the Americans appear to suffer from.

Catherine Elwes

Masai in a Dance Performance for After Image



# Review

The tantalizing title 'Zen Abbatoir' refers both to an event and a group. As an event it represents one of the prevailing trends of presenting an evening's entertainment in an alternative space with a wide variety of media. Not easily definable, it incorporates music, performance and cabaret of disparate variety and in this instance is held together by the continuous strand of video presentation. I went to see Zen Abbatoir at the London Film-makers Co-op. The other venues were the Hammersmith Idiot Ballroom and the Central 100 Club.

The scheme of the evening was well-worked out in theory. A programme listed all the events to be held with a Swiss delight in time-tabling and a poster noted these in outline — 'Noise Pop & Motion Pictures Performance Akshun Animations Slides/Tapes Evangelist Disco'. Inevitably the tight scheduling fell through in practice but this didn't really seem to matter as the main constituent parts all happened eventually. These featured a performance by Andre Stitt and Tara Babel, an appearance by Russ (alias George Formby/The New) and a musical set by the group Zen Abbatoir (perhaps better known as C.O.D.E.bmus by which name they produced a 12" single with Rough Trade). These live appearances were connected together by a video/disco continuation and a large notice at the entrance advertizing a raffle set the atmosphere for the evening — 'Everyone a Winner' it announced. 'First prize: A Night of Abuse.'

The videos themselves were screened on two television sets placed obliquely side by side and relayed images simultaneously to the accompaniment of records provided by the Evangelist disco. The most notable presentation here was a film of one of Alistair MacLennan's performances — the fish piece. It was fascinating to see his compelling and deliberate movements in close-up and even on a television screen, his presence was magnetic.

Stitt and Babel began the evening's live component with their latest collaborative performance 'Akshun — Terra Inc.' This carried on the use and theme of media that was so much a part of the event as a whole. Rather than relying on pure performance technique, the pair incorporated slides and film footage in this piece — an addition which worked very well considering the timing problems that this can so often present. The purpose of the 'akshun' was not explicit but as with other pieces by Stitt, some sort of clue seemed offered in the title. My personal feelings were that a meaning was invited and I took that to be an exposé of violence. ('Terra Inc'). As usual too, it seemed that shock techniques were required to get the theme across. Rather than taking physical measures of violent destruction that were used at the Cabaret Futura (dissecting a rabbit with a chainsaw), Stitt and Babel use a milder form of surprise on this occasion. The performance begins with a slide sequence



Stitt/Babel

## Zen Abbatoir

showing them both nude and indulging in a series of sexual games showing a private activity to an unsuspecting public.

Innocent enough in itself, the action becomes more sinister when one realizes that the devices used to enhance pleasure (bondage gear — heavy studded leather belts, twine etc and toy guns) are of course suggestive means of causing pain. The slide sequence ends and immediately after this the two performers enter the room fully dressed in red costumes. They conduct a complicated weaving movement in which they each circle the floor but never allow themselves to meet, to a rhythm dictated by a synthesized drum beat. This leads to a silent communication with semaphore flags and culminates in a roll on the floor — a bodily contact that suddenly seems violent after the previous sequence. The sex/violence syndrome is then reintroduced in a film episode which involves a python. First, the phallic power of the serpent is suggested by an image of a human hand stroking its sides. Next the python is let loose and we see it stalking prey. A mouse is captured by a rapid coiling movement and is then hypnotized into total paralysis. Once this is completed, the python consumes the prey entirely whole through its gargantuan jaws — a feat of brutality that is nevertheless natural and yet has powerful sexual connotations. The film ends and the action is passed on to the live performers once more. They both retire to the back of the room and light smoke capsules. Suddenly the silence is smashed by a terrible noise and the two people leave their performance space by walking, almost bumping their way through the audience bearing fog horns and forcing the spectators to make way for them.

I was admittedly a little suspicious of this form of sensory assault as it can be an all too easy way of affecting the spectator but on the whole it seemed to fit in with the overall tenor of the piece. What did bother me though was the very unclear attitude to violence that underpinned the performance. Although apparently warning against the violence that leads to war and the situation in Northern Ireland, the attitude to sexual violence was ambivalent to say the least. These issues are too emotive not to be handled with clarity and Stitt's intention should be made more obvious.

The evening's activities were continued with more videos and a slide presentation followed by a short interlude given by Russ on guitar and shouting (not well received). More videos followed and then the third and final set of the evening took its turn to perform live. This was the group Zen Abbatoir and their contribution consisted of a series of songs accompanied by visuals. The feature of their music is that it is played on a variety of non-instruments — 'noise pop' as they call it. The drum kit for example, resembled a sculpture by Tinguely — bin lids, cake tins, scrap metal cymbals etc. were mounted high on top of each other and some of the other instruments were equally bizarre. The sound/noise concept although such a well used idea in the twentieth century was given a further dimension here by the group's incorporation of other media as an integral part of the performance. Slides and film reels were shown, sometimes simultaneously, and it was from these that the audience gained the gist of the group's meaning, rather than from the lyrics which were generally unintelligible. The first film showed sequences from televised news items interspersed with shots of a pig being dressed up in clothes and then decapitated. The second film was a rather effective animation made by members of the group depicting scenes from urban life. The overall theme that came across was an indictment of the ugly face of capitalism and of twentieth century power politics and the cacophony of sound showed the way they felt about it.

This kind of event as a whole is not for those who like their performances neatly rounded and highly polished. I would have preferred fewer delays but admired the commitment that brought it together in the first place. There is a lot of potential in live/media collaborations of this type and an evening spent this way offers a challenging alternative to more conventional ways of viewing the two.

All very basic stuff and the quality of the music was not exactly great. But, at the end of the day, there was a refreshing rawness in their approach — a directness and energy that seems rare in our apathetic 'Eighties.

Anna Moszynska

# National Performance Listings

Pull Out

## Brighton

### Zap Club

Info: 0273 606906/506471

The Performance Nightlife phenomena hits Brighton. To be reviewed soon.

February 5: Venus in Furs, Randolph the Remarkable, Mivvys, C & H productions.

February 12: Alexi Alexander in Garotting the Audience, Phantom of the Opera, Eastbourne Theatre Company, Tom Dell

February 19: Cabinet of Dr Galigari-Yorkshire Actors, Lyn Thomas.

February 26: Sue Carpenter, Otiz Cannelloni, Dance Factor.

March 5: Extremists in an Igloo, Event Group, John Hegley.

March 19: Peters Army

March 26: Roland Miller and Tim Bat.

## Bristol

### Arnolfini

Info: 0272 299191

February 22-26: Basement in Bristol. Basement Group from Newcastle group show, with video, film, and performance from Belinda Williams, John Bewlay, John Kippin, John Adams, Richard Grayson and Ken Gill. (See feature this issue.)

February 25-26: Roberta Graham in Campo Santo, installation and performance.

February 26: Jan Steele and Janet Sherbourne. Experimental music.

March 1-5: Ian Breakwell, installation, drawings, film, video.

March 10-16: Rational Theatre/Malcolm Poynter in Orders of Obedience. (See review this issue.) Includes sculpture by Malcolm Poynter in Gallery.

March 18-19: Impact Theatre in Useful Vices.

## Cardiff

### Chapter Arts

Info: 0222 396061

February 1-5: Bob Carroll, with Belinda Neave, Dave Sulzer, and the Pioneers in Cardiff Dirt Show.

'An exposure to Carroll is like riding a freight train through the conscience of the cosmos... a one-man rock-opera without the music, a tribal story-teller without the costume and a cynic without bitterness, Carroll is also an actor who rejects form, who starts the show by throwing his coat in the corner, reaching for his beer stash and offering a can to someone in the audience.'

(Montreal Gazette) Carroll's appearances here are apparently legendary, and two weeks prior to

the performance he will be touring the streets of Cardiff looking for material for his performance.

February 9-11: Flying Pickets

February 16-19: Dance Wales

February 22-26: Rational Theatre in Orders of Obedience. See Review this issue.

March 3: New Arts Consort

March 5: Bara Caws (Welsh language performance)

March 18: Lol Coxhill

March 26: Cardiff Laboratory Theatre in For A Lost Hour. A celebration for the changing of the clocks.

March 28-31: Akademia Ruchú. Recent work by powerful Polish Group.

## London

### Air Gallery (London Video Arts)

Info: 01 278 7751

February 10: Dion and Poloni. Canadian video artists present recent works.

February 17: Neil Armstrong, video tapes.

February 24: Iron in Flesh

presents Land Murder, performance with video, music.

March 3: Susan Taylor, performance.

March 10: Joint presentation with London Film Co-op, video, film, performance by women artists.

March 17: Joram Tenbrink of Moonshine Video workshop,

Future Tense, The Life and Death Show, anti-nuclear videotapes.

March 24: Nan Hoover, video and performance.

March 31: Continuation of joint presentation with Film Co-op.

### Apples and Snakes

Info: 01 223 7031

Poetry Cabaret.

February 5: Adrian Mitchell, Ferenc Aszmann, Chand Sharma, Jenny Lecoat.

February 12: Ghosts of Individuals, including Patrik Fitzgerald, John Hollingsworth, Anne Clark, Kevin Hewick.

February 19: Tom Pickard, Peter Campbell, City Lines, Rory McLeod.

February 26: Joolz, Emile Sercombe, Don Carroll, Newton Neurotics.

Full programme for March, not yet confirmed.

### Battersea Arts Centre

Info: 01 223 8413

February 2-27: Clapham Studios, using the gallery as a workshop and studio space, aiming to complete paintings, drawings and sculpture during the first two weeks, giving the public the chance to see artists at work and to talk with them.

Also, in the Cafe, Lefili Tladi,

an African drummer exhibiting drawings which 'reflect his dreams, reactions and encounters with the external world in the struggle for change in South Africa.'

February 15: Boomerang to the Source, music for the opening to the above show.

March 2 onwards: Moving Art. Installation, painting and sculpture exploring aspects of movement.

## B2

Info: 01 488 9815

February 6: Simon Lane-Reading, The Fish Starts Smelling At the Head + Film.

February 13: Neo Naturists in Cro-Magnon Woman.

February 20,27: American Video selected by Mark Nash.

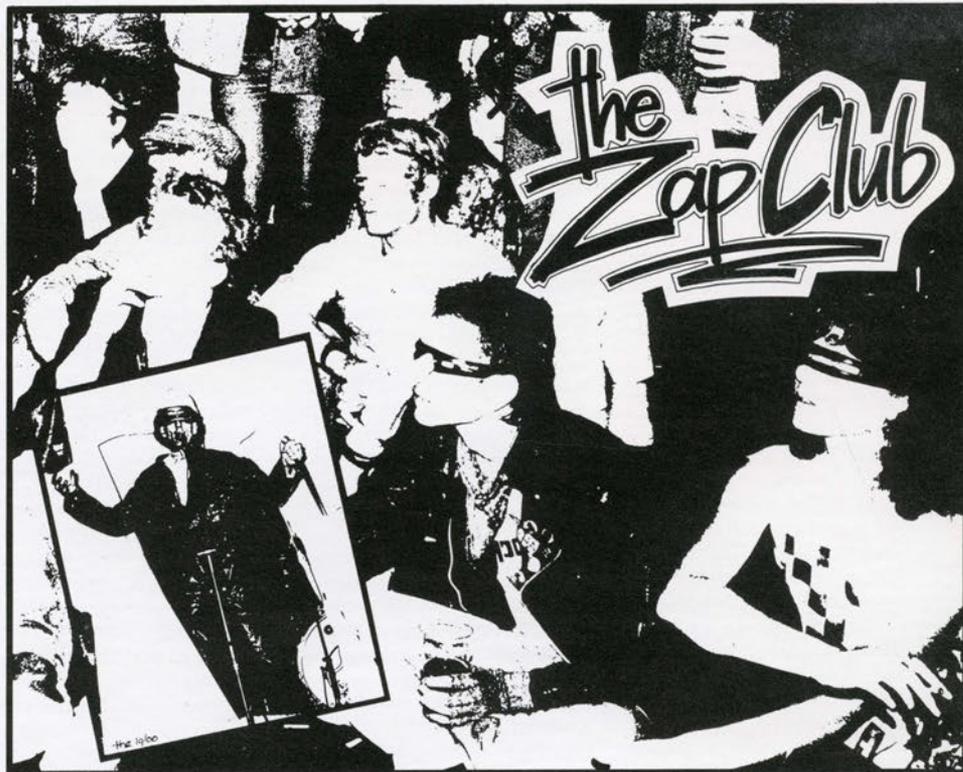
March 6: Maureen O'Paley, Stuart Jane, Michael Rose.

Film/Performance — Greater The One.

March 13-20: Continuous video/film installations by Jo Camino, Jim Diver, Judith Goddard, Ian Kerr, Michael Kostiss, Steve Littman, Zoe Redman, Julia Percy, Cordelia Swann, Cerith Wyn Evans.

March 27: Mick Aslin, Julia Percy, Simon Phillips, Matthew Bower — Film/video performance.

March 22-27: Jeremy Welsh, video installation.



# National Performance Listings

## Cockpit Theatre

Info: 01 402 5081

Angels of Fire: Festival of New Poetry, February 7-12.

Every night: Open hour for new poets, plus Knife in the Light, a stage poem by Jay Ramsay. Plus; with compere Sylvia Paskin:

February 7: Benjamin Zepheniah, F. Dhondy, H.O. Nazareth, Alev, Allen Fisher, Jeremy Silver.

February 8: Micheline Wandor, Tina Reid, Stef Pixner, Maureen Duffy, Paul Buck, Berta Freistadt.

Wednesday February 9: James Berry, Mario Bayer, Helen Deniston, Taggart Deike, Geoffrey Godbert, Sue Hubbard.

February 10: Libby Houston, Dinah Livingstone, Christopher Cardale, Frederick Williams, Madge Heron, Jeff Cloves, Pete Zero.

February 11: Joolz, Slade the Leveller, Little Dave, Little Brother, Seething Wells, Don Carrol.

February 12: Jay Ramsay, Keith Jefferson, Michele Roberts, Alison Fell, Ferenc Aszmann.

## Dance London 83

Info: 01 388 2211

(Various venues)

February 11-13: Laurie Booth

February 28-March 6: Maedee Dupres and friends

March 10-20: Will Gaines

March 16-18: Selwa Rajaa

March 20-27: Janet Smith and Dancers

March 26-April 8: Alpana Sengupta

## Drill Hall

Info: 637 8270

February 6: Nexus Opera

March 17-19 GLC Nuclear Bunker Party

March 22 onwards: Monstrous Regiment in 3 Monologues. - I'm Ulrike, I'm Screaming - Muller, Freaked Out Muller/Diary of a Prostitute in a Madhouse. By Dario Fo and Franca Rame.

March 1-12. Doppelganger in Broken Years. A collage of wartime photos, songs, letters and poetry - the plans that succeeded and those that ended in bloody tragedies - a story of survival and veterans, of social disorder and making do - two broken people meet during broken years and attempt to break down the barriers between them. An impressionistic tale told through Doppelganger's distinctive musical and physically based performance style.

## Eccentric Enterprises

Info: 01 969 7019

February 25: Eccentric Enterprises presents the 'Has Anyone Here Seen Kelly Show', Poetic and Jazzy search for the Hampstead intellectual.

At the Gypsy Queen, 166 Malden Rd. London NW5. Featuring: Ian Hinchliffe, Terry Day, Maggie Nicholls, Bob Flag and various artists.

## Electrum Gallery

Info: 01 735 6633

February 8 onwards: Media Arts Group in Paper Plus. Continuous installation plus occasional performance. '... basically the idea is that anyone can be a performance, anyone can be art, because I feel the human form is such art. What I am doing is taking that basic figure and transforming it into living paintings or sculptures by adding the elements that will be on exhibit at the gallery. When they are on they act as performance elements, and when they are off, they act as documentation of the performance.'

## ICA

Info: 930 0493

February 2-6: Omnibus from Montreal present Beau Monde.

February 3: Jean Paul Curtay in How Do You Feel About..... (A non-verbal sound performance) and It Would Blow Our Minds (Mental Music for Survivors). Of him John Cage said: 'His manner was striking. It was intense and somewhat alarming... That I found the brief performance'

Curtay gave me last fall in Paris alarming is no criticism of it. To frighten is one of the classical aesthetic effects of a work of art in Indian traditional terms.'

February 9-29: Secret Gardens.

An ICA collaboration between Tim Albery, Geraldine Pilgrim, Ian Spink and Antony McDonald. A complex piece of visual theatre which like the book The Secret Garden, explores fantasy and obsession in the lives of the characters but moves beyond the childhood of the novel. The adults in Secret Gardens, from the fictional Mary of the book to the tragic heiress Nancy Cunard, are bound together in a tale of what men and women do to each other in the name of love and in pursuit of their own 'secret gardens'.

February 20: Laurie Anderson in United States Parts 1-4. (At Dominion Theatre.) An extra performance of this absolutely

essential show, as all the other dates are now sold out.

March 1-5: Unconfirmed continuation of Secret Gardens.

March 6: Lost Jockey.

March 16 onwards: IOU Theatre Company in The Patience of Fossils.

ICA Gallery: March 2 onwards: Artists-Architecture; Scenes and Connections. Installation by General Idea and Video by Dan Graham.

## Oval House

Info: 01 735 2786

February 2-13: A Late Show.

About the inner relationships of a group of lesbians stranded in a cabin by a snowfall. By Jane Chambers, directed by Kate Crutchley.

savvy, concrete sensuality and rock'n roll... a tribute to adolescent sexuality.'

February 24-25: Phillip Grosser

March 10-11: Carolyn Adams

## London Musicians Collective

Info: 01 722 0456

Regular events:

Fridays: The Early Club

Sundays: Communication Club

Thursdays: The famous LMC Club Club Night.

March 25-28: Fast and Loose '83.

A non-stop (well almost) 3 day roof-raising bonanza bringing pop, Japanese, Greek, Afro-Caribbean, improvised and composed music together, including concerts, workshops, contemporary films, public discussion about films on music, Cornelius Cardew pieces,



Rayner Canham

The Knives Beside The Plates, a performance by Hermine and Binnie at the Notre Dame Hall on February 2-23

February 2-6: Three Women in Clotted Cream and Wounds.

February 9-13: Theatre Babel in Memorial. Grotowski Theatre Laboratorium based performance and research company. A performance evolved from the confrontation existing between inhabitants and their environment - the wasteland of war. Of Passchendaele, of Hiroshima, of future possible wastelands, the wasteland created by, and surrounding humanity and the consequent 'wasteland' existing in the individual. The performance has evolved from English, German, and Japanese texts and imagery.

## Laban Centre

Info: 01 692 4070

February 4: Marta Renzi and Dancers. Only UK performance

of this New York group described as 'a remarkable tribute to street

an all-Japanese group, and the very best of today's improvised music.

Their motto is 'never a dull moment'.

John Whiting in Playback III (Melvyn Poore), and the word was made flesh (Henry Brown) based on the writings of Alfred Jarry, and combines religious and erotic fantasy with pataphysical material to form an elaborate theatre piece. February 15: Maedee Dupres and Lindsay Cooper. Newly created performance with music by Maedee Dupres.

## Music Theatre Festival

(New MacNaughten Concerts)

Info: 01 387 9629

(At Bloomsbury Theatre and Logal Hall)

February 5: Vocem in Dum (Roger Marsh), A Ronne (Luciano Berio), Andante Cantabile (Steve

# National Performance Listings

Stanton), Bass Drum (Alan Belk).  
February 7: Carles Santos, solo programme for extended voice and piano.

February 11: John Potter and

## The Slammer

Info: 01 677 4085

Performance selected by Richard Strange. (See Performance and Nightlife, this issue.)

February 1: Theatre Kathartic in Current Event, Current Think, Hermine, and Popular History of Signs.

February 8: The Copy, The Oblivion Boys, The Event Group, Richard Strange and Rene Eyre.

February 15: Death Magazine '62. (Birmingham-based performance group), Katha Munnery, Bob Connolly.

February 22: Rosei Gibb, Rene Eyre, The People Upstairs, Japanese Theatre of London.

March 1: Frank Chickens: (All-Japanese female Karaoke singers, recommended.)

Any performance artists wishing to appear at the Slammer should call Richard Strange at the above number.

Coming Soon: Silvia Ziranek, Ian Smith.

## Zena Naj Bo Doma Cabaret

Info: 01 607 2861

Pub Cabaret with lots of performance, reviewed this issue. Dates unconfirmed; ring above number.

**For advice and information on London arts venues, including access and facilities for disabled people, call Artsline on 01 625 5666 Tue-Fri, 12-4pm, Sat 10-2pm.**

## Leicester

### The Magazine

Info: 0742 660143

Live Art Works.

Thursdays, March 24, 31, April 7. Different programme each week including Roland Miller, Feminist Art Group (Nottingham) and others to be announced.

## Manchester

### P.A.T. (Radiator)

Info: 061 224 0020

February 10-11: Cliff Hanger in They Came From Somewhere Else. 'Middleford is a New Town. Its inhabitants are modern, prosperous, busy and normal. Many of them have jobs. They eat, sleep, live, smile, dance and cry and, when it is necessary, they buy shoes or wash up. Then the Stranger arrives, and nothing will ever be the same again. The snow

melts and the day gets hotter. Goldfish and terrapins attack innocent citizens. Carefree shoppers are sucked down drains without warning. Some blame Teenagers. Others, the government. And some the Stranger. February 15-19, 22-26: IOU Theatre in a new work created in Manchester.

February 12-25: Theatre Totale in Movie, Movie. A non-naturalistic imagistic show combining the

March 26: Glassworks in Project.

## Newcastle

### Basement Group

Info: 0632 614527

February 2: Ian Boddy, Sound Installation.

February 5: Julian Maynard Smith, Performance.

February 9: 6 French artists from Paris, Performance.

February 12: Mineo Aayamaguchi, 24 hour work.



Leon Morris

### Ian Hinchliffe with famous pot plant in an Eccentric Evening

techniques of the silent movie with dialogue, music, movement, tap dancing and slides, to create an outrageous total experience that sets reality against reality.

'The first large scale performance event to be held in the NW for many years (possibly since the end of the advance of the glaciers.)'

March 3-5: Jacky Lansley in 'The Impersonators'.

March 10-11: Monstrous Regiment in 3 Monologues by Dario Fo.

March 12: British Events in The Island. Also, Dave Stephens Talks His Way Out of It.

March 17-18: Bloodgroup in Dirt.

February 15-17: Peter Margeram, Sound Installation.

February 19: Ian Walker, Film and tape slide work.

February 23: Stuart Marshall, Video Installation.

March 2: Craig Sisman, Performance.

March 12: Nan Hoover (Holland), Video and Performance.

March 19: Joel Hubaut (Normandy), Performance.

Coming in April: Charlie Hooker, Event with choreographed cars in Gateshead multistorey car park.

See article this issue about Basement Group.

## Northampton

### Northampton Co-operative Music

Info: 0604 61666/403322

March 18-19: Oral Complex, with Bob Cobbing, Clive Fencott, John Whiting.

Performance and workshop.

## Nottingham

### Midland Group

Info: 0602 582636

February 9-10: Fergus Early in Are you right there Michael, are you right?

February 17-18: Maedee Dupres and Friends in Face On a collaboration of dance, music and film, with music by Lindsay Cooper, dance by Richard Alston, and film by Sally Potter.

February 25: Virginia Astley plus French and Saunders.

March 3-4: Monstrous Regiment in 3 Monologues by Dario Fo.

March 9: Electronic Music Now. Tim Souster, sound projection, and John Wallace, trumpet.

March 16: New Arts Consort.

March 25: Killer Koala, The Gymslips.

## Sheffield

### Expanded Media Show

Info: 0742 56101

Until February 11, daily performance, video, film, exhibitions and lectures by the following artists:

Charlie Hooker, Sonia Knox, Karen Knorr, Steve Hawley, Tim Cawkwell, Roberta Graham, Andre Stitt, Sharon Kivland, Chris Andrews, Ian Breakwell, Anne Rees-Mogg, Paul Burwell, Chris Garrat, Ian Bourne, Tina Keane, Nigel Rolfe.

## Wolverhampton

### Wolverhampton Polytechnic Arena Space.

February 10: Marty St James and Anne Wilson. (Info this perf. only, 01 254 2410)

## Touring

### Forkbeard Fantasy

Info: Droxford 605

Touring the Brontosaurus Show. March 4-5: Tower Arts Centre, Winchester.

March 9-10: Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth.

March 13: Zap Club Brighton.

### New Arts Consort

Info: 0222 25650

Music for ensemble, film, video and dance. Influences range from systems music to Latin-American. Music by Charles

# National Performance Listings

Barber, Film and video by Mike Stubbs, performance by Nigel Gilvier.  
 March 3: Chapter, Cardiff.  
 March 5: The Premises, Norwich.  
 March 6: Blackfriars Theatre, Boston.  
 March 6/7: Centre for Arts, Birmingham.

March 9: Trinity College, Leeds.  
 March 10: Bretton Hall, Wakefield.  
 March 11: Polytechnic, Sunderland.  
 March 13: Dovecot Arts Centre, Stockton.  
 March 14: Ilkley College.  
 March 15: Chesterfield College of

Art.  
 March 16: Midland Group, Nottingham.  
 March 17: Phoenix, Leicester.  
 March 18: Thamesdown Arts, Swindon.  
 March 19: Almeida, London.  
**Impact Theatre**  
 Info: 0532 445972

See profile this issue.  
 February 22-27: Ralph Thorsby Community Theatre, Leeds.  
 Birmingham.  
 March 9: North Cheshire College, Warrington  
 March 11-12: Exeter University  
 March 14: Rolle College, Exmouth  
 March 18-18: Arnolfini, Bristol



Forkbeard Fantasy on Tour

## LIVE ART NOW

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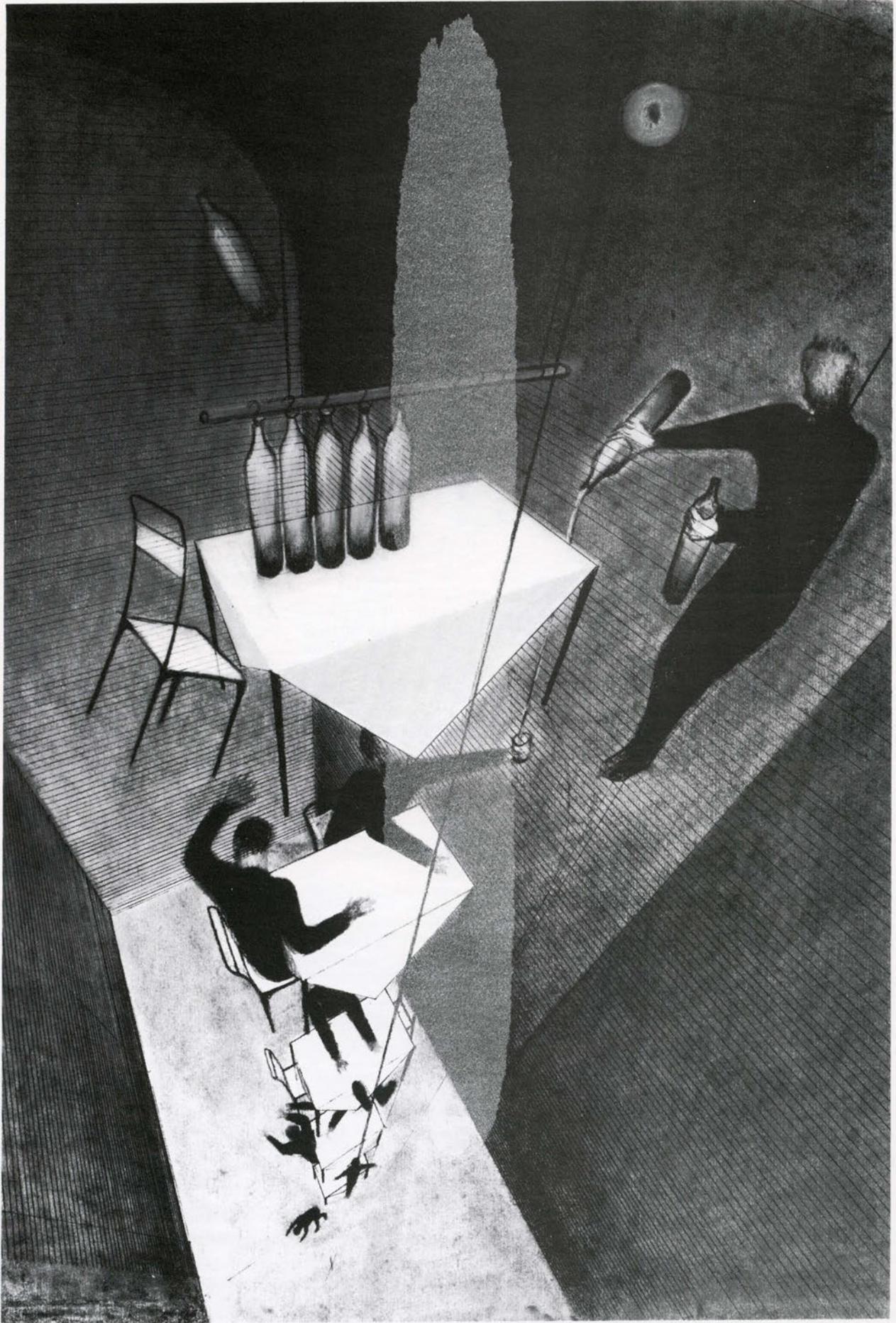
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Station House Opera

Drawing by Miranda Payne

# Documentation



Julian Maynard Smith

This year the Brooklyn Bridge is a hundred years old. Station House Opera have been invited to take part in the celebrations, by performing in the tall, church-sized vaults inside the anchorage piers of the bridge. This will be one of a series of performances this summer organised by Creative Time in New York.

Today the Brooklyn Bridge is an object of sentiment, a piece of history providing an affirmation of the new American values. When it was built, it was the largest, longest, most advanced construction of the industrial age. It used innovative technology to express an ageless fantasy to suit modern requirements. This fantasy of triumph over gravity, and ultimately of flight, was the force behind the building of five of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and of the Gothic churches, as well as the twentieth century aeroplane and rocket. Consistently, people have tried to imagine an escape from worldly constraints, by lifting up heavy, earthly masses and making them reach to heaven or across the sea.

Bridges are practical solutions to practical problems. The fantasy is used to shape the physical future. In painting the fantasy of flying is relieved of any necessity to deal with gravity. But in the theatre, because a human body off the ground is remarkably heavy and unwieldy, flying has suffered from the impossibility of making the image well. Dramatically, there is rarely any need to elaborate on the mere fact of flying. Of the two kinds of harness available, neither can be worn for more than five minutes without agony. Flying becomes a question of a quick up and down. It remains a fantasy for the designers as well as audience. In theatre no-one has yet used the fantasy to produce a practical solution, as they have in engineering. No-one has explored the positions and motions of a body in mid-air, or the routes

of movement that open up when you are off the ground.

On the ground, you can stand, sit, lie down, jump. In the air these things lose their meaning. In practice, in the air you are normally spoken of as either falling or flying. There are not many words for human activity in the air, because of our inexperience of it. Roll, soar, bank, dive — the aeroplane's vocabulary is taken from the bird's, and it doesn't refer to humans but to machines. Usually, humans who are in the air are in something that might as well be, or actually is, on the ground — a plane, or a skyscraper. The activities they pursue and the attitudes they assume would be no different if they were on the ground.

If you can fly, you are a bird, a bat, an insect, or dreaming. If you are human, you can dream, or you can stand, sit, lie down, jump, or fall. All you need to sit is a chair. With a few articles of furniture with you, it is not difficult to do these things up in the air. If you accept the virtues of suspension, you can dispense with the things humans don't need, like walls, ceilings, floors, wings, fusilages, lifts, and balloons. These things are needed by buildings, aeroplanes and the like, which we have abandoned along with the fantasy of true flying, in order to find out what you can do with suspension. They turn out to be unpredictable. In a world without floors you are out of touch with your surroundings. Things tend to be unstable. You can be seasick while sitting on a chair, or jump sixty feet up and not come down. Without the need for legs as points of support, you can stand, sit and lie down any way up.

The performance is a development from 'Drunken Madness, Invertebrate Living', (reviewed by Leslie Dick in *Performance Magazine* no.15). It lasts one hour. Five tables hang from wires in a vertical column sixty feet high. Men and

women sit on chairs hung from them. Two waitresses wearing parachute harnesses, connected by a wire over a pulley, travel up and down from table to table. At the top table are rows of bottles, glasses, and weights. The first half of the performance demonstrates the workings of this construction. Using the weights to bring them down, the waitresses distribute the bottles and glasses to the tables, and when they have been drunk, clear away the empties to the bottom table. The weights that collect at the bottom are passed up from table to table to the top. The whole process is very difficult to control, because of the nature of the construction. With these dangers, every movement must be signalled. When a movement is from the top to the bottom, all five tables and both waitresses must signal their readiness. Each performer has an instrument — a whistle, gong, trumpet, handbell, etc. Rehearsals will reveal the actual system of signals used, as well as all details of performance, and the entire second part. It is the unpredictable behaviour of the construction that will necessitate its own, functional music.

The second part will elaborate on the discovered irregularities of the system. As bottles accumulate on a table, this may lead to strategies of drunkenness. Drink spilt on clothes and tableclothes may lead to the supporting cables being used as clotheslines. The waitresses may tire of their job and sit at the vacant chairs at the centre table. If they remove their harnesses, their roles may be adopted by those at the tables above and below. The tendency for a table to capsize when one person leans towards someone leaning away may be the reason for doing it, disguised as physical assault. For the solitary drinker at the bottom table, the decision by his chair to fly to the top table may lead him to become a dog.

**Julian Maynard-Smith**

# Review

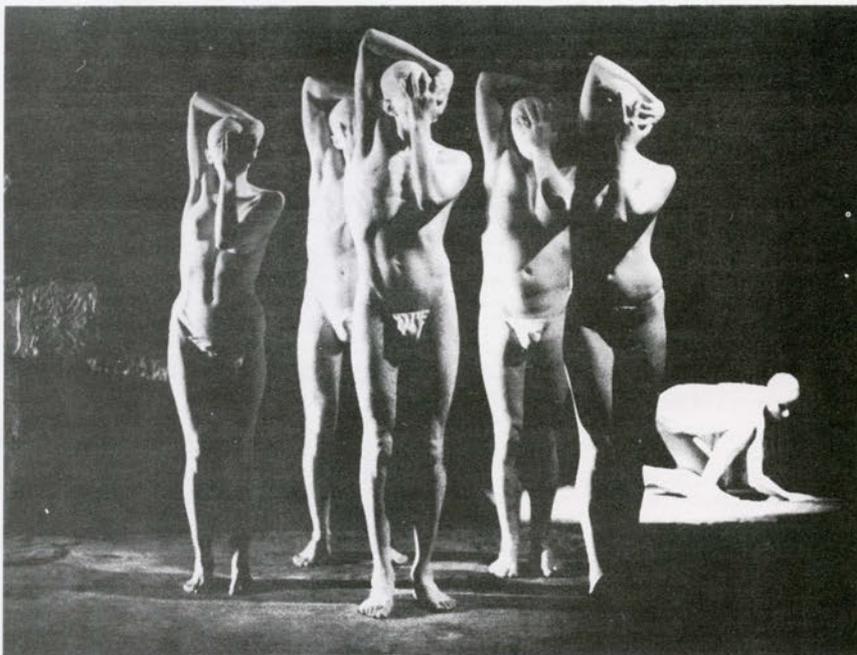
Companies that create genuinely dynamic and exciting images are pretty thin on the ground these days. Rational Theatre shows always have at least one particular image that is brilliantly simple in conception and compelling to watch in execution. In 'Chicken Tikka', a humorous speculation that the afterlife consists of an endless wait between courses in an Indian restaurant, there is a moment towards the end when the walls of the restaurant collapse to reveal a blaze of light out of which walks a humanoid cockerel. No less compelling is the image with which their latest show 'Orders of Obedience' begins.

A slightly raked platform almost completely occupies the end of the ICA theatre supporting a wasteland that suggests a lunar landscape. A ravaged temple is hinted at in the fragments of fluted column that lie about. The mood is timeless and airless, a feeling echoed by the chalky textures and the matt monochromes of this environment. Towards the back, the rake builds up into a cairn from the depths of which appears the first figure to risk venturing into this arid world.

Pushing open a trapdoor, the figure inches upwards and the light pouring up from down below reveals it to be human but androgynous. It has no hair or clothes. The natural colours and texture of skin have been superseded by a neutral white uniformity. Neither male nor female, without personality or identity, the figure gradually emerging from the shaft is a startling symbol of this animal known as humanity. It has life, energy, possibly thought, intelligence even but it is threatening in its ambivalence for it gives no signs as to its propensities. Despite the lack of accoutrements and an accompanying cultural stance, the figure has an evil access to technology and standing waist high in the shaft, it produces binoculars and scans the landscape. Two rays of light shoot from the lenses and pierce the half-light, probing beyond the figure's own encapsulated world and into the dazzled eyes of the audience. The simultaneous receiving and sending of light reinforces this creature's magical ambivalence and its technology seems a sinister tool.

With a crack and a thump, a twin being reveals itself at the back of the auditorium suspended from the rig. It drops apelike to the aisle and with several others, makes its way towards the signalling light of the other. As they stumble down the aisle, specific knowledge of this new species (or is it very old?) becomes apparent. Emotion is still with us. The figures' faces contract in silent screams of maybe pain or fear. The emotional expressions are heightened by contrast with the naked, bland, anonymous bodies that seem to move lumpenly and sluggishly as an unhappy accompaniment for minds that pay the price of their consciousness. Figures stir in the sand and stiffly raise themselves to life. The figures

## Raid On The Inarticulate.



Peter Godfrey

Rational Theatre in *Orders of Obedience*

reach their homeland and the stage is set for this drama of the naked ape. It has been an eloquent introduction. Through a minimum of activity, attention has been focused on the raw material of life and theatre — human beings in action — and given an atmospheric key through these actions being pitched against a qualifyfing environment.

This initial episode of 'Orders of Obedience' deserves the lengthy consideration given above because it showed the company at its best, creating dynamic visual theatre around a coherent artistic policy (as outlined by Peter Godfrey in *Performance Magazine* issue no. 20/21). This strong beginning seemed auspicious but the subsequent development of the piece unfortunately began to fragment and become distinctly unsatisfactory as material was presented on an arbitrary, almost whimsical basis.

With eight performers now fully revealed, five formed a body to perform movements en masse while the three others performed simultaneous cameo actions on either side of the cairn. The central corpus now moved to performing various movement pieces. They faced the audience and one could see the glint of humour in their eyes as they surveyed the audience as if to acknowledge the ridiculousness of their shaven bodies covered in nothing more than g-strings and a liberal coating of pancake makeup. 'We have nothing up our sleeves,' murmured the commentary, 'We have no sleeves!'

And then on to a whole collection of shuffling movements, slapping movements and peculiar ways of walking bent double using the knuckles for support. The applaudable lightheartedness seemed out of step with the enigmatic content and completely out of step with the spirit of the beginning. The unfortunate effect at times was one of being downright silly and the appearance of three men wearing horse masks, *Equus* style, was plain ridiculous due to the leeway given by the admitted humour of the piece. When two men removed their masks to wrestle in rugged Lawrentian fashion, the commentary that pointed out 'You've got to assert yourself, you've got to show who's boss' seemed risibly mundane.

The piece recovered, though, to finish well. The figures, now bedecked with head-dresses, moved about fretfully in a square of light in a way coincidentally or deliberately reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's play, 'Quad', shown for the first time on television the night before. Abruptly they entangled and fell to the ground. Like an Advent calendar, many small doors in the cairn swung open to reveal heads staring balefully out. The overall effect had been one of a show drowning in a flood of different inputs and concepts.

So why did this show not achieve the potential indicated by the calibre of the company? The problem seems to have two aspects, one being the nature of the dramatic language that Rational Theatre are exploiting and the other being the way that

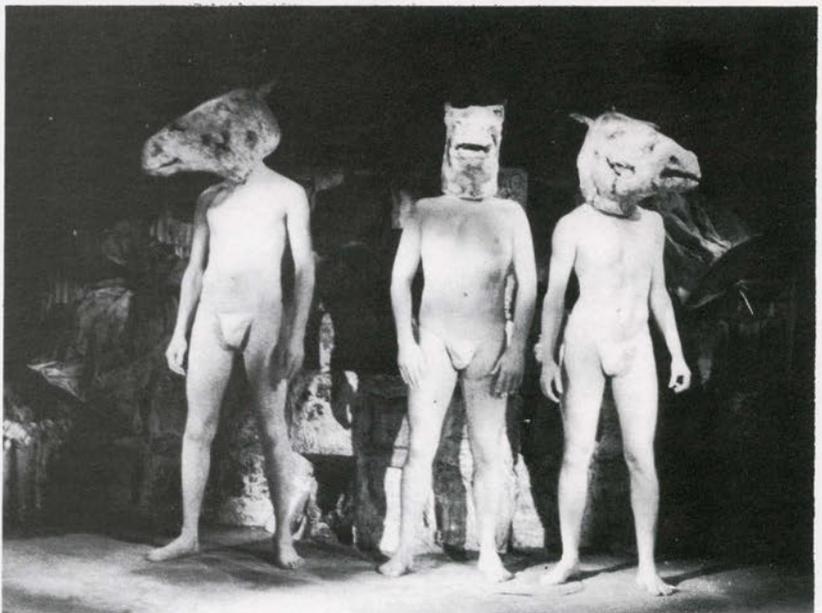
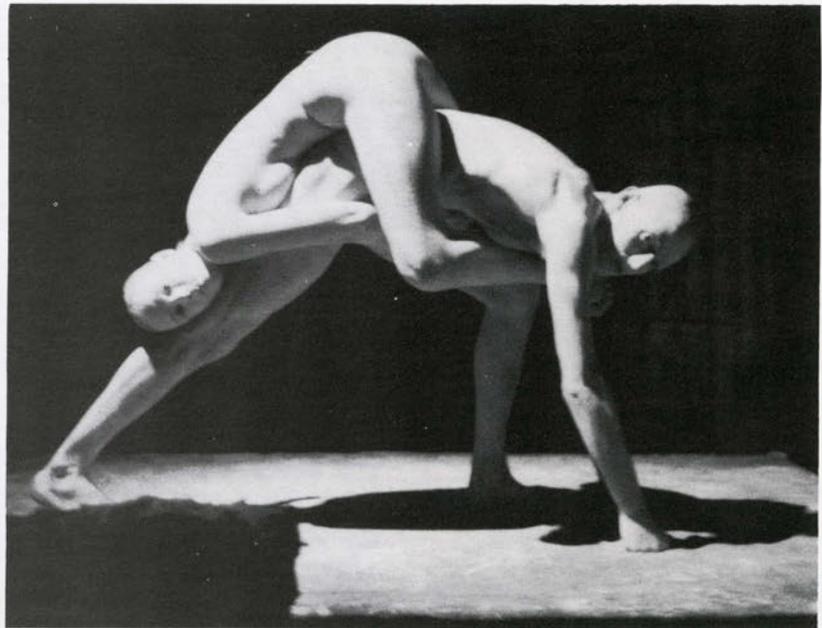
the company uses that language to realise its concerns.

The company seeks to 'express thoughts and feelings at more than a merely narrative level' and describe this process as not surrealism but as 'supernaturalism'. This concern with the elements of meaning lying behind the appearance of actions and images points to an avowedly metaphysical language reminiscent of Eliot's 'raid on the inarticulate'. Now the attempt to push an expressive language to encapsulate an idea or emotion that has hitherto lain beyond the ordinarily perceived constraints of that language has been a constant concern of innovative artists for centuries although more so for this century. As the mode of creating artworks has gradually shifted from one of bespoke creation under the patronage of a commission to one of gratuitous expression, this concern has become more visible as the artist is liberated from the prescribed limitations of form and content. The artist is free to pursue the more elusive notions that stem from a concentrated involvement in the process of making art and the considerations of what constitutes the process and what is admissible as content.

However, eliminate any problem with a solution and it's a fair bet that the solution brings with it only yet another problem. It would seem to be this. By addressing themselves to the problem of presenting 'slices of the full truth about the world in its emotional and intellectual richness', Rational Theatre cast their net of consciousness so wide that it trawls in a vast catch which, when emptied on the deck for evaluation, proves so diverse as to produce an effect that at best seems an inscrutable complex of fragments and at worst a mish-mash that could mean anything to anyone.

Resolution of a richly amorphous mass of themes drawn from the nether regions of consciousness has usually been done through idiosyncratic individualism, an approach rejected by Rational Theatre in favour of a collaborative process of devising and production. This seems to be the second aspect of the problem, namely that the pluralism of the collaborative process seems to compound the problems of working with a diverse and elusive language. Rejecting the hierarchical means of production in favour of a collaborative, responsive approach does not mean that the faults inherent in the former are redressed by the latter. Rather it seems that the problems and advantages in the first method are completely displaced by a radical new approach with its own inherent pros and cons.

Collectively weaving a coherent thread of meaning (not necessarily a natural, logical argument) from a dense mass of elusive material probably needs telepathy or a unique sense of mass intuition. The latter may yet be a possibility but at present, Rational Theatre seem hampered by the exact reverse of what hamstrings so many collaborative enterprises — 'Too



Peter Godfrey

many indians, not enough chiefs.' There is a wealth of input from experienced and capable personnel but a central guiding purpose seems to be badly lacking in a show that often has the tackiness of a workshop production. A possible saving may have been in working with an identified figure such as Malcom Poynter, the sculptor whose images and involvement formed a major input for 'Orders of Obedience', but his own sculptural work seems to be grounded in ineffable hints and clues and so to be building on such work in a similar vein seems to have been doubling the problems involved.

Although the show is not entirely

successful and in some ways rather disappointing, it is excellent to see a company outlining a fresh new policy and committing themselves to creating that work. At a time when the performance world seems short on ideas and hemmed in by financial constraints, a brave new departure is to be respected and welcomed. It's good to see that sufficient number of gigs have been set up to enable Rational Theatre to tour this show till autumn '83. The work will certainly develop and progress. It is a mark of the company's seriousness that they are prepared to make the commitment to stay with this piece for this long.

Phil Hyde

# Review

## Anti-Anti Opera

It is an all too rare occasion that either of London's National Opera Companies produces 'an avant garde' work. *Le Grand Macabre* was written as a commission for the Swedish National Opera and given its first performance in 1978. Ligeti has always been something of an 'avant-garde-music-brat', defying critics and academics by consistently cutting across boundaries of current schools of thought, and doing it with a flair and success that leaves many of the specialists in those fields behind. He has proved equally inventive and exciting whether it be with ambient electronics or with the witty eclecticism of *Le Grand Macabre*, and as such, is worth looking at.

*Le Grand Macabre* is a whimsical comic strip, surrealist work with a scenario operatic and bizarre enough to give ample scope to Ligeti's wide range of talents. He describes it as an 'anti-anti-opera' which is not quite the same as an opera. It is twice removed from conventional opera which makes it for all its musical difficulty a surprisingly accessible work. The plot is essentially simple. The curtain rises to reveal a pair of lovers fucking in the middle of the M4. Inexplicably both the women are in ballroom dress. Meanwhile a drunk sings the praises of this his homeland, Breughaland. Nekrotzar drives up in a hearse claiming to be the archangel of death come to destroy all life on earth. He takes the drunk as his slave and the lovers relocate to the

comfort of the back of the hearse. Through a sado-masochistic killing, a wonderfully slapstick court of Prince Go-Go, we arrive at the final hour when Nekrotzar will utter the apocalyptic incantation which will finish off everyone. Prince Go-Go tries to prevent him by getting him drunk, he fails and the heavens split open. After the apocalypse some life remains and Nekrotzar in tragic vein bemoans his failure whilst Prince Go-Go tries to comfort him. Finally, Nekrotzar tries to escape but is stopped and he melts, Warner Brothers style until only his leather cap and coat remain. The lovers emerge from the hearse oblivious of what has been happening and they all agree that we shouldn't fear death until it comes, we should just get on and have fun while we can. The whole thing carries its simple direct allegory with a load of good humour that makes it very enjoyable entertainment.

However, given the vitality of the music, scenario and libretto the production was curiously underplayed. It was as though the producer wanted to avoid clichés, but when you are throwing custard pies there are only clichés and it is better to go right over the top than to try and invent some cautious restraint. Also, although the set was spectacular it provided for some difficult scene changes and longeurs that seriously interrupted the racy pace that the music demands. The set also led to a more

serious production problem. In the countdown to the end of the world, instead of allowing the music to build the tension, as it does wonderfully, the producer found it necessary to add touches of authentic panic, with scuffles in the audience and performers running through the aisles. This attempt to involve the audience in the fate of life on earth succeeded mostly in destroying the comic strip reality of the stage. Anyone who has been to Disneyland will know what a tremendous disappointment it is to meet Mickey Mouse, live in the flesh, because like all movie stars, off stage his velcro shows. I couldn't help thinking that someone with the brilliantly economic talents of Geraldine Pilgrim would never have made these kind of mistakes which made me reflect further on the costs of an ENO production against the costs of a *Hesitate and Demonstrate* show.

The music, conducted with his usual energy by Elgar Howarth, is very much of the 'scratch and squeak' variety but with moments of real grandeur, and of brilliant wit and hilarity, as in the theme played on air horns of the Harpo Marx variety.

*Le Grand Macabre* is not a great opera, but is a wonderful entertainment that does a lot to show that contemporary music can be fun and enjoyable.

Steve Rogers



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## Où Sont Les



The role of an all-knowing master is somewhat abeyant these days, having been so ever since the expert was thoroughly demystified and the specialist's authority shown to be not totally reliable. But the maestros are still with us and doubly irksome through their conspicuous absence.

Last year London saw Peter Schuman's Bread and Puppet Theatre with Schuman nowhere in sight. Was he here or back in America, having despatched a touring party to Europe? Recently Peter Brook's production of 'L'Os' played the Almeida Theatre although close investigation showed that he himself wasn't involved in the production. Workshop event of the year must have been Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre Laboratorium at Chapter Arts Centre. The problem is that Jerzy doesn't actually work with the group anymore, having gone off to do other thing several years ago. At least there's a consistency here. If you're going to play God, it's best done through an absent presence and let the devil take the Trades Description Act.

Another legendary company played London before Christmas when Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 brought two pieces to the Riverside Studios. As a sculptor, designer, writer and innovator, Kantor at 68 has a career that spans some forty years spent creating theatre and manifestos. Since 1965, he has concentrated on his own brand of 'happening' which he calls Cricotage. In all his pieces Kantor is there on stage with his company. Here there is no mystique about an elusive famous name. The man himself wanders idiosyncratically in and out of his players, ruminating on their actions, wagging his fingers as if to urge them on, visibly moved as events take a turn for the better or the worse.

The two pieces the company presented were 'The Dead Class' and 'Where are the snows of Yesteryear?'. Both were devised several years ago, in 1975 and 1978 respectively, and both have received considerable critical acclaim. 'The Dead Class', described as a dramatic seance, is a long and difficult piece due to high proportion of the

action being conveyed in the Polish language. Set in a classroom, actors mingled with mannequins in an event that was made more difficult to comprehend through being constructed around highly personal points of departure from Kantor's life and little known authors such as Witkeiwicz and Gombrowicz. Although there was a strong visual presentation, the large amount of inscrutable dialogue prised one's mind away from maintaining a rapport with events on stage and at the end, ninety minutes seemed more than enough to have seen.

The second piece was very different. Lasting just thirty five minutes 'Where are the Snows of Yesteryear' is as recondite as 'The Dead Class' but its brevity and the clarity of its images made it a highly absorbing spectacle. A critique of the event seems only possible by way of a description.

A long avenue has been made in Studio 1 at the Riverside Studios for these performances. This avenue is the result of posi-

# Neiges D'Antan?



tioning two banks of seats facing each other so that the audience are in two opposing groupings looking at each other across a playing area whose width vastly exceeds its breadth. At one end is a skeleton dressed in black and at the other is a Heath Robinson style contraption, seemingly the result of a marriage between an outsized French horn and a pram.

As the audience enters, they must walk through the performance space to their seats and Kantor is seen pottering about and studiously observing the arriving spectators. He whips out a watch on a chain to check the time. In his black suit and white shirt without tie, he could be an international conductor or the theatre doorkeeper helping out as an usher. Eventually the audience are seated and Kantor brings the houselights down with a gesture and paces over to one end to cue his performers.

Eight men wearing white paper suits pull a rope the full length of the space. They pit their full weight against an unseen force and with great effort finally attach it

to a point at the far end. One man is left alone to measure the rope with a wooden ruler. With a futile slowness, he pedantically goes about his task with military precision. Another approaches the skeleton and dresses himself in its black clothing. Accompanied by a similarly dressed young girl, his walk suggests a priest or judge. The next episode is coloured with the same sense of futility. A short fat man clumsily and repeatedly attempts to rewrap a parcel with an ineptness that causes him to undo on the final fold all his previous work. Now a bucket chain is formed of all the performers and the mood changes to one of crisis and panic. The priest and child rush up and down to the contradictory sounds of a bluesy jazz trumpet. Now enters 'the gentleman well known to us'. A tinpot general goosesteps down the full length of the space, made comically menacing by her exaggerated paper uniform. The piece builds to a climax. A man dressed in only trousers and bib and tucker pulls his bride along on a sheet. The little girl runs dis-

traught. The clanking contraption starts to move and to the blaring sound of 'Hernando's Hideaway', twin brothers each dressed in the red robes and mitre of a bishop, dance a full blooded tango with each other. This is a unique, glorious moment, filled with the contradictory emotions of despair, humour, energy, lifelessness and absurdity as the area becomes alive with simultaneous events. All this is swept away as a long white paper sheet is unrolled by the performers and rattled up and down like a thunder sheet to the sound of marching feet. Finally, after the general has entered strutted for the second time, Kantor unclips the cord and reels it in.

A masterly performance? Yes, that's about the right description. This was a piece well nigh impossible to comprehend rationally due to the difficulties of considering a performance lying outside the usual cultural references. Highly personal and idiosyncratic, it nevertheless remained an inspiration to anyone working with live visual images in a theatrical format.

Phil Hyde

# Short Reviews

## ABDC Workshop Battersea Arts Centre

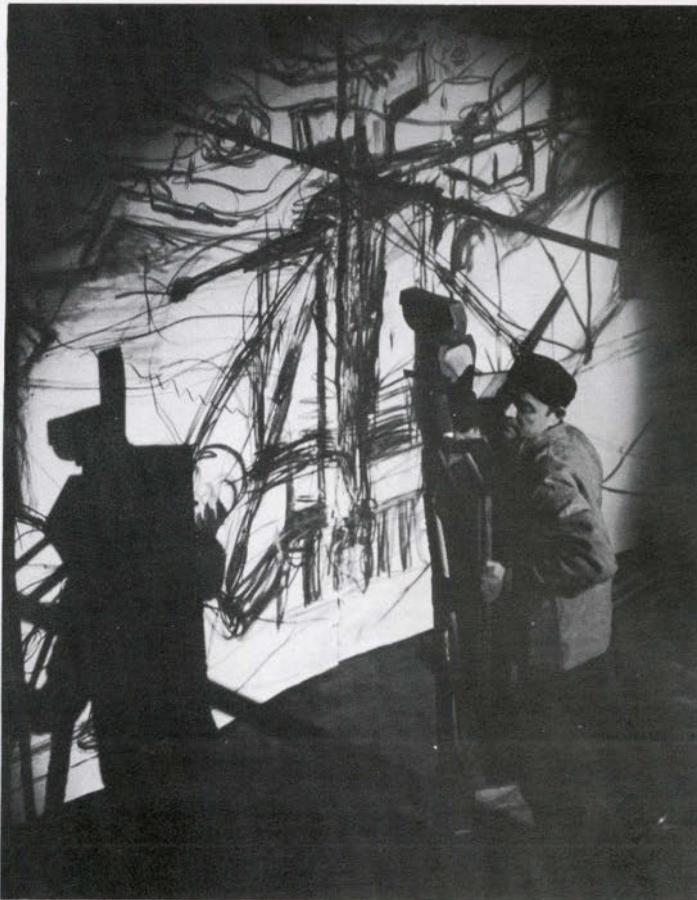
For a single evening in January, the entire first floor of the Battersea Arts Centre was taken over by the ABDC Workshop giving interested persons a full taste of the variety of work on offer from this team. ABDC stands for the 'Art and Design Building Centre' (see last issue) and to date, their main activities have been in the realm of the applied arts not only of artist and architect but also of craftsman. One example was the designing and construction of a fountain, another was the making of a series of mirror constructions.

The extension of these pursuits and interests into live performance was an appropriate and logical next step. Not only did this offer the opportunity to incorporate more skills into a single project, but it also allowed the group to explore and utilize the basic elements of performance — immediacy, energy and public communication. A start here was made at the Edinburgh Mound last year, but *Cennini's Private View* is the first rounded collaborative effort.

The evening started appropriately enough at the Private View of their exhibition in the Galleries at BAC which showed photographic and art documentation of their projects over the last two years. The most visually arresting part of the show was the display of mirror constructions last seen in London at the Moira Kelly Gallery in 1981. Beautifully hand-crafted artefacts, the mirrors also embody the collaborative ideas of the ABDC Workshop. Not simply two-dimensional, the mirrors are titled and tilted to show a projection of the world at angles. Ideas of architecture, landscape and also of art are called forth either by their associative names or the three-dimensional forms. *Labyrinth* for example depicts the miniature landscape of a maze as well as suggesting an artistic conceit. Concepts of illusion and reality, perception and interpretation subtly merge and it is no coincidence that it is here, in the hall of mirrors, the performance begins.

Cennini, it transpires is one of the mirror constructions initially hidden from view by being placed on a bier and obscured by a shroud. Cennini is also of course, the name of the Medieval painter and craftsman, skilled in the art of gilding. The Artist (Ken Turner) comes to look for him in the exhibition and finds him, revealed by Myth (Helen Powell) lying under the pall. Having thus interrupted the Private View, the Artist makes the spectacle 'public' by drawing the art audience away from the Gallery and into the Theatre via the stairwell where a second stage of the performance is enacted.

The theme and form behind the three part performance are heavily symbolic. The triple location of the action is mirrored by the tri-partite division on stage in the theatre. Three performers act out separate



Pauline Lord

Cennini's Private View

rituals relating to aspects of Life while the Artist draws a mammoth landscape on the back wall. The event is structured through sound provided by two musicians on a variety of instruments and sound effects, and they working in conjunction with the Artist who has to finish his picture by the end, determine the pace of the performance. The underlying principle is an artistic one — that of exploring the concept of the painted triptych (traditionally, a Medieval altarpiece composed of three panels) and of breaking unity of space, time and theme. The actions of the performers become explicable in relation to this idea as each person acts out three separate views which are totally independent of each other and yet combined by the thread of art embodied in the Artist and by implication Cennini who 'watches' on. Given the many different actions happening on stage at the same time, it was difficult to take in the whole picture at the same time. As with studying a triptych, the invitation was to concentrate on each separate part individually, as well as taking account of the whole. Although people were encouraged to walk around the theatre, this was unfortunately difficult as there was not much space left. Also the pace could have done with being a little faster. However, such criticisms were vindicated by the finale.

The actual message of the piece is made clear in the last five minutes of the per-

formance. Cennini is carried to the centre of the now completed drawing and takes on a new persona — that of the warning angel in Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (as described by Walter Benjamin on the front of the programme). Whilst he, reflecting artifact, urges us to see the irresistible storm to which his own back is turned, the drawing behind him splits down the centre revealing a tilted landscape of devastation with piles of debris growing upwards and angels of death flying in the sky above. The four participants are powerless in the face of the apocalypse and fall helplessly to the ground bringing the performance to an end.

The layers of meaning and plethora of interpretation make this a demanding performance to watch. I found the end intensely moving and very much enjoyed the integration of artistic ideas both in terms of the performance and in the continuation from Gallery to Theatre. It is a great tribute to the people involved that they have contributed activities from a different background to their own training (Helen Powell and Eric Parry who did the lighting are both architects for example) and the evening as a whole showed that there is definitely mileage left in interdisciplinary projects of this kind. I look forward with great interest to seeing more performance work from the ABDC Workshop.

Anna Moszynska

## The Cabinet Trick Vauxhall Studios

From the person who had his audience cycling through the Bristol countryside at 4am to meet a rendez-vous in an isolated deserted house, where bizarre persons went about their business, seemingly unaware of their odd behaviour, tetchily despatching to bewildered performance goers instructions on how to find the next clues in the 'treasure hunt' we have another adventure. Robin Whitmore, an extremely talented performance artist, director and actor, who has done much work in Berlin, has conceived, produced and directed from his studio in an old printworks, a journey through a 'perfectly ordinary cabinet' to another world.

This world is that of a strange family. The Ripley family's printing works closed down three years ago. As far as anyone knows, they simply disappeared. But in fact from January 22 to 28th the Ripleys terrible secret is revealed: they never actually left the building (Robin's studio) but have lived and worked by night and in that time NOT ONCE LEFT THE BUILDING. What has happened inside the building? What kind of bizarre things have grown in their terror and isolation from the outside world? And why are they opening their doors to the public exactly three years to the day after they locked themselves away?

The Cabinet Trick is a half hour journey which takes place in a maze of obscure tunnels, never ending passages and secret rooms, which is entered through a concealed panel at the back of an otherwise perfectly ordinary cabinet. The audience are guided round in pairs at five minute intervals. Once inside the maze the visitor experiences all manner of surprises in the Ripleys house-hold: a photo booth which produces hand drawn portraits; the security of the Ripleys cosy sitting room turns into a ghost train; one room is 'computed' to attend to nothing but the comforts of the visitors. Throughout the journey files are kept on each visitor's 'progress'.

The success of Robin Whitmore's work lies in its ability to work on many different levels. It appeals, on one level, to the best side of our childish imagination; the idea of tunnels and corridors made from cardboard, transformations of rooms into other worlds, the magic properties of objects and the excitement of bizarre eccentric characters. We are entranced in the same way that we are bewitched by Tinguely's machines; yet the childlike explorations belie a very sophisticated set of ideas which explore important social issues, in particular those which are relevant to early teenagers, such as unemployment, the military and media/glamour images.

If Whitmore's first aim is to provide an exciting experience, his second is to put forward these ideas by involving the audience in an unconventional way; not through clumsy audience participation, but through their thinking about and afterwards hopefully discussing the implications of the show and how it relates to each participant back outside in the real world.

The witty, often bizarre and totally absorbing world he creates for us during our 'journey' communicates these ideas with an effectiveness which could only be achieved by someone who understands that delicate balance between the sublime and the ridiculous, and has mastered it in his own work.

Chrissie Iles

## People Show No. 88 Kings Head

The People Show continue to be one of the most disappointing groups performing today. A few years ago, shows such as the Billy Holiday show (Jackson's Lane, 1979) and Jim's Gym (Bush Theatre, 1980) vindicated their reputation as an exciting and unique outfit. Over the last two years, a sea change seems to have occurred. Appearances at more upmarket venues such as the Royal Court and the Hampstead Theatre Club have led them into producing work that seems merely to pander to the humour and taste of a cosy, comfortable middle class audience.

The rot seems to have set in with their adoption of a new cabaret format in place of their traditional anonymously numbered shows. The People Show Cabaret was an entertainment piece which seemed to reject the alogical juxtapositions of previous work for a freewheeling selection of stanup monologues, tumbling routines and musical numbers. Instead of the previous mystery, the events and images achieved justification through a storyline of four musicians, in continuous personal conflict, attempting to play Glen Miller's 'In the Mood'.

Well, why not? Perhaps a whimsical bit of nonsensical entertainment is what's needed in recessionary times. Maybe this is what people want to see these days. It's probably a sensible way to get enough fee paying gigs to keep the company afloat. Rigorous artistic policies are a luxury that few can afford when the cash is tight.

Nevertheless, the People Show Cabaret at the Royal Court last December was a travesty. The national press beamed patronisingly and rationalised this oddball entertainment as being the work of four inspired clowns. And it was oddball because few leopards can change their spots and remnants of the old approach still showed through. The overall effect was cloying and frustrating. The middle class audience politely lapped up with tolerated amusement the genteel mix of vaudeville and absurdity that the People Show were now presenting. Nine months previously, the People Show had hit their audience very hard with a small environmental show upstairs at Oval House. Here was mayhem in a dentist's surgery with mannequins and contraptions flying and whirring. Mark Long attempted to move his bowels in full view of everyone and

inflicted a verbal assault on a hapless member of the audience that had the rest of the room suspended somewhere between hilarity and horror. The consequent change from an abrasive dynamic to polite titillation seemed a tragic loss of direction.

And so it goes on. The George Khan Show (People Show No. 88) is from the same mould of latter day variety. It played the pre-Christmas slot at the King's Head, a natty little theatre restaurant in a pub where a pint costs a quaintly anachronistic fifteen shillings. It's a good place to consider reputations made before decimal currency was introduced. Number Eighty Eight tells the story of four 'jossers' and their tennis ball tumbling act, best imagined as a cross between Morecambe and Wise and the Ken Campbell Roadshow. From these humble beginnings, George Khan rises to fame and fortune as a musical maestro and the show examines his success through traditional devices such as running gags and shaggy dog stories mixed up with absurdist excursions to Beirut and considerations of Armageddon.

The audience loved it. At seven pounds nineteen shillings for dinner and show, they were determined to get their money's worth. Good luck to them — you pays your money and you takes your choice. It was pretty poor stuff, though. Seen by itself, the show was pretty thin on the ground, lacking the scripted routines and stunts that make for engaging variety and the absurdity seemed to feed off the respectability that Monty Python has brought to nuttiness in a comic vein. Seen in perspective, this show is a trough in a chart that marks many high points of unique and amazing moments. At present the People Show are taking no risks and challenging neither themselves nor their audience. Let's hope they can sort out the policy that has made them into variety artistes manque before they succumb to the fate of any struggling variety act — a letter from the powers-that-be saying 'Sorry, lads, not good enough'. They've got 11 more chances before their centenary comes up.

Phil Hyde

## Philip Jeck Chisenhale Dance Space

Upon arriving at Chisenhale that evening, I immediately had a sense of being in a vast unlimited space, filled with numerous passageways that receded into the distance. This effect was created by a series of enormous (news) paper screens which were hung from the ceiling to the floor at intervals throughout the space. Outlines of human figures were painted on the screens. This environment was softly lit from behind, accenting the natural light and shade of the paper. A single plant had been placed in the middle, stage front. There was a variety of music recordings played in the background: 1930's-40's jazz, Polish

folk, waltz, Japanese music, and contemporary Western rhythms. There were also dialogue and monologue recordings in Japanese and in English.

Early in the piece Jeck sat at a wooden table behind one of the front screens in which a 'window' was cut out for us to see him on the other side. There was a candle and a plant on the table. The simple image of a man sitting in profile at a table became rather surreal as Jeck put on a pair of dark glasses and a large 'teeth' mask. This image turned out to be something of a red herring, for the rest of the piece suggested a more serious line of inquiry.

Wearing a shirt and trousers, Jeck performed a series of swinging and twisting arm and torso movements while standing on one spot, stepping, and walking in the middle of the space. These movements began with a pose suggestive of flying and being held down at the same time. This 'bird' pose, which was often repeated, became a symbol of the overall work. As the performer moved through the space, he held various poses beside some of the painted figures, poses which exactly corresponded to the painted images. Sometimes he superimposed himself on the images, thereby making himself the replica. Through his movements he gradually tore open some of the front screens in passing. The background music kept to a regular rhythmic beat.

Another window higher up was cut out through which the performer viewed a scene below — a small table with lighted candles. It was interesting to see him looking in at a set that he himself had just arranged. This action was characteristic of the nature of the piece, which main concern was looking at self-images and questioning the reality of those images.

Several times the performer left the space and returned wearing a different costume: a track suit, a suit and tie with hat, and lastly wearing only trousers and a hat. Each time some of the earlier movements were repeated, including the bird motif. There were also some lighting changes later in the piece.

Towards the end of the performance Jeck brought out three white dolls and placed one on the floor, one on a sheet of plastic, and the third, carried on in parts, was then assembled. They looked strangely like crucifix dolls. One of the painted figures was cut out — the image of a man — and put on the floor near the dolls with lighted candles all around it. The recording during this time was a stream-of-consciousness monologue about making tea, a burst water pipe, and the dolls, with the sound of hovering in the background. The movement poses began again, with an interesting contrast of soft movements and hard hand gestures. The performer lay down, then continued moving back up to standing. As the movements began to flow one into another, they became sharper and more vigorous. He gradually moved this way into the central space while the swinging and twisting of the arms and torso became more and more vigorous, but

well-controlled. Some other screens were torn open as he passed by them. Continuing these movements he arrived behind one of the back screens where we could see only his shadow moving.

In the last scene Jeck appeared half-naked, carrying a wax tray with two lighted candles and paper flowers. He ritualistically burnt the flowers one by one, then blew out the candles around the paper

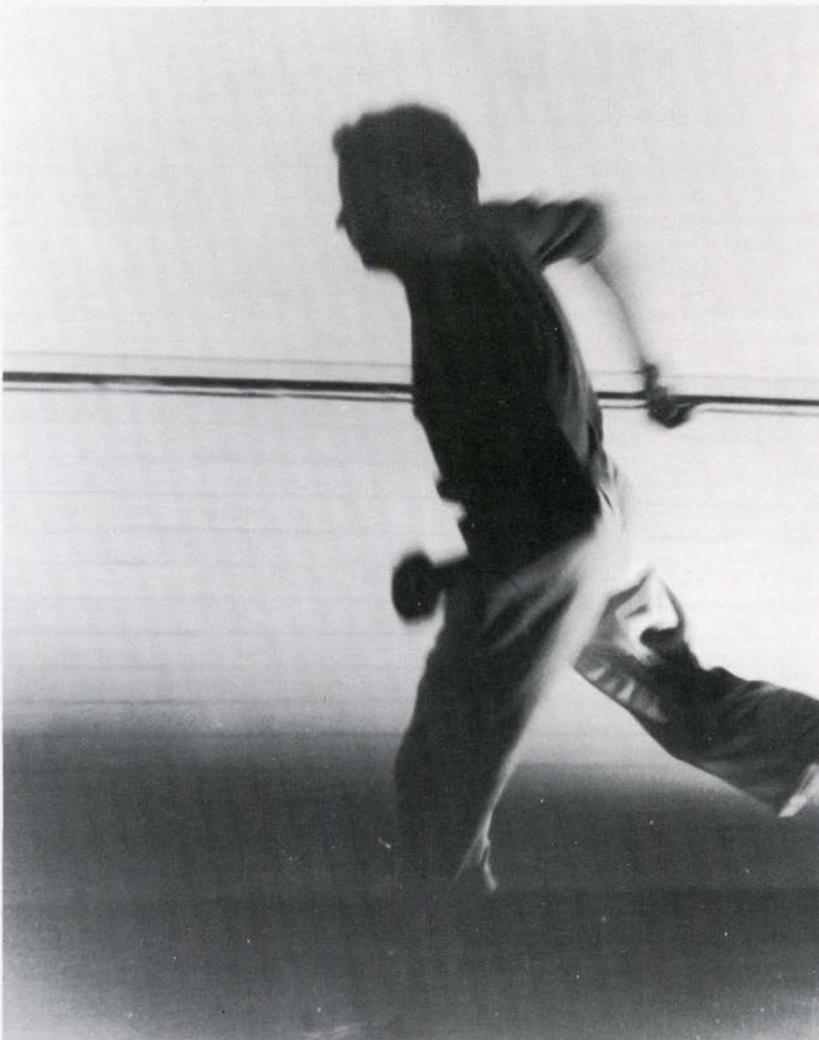
man, and carried the tray to centre front and held it up, blew out one candle, waited, looking at the second one, then blew it out.

I enjoyed the surrealistic quality of the images in this performance and the way they were used both to question and to clarify the performer's sense of his own reality.

Carol DeV Vaughn

## Grotowski Workshops

### Chapter Arts, Cardiff



Robin Morley

'Is Grotowski here too?' I asked, to get a reply to the rumours circulating. 'No', replied, a member of the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, 'Maybe he'll show up later in the week. He's in Italy at the moment.'

What is this Grotowski phenomenon? His book 'Towards a Poor Theatre' is thought of as essential reading for those working in the theatre. But his Theatre Laboratorium company, living examples of his research, have not performed in Britain for ten years. So their visit to the Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, last November, aroused much interest. Hosted

by the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, they ran a week long series of workshops. I applied.

What is this Grotowski phenomenon? In 1959 he created the Teatr Laboratorium in Opole, a small town in south-west Poland; his co-creator was Ludwik Flaszen. Since then their activities with the Teatr Laboratorium have gained international recognition. On moving to Wrocław, they set up the Institute for Research into Acting, continuing the research and performances, redefining the way the actor works. The actor stripped

bare. To reveal the untapped resources and energies. Teatr Laboratorium showed what was possible in their own performances, based on Polish and international classics. And also in workshops in Poland and on the international theatre network. Here in Britain their reputation is formidable but there have been few chances of first hand experience. So up to 300 people applied for the 90 places on the workshops in Cardiff. We decended on Chapter, packing out the cafe, with the atmosphere of the First Day Back. Rumour and speculation about the week's work were rife. While among the coffee cups the newspaper announced Lech Walesa had been released from prison, we waited to be selected for interview, to be placed in one of the five workshop groups. I was eventually called with eight others over to the Gym and told to wait in an ante-room (in keeping with the many jokes in Poland about waiting and queuing for things). At last to an echoing 'Come', shedding shoes, we entered. Sitting at the other end of the old gym were two men in their late forties or early fifties. Shock. Why did I expect younger people? Ludwik Flaszynski and Zygmunt Molik who interviewed us have been working together, along with most of the rest of the Teatr Laboratorium company, for 23 years. A lifetimes work, as one of them is to say later.

That evening the results of the brief interviews were announced along with the starting times for the individual work groups. Which ranged from 9.30 am to 11 pm in the various spaces in Chapter. I was part of a group of twenty to work with Stanislaw Scierski, who preferred to be called a 'work leader' rather than teacher. In the forward publicity for the workshops each member of Teatr Laboratorium had described what their group would be working towards. Careful reading of all the descriptions revealed they all had a similar orientation, in removing the obstacles to expression whether it be in the body, voice, or mind.

Stanislaw Scierski, 'Stan' as we were to call him, had named his workshop Organic Man. The workshop description included phrases such as 'Work which involves body, voice and movement, in improvisations which are sometimes structured.' and 'The most important thing is *presence*, comprising an open-ness to other.' and also 'All the same, one might describe the essence of this work as the discovery, through action, of the Common Unknown.'

We started work the next evening, Stanislaw quickly establishing that although he was the workleader he was not going to direct the group. As we discovered he instead nudged the group in several directions, but on the whole let us find our own level as a group. Each day's work started with physical work which rose in intensity, followed by explorations in voice, movement, and what I would call group improvisational movement work. Which involved running, leaping around

the studio space as a energetic herd. By the third day my arms fell out of their sockets and others suffered other ailments of excess of movement, including foot blisters the size of small fried eggs. As the work progressed discoveries were made, I discovered a voice and felt its projection throughout my body, the finger tips vibrated with sound! The overall impression of the seven days work, was that of being picked up and shaken, until bits fell off. We had been told that the reason for what we were doing would come to us, maybe not until after the work had finished. In contrast to the workouts, Stanislaw asked us to each present an 'invitation', what this was caused some confusion at first. We eventually discovered we were to present a short performance using a text, not an improvisation, to the rest of the group. Stanislaw used these 'gifts' as he called them to let us all watch each other performing. And on occasion he asked the person to repeat the performance, pushing it further and further each time, until it transformed with the exhaustion of the performer. The 'Gifts' included Brecht songs, passages from Shakespeare, parodies of the workshop and Stanislaw, Irish Protestant songs and Welsh myths.

The end came quickly, suddenly at the finish of a long voice improvisation, the sound drifted away and time had run out. Some of us wanted to continue and others were ready to stop. But time had run out, and Stanislaw was having visa problems.

What was it all about? After talking to people in my group and the other groups, I would like to suggest it was deep background work. It was not character work, stage skills, movement, mime, mimic and song but what lies behind all this embellishment of technique and style. Stanislaw was trying to get us to discover deep seated energies and real direct forms of expressing ourselves. I think we went a little way down the road into this hinterland of expression. It seems the area he was aiming us at is closer to performance with its risk taking and visual imagery than theatre.

Grotowski didn't turn up after all, but, some of his discoveries did and I hope Teatr Laboratorium will be brought back again, soon.

Robin Morley

## Dawn of Dusk Oval House

Every winter in south east London's Oval House members of theatre workshop groups combine their skills to stage a Christmas show. They develop the initial idea through corporate effort and this approach is particularly interesting in that none of the cast are professional performers.

There was intrigue, pride, unrequited love, comedy and a large stock of Christians and Romans. The fall of Rome provided an epic theme. Set around 450 AD

this was the story of Honeria and it was she who bore the weight of the serious moments of the play. Honeria was the sister of Emporer Valentinian and the innocent victim of his corruption. She was executed for treason after her alleged involvement with the arch-enemy Attila the Hun.

As they entered the incense filled theatre the audience surrendered their names to a shaman-major-domo who shouted them out at the top of her voice. Like senators, or witnesses to some bizarre trial they took their positions, some reclining, on the rough banked seating. It was a large local audience, friendly, talkative and eager for a good show. While Attila, on a raised platform at the rear of the hall brooded over the proceedings, the performance took place in the central arena of stucco pillars and arches. The design was well conceived and the period costume and technical effects not merely provided a setting but synchronised and connected the piece.

It has to be said that ninety minutes is not the ideal length for an epic and a script well loaded with obvious political allegory, high flown truths, peevish argument and bad dialogue does not help. Quite often cod acting made a florid sentence into a beautiful one-liner. As the slave girl said when she kissed the diplomat: 'I can't believe this is happening to me'. For all that, the evening was rich in all forms of theatre skills. It was energetic, entertaining and above all unselfconscious and funny. The representatives of Rome — Emporer, Pope and General — were portrayed as power crazed idiots or fops. It was not easy to show twenty years of Rome's collapse through such ciphers.

In contrast Honeria was a still, thoughtful character. She and her court-women plumbed deeper levels of experience through some clear and simple movement. In spite of theirs being the most stylised roles one felt by the end of the evening that these were the only true people onstage. Similarly the final episode of the show was most powerful. Each of the three fops court Honeria before her death. For the Pope she wears the head of Christ — a splendid mask — for her brother she appears as Satan and the General sees her as Death. Attila, still behind us, drops dead and it is left to his young son to announce the end.

The process of preparing was probably more important than the end product. Nevertheless it was an exciting alternative to the usual Christmas production and the next one should be worth a visit.

Andrew O'Hanlon

## Zena Naj Bo Doma Hemmingford Arms, Islington

'Zeena Narge', 'Zimma Nig', 'Shoona-blurg Nip', went the running gag at the opening night of Londons newest pub cab-

eret venture as each comedian in turn picked up on the venues name Zena Naj Bo Dama. It may have been hard to pronounce but it certainly wasn't hard to miss as it hung from the ceiling in large wooden letters emblazoned with flashing fairy lights and created havoc with juggler Tim Bat's blazing batons. It was of course an exercise in self-parody but it does underline the seriousness with which promotor Laurence MacKenzie takes this venture; low overheads (if you'll pardon this levity) and a general demand do not necessarily create a successful venue.

Rapport between the performer and audience was facilitated by placing the stage at the corner of an 'L' shaped room above the bar. This compares favourably with other cabarets where arriving late can only be likened to trying to reach the bar on an inter-city Buffet car at Christmas Eve. Lee Cornes (late of the Wow Show) hosted the evening with large helpings of material that was both interesting and adventurous. It takes courage to feign lack of courage and start a show by hiding behind four members of the audience that one has just pulled onto stage, but he succeeded. Unfortunately, as a host his range isn't quite flexible enough to adequately control the flow of the evening.

The Zena Naj is providing an experimental pot-pourri in terms of quality and quantity (albeit a conventional mix) which creates a testing ground for performers, though restricted by the type of audience. Future plans however, do include a Friday night opening for evenings of more unconventional theatre and performance groups.

Dave Rose

## Young Lust

Private House, Kilburn

Timed to coincide with mass at the local Irish community's large church at Quex Road, right opposite the small terraced house where this event took place (curious mass-goers stopped to peer at the R.C. icons posted to the front door), this 2-hour show offered curious reconstructions and distortions of church ceremony. The house was suffused with cathedral incense, the bar served only bloody mary's, children ran about shouting about what they thought this life was for ('having fun') 3 ex-members of Sisterhood of Spit played brass madrigals, and a goggle-eyed woman and a man stripped to the waist enacted a tense communion at an altar-like table in the tiny front room while meat kebabs sizzled on cross-shaped wires on the open fire. Dense poetry alternated with cosily-delivered anecdotes of Jesus and Mary; genuflections and signs of the cross mutated into IRA salutes and Indian arm-wrestling; while statues of Buddha and Lenin watched from the shadows. I certainly had no appetite for the kebabs offered for sale after this ceremony, but perhaps this was Young Lust's intention. Quite where the Lust came into it was also a mystery (sacred or profane?) and I felt that some of the performed images had lost their impact by having been hinted at too strongly before the actual ritual was enacted. After the show the most commonly-heard comment was 'I'll let you know what I think of it tomorrow'. So will I.

Andy Soutter

# Feature

Pe

The relationship between audience and event is a crucial one. All events are rituals, created in order to focus on ideas. The art ritual and the club ritual are very different; so, therefore, is the performers' relationship with the audience. The focus will therefore vary enormously. In a club situation, which offers intimacy, sociability and a greater opportunity for interaction and direct response (for example, dancing), the audience have come primarily to meet and socialise. Their response to a performance will probably be fairly low key, since it will not be the focal point of the evening in the same way as a similar performance taking place in a gallery situation.

It is a question, then, of audience expectation, and, for the organiser, of careful planning to match the venue and audience with the work. The performance event at the Waterloo Gallery in the summer of 1982 for example, was notable for its strong audience response, and can be said to have had the right audience for the event, i.e. an art audience who had come primarily to see the work, but because of the bar and food and informal atmosphere socialised as well. When each performance began, however, they gave it their undivided attention, something which is much more difficult to achieve in a club situation.

The importance of the actual venue emerges here. The Waterloo Gallery was a scruffy warehouse which performed a fine art function but without many of the constraints and formalities of a fine art venue. The audience, therefore, although basically fine art-based, was much more diverse, and contained a fair sprinkling of people who go to clubs but do not generally set foot in galleries. The club, on the other hand, has always existed primarily as a focal point for meeting and socialising, and that remains its primary function. It is concerned much more directly with the business of 'entertaining'.

All this is not to deny the possibilities of an exciting and successful club performance event. The likelihood of this, however, depends very much on the choice and quality of the performers (some performance work is simply not effective in a club situation), and a lively and essentially *active* programming policy (to sit and wait for original acts to make the necessary approaches is a form of passive programming which has, in my experience, been a recipe for disaster, leading to a selection of work of the lowest common denominator).

The audience response is an important element of this. In a gallery situation an assembles group of spectators will politely watch a performance, to the end, and assume that because it is being presented as

First in a new series of articles on performance in nightclubs, Chrissie Iles considers the relationship between audience and performer.

## Performance Nightlife



Rene Eyre at the Slammer

'art' it possesses a certain credibility and meaning which, if they are unhappy about, they must obviously have missed or misunderstood. They would not dream of voicing their doubts to the artist, even in the form of walking out or talking in the middle, and would tend instead to see the fault as somehow lying in their own inability to appreciate or comprehend.

The club situation provides the opportunity for a more direct relationship between audience and performers. The venue gives the work a different context in which the relationship between audience and performer is less formal, more direct, and in which there is a greater expectation to be entertained. Performers do have a certain responsibility towards their audience. Much of the performance I have seen in clubs (leaving other areas aside for the moment) has quite simply not been very good. If that is the case then the club provides an ideal forum in which to test audience reaction and to act accordingly to make improvements and constructive changes. The audience, by acting as a kind of barometer, can be extremely useful to both performers and organiser in providing information which in a gallery context is usually more politely hidden.

The idea of crossing over audiences and venues is one which goes against the grain of the English sensibility. In New York (source of inspiration for Richard Strange's *Slammer Artoteque*) culture is something which everyone must possess, and there is great social and cultural mobility. In this country, by contrast, everything is governed by social position. Culture is something impossible to 'acquire'. There is much less social mobility and culture remains deeply rooted in tradition and the past. British people are notoriously resistant to change. We find it hard to accept the idea of an interchange of cultural contexts. However much we may embrace the ideas of New York, deep down the old familiar structures remain sacrosanct. The Victorian view of art as 'high' culture, morally improving, remains deeply entrenched in our ideas of culture in this country, however unconsciously, and continues to affect both performer and audiences' approach to their work. It is this attitude which provides some of the greatest obstacles to a truly innovative and exciting presentation of live work in different contexts.

Chrissie Iles

David Corio

**Annabel Nicolson**

'at the camp we have had a vision of thousands and thousands of women coming together around Greenham Common'

the beauty of this vision was that each woman who came was needed as part of the making of the circle

'embrace the base'  
a concept which could only have come from women's experience

embrace — to take in the arms: to press to the bosom with affection: to take eagerly or willingly: to comprise: to admit, adopt or receive — to join in an embrace

'embrace the base'  
creating a supporting structure of and from ourselves within which our feelings could be expressed creating a network around the base acknowledging our fear our common cause for fear releasing it releasing each other

'embrace the base'  
joining in an embrace around the base embracing as a physical form of expression bringing people closer together

women who have not taken part in such actions before wanted to come to this one women who friends knew particularly older women who had not had contact with movements of this kind or been involved with such activities wanted to come

my mother could have come she would have been quite safe the circling of the base was in itself a circling of women protecting each other holding hands holding on

the same purpose  
the same commitment reaching round and round

each woman was asked to bring something to attach to the fence something personal 'anything related to real life as opposed to the unreal world the military base represents'

shying away avoiding thinking about fear of contact with something so alien not wanting to place myself or anything close to me anywhere near the site of such

'contamination' another woman called it fear of being contaminated

but being there seeing it all an expressive living reminder of why we were there our lives seen together most vulnerable most moving women coming to the fence found themselves already there

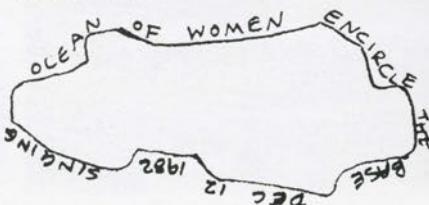


something so alien seen for what it was

made to bear our meanings  
made to bear witness

'As women we have remained silenced for too long, silenced by the argument of defence — the balance has been tipped and at last we see the ultimate insult to our intelligence: nuclear weapons

Women are no longer giving their silent consent to wars'



W. H. H. H.



forming a circle was about continuity  
 seeing continuity in our lives 'we suspect  
 the circle will take on its own energy and  
 form' women taking each others' places at  
 the fence watching over each others' lives

keeping watch

towards dusk making our way towards  
 the gates groups of women forming  
 round each other singing darkness

light from candles making same spiral as  
 women dancing women with candles cir-  
 cling round spiralling forming a spiral  
 more and more women spiralling round

*we say no*

*we say no*

fires being lit darkness tents being pit-  
 ched women singing small  
 groups round fires

attending to

making shelters

so many of us so close so completely re-  
 sisting  
 since early morning outside the  
 gates in the road  
 living out what we deal with everyday

our rawness in this world  
 what we know we see before us

rescuing each other with 'the whole world  
 is watching'  
 is this the only thing that stops them

how many times for how many women  
 no one is watching

so close so completely resisting  
 since early morning

women are singing

LESLEY MCINTYRE



HANBOTTOM

PAULA ALLEN

*you can't kill the spirit  
 she is like a mountain  
 old and strong  
 she goes on and on*

*you can't kill the spirit  
 she is like a mountain  
 old and strong  
 she goes on and on*

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**CARLESSANTOS** Bloomsbury Theatre  
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 Wiegold and Brown

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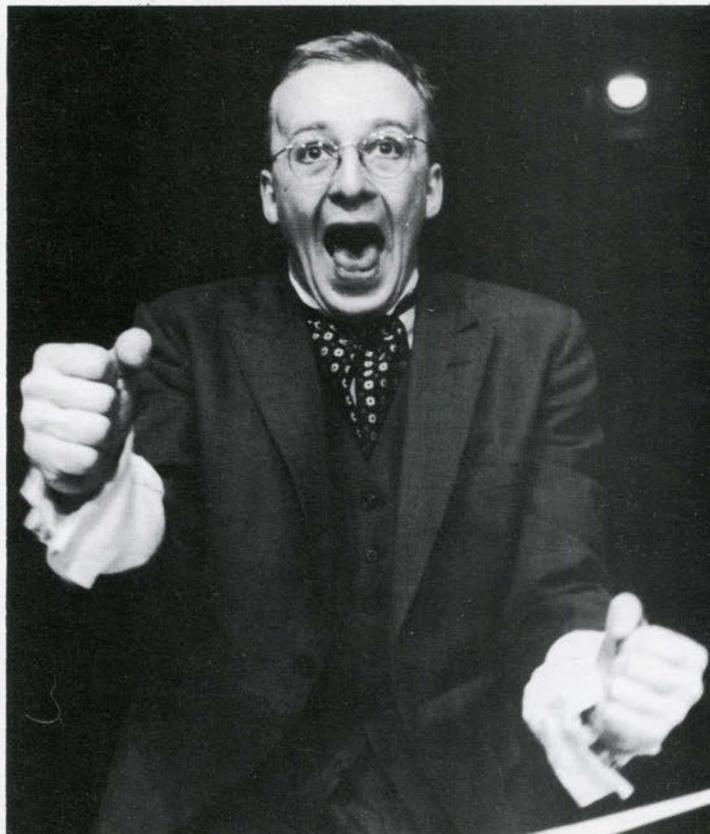
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