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ROMANS IN A BARBARIAN CAMP

Dear Performance

You will forgive me if I suggest that Rob La Frenais experience with his surname ought to have made him a little more sensitive to misspelling elsewhere. Elizabeth, your Arts Council spokesperson, is surnamed Macgregor. The offending agency which organises the Ideal Home Exhibition, and which stopped the performance by Marty St James and Anne Wilson (Performance Magazine May/June 1986) is called Angex.

I am afraid it is to Angex's defence that I spring now. Partly because the Arts Council, if not tarred with the same brush, has at least been splattered with it, for not having tried hard enough to use its financial investment to better effect. The Arts Council is a public body, and I fully and freely admit what it staked in the Ideal Home Exhibition in March this year. Our two main collaborators in this venture are, however, commercial organisations which do not wish to reveal their costs. All I can say in these circumstances, therefore, is that the Arts Council contributed about one-fifth of the total cost, from which you might deduce that our financial clout was relatively small.

Perhaps we did not try hard enough with what clout we did have, but then perhaps you should have looked behind the *Soap* performances at the Living Art Pavilion itself. For this structure Angex gave us a ground-plan to work within, which we did (just), but what startled everyone was the overwhelming height and presence of our mock temple. This was the real, hard-nosed commercial world, remember. Angex had to make ends meet, and this meant keeping its regular exhibitors happy enough to come back year after year. For those few of your readers unfortunate enough not to have been to the Ideal Homes Exhibition, the centre of every exhibition is a circle of showhouses within which is a 'feature' reflecting the theme of the year. This year the theme was 'Art in the Home', and the feature was the Arts Council's Living Art Pavilion. Your readers can perhaps imagine the fury of those companies, which had spent small fortunes on renting the space and then building (with *real* bricks and mortar!) and furnishing their showhouses, when a giant green shoe-box crowded them out.

Then, to cap it all, performances started blocking the throughfares. The 'clogging' problem occurred because the Arts Council strayed beyond the limits set it. What in Angex's terms was a demonstration (like, as Marty and Anne would have it, Ted Mould demonstrating double-glazing) spilled over into the passageways. When the idea of performance arose, Angex did express

LETTERS

concern about the possibility of crowds blocking the passageways. They agreed to allow it for one preview. We were naturally concerned that this was not an ideal situation for the artists, and we were delighted that they agreed to perform under these circumstances. The press view performance was a great success and Angex, after some persuasion, agreed to let us put it on for the general public, again on a trial basis. Unfortunately the position we chose did lead to congestion. We could not persuade the organisers that moving the performance would alleviate the problem. I am afraid that it was our fault for not playing according to the rules.

As far as we were concerned, Marty and Anne's performances were one of the highlights of the Arts Council's intervention in the Ideal Home Exhibition. They complemented the more traditional works of art inside the pavilion and were a marvellous advertisement for the pavilion. They also hinted at dimensions beyond the commodity, and provided an absorbing and brilliant parody of much of what the Ideal Home Exhibition currently stands for. They injected a touch of humour into a purgatory for trudging consumers, and I would not be surprised if many who watched them wondered as much about the nature of the modern consumer society as they did about the strange antics of contemporary artists. While I understand, and am sorry for, Marty and Anne's disappointment and the pressures they were put under, I cannot regret having made the effort.

Rob, your image of barbarians at the gates of Rome is the wrong way round. In fact the Romans were in the middle of a barbarian camp. If they encountered some incomprehension and suspicion, they also met with a genuine attempt to come to terms with the work. The wonder was that we did as well as we did. Next time we will do better.

Yours sincerely,
Mike Sixsmith
 Assistant Art Director
 Arts Council for Great Britain
 105 Piccadilly
 London W1V 0AU.

PRIVATE INCOMES

Dear Performance

Thanks for publishing the extract from my booklet 'rough notes on Artists Liberation'

as a polemic in the June issue.

There was one misprint which reversed my meaning and lost me a few friends! I wrote that there are artists who have a middle class background but *don't* have private incomes (i.e. wealth). This is confusingly printed as *do* have private incomes. The important point being that these people have exactly the same economic interests, as artists who produce value that is exploited, as those of us with working class backgrounds. The drift of my 'polemic' is towards unity amongst artists whilst this misprint suggests a conflict of interests on the basis of class background. In fact *ALL ARTISTS ARE EXPLOITED*. The tiny minority of rich ones will not find in economically debilitating but will still find it spiritually enervating.

I know how easy it is to make errors in publishing but this is a particularly important point to be clear about.

Yours,

Stefan Szczelkun
 85 St Agnes Place, Kennington,
 London SE11 4BB.

Dear Performance

As my mother very kindly occasionally sends me out your most interesting and entertaining mag, I thought I'd send you a performance piece of my own as a token of appreciation. Here it is:

'A PERFORMANCE' (Unfinished)

- 1) Wait then fly to Warsaw. Wait.
- 2) Visit Gdansk and buy postcard.
- 3) Wait. Buy a stamp and send off to *Performance*.
- 4) Wait.

(Approx length of work 1 year — still to be completed.)

PS Gdansk is a very pretty town so can I have my round of applause now?

Love and greetings from Poland,
 Yours truly,

Karen Strang and Limited Space

EXPLAIN OR SHOW?

Dear Performance

I recently received a note with the latest copy of Performance Magazine asking me to re-subscribe.

I don't know. What's the Editorial Policy?

How much concern is there with the presentation of IDEAS effectively, in the form of GOOD COMMUNICATION?

Sorry, concern is the wrong word. Enthusiasm is the word.

It all seems to have become explanation rather than SHOWING, in the last couple of years.

Please let me know what you think.

Yours sincerely,
John Hale
 London N16

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PERT

PREVIEW

+ **UPTOWN HOUSEWATCH:** Following the success of 'Housewatch' in Leyton, East London, last November the 'Housewatch' group are now set to undertake a series of shows in London this summer.

For the uninitiated the 'Housewatch' idea is centred on turning a house into a public film show by projecting onto the windows of the house from inside the structure. In effect this means that the house becomes a sort of multi-screen architectural installation. The six artists concerned respond individually to the possibilities of this street level screening context in distinctive and different ways, each artist creating work specific to the given place. Lying somewhere between event and film installation the project's appeal is further underlined by the changing nature of the thing. 'We don't usually have much chance to run through the thing so there is that slightly risky feel to the shows', say the group. The

work itself ranges from tragi-comic burlesque through to more understated pieces which attempt to create some comment on their screening context. For the latest shows some artists are screening completely new works while others will be 'revising and extending' original pieces.

Despite continuing funding problems — the current shows are jointly financed by Artangel Trust and the ACGB — the group are tentatively considering a nationwide tour and seem open to the possibilities of exploring the performance aspect of their shows. 'It's something which isn't fixed . . . The exciting this is that its always in a state of change', comment the Watchers.

Operating at a point between the street-art-for-the-people discourse of the late 60's and an updated aesthetic that accounts for a broad range of concerns 'Housewatch' is a simple but clever notion which somehow manages

to bridge the gap between experimental film and popular event. If there were a slogan it might read 'Don't Watch The Box Watch The House', in the meantime 'Housewatch' consider their group photo with some humour. 'We all look like gangsters', says someone. 'We ARE', comes the reply. (NICK HOUGHTON) *Information:* Artangel 01-434 2887.●

+Robert Ayers and Company's new performance **REGULATION** has been commissioned by the Mappin Gallery in Sheffield and is going to be staged in the Botanical Gardens there at 10 each evening, August 11-15. 'It all happens in the dark,' Robert Ayers explains, 'and the audience get the chance to wander into what might happen in the garden at night.' People who saw his less-than-successful **FLYING BANANA BOXROOM** in Stoke on Trent in December will know that this sort of nocturnal fantasy is familiar territory for Robert Ayers, while those who saw **FALLING** at the Midland Group might be looking forward to spectacular daredevilry of the sort that is captured here. Robert Ayers's drawings for the performance suggest some of the things that can be expected, and he promises, 'a park-keeper, a librarian, a gang of naughty boys, a couple of rather odd little houses, puppets, at least one song, buried treasure, a snake hallucinated . . . I don't think that's giving too much away.' And anything else? 'Well, there'll be a lot of fire.' *Information:* 0742 26281.●



+ **IS IT THEATRE? IS IT ART? DOES IT MATTER?** On August 30/31 Riverside Studios will be hosting a weekend of talks and discussions about performance art and visual theatre organised by Claire McDonald of Impact Theatre. The sessions will look at current practice, definitions, criticism as well as discussing new commissioning policy, funding and management of artists both here and in Europe. There will be the opportunity to see performance videos, performance work

in the Riverside gallery and the Wooster Group's production of **THE ROAD TO IMMORTALITY PART 11** (pictured here in its previous incarnation as **LSD**) running Aug 21-Sept 6.

If you want to discuss burning issues here and find out about who is doing what where or air your views on the state of the art, be there, it should be at the very least a provocative weekend. *Information:* 01-741 2251.●



THE MYTH BETWEEN THE SPACES . . .



THE SPACES BETWEEN THE MYTH

ROB LA FREN AIS travelled across Australia collecting material for this special focus issue of the magazine. Here he describes the peculiarities of an artworld divided by thousands of miles, as reflected by the 'artspaces' that exist in the different cities. Each part of Australia has a discreet identity of its own, coloured by its history, both distant and recent:



Randelli's 'Love Stories'

IT IS QUITE LIKELY that the European visitor to this continent will disembark at Perth, first stop for thousands of assisted passage Britons in the fifties and early sixties and home of Swan lager and its millionaire owner Alan Bond, who galvanised sleepy Western Australia by bringing 'home' the America's Cup. This winter (or, climactically Summer) the chintzy twin-town of Fremantle will be overwhelmed by expensive redevelopments, floating stadia and Disneyland marinitis, as the Yanks come over to re-bag their beaker. Already the place has something of a siege mentality, with a gaunt building at the centre of town bearing the legend 'Cup Defence headquarters' and sidestreet deviationist graffiti — 'Fuck the Cup'.

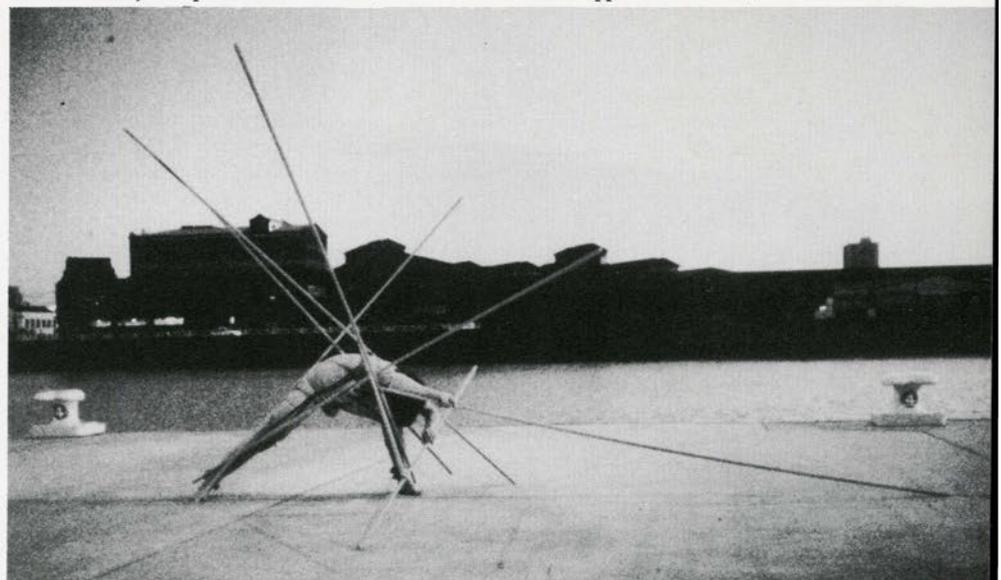
It is also in the olde-worlde wild west streets of Fremantle that the first evidence of Australia's far-flung network of Art Spaces are to be found, Praxis. Praxis is both a building, like many in Australia, roughly modelled on the old Arts Lab concept, and a magazine, Praxis M. which has already gained something of an international reputation. Like many magazines in Australia it is dominated by theoretical discourse, but its sheer range shows the hidden depths of the Western Australian arts infrastructure. It is edited by Marco Marcon, who has recently taken over from Allan Vizets who now runs The Performance Space in Sydney, in one of those intra-continental staffing shifts that seems to take place from time to time here.

The building itself has also undergone recent changes. Julian

Goddard, a charismatic figure who ran it until recently, appears to have had his differences with the board (all over Australia Boards of Management are extremely powerful and active in Art Spaces) and has left. He has also had his differences with the way Art Spaces are going in Australia, as he ruefully points out: 'You can look at it as a classic subcultural situation. In the seventies they emerged as subcultures, and now they've been appropriated through hegemony back into the mainstream.' But he sees it as inevitable 'The Art Spaces at a conference in 1983, in Hobart decided to change their name from alternative to *contemporary* art spaces. It was a recognition of the shift of the role of those institutions within the community. People read that as a

direct criticism, but it's not, it's just a reality.'

The performances I saw at Praxis were well-organised and well attended, but seemed very safe, and very much caught up into that trap of sound-tape/slide-text that seem to characterise performance wherever it is isolated from any spark of danger and difficulty. There is very much a sense here of doing everything in an isolated laboratory sense, which of course is reflected by the geographical distance from the metropolitan centres. When I led a discussion at Praxis, the discourse was well-informed and lively, but there seemed to be lacking any sense of urgency, or indeed reality to the issues we were discussing. Later, in Sydney, I was to find the exact opposite to this —



Ray Richards, from Ddart performing in Melbourne



an almost exaggerated sense of importance, or moment in some of the endless forms. But as a general introduction to Australian cultural life I found Praxis a fair and friendly place, beginning to flourish under the new director, Canadian John Barrett Lennard, one of a new wave of 'professional' administrators similar to the British City University trained generation.

Before leaving Perth I went out to W.A.I.T an airy and enthusiastic campus where Goddard and performance artist David Watt are teaching. Here there is a libertarian spirit similar to the British art schools in the early seventies, and indeed there was the same feeling of time-warp such institutions produced. Veterans of Australia will fall over themselves to inform that this is a common first impression but I will simply record that I met; a young man who specialised in performances to church congregations, a woman who mass-produced wax 'fetish-objects for the middle classes', an ex-miner who is scouring the desert for old machines in the manner of the Bow Gamelan Ensemble, and a woman who spends all her time, in fact has filled her studio entirely of, multiple painting of Myra Hindley.

Off to Adelaide, and into the capable hands of the resourceful Louise Dauth, who told me everything I needed to know about the Australian art scene and more, and who I will let speak in her own words in an interview (see page 18). The EAF has far more the rambling, lively atmosphere of the 'arts lab' to it, with a continuing resident artists programme and a well-stocked bookstall. A publication 'A Decade at the EAF' makes illuminating reading, in that it maps an ironic model outline for development of post-object art within any kind of

institution. All the little traumas and successes are there, from a whimsical beginning — founder Donald Brook sitting on a beach stating 'What Adelaide needs, I believe is an Experimental Art Foundation' to it actually happening within a year — Australia is not known as the Land of Opportunity for nothing. Then there was the drama that ensued when extremist body artist Stelarc was prevented from performing the first of his suspension pieces — performances by Stuart Brisley and a whole procession of installations and events that could have rivalled London's Acme gallery in its boom period. The difference being of course, Adelaide still has the EAF.

While Adelaide has a single focus for its arts activity, Melbourne seems to be decidedly split. The demise of the George Paton Ewing gallery, and the Australia Council's active policy of encouraging one art space in each state capital means that there are several forces clamouring for attention. The ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Arts) is a somewhat sedate contender for the role, set as it is in Serpentine-like pristine isolation in parkland adjoining smart South Yarra. It currently has as a freelance curator video maker Robert Randall, whose work with Frank Bendenelli (Randelli productions) is fresh and interesting, dealing as it does with the vagaries of style-dominated personal relationships. Randall and Bendenelli have recently started what is essentially an Australian version of London Video Arts, Modern Image Makers Association (MIMA) which organises distribution and showing. Despite the obvious energy and flair of Randall, the future of ACCA, whose director had recently left under a cloud amidst allegations of promoting private dealership with public money, seemed uncertain. However it's 'smart' premises and impressive sounding board give it an advantage over the other art forces in Melbourne, the loose and anarchistic 'Sculpture 85' collective who are energetically campaigning to take over a large empty building in the middle of the city, the Regent Theatre. This group take on an anti-curatorial stance, which earns them some displeasure in the art bureaucracy. It was appropriate to find aligned to them a face from Britain's recent art historical past, Ray Richards, whose circular walk with Dart had caused a media scandal in seventies, and whose living sculpture

Spanish holiday event with Dennis De Groot was recently featured in Performance. Ironically, on one of his first events here, he was arrested for nudity, and the case became something of a cause celebre here, with top figures from the art world lining up to defend him in court. He won the case and it is no wonder he is happier here than in a country which, if stories are to be believed, persecuted and drove his work out of existence.

Hobart, Tasmania, is the home of Chameleon, proof that an art space can be started anywhere in the most barren terrain. A pair of energetic young Tasmanians, Anne Macdonald and David O'Halloran were at the centre of activities here. Macdonald had recently achieved notoriety by having one of her photo-collages covered up with stickers by the Art Gallery of New South Wales during *Perspecta 85* (see review) for obscenity, a decision which caused director Edmund Capon to come under heavy attack from the strong anti-censorship lobby, and of course increased the crowds of the curious who insisted on pulling the stickers off it every day. O'Halloran was about to curate an exhibition of Post-performance documentation (see review). Also in Hobart, English performance artist/sculptor Terry O'Malley whose work is based on ritual mask drama with strong sculptural overtones. His position as a maker of objects with a desire to tell stories, seems to lead him somewhat into conflict with the relatively high anti-theatrical attitude of the art establishment here.

It was Biennale time in Sydney, no less so than in the Performance Space who organised my tour, and now base for collecting materials for this issue. Every day a bewildering collection of objects and activities seemed to pass in and out of this space . . . one day a gallery full of undulating leaves, the next a wardrobe full of honey, the next a professionally fitted out radio studio broadcasting events live nationally, the next a picnic-party of mad video artists from Brisbane. See various articles in the rest of the section for details. The Performance Space is a large rambling building in Redfern, a so called 'rough' area of Sydney, and is run in a rather short-staffed way by Allan Vizents, formerly of Western Australia, Barbara Campbell and Pauline Adamek. It was fairly recently founded by Nick Tsoutas and Mike Mullins (see interview) as an



Ex De Medici in Canberra

The Praxis Staff

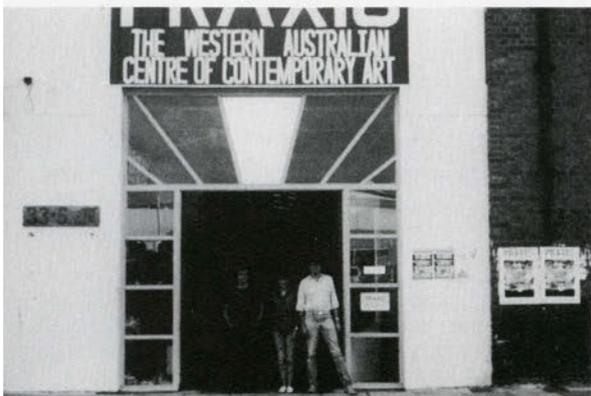


PHOTO / ROB LA FRENAIS

experimental theatre space, but Vizents is introducing a more visual art input. I got the impression that this approach is causing difficulties with the Space's board, not least because of the complicated art political manoeuvres of a territorial nature. This is a pity, because the synthesis between the various genres and media seems to take place at the Performance Space in a highly successful way.

The British contribution to the Biennale was curated by Sarah Kent, who, along with some more conventional choices, included Malcolm McLaren. McLaren while lazily sticking up some record covers on the wall, managed to successfully overturn some of the Biennial forums and introduce his own brand of cultural anarchy. This could not have been done in Britain, where everyone is bored stiff by his punk-Thatcherite stage pirate act, but in Australia it worked a treat. This is because the artworld here is overburdened by the hegemony of French philosophers, or as Nicholas Zurbrugg, curator of Soundworks put it, 'the Baudrillardian virus' and the tendency to indulge in circular discourse. The reaction to the rarefied debate, the reliance on excess of terminology to combat 'culture cringe' provided a ripe and swollen fruit for Malcolm to puncture, telling wide-eyed art students, steeped in theory concerning the social condition of art 'go out and get the money, it's yours'. Such events as the one McLaren was in had an alarming tendency to dissolve into Mad Hatters Tea Parties, with disruptions by disco-dancing with ghetto-blasters (the Yugoslav performance artist Ulay) members of the panel stuffing their ears with earplugs and repeated calls for the dissolution of the Chair (Soundworks forum).

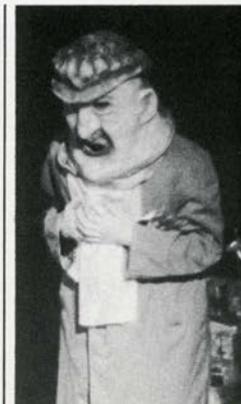
The final stage of the trip was to the capital Canberra, a festival of Britain-styled futuristic city for a series of performances organised by Anne Virgo of the Arts Council Gallery. Ex de Medici did a simple but effective walking sound piece called *I'm Walking* (*All along the road I'm walking*). Andrew Powel performed *Your Pound of Flesh*, a ritualistic work rather like David Medalla being directed by Kenneth Anger, while John Deebil cast on the spot a praying vegemite sculpture (he's made many of these all over Australia — no kidding!) A visit to the National Gallery at Canberra reveals a vast file of press material about the Blue Poles

Jackson Pollock purchase scandal, 'Dunks Did It!' which is said to have been the final straw in forcing out Gough Whitlam in 1974 (apart from the wicked Pom conspiracy) and which, like the Tate bricks, is still talked about today.

It was in Canberra that I met the legendary Arthur Wicks from Wagga Wagga. Wicks is, I suspect, one of arts 'outsiders'. His work is a combination of large-scale land art and absurdist infiltration, and has included the following actions: lying naked across the San Andreas fault, California, living on the roof of the Art Gallery of New South Wales for a week, setting up a fake checkpoint between Germany and Austria and rowing along the Sydney railway system and Melbourne tramways. A former scientist, and of the earlier, post 70s generation of performance artists, he is still going strong, and although I saw none of his performance, it was a pleasure to meet someone who seemed anarchically un beholden to 'current' art practice.

It is not easy to catalogue the sudden inrush of names and places, the demonology of ideas, artworks, spaces,

politics, gossip and myth that is the Australian art community. The population being so small, (as Australians, always keen on statistics, will tell you) it harbours a surprisingly large number of artists, and an even more surprising number of performance artists. Foreign visitors will not find themselves the lodestone they once were, as much of what they might say or do has been outstripped by local product. The myth, also, that the arts are desperately well funded is also just that, a myth. But they don't do badly either, and Australia is a pretty good example of what things might be like with a change of government here (and a Labour party with an arts policy). While the Australians may be struggling with some of the problems we left behind a few years behind (the return of painting, death of performance art etc) it has dealt with many of the problems still facing us in the future. Whether they like it or not, Australian artists are still somewhat isolated in a laboratory, peering into which, we can make some interesting discoveries. ●



Terry O'Malley in Hobart

Arthur Wicks rowing up the Melbourne Tramway

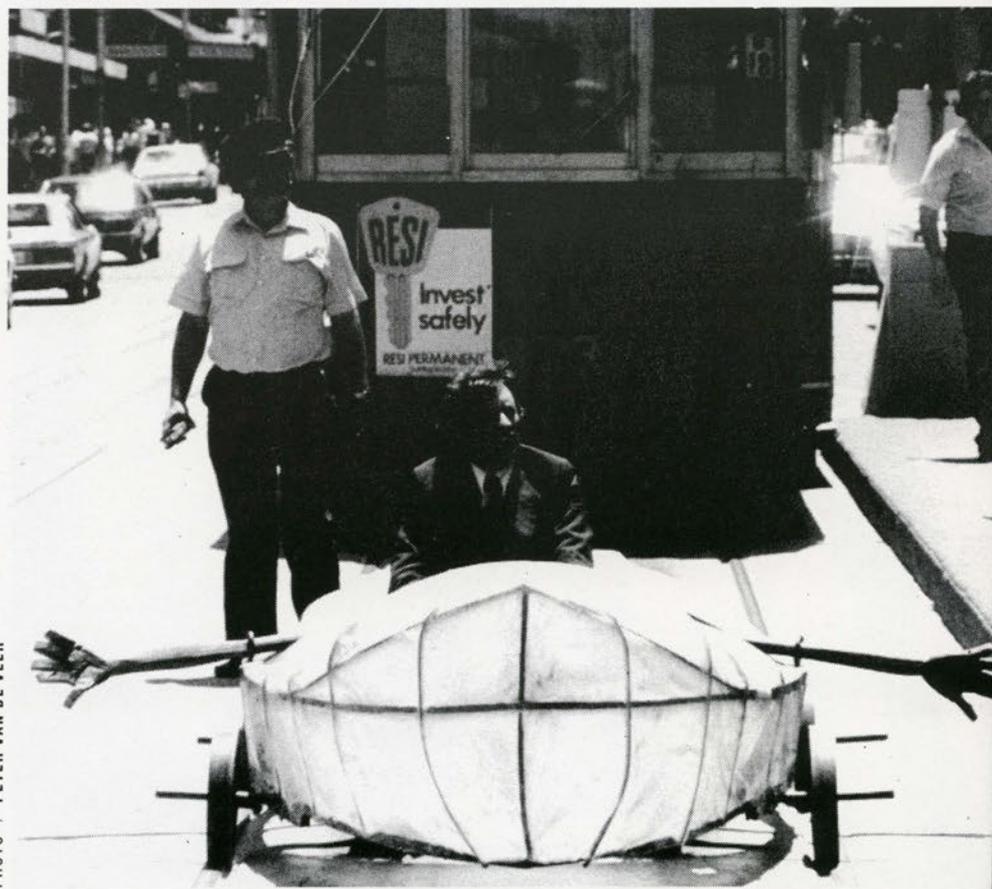


PHOTO / VEET SANDEHA

PHOTO / PETER VAN DE VEER



PUTTING ON AN ACT -



PERFORMING FEMININITY

Performance by women, on womens issues, but without excluding men, is thriving in Australia, SARAH MILLER describes advances made at a recent festival in Sydney:

IGNORE HER . . . she's just 'putting on an act'! When we understand how susceptible women artists have always been to the aesthetic standards and values of the male tradition and to male approval and validation, we can appreciate the complex and vulnerable space a woman occupies when she chooses to expose herself, to speak out as subject/object/performer. She's just 'putting on an act'. It is perhaps habitual to

perceive such behaviour as selfish, self-centred, at odds with the traditional role of woman as nurturer, as hostess if you like, ensuring that the party runs smoothly.

'Putting on an Act', four nights of women's performance and a forum was the second event in a continuing investigation into the position of women in the arts, that was initiated in 1985 by the Affirmative Action for Women in the Visual

Arts Committee of the Artworkers' Union. Originally intended as a week of performance art, it was finally decided to broaden the parameters, to look at a number of areas which have served as source material for visual artists, as well as examining those kinds of performance historically associated with female specificity such as belly-dancing, whilst flexing a bit of muscle in the traditionally male domain of weights and body-building. Types of performance ranged from the aforementioned belly-dancing and weight lifting to performance art, poetry, sound-works, tap and post-modern dance, comedy and theatre. Any temptation to present women's art as a specific style or movement was thus immediately rendered impracticable.

Certainly there were recurring motifs, and perhaps the most frequent was the construction of stereotypical images of women appropriated from media and popular culture, which were questioned, parodied and ultimately disowned, emphasising the distance between the representation of women as product or commodity, and woman as process, restoring the third dimension, performing femininity.

The Hollywood melodrama of the '40s and '50s proposed a moment of identity culturally marked as specifically feminine, which was directed particularly towards women's audiences. West Australian artist, Rosalind Patterson, utilised the conventions of melodrama in her piece entitled *Whats the Difference?* However, her excursion into a melodramatic and thus potentially hysterical world, was informed by a cool, formal and articulate presentation which worked to subvert the adopted form and its associate qualities of deceit and irrationality.

A woman stands on the main track transfixed by the spotlight of an oncoming train. I can hear the wheels turning, the grinding sound of metal on metal. The woman gestures ineffectually, brittle, articulate movements. Her hands clench and unclench. She screams . . . silently . . . in agony . . . in frustration . . .

Why doesn't she move?

A woman blows up a balloon. It's difficult. The

Peta Sanderson in . . .
Barbie meets
Transformer



balloon is resistant, rubbery. The woman is intent, careful, absorbed. The noise of a train is still to be heard rumbling ominously in the distance. The light goes down. The woman lets the balloon go. Rejected, it farts miserably to the ground.

Why does she deny herself?

A woman in a fox mask and fox fur gauntlets awkwardly traverses the space caught in the light of a slide; it is the hunt. Cunning, cautious, alert, she reaches her target which is illuminated by the enormous, glaring eye of the fox itself.

Who is she, the hunter or the hunted, desired or desiring, subject or object?

A woman, white lace and candles. She lights the candles. A church bell chimes. Slowly she picks up a shovel and sifts through the clouds of flour. The audience is very still. The woman is absorbed but conscious of being watched. She finds a book. She performs for her audience simulating joy, surprise, curiosity. She covers the book in rich velvet, but another thought intrudes. She opens the book and taking a pair of scissors, carefully cuts through the pages creating a spiral. She attaches it to her head—a veil—it looks like lace. The story complete, she puts out the candle with her palms, grimacing in pain. The space is warmly black, contentedly black, satisfyingly black and image full.

Rosalind Patterson's performance grew out of her interest in feminist theory and what she perceives as the potential for such critiques to be taken over and co-opted by phallogocentric systems, thereby re-enacting the imprisonment of the representation of women as victimisation, or as the evasive consolation of romance. *Whats the Difference?* was cleanly performed and beautifully succinct. It raised questions but remained open-ended, resisting the temptation to provide solutions, to resolve the relationship of women to culture.

The consolations of romance were more than usually evident when poet Tammi Kim Smith emerged from the audience in pink frills and furbelows, pouting and coquettish, the very picture of a Hollywood starlet. A sex kitten luxuriating on an enormous bed draped in leopardskin: 'You know I'm sooo strong with my enamelled nails, my accidentally circumcised nose...' she cooed.

Silently behind her, the woman transformed, sculptor Peta Sanderson working with free weights, her stoic beauty and strength lending the piece a curiously choric quality.

The Adventures of a Reluctant Emasculator — Barbie Meets Transformer, took a humorous look at what in fact constitutes sexual difference. Women are different, not because they have wombs but because their experience is constructed differently. For both Barbie and Transformer, nature becomes culture. Muscles may be seen to function in the same way as costume... but muscles are supposed to be natural! What then is a woman's body? Is there a point at which a woman's body becomes something else, is transformed, and if this is so, is that something else inevitably mas-

culine? Thus not only is the naturalness of the body called into question but the natural order of gender is queried through a transgression of the boundaries of sexual difference.

Of course muscles also connote violence and aggression, and it was an interesting facet of the piece which allowed the audience to read the sculpted female body positively, in terms of a woman taking control of her body, in terms of her potential to 'rewrite' the body, to allow a new female voice, rather than presuming an assumption of masculinity.

A performance which was not well received was *We Exist*, performed by the self-proclaimed Sydney eccentrics Les Bean and Harold 'the Kangaroo' Thornton. It was clear that many people were disturbed, embarrassed, even angered by the presence of two such unashamedly naive and awkward performers. Harold, who looked about 60, was attired in crimson velvet breeches, smock and beret, painted a portrait of infamous Queensland premier Joe Bjelke Peterson complete with devil's horns, whilst Les Bean sort of wandered around.

She wore mask and body paint, took clothes off and on, sang a bit, worked out and banged a drum with the practice cover left on, all in front of a slide of a painting of Sydney's Luna Fun Park. It was unpolished, unworked, lacking in confi-

dence, all that stuff. But it was immediate and specifically reflective of their concerns. The performance was stopped, censored, the non-rational elements as it were, expunged. Some standard was not met and I was quite curious as to why this should be so. There is after all, a quite respectable tradition in performance art whereby the artist outlasts or outfaces the audience. As it was the last piece of the night, the audience were free to come and go according to their interest.

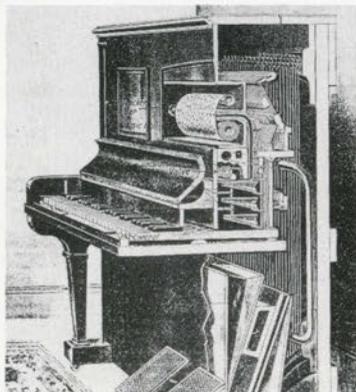
Ignore her... she's just 'putting on an act'. Performance as an activity connotes pretence as the distance between the act and the 'real' self; acting in or out of character. To perform is to construct a subject, at once constructed and called into question by that distance; a constant grinding out of new beginnings from old endings.

(Just) 'Putting on Act?' I have not attempted to do critical justice to all or even a few of the works presented during the week. However, if I were to dare to generalise about an art, a week so full of contraries, I would suggest that the central or pervasive theme was the liberation of human potential and the various forms of oppression which meet us openly or insidiously wherever we look. To perform is to interpret and to create anew. What language does the performing body speak? ●

Rosalind Patterson
screams... *What's the
Difference*



PHOTO / JUDITH AHERN



KILL THE WORD!

What happens when you lock up numerous sound artists, and performance artists using sound, in the same cacaphonic space for space for nearly 72 hours? NIGEL HELYER charts the progress of Australia's recent Soundworks festival:

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a lonely stutterer, isolated from the world (of discourse), by his cross-fire of phonemes and by their smirks and blushes. He desperately needed an ally, a conspirator and so he wrote one down, his own double agent code-named *Motler* (get it?). Together they set about planning the final solution, the systematic elimination of the

SEMANTIC from the SONIC; beginning with the poem 'Annihilate the Word before it Annihilates You!' and ending at Soundworks with the high volume vehemence of a steam locomotive on an enthusiasts run.

Allow me to set the scene, we are sitting in a dark grey hall (yes *everything* is dark grey!), it is, as Nicholas Zurbrugg (one of the Soundworks curators), reminds us, a type of fall-out bunker for poets, the kind of place to which we will all surely be assigned in the none too distant future! Casting our eyes about we realise that we are surrounded by enough recording equipment to set up a pirate radio station, and by enough large bearded men to start a real-ale revival in Sydney (God forbid!). The producer from the ABC (the antipodean version of Auntie), laments that we should really do something about the acoustics in here but then this is The Performance Space. As one of the last outposts which deliberately facilitates transdisciplinary culture T.P.S. is an organisation which still recognises the term ethics, so much so that it recently turned down the offer of a new home in the conspicuously luxurious wharf owned by The Sydney Theatre Company (yes it actually protrudes into magnificent Sydney Harbour!), preferring to remain in festering Redfern on purely ideological grounds. END OF SCENE PAINTING:—

In the words of Nicholas Zurbrugg (soundworks curator) 'the intention of the programme of Australian and American SOUNDWORKS is to bring together performances and critical forums

Jaz Duke
the inventor
of *Motler*

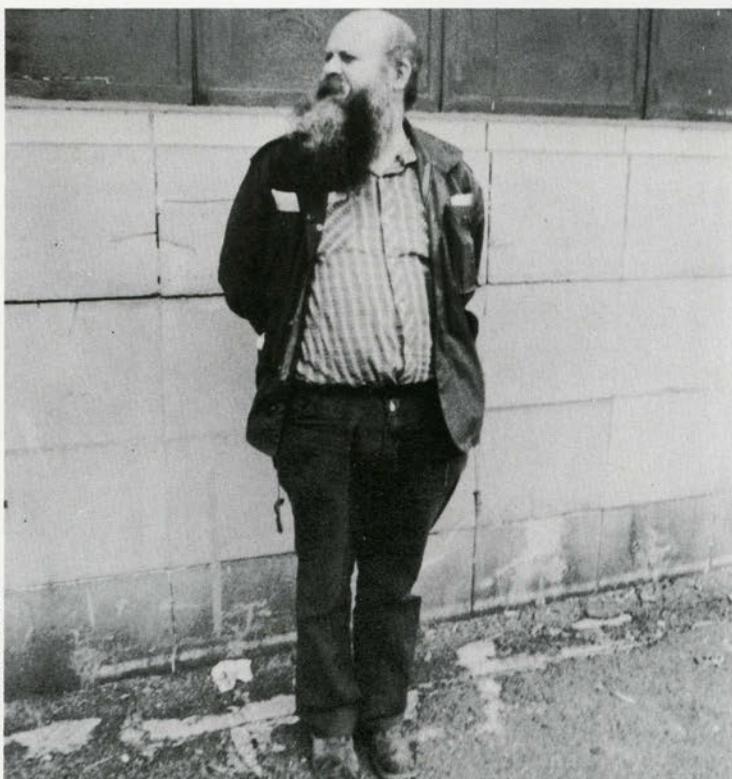


PHOTO / PATSY VIZENTS

juxtaposing and illuminating some of the liveliest and most enjoyable experiments with language, sound, image and gesture . . . 'A LA:—

*Revelled in the word spool . . . Spooooo!
Happiest moment in the past half million.*

Samuel Beckett, *Krapps Last Tape*.

Well with these sentiments in mind and cast adrift in that sea of over-developed beards how did it all pan out? Mixed feelings; very mixed feelings; over the course of the three day audial marathon some very obvious differentiations evolved and it is to these, rather than to a straight forward account of events that I wish to turn our attention.

It is a tale told by an Idiot, full of sounds and fury, Signifying nothing

William Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, v.5.

SOUNDWORKS:— this isn't prose; not a legal language of true predicates, of verbal cause and effect; this is the place where even the corrosive effects of poetic metaphor are left behind (abandoning the text), for the very root of verbal discourse, sound pure and simple! Well it's not quite that easy and so we arrive at the first disputed border zone patrolled on either side by vocal soundworkers, (and by that I mean people who use their voice!). In the *red* corner we have the *semanticists*, those who examine, extend and address via the meaning structures of language, they are characterised by at

least some vestige of narrative form. In the *blue* corner we find the *audiophiles* whose who have carried the project of modernist abstraction to its logical conclusion producing soundworks liberated from the burden of rational signification; the voice as instrument; from here it is a short walk to the concert hall and the history of music.

To be scrupulously honest a middle-ground does emerge to wed the poles of this axis, occupied by those who would no doubt be happy to be characterised as post-modernists (that land where all *isms* are *wasims*), a territory in which simple narrative and syntactical structures are hung, drawn and quartered in order to de-construct those elements of ownership, power and authority vested in our language! (Curiously the voiceworks emanating from this position operated as emotional patterning devices; not unlike listening to a cattle auction in Japan; the meaning is in there somewhere, you're just not sure how to get at it!).

THE EVIDENCE:— The red corner is well represented by Allan Vizents an American who has had his U.S. passport shredded in an official exchange of cultural identity. The principal materials supporting his performance are a pork-pie stetson hat, a remarkably adaptable and disciplined voice and a prepared text (word-processed!). The twenty minute

work *African Violet* takes the form of a public address to a plant of that name which recuperates the originally biographical subject matter into the realm of the socially available and inclusive (it speaks of and to OUR condition rather than HIS). Structurally the extended narrative is generated by the application of an exquisite, but brutal, linguistic logic to a simple anecdotal core, the resulting fermentation develops a super-reality saturated in irony and metaphor. This collision between a socially constructed 'consumer' and the pathetic object of mass production allows Vizents to speak directly and critically of late twentieth century capitalism — and all this achieved by the *meaning-power* of words!

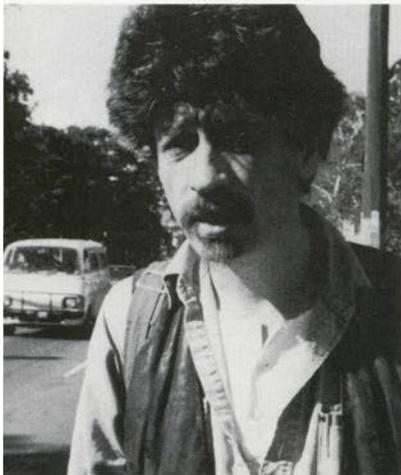
BY WAY OF CONTRAST:— The blue corner boasts the corpulent figure of Jas Duke (the inventor of *Motler*). His last fifteen years have constituted a revenge on all us lucky bastards who can speak straight; his is the ultimate deterrent, the threat of 'not to mean'. Duke boasts a 'solo male voice, untrained in singing and not amplified or modified by technology'. . . (he doesn't need it!) . . . his voiceworks are analogous to 'playing the saxophone without the saxophone!' and as such are developments of the 'classic' sound poetry of Hausmann, Schwitters and Marinetti but with the added ingredients of Ayler, Coltrane and



Ellen Zweig
from California



Shepp. His single word, or single phrase based, 'poems' are punctuated by a primitive form of optimism and humour, a quality which was apparent in his forum contributions, being both open and tolerant (and as such an uncharacteristic feature of these events!). Behind Mr Duke, right up against the post in the blue



Chris Mann: horserace commentator speed

corner we trade solo- voice for solo-instrument arriving at the interface with music proper and the final release from the onus of meaning (in the objective(ish) sense of the word!). Leigh Hobba and Sarah Hopkins both employ a range of extended playing techniques to avoid the pre- conditioned forms of conventional musical production. Hobba by gently forcing the clarinet to become an organ of respiration hovering through simple melodic structures that echo Hopkins cello work, with its circular bowing, bowed harmonics and vocal harmonization, marked to an undulating rhythmic pace which is recognisably alien to Sydney (Sarah lives in Darwin).

And the middle-ground; that territory traditionally stalked by the referee? Here we shall co-opt both Ania Walwicz and Chris Mann who although appearing to operate from ideologically distinct vantage points; Walwicz in the role of ethnic (English as a second language), poet and Mann playing the part of Master of Ceremonies conducting the wake for the Death of the Author; they have in this context certain structural and



Ania Walwicz English cracked open to reveal its strangeness

tactical similarities. **BROKEN ENGLISH:**— If the project of European Modernism can be summarised as a mixture of evangelism and utopian rationalism leading to the concept of a divine stasis of perfection then the post-modern (referee) has either, through a massive dose of common-sense or cynicism disavowed this crusade. The

KILL THE WORD!

resulting *Post-Mortem(ism?)* has an ideological mandate to examine, recombine, re-run, etc, the very fundamentals of our language base (or so it explains to itself in idle moments!). Both Walwicz and Mann employ a corroded, truncated and multi-layered approach to voice-works with Walwicz developing her Polishishness to invoke a world of *childspeak* and *mothertalk*, a hubble-bubble toil and trouble of English cracked open to reveal its strangeness. Mann on the other hand comes from a position of linguistic privilege. Mann who reads from 'blocks' of prepared text at an incomprehensible (horserace commentator), speed combines the literary charms of Wittgenstein with the verbal delivery of Professor Stanley Unwin. I don't think that it is cruel to point out that Mann's position is developed from the massive dose of cynicism (rather than common sense!), allowing his silvery tongue to refute, rebuff or otherwise smart-arse any discussion to a grinding standstill!

O.K. enough of language; now for the \$64,000 question, TECHNOLOGY!

The salient point to note re:— 'Soundworks' is of course the confluence of America and Australia, one which happily avoids the trauma of that other Anglo-fusion, *Mother-land* and *Colony* with its concomitant Oedipal drives! For whereas England still represents for many a resented fountainhead of cultural authority, America is simply an example of how to effectively give the slip to colonialism (political, economic, cultural or otherwise), but this is an old story . . . ! Yankee Know-How sign-posts the last frontier that shall concern us here, that final border dispute — Technology! We have a problem in discussing this topic in the context of Soundworks for the simple reason that bye and large it fell into the 'too hard or too painful' category, with only the shining example of Larry Wendt to lead us from the impasse. A sketch map of the terrain looks something like this:— Despite their superficial similarities and

their (almost) shared principal language the U.S.A. and Oz. are chalk and cheese. America can quite rightly claim to be one of the original industrial cultures on the globe, which as we now know is a mixed blessing! Australia on the other hand has been heavily manipulated, from the time of colonisation, by both British and American industrial capital whose principal concern was, and is, to stymie Australian industrial development in order to retain it as a bread-basket and mine-site; a poor relation primary producer. As a consequence of these policies Australia cannot be deemed to be a 'Post-Industrial' culture for the simple reason that it has never been an 'Industrial' culture. Ours is a society that has developed technologically long after everything in the hardware stores was put into plastic bags! Here we view technology from the position of a client, as a set of culturally pre-coded packages (only its not our culture that codes them), we can play only that which the pre-sets on the DX-70 allow, we can write only that which MACWrite permits.

Looking about the 'Soundworks' audience we can distinguish either a servile acquiescence to the new (the inevitable synthesizer groupies), or rabid luddites who even refuse to use a microphone (no doubt as it represents the phallic head of the technist beast!), there are no reasonable people here!

Then let us escape from the audience, that spoiled child who doesn't like what it sees but doesn't know what it wants, to the fictive world of Larry Wendt. **FIRST IMAGE:**— Larry, who comes from San Jose (Silicon Valley) is talking about *folk-art*. He and a few friends are sitting around the table, the coffee's on the stove, the wood fire is crackling; yes they're shooting the breeze and *quilting*. The fabric concerned turns out to be electronic, P.C. boards, I.C. chips and a myriad blobs of solder; all picked up at the local opportunity store or neighbourhood garage sale. You see the **FAMILIARITY** that Americans have with technology **MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER!** **SECOND IMAGE:**— Larry again; In performance. On the table in front of him is spread the *quilt*, it's a nightmare of wires and P.C. boards, the central feature of which is a voice sampling device garnered from an abandoned robot elevator. He taps on to the keyboard and twirls the mini-joystick pulling ambient sound from San Jose off the hard disc drive. Then he slowly starts to speak into the mike of his head-set, a voice from the remote future telling us all that is about to happen.●



NO ONE

**NO ONE
WANTS YOU**

MIKE MULLINS is one of Australia's enfants terrible of performance. His small and large scale subversive performances have been the stuff of myth and legend, have got him arrested on several occasions, and have been a thorn in the side of arts funders and the media, **ROB LA FREN AIS** met the creator of No One and the Lone Anzac:

Rob La Frenais: How was the *Invasion of No-One* conceived?

Mike Mullins: It was conceived in 1979. No-One never has a face and is like a chameleon animal. For example, No-One was originally dressed in a three-piece white suit and would always hang around American-style venues, pinball parlours and Macdonalds and places like this. Then No-One became the Lone Anzac, the Anzac being one of the strongest symbols Australia has, except he was rotting. He was decaying, The Lone

Anzac had a mission to carry the Australian flag minus the British symbols, so it was in a way a republican image. One hour after the Lone Anzac was born, he was arrested. The Lone Anzac went to court twice.

RL: For what reason?

MM: Causing serious alarm and affront in a public place to reasonable people.

RL: Was it because the uniform was rotting, or because you were wearing the uniform in the first place?

MM: It's because he infiltrated an

official ceremony, the Australia Day ceremony, where they re-enact the landing of the British, in the way of the British on their way from the New Endeavour to the dock, an actually made them go to another dock. He re-directed the re-enactment of the landing of the British. Then he followed them to the official ceremony.

RL: What exactly happens at this ceremony?

MM: There's fucking Union Jacks flying everywhere, and they talk about



WANTS
YOU

how wonderful it is to be an Australian, and they have a re-enactment of the landing. The Endeavour is Cook's boat, right? It sails into Sydney harbour, then they all row to shore. Then they have an official ceremony where all the Premiers and the heavies are there, and they make speeches and they all piss off and have a holiday. Now, the Lone Anzac re-directed their path by standing in their way, so they couldn't land, then followed them to the official ceremony, because the Lone Anzac's mission was to stand at national monuments, with his version of the Australian flag, exactly as you see it, except with no British flag in the corner, and with an Australian sky blue instead of the British royal blue. This national monument that he happened to want to stand by was within the roped off area of the official ceremony, so they arrested him. The flag of the Lone Anzac was in jail for eight weeks, they impounded that. I didn't go to the court, the Lone Anzac went to court.

RL: Explain the separation.

MM: Well, the Lone Anzac was No-One. You've got to understand, No-One is the faceless person. Then No-One has an outfit on, let's say and No-One becomes that entity, so No-One was the Lone Anzac.

RL: You mean other people than you have been this . . .

MM: Up until the Invasion of No-One, in 1985, I always played No-One. No-One never speaks, by the way, once wrapped up, I never speak. Yet for example, I think on this day, Australia Day 1981, No-One spoke very loud.

RL: But explain further this separation. Why do you cease to be you?

MM: You should try and shut me up! It's a play on the word no-one. I mean, I am a performer, I am performing no-one. No-One becomes certain issues. Let's say the Lone Anzac is an issue. Is that a good enough distinction? No-One was the Lone Anzac, as the Lone Anzac, No-One was in the Australia Day ceremony, was arrested, went to court twice till they gave him back his flag, No-One then confronted Prince Charles in the Botanical Gardens, stood in his path . . .

RL: How did Charles react to this?

MM: He was afraid. Surely his worst fear is of the faceless person in the crowd.

RL: How did you know he was afraid?

MM: Because he was about this far away when he started saying 'Which way do I go, which way do I go?'

RL: That's the whole thing about the British royalty. There's always someone there to tell them exactly what to do. If they lose that they're actually very lost. They're moved through a totally artificial continuum, which always smells of fresh paint. But what exactly happened?

MM: Well, the Lone Anzac was on the crossroads of these paths. The official party, with about seventy of the international press were approaching the Lone Anzac. Also around the Prince were a lot of schoolkids. The schoolkids saw the Lone Anzac, rushed ahead and surrounded him. Then the press saw the kids surrounding the Lone Anzac, and the press raced ahead of the Prince. By this stage, there was a complete large circle around the Lone Anzac, so in order for the official party to travel along the path, they had to break into the circle. So all of a sudden, they were enclosed. In this moment, there was panic. Very contained panic. But sort of an electricity that in many ways is what I thrive off, as a performer. All Charlie Windsor said was, 'Which way do I go, which way do I go?' and in point of fact was taken down the wrong path and had to come back. To me this was a clash of symbols. There was a republican symbol, and there was a symbol of monarchy. The meeting of two symbols. I really like this aspect of it.

RL: You said you felt he was afraid . . .

MM: I think, in a way, No-One is a terrorist. The archetypal terrorist image is the non-face. Surely, for this man, in a very human level, this must be one of his worst fears. Now, after the arrest of the Lone Anzac on Australia Day 1981, I had become very cautious about such confrontation. I'd actually rung up and informed the National Security organisation, which is called PROTOCOL, that the Lone Anzac would be there. What surprised me was that he was confronting No-One without the knowledge that No-One was going to be there. That he hadn't been briefed on it. That surprised me, because I'd briefed PROTOCOL.

RL: So there was either a mistake, in that you weren't picked up beforehand, or somebody just decided deliberately to let it happen.

MM: Well, that sounds pretty



outrageous though, doesn't it! I also remember, in this incident, the distinct presence of someone behind me. The power of No-One is in the stillness and the silence. It is the silence and the stillness that haunts people, disturbs people. There's been the most extraordinary reactions to No-One. I respect the power of No-One

RL: So what came next?

MM: There was a 12 hour vigil on Bondi beach on Anzac Day — when Australia celebrates its defeat, and it's one of the major celebrations in Australia. The Lone Anzac on Anzac Day 1981 was on the beach from dawn till midday. He pitched a tent and camped on the beach with his flag. Then the Lone Anzac went to the Australian Rules Grand Final, which is a football match where 130,000 people turned up. For me this was a really symbolic event where sport met art. The Lone Anzac stood knee-deep in beer cans under the scoreboard, which is where all the yobboes go, because it's where the cheapest tickets are, and became part of this cultural event. After the match had finished, this drunk person came up to the Lone Anzac and said 'You're the ugliest thing I've ever seen' then poured beer over him. For me this was like a baptism. Art was finally consummated within the sport context.

RL: So finally you staged *The Invasion of No-One*, in Orange, a suburban New South Wales town, using 130 school kids. Schoolchildren tend to be highly conservative in an odd way. How did you get them to participate?

MM: Told them it was a secret. Only those who would participate in the project would be told the secret. That was my recruiting technique. What I promised those kids who did finally volunteer was to give them a voice in the community. That was the aim of the project, fundamentally. So the first thing that appeared was a poster, based on the Kitchener pointing figure, only saying No-One Wants You. It was a four star US General without a face. A week after the poster appeared, two things happened. One was when the local residents opened their newspaper there was the poster. On the same day, a large silver

PHOTOS / ROBERT MCFARLANE





The No-Ones line up for inspection

Fairlane, with the numberplate saying No-One slowly cruised into town with a No-One chauffeur, and in the back seat was the figure from the posters, who was particularly interested in one block of the centre of town, and would pace around taking notes and cruising about. There were a number of official functions in town that day. The General would just sort of slip in to these functions. One of these was with the Federal Minister for the Arts, who got very nervous. He had turned down my invitation to join me for lunch in the cage at the zoo (an earlier performance) which I was always a bit pissed off about. When General No-One appeared in the crowd, he forgot his speech entirely and started to apologise to me for not turning up for lunch. That evening he was booked into a restaurant, and so was General No-One. General No-One arrived — the secret password in the whole invasion operation was 'there's movement at the Station' which is the first line of a classic Australian poem by Andrew Patterson, the Man from Snowy River — there was a very successful film made of it. So, when the official party from Canberra arrived at this restaurant, by predetermined arrangement, the owner rang HQ, the office of the whole operation, and just said 'There's movement at the station' at which point the General left HQ, arrived in his chauffeur driven car. At the restaurant the General was shown to his table, the owner of the restaurant saying 'your usual table' which just happened to be diagonally across from the official party table, and the General was served his 'usual meal' which was a crystal glass bowl full of brains and hearts.

RL: Winning Hearts and Minds.

MM: Yes. So then General No-One disappeared never to be seen again. But on the following Monday, ten identically dressed No-Ones appeared in the inner city. They were all in yellow uniforms. On Tuesday twenty appeared. On Wednesday fifty, on Thursday a hundred, and on Friday a hundred and thirty appeared. On Friday also, on the steps of the Sydney Opera House, two of the kids handed a message to the first of thirty adult

runners — this message was — in the five weeks I had been working with them I had taught them a parliamentary system of debate, where they discussed issues concerning them. From that they had to formulate a message to the world. The runners, in a relay, carried this message across the Blue Mountains to Orange. It was timed that the last runner would arrive in the middle of the final performance on Saturday. So after the 130 had infiltrated pretty well all day on the Friday, at 0500 on the Saturday morning we closed off a block of the main street, which is also the Great Western Highway, with 130 chairs facing the post office. The post office was always a focal point for the attention of the No-Ones, they always hung around the post office — it's where all the kids who are on the dole hang about. So it started with the kids arriving en masse, as No-One, sitting in the chairs and just waiting. They were waiting for the message to arrive from Sydney. Then we released 130 sheep, which just wandered around. Then we broadcast a video, very loud, of the kids saying what they thought of Orange, Australia and the world. Just as the video finished it was announced that the two runners from Sydney were arriving — the timing had worked out exceedingly well. The two runners were a white woman and an aboriginal man. They ran in with the message. One of the No-Ones emerged from the centre of the 130, elected by the others, unwrapped and took the message of the message stick, read the message, then submerged back into the No-Ones. They then handed out sheets displaying the message while on the video there was just an old bloke playing a very haunting clarinet. Then they disappeared never to be seen again..

RL: What kind of reaction happened in the town?

MM: The largest reaction was to the posters. The morning that Orange woke up to the poster, the town was in almost a state of anarchy. I was staying in a hotel at the centre of town. We were woken up, my friend and I, at 7.30 that morning with people discussing the posters in the back lane which our room looked out onto. The kids had postered overnight with great enthusiasm. Concentrating on the centre of town, on the pillars of the courthouse, on the RSL (Returned Servicemen's League) which is like the temple of the Anzacs — its a place

where everyone goes and gets pissed. No-One talked about the content of the poster. It was just that they were everywhere and this was a clean city. The thing was that Orange has a huge heroin problem, here are one thousand heroin cases going through the local court every year, which is the highest outside the metropolitan area in the State. No one ever speaks about that. The local papers never mention it. But this was front page news for three days.

RL: What was the basis of the headlines?

MM: Youth project creates scandal. The district ABC manager also took offence and refused to broadcast any festival of Arts information until all the posters had been taken down. Then it reached the Sydney Morning Herald and national television. But the kids, when they started infiltrating, faced incredible negativity. I saw old ladies walking this way across a pedestrian crossing and five No-Ones walking the other way, and digging one of them in the ribs, quite violently. I saw middle aged people wrap up newspapers and hit them on the back of their heads.

RL: How did the kids feel about all this? Did their parents attempt to intervene?

MM: I think on a number of kids there was huge pressure from the parents. But you see the whole thing was a top secret operation, the kids were really into it, and no matter what pressure they were under they wouldn't tell. I think this caused a lot of problems for them, yes.

RL: While this must have been very exciting for the kids, aren't you a bit concerned about the long term effects this kind of work might have on the social fabric of Orange. I think there's a great responsibility for artists who are engaged in that kind of subversive work. Once it's all over, mightn't it lead to a greater . . .

MM: Despondency. Yes, but one of the big things that came out of the invasion of no-one was HQ — where they could all drop around and have coffee, smoke their cigarette, use the typewriter . . . and I tried to persuade the council to make something permanent out of it. I agree with you, I think that sort of responsibility is essential. Because you can't bring the kids way up there and just leave them. The fall down is too high. It's like those environmental art projects which spread chemicals through the snow.





VIEW FROM THE SOUTH

The Experimental Art Foundation was the first 'alternative' art space to be started up in Australia. LOUISE DAUTH explains why it is unique:

Rob La Frenais: What was the situation at the EAF when you first arrived?

Louise Dauth: In the eastern states the only thing that Adelaide was, was the EAF, to the art community in Sydney. I came and found that it was an organisation in difficulty, that it had, through a number of internal and external forces, undergone some changes, and lost some energy, I reckon. It had become a bit directionless.

RL: It was part of the early renaissance of Australian art space, in which all over the country suddenly began to happen at the same time?

LD: It was the first art space to be set up. It was set up in 1974 as the first large non-gallery space, the first non-commercial space.

RL: So you were moving into a place with quite a history. It meant quite a lot to you before you came here, in terms of Australian art history.

LD: I never rationalised it, or knew the details. When I helped set up Artspace — I was co-chair of the first board of management — we used the EAF as an example. We took their constitution and used it as an example.

RL: What kind of work was this place particularly known for?

LD: It was founded for performance art, conceptual art, post-object art, as a venue for what was experimental.

RL: Would you say that it had a particular Adelaide flavour or style?

LD: No. In fact one of the things that I discovered, which is the curiosity of history, was that it had made its reputation largely by bringing people into Adelaide. The town both consumes, loves and hates, external stuff.

RL: But I think that's general to all of Australia. It's one of those things that can be projected outwards.

LD: Yes. But this is a relatively small town. It is a million people a long way from anywhere. It's like the festival it has here. It has this fantastic cultural overload once every two years, and it's almost as much as this town can take. Afterwards, it goes back into a dormant condition.

RL: Yet it certainly gains quite a cultural identity from that. South Australian numberplates proclaim it as the 'Festival State'. That can't just be blind bureaucracy or imported Sydney attitudes. There must be a strong local feeling towards having such a large amount of culture here.

LD: It is a city which has some of the most progressive legislation history — like being the first place in Australia to decriminalise homosexuality, like the first place to give women the vote. It really has got an image of itself as

Tripping the light Fantastic by Pam Harris and Michele Luke



being civilised. It's part of the founding fathers stuff — that it was founded without convicts. The recent performance by Pam Harris and Michele Luke at EAF (see picture) is based on the writing of Colonel Light, who designed Adelaide. He says things like it's terrific that it's so far from Sydney and Melbourne, because it won't get any of the ragamuffins.

RL: Now, in this town founded by a retired colonel, there is an art scene what seems to be almost entirely run by women. Women seem to be extraordinarily active here. More so than in other places.

LD: I think that it is more so because it's . . . I might as well damn myself I guess . . . because Adelaide is a small town, you can only go so far if you are at all ambitious. Cultural training is for men to be ambitious, and women not to be. So, if you are a man, and you are in Adelaide, you take it so far, then use it as a stepping stone to go to Sydney and Melbourne. Women, having been socially conditioned not to be ambitious in that way, and by getting linked to families and things, tend to stay in Adelaide. So you have this range of very competent and skilled women — there are enough men in Adelaide, but the ones who are ambitious in terms of getting to the top of organisations and running things, leave Adelaide — with the exception that there are a lot of gay men in Adelaide, and within the arts. In the 1970's gay men did move to South Australia because it was the only place it was decriminalised. People also moved here in the seventies when there was the first Labour state government for a number of years — although they were really making up for all the money the Liberals had never spent on the arts, it looked as though there was this phenomenal injection of money into the arts in South Australia — that's when it really became a focus. There were all sorts of good legislation about homesteading and grants for artists that would allow them to buy land. So lots of people moved down, moved up to the hills, bought little cottages, started producing hand made flutes — it was a bit hippy-trippy, you know. It really did become a focus for the arts then. With the subsequent liberal government, funding to the arts did suffer and with now a slow erosion it is not the power place to be if you're a male. So, people tend to leave.

RL: But one also had the idea that women were very active in the art

community, and this was a compensator, or an equaliser for places where there are men ruling the roost, to have a place where women are taking the corporate decisions in art much more. EAF seems to have a national reputation now as a place where not only do women hold the key posts, but also where there is provided a sympathetic environment for women's and feminist-based work.

LD: There's a terrible danger in that, of becoming marginalised. I fight against that, and I'm now in a position where I have to take an affirmative action for men, in a way.

RL: Affirmative action for men!

LD: But Adelaide does have a very strong history of women. It was the founding place for the women's art movement in Australia. The women's art movement has had a varied life, was based in the seventies, and over the last few years . . . the forces of the Left always schism, and always end up self-destructing. The Women's Art Movement still exists, but I don't think it exercised any critical judgment on the basis of — if it was by a woman it was all right — it rejected any other basis for assessment, and when people that tried to introduce other processes, or non-separatist lines, or tried to introduce another set of values about worth of work. It ended up with the movement almost coming to a halt. It is now a very small movement in a very small area of Adelaide. Here at EAF, we've been accused of being the new WAM, which is ridiculous.

RL: You mean that a process has been completed, and women are now not having to be judged as 'women artists' but as artists specifically. The word 'woman artist' becomes as redundant as 'man artist'.

LD: That's the societal process that has happened, and I think that's a healthy thing. It's the same reason that photography centres are dying, because photography is no longer, should no longer be a separate form to the body of art process. I personally don't think that the Women's Art Movement here took sufficient account of that development, and self-marginalised by hanging on rigidly to a separatist, uncritical framework. Mind you, the backlash is that a lot of the rules are still run by the boys, so 'let's all be just artists' attitude means they can say on a one-off basis 'so what if there's only 30% women?'

RL: You get a creeping backlash, not even a conscious thing, where you

suddenly get prizes and selections which just happen to have eight men to two women. People stop noticing it, and it starts happening with monotonous regularity.

LD: All the time. And if you start doing it the other way which is the danger I now have, of starting to be perceived as putting on only women's work, or only employing women, or primarily employing women, you end up being marginalised and people saying 'they're just about women . . .

RL: So male artists don't bother to come here.

LD: It's a very delicate line to tread. But when you talk about it being nice to have a place where women are in positions of power — amongst the contemporary Art Space directors I'm the only female. Anne Virgo, who was running Bitumen River Gallery, which is a similar, but different space, and now running the Arts Council Gallery is an exception, but . . .

RL: It's still a case of step down boys.

LD: Yes. Commercial galleries — there are a lot of women in commercial galleries in Australia, which is an interesting thing. Sydney is full of commercial galleries run by women. Melbourne's full of commercial galleries run by men.

RL: Tell me how you see the EAF developing in future years.

LD: I think that the whole question of contemporary art spaces in Australia is at some kind of watershed. We are underfunded and under-resourced for the level of expectations that are placed on us. We have a society which does not have the varied infrastructure that Canada the US and England has. You don't have that range of types of commercial galleries and types of public space. In both England and North America you have a much wider range of options for showing and discussing artwork.

RL: You mean that everything here is dominated very much by the public sector?

LD: That's true, I think, but that's not quite the point I was making. What I was trying to say was that there are here commercial galleries, and there are state and national galleries, and regional galleries, which are all much of a muchness. There's nothing in between. What we are becoming is another step in filling in that gap, in the provision of artists services and access to space.●



DISTANCED PAIRS

Collaboration can be a problem between two artists, when your other half is on the other side of a continent. JULIAN GODDARD profiles two pairs of artists who are faced with this problem peculiar to Australia:

I first saw David Watt perform in Hobart, Tasmania in May 1983. I'd read and heard about the famous *Heroes* performance in Adelaide in which Watt set fire to a ring of shoes while reciting the names of various cultural heroes. Somehow one shoe managed to explode just as Disney's name was announced. This performance managed to get a great amount of attention in the Australian art press and I was looking forward to seeing the Hobart pieces. I wasn't disappointed.

Anzart in Hobart, 1983, was an exchange of Australia and New Zealand artists concentrating on performance, video and installations. Watt did several performances with Adrian Jones and Stephen Wigg. The Watt/Wigg collaboration dates from 1980 and continues today.

All the Anzart pieces were critical of consumerist culture. One performance involved Watt and Wigg, back to back at opposite ends of a see-saw pivoting on a rock, struggling, trying to out balance each other and to free themselves from ropes. Over this image ran a sound track of staccatto voices taken from radio, saying things like, 'do this, now ... at the ... keep it'. The American voice seemed to control the performers.

Anybody growing up in Australia in the 1950's as did Watt and Wigg was dated by American models of behaviour and culture. 'Leave it To Beaver', 'My Three Sons', 'Father Knows Best' taught Australia's kids what it was like to be American. The Americanisation of Australia post World War II was, and still is, possibly the strongest international influence on the community. Watt ques-

tions the validity of this cultural/behavioural domination through highlighting the pathos of the imagery and stereotyped ways of acting that was the appearance of 50's American television culture.

With Wigg the two have produced over 30 separate performances in the last 5 years all questioning the alienation of commodification.

The use of advertising in the propagation of ideology is a persistent source for critical enquiry.

In *Eye to Eye* the sincerity of eye contact is put through microscopic scrutiny. The audience was confronted by an image of two bodies supporting large television monitors, each displaying a giant eye. The metaphors are endless but the one that counts is the direct experience the audience has of every minute movement of the eyes. Eventually the eyes become a pair looking at the audience asking for sincerity in the audience's response. A simple idea pushed to a level of articulation that requires anyone watching to re-assess their day to day contact with people and the conventionalised ways of dealing with everyday encounters.

In a piece presented recently at Praxis called *How to Succeed in a Man's World*, Watt parodied images of successful male careers of the 50's and 60's. Images of managers, accountants, executives striking poses of efficiency, hard work and responsibility were pitched against a soundtrack of South Pacific pastiche in front of which Watt danced with giant hands and a giant smile.

He plays the part of the Chaplinesque fool dragging the whole show into the depths of ridicule and eventual pathetic futility.

Watt and Wiggs performances are usually humorous — never funny.

Their simple humour relies upon decontextualising of images. '*The Dick Van Dyke Show* today looks very odd, very strange but not very funny' says Watt, yet it is in the reconstruction of these images that the humour is located. Parody is second nature to Australian comedians; even if it is usually a parody of the Australian character-witness Barry Humphries or Norman Gunston. It is in the satirical mimicry of images, movements, ways of behaving and language that Watt and Wigg have been successful in combining humour and wit as a base for critical analysis of consumerist culture.

David Watt lives in Perth, Stephen Wigg in Adelaide, 2,500 kilometres away. The distance of their collaboration only strengthens their keenness to work together and in a way reflects the craziness that is Australia. That two performance artists can maintain a working partnership despite such a great distance is witness to their commitment and persistence, and their personal achievement.

Pam Kleemann and Anne Graham have collaborated on a number of performances since 1981 when they first worked together on *Window Dressings*, a piece at the Old Praxis space on the main street in Fremantle. *Window Dressings* was just that; two women undressing,

dressing and striking poses in a shop window.

'This performance related to female identity crisis:— How to look beautiful, be sexual, charming, intelligent, a good mum, independent, how to cope, how we try on different personalities, looking for the one that will cover the spectrum'.

What seems to have started as a kind of mutual assistance has since developed into a complex and sophisticated dialogue between two women about their individual identities and their roles as women artists.

In *No Protective Layers*, 1983, clothing or more precisely, bondage of a social metaphor maintained the initial interest in the manipulation of women's appearance. The performance involved a ritual undressing and eventual celebration of 'the nature' of the body.

The histories of women's suppression and the use of clothing as a means of insulation and alienation from the 'natural environment' were represented by their wearing and shedding of layer upon layer of calico bandage. The slow constant pace set by a soundtrack of Japanese music made the piece take on a ritualistic appearance. The end of the performance came in a symbolic marking of their bodies with ochre.

This shift from an image of woman as a body repressed and constrained, to that of a body of strength and celebration gave the performance a quiet power of liberalisation.

The later works have continued to explore the primitive power of the body as an opposition to conservative ideology.

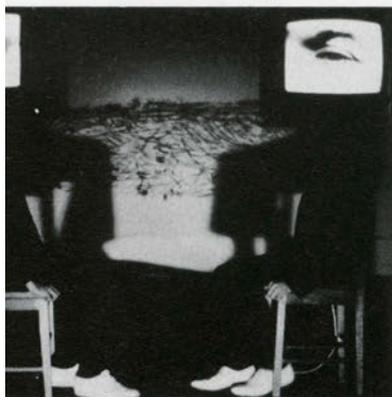
In *A Fine Line*, the most recent collaboration, Kleemann and Graham questioned the problems of choice and the uncertainty and contradictions in making 'decisions'. The luxury of having to decide, as opposed to primitive motivations and the need to survive were examined in the context of another ritual-like process. This time the use of water, fire and slow movements gave the work an underpinning of a spiritual/religious statement.

This work involved the most elaborate stage props the two have used, with the construction of a boat, a cage and a dinner setting with Graham taking the role of the male in dinner suit and Kleemann in enchanting evening dress.

The elaborate juxtaposition of everyday images of mundane ritual (watching TV, having dinner) with the powerful primitive ritual use of fire and water was meant to remind us of our instinctual life. The reflection of older rituals embodied in our daily living suggests a kind of

Cont. page 22

Watt and Wiggs,
Eye to Eye



THE MENACING CURVE OF THE ABSENT ARTIST

ANN BERRIMAN on some performance artists who have constructed static and time-based installations for the Sydney Biennale:

The best Biennale venue is set upon water. Utilising an abandoned warehouse on Pier 2 at Walsh Bay in Sydney Harbour, the exhibition expands into a huge basilica-like structure which allows ample space for each artist to show his works. Far from the constrictions of pristine gallery walls, the warehouse provides both breadth and height, giving breathing space to even the largest of sculptures and installations.

A black-bull hide, a black grand piano and a large black box are the objects set up by the three more well known performance artists in Australia, Anne Graham, Ken Unsworth and Mike Parr. The installations relate to their past performances, but they themselves are absent from them. For each of them the presence of the body has had various meanings, the body as activator of the installation, representative of the social body, metaphor for personal quest and as language for what cannot be said or translated.

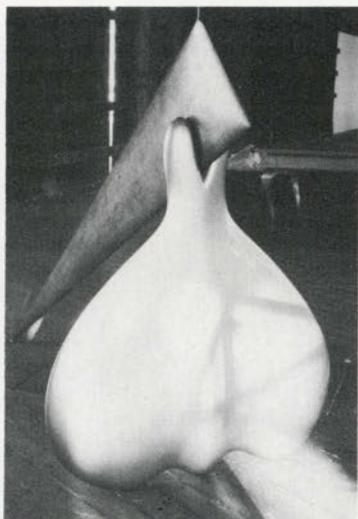
In the absence of the physical body, should the artist be part of the work, and how does the presence or absence relate to self-portraiture?

Anne Graham's installation of a graphite-coated table with a mound of salt, brilliant under a spot light, is set in front of the stretched hide. Its soft skin is pinioned to the wall with great spikes, while simulated horns curve menacingly above it.

A chair at the end of the table suggests the imminence of a high priest or priestess to officiate at the altar.

The nature of the tableau is enigmatic, but the tips of the sensually curved table legs are red. A form of a large pink heart, its rounded cleft penetrated by the blunt end of a tapering shaft, sits symbolically aside. The hard metallic surface conveys a sense of an inescapable destiny in relation to the ritual. Blood must be let, vulnerability must be pierced.

In her previous work, *Balancing Acts*, (to do with birth and impregnation) Graham, with an associate, Joan Grounds, carried out a ritualised fertility dance. Appearing as vestal virgins in drapes, Graham rose from a foetal position in



front of a large pink amphora, tearing out of a shroud of cloth. They both took the surrounding complementary parts of sculpture and coupled them.

These male and female components of shafts, discs and bows, coloured grey, pink and yellow, suffuse suggestively at points of contact. They remain, as sculptures, as vital in their mating dance as when activated by the performers.

Graham deals with female fecundity and mutability on a personal and historical level together with patriarchal oppression.

The work for the Biennale, *A Fine Line* contrasts and equates aspects of contemporary life with a conceived natural or primitive pattern of behaviour. Graham is 'prime mover' and activator of the ritual which will evolve as the work develops through stages.

While Graham's work can be seen as literal, linear narrative, Ken Unsworth's compositions operate on an emotional level. In this current work, created as a homage to Beuys, a middle C is played mechanically on the piano. This repre-

ated note drums on the mind subconsciously, presaging some hidden threat. Accompanied as it is by the continuous ring of the telephone, the already aggravated sense of urgency is even further aroused.

In past works, Unsworth's body has been an integral part of the installation. Propped up on sticks against a wall, covered with sand like an hour glass, his body has been a metaphor for the social body.

Although absent in the new work, one is still conscious of some human presence. The piano is suspended by wires weighted with round river stones, forming a boundary. It hovers like a grey eminence of enigmatic proportions near the entrance to the exhibition. Beneath it lie a walking stick and a graded spiked seat. On a crazed mirror, forming the front plate of the piano, is the name 'Elizabeth Volodarsky'. Though the work is imposing by normal standards, it is at ease with the solid construction of the warehouse with its strutted roof and rows of square wooden pillars. When struck by a shaft of light through the high windows it gives a sensation of Gothic splendour.

Unsworth, known for his enigmatic and dramatic installations, plays on his audiences' subconscious. Unable to alter the course of events he manipulates and juxtaposes elements in order to arouse a similar emotion in the viewer. He has also rendered these dark forces in paint, concealing an image of himself in the landscape.

In past works he has had himself covered with sand as though poured from an hour-glass and propped himself on sticks leaning precariously against the wall. Although absent from this installation in the Biennale a personal element is inherent in the playing of the note on the piano and in the ringing of the telephone waiting to be answered.

Mike Parr's shadowy room-sized box is placed at the end of the Pier. Its dull, black surface fuses with the wood of the walls. One door opening draws the viewer into the interior. There is nothing inside but the gloomy atmos-

Ann Graham's *A Fine Line*





OF THE SACRED IN THE AIR!

ACTION 1

Chameleon Inc.
Artists Studios and Gallery
46 Campbell Street
P.O. Box 281 C HOBART. 7001
Telephone (002) 34.2744
Friday 22 November 1985
AN EXHIBITION OF POST
PERFORMANCE ART

I am writing to artists who utilize Performance with a view to curating an exhibition of performance documentation and post performance work at Chameleon, Hobart during the first half of 1986. . . .

Yours sincerely
David O'Halloran
Curator²

ACTION 2

PERFORMED AND PRESENT
May 3rd to May 24th 1986
The Art Army Anne Graham Ex de
Medici Peter Stitt Allan Vizents³

ACTION 3

Through his poster (see illustration), Ray Arnold has represented post-performance documentation as promising plenty of meaningful gestures, lack of metaphor and a 'from clearly discernible concerns, disintegrating into silence/no meaning/void' once you have got the message approach, which for many offenders was somewhere about 1918. Others gave it liberty until the mid-seventies, and others, totally sick of lack of profits, gave it the BIG A at WEST KUNST, COLOGNE in 1981, by ignoring it all but totally.

(Gilbert and George did it with cibachromes; Marina Abramovic and Ulay with large format polaroids; Chris Burden is alive and well in the video collection at the National Film Library; Mike Parr's smile is no longer on ice⁴ but hanging large from the walls in most major Australian collections, and more.)

Yet, Performance Art, deregulated to 70's mainstream history by the dominant discourse, still gets tickets.

ACTION 4

A visiting curator was overheard to say, 'Who is this artist. I haven't seen him in the catalogues.'

'THE POWER OF POSITIVE OCCUPATION OVER RANDOM DECONSTRUCTION'

The Art Army (Bronte Edwards and David Hansen)

I have a curious sense of privilege when looking at contemporary work from geographically regional areas, especially this one; my home town. There but for FLUXUS, go I.

I use geographical as the participants in this show could well be described as 'regional' but more in the cerebral rather than the geographical sense.

These two regionalists, The Art Army, are from South East, South Australia and nearby across the border, Victoria.

BLUE FORCES (Hansen-Colonel-Warrnambool) involved himself with acts of physical and quasi-spiritual aggression against his friend and colleague, Bronte Edwards (Commander-in-Chief — Mount Gambier).

Hansen is, or was, Director of the Warrnambool Art Gallery according to a letter I found inside the cover of a book, MARCEL DUCHAMP;⁵ prominently displayed among the debris or 'DEVICES' that are part of the Art Army's post-performance documentation. This, together with a photo-copy summarising Chris Burden's performance work in Italian and English, less for the benefit of the immigrant pine fellers in the area than a communique from the deep, dark slums of dominant discourse, courtesy Rank Xerox, Flash Art and a good doer for brothers in the regional wilderness, further excites my respectful curiosity about work of this derivitisation in an area where terrorism is the guest speaker at the Rotary Club.

Is Hansen slumming it; is he implementing a community arts concept programme which will benefit the porcelain collection; can he only get Rambo and the selected works of Chris

Burden at the corner video store, or what?

Hansen is the 'POSITIVE OCCUPIER', re-affirming the 'POWER' of 'POSITIVE OCCUPATION' over 'RANDOM DECONSTRUCTION'.

Is Hansen, the bureaucrat, envious of Edwards, the random deconstructionist. Is Edwards, the random deconstructionist making enough out of it to afford a MERCEDES,⁶ or doesn't he care about it or does Hansen think Edwards cares enough about it to allow material immaculate possession to hold sway over incidental acquirement. There's something wild and weird going on. Maybe they should clear fell the area rather than looking through filtered forests of information expressed through titrated cultural codes — private at that. Perhaps a serial comic with further adventures of these two brothers in arms, the positive occupier and the random deconstructionist, would make an appropriate follow on.

Two objects from her performance, Balancing Acts IV 1985, were exhibited by Anne Graham. These were two of the six or so objects Graham used in the performance and were, I believe, bought by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, not in some cupboard category post-performance art, I am sure, but as objects in their own right, i.e. sculptures.

During her ritualised performance, Graham addressed each object in turn, attempting to charge each object with significance.

To my mind, she did not succeed, and in transposing these objects to the context under discussion they assume an aura of puzzling inclusion, except perhaps to allow an opportunity for Nigel Helyer to use her catalogue space with an essay on the power of propaganda.

... how much more effective does (this) concussion of the real and imaginary become when we consider those intentionally beguiling objects that constitute the world of culture? Already fully decked with their own capacity for self re-flexivity; manufactured as it were

· P E R F O
E x h i b i
r m e d a n
S a t u r d
r d a y M a
n c l u d e
G r a h a m
r S t i t t
· C u r a t
l o r a n
e P e r f o
· D a t e s
t o S a t u
6 · A r t i
r t A r m i
M e d i c i
V i z e n
T i l e P
s e n · D
3
· A m i s
A m e
V c
O ' H
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3

for reproduction!

Leni Reifenstahl, 'the innocent bystander/film maker who had the dubious privilege of recording the sombre events of 1934 Nuremberg on Film, was a principal protagonist in the design and 'fabrication' of Nazi myths at Nuremberg,' Helyer quotes Sontag.

All is not well on this centre spread, Helyer takes pains to say. I hope he was paid an artist's fee for his contribution.

Peter Stitt deals with Nuremberg directly and subjectively. He takes exhaustive multi-layered steps to let his gallery audience know that his personal sense of outrage is focused back in 1934.

In the setting of his audio-visual, the display of found and acquired objects with documentation of previous work, he has presented an installation that keeps the viewers attention for at least half the audio and 2 or 3 times through the slide sequence.

Stitt writes in his catalogue notes, that this work, 'CAMOUFLAGE, . . . attempts to offer a view of a hidden order, quiet

disguises attempting to hide the truth as past and present governments constantly do.'

He doesn't achieve this broader view due to the overriding power of his central imagery. There's a lot of mileage in holocaust. This installation is more like a museum of personal concern, private and singular when stripped back. Evidently, he was the only artist in the show to install his own work, reflective of his personal concern with both his subject matter and audience.

The other two works in this show complete the brief history of performance concerns over the last two decades.

Allan Vizents, 'actions in a landscape setting,' is clearly rationalised in his catalogue essay; . . . 'the images appear rather simple and tinged with irony . . . the disjuncture(is) the failure to relate to history in terms of Australian visual culture.'

This series of images was originally published in a small edition book, Clear Testing 1982.

Books don't sit well on walls.

Vizents concludes his catalogue notes, 'I have come to prefer ordinary language and the narrative structure, with most of the energy focused on content, or cultural reference.'

Vizents is a clear thinker and strong performer, and as his last produced audio tape DECOMPOSING HORROR, 1985 (included in the show) indicates, he has done well to leave his earlier synthesised/voice mixes behind in favour of a purer delivery of his multi-layered narratives.

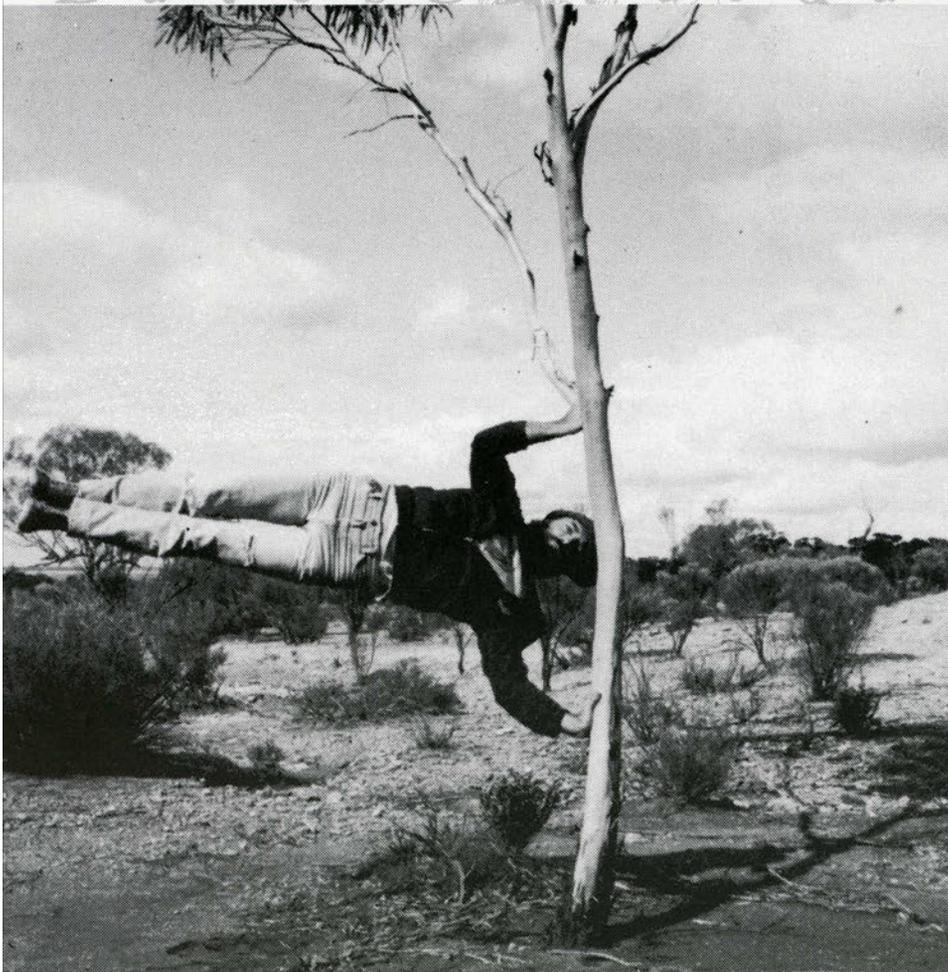
Ex de Medicis rationalises her post performance art contribution with classical process statements and I can't get beyond this to get a clear view of her drawings which have the strongest visual impact of the show, but that's not what this show is about.

ACTION 5 (FINAL)

The curator sends out his ideas, looks at what comes back, balances it, re-organises his concept according to responses to the ideas and THERE, it EXISTS, with a CATALOGUE to prove it and now a REVIEW.

Am I the Leni Reifenstahl of O'Halloran's performance? ●

Allan Vizents' 'actions in a landscape setting'



- 1 Nigel Helyer. Catalogue essay accompanying Anne Graham's 'Balancing Acts IV 1985' in PERFORMED & PRESENT.
- 2 Flyer sent to artists, David O'Halloran 22/11/85.
- 3 Page 1. Catalogue, PERFORMED & PRESENT.
- 4 Mike Parr. Performance. Adelaide Festival of Arts 1980.
- 5 MARCEL DUCHAMP. Ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine Museum of Modern Art N.Y. 1973. Reduced from \$30 to \$12.50. Frontispiece altered by Hansen (presumably).
- 6 Meanwhile, in Warrnambool and elsewhere, Blue Forces (Hansen) were engaged in a series of 'terrorist' actions against objects made by or belonging to Bronte Edwards, as follows: 4. Kicking in the door of Edwards' Mercedes-Benz — extract from catalogue.



JILL SCOTT

Rob La Frenais: Your current work in video draws very much from science fiction and mythology. SF has always been dogged by literalism. How do you get away from this?

Jill Scott: I'm really quite interested in trying to manipulate and change the concept of the archetype. My references become abstract, but start from a fairly literal base. Because I'm feeding in my own imagination they actually become abstract, and yet one can see through that.

RL: You name your planets after certain women with references to contemporary Australia . . .

JS: Planet Queenie, Planet Eve, I'm really interested in trying to cross-fertilise time — I think time travel's the most interesting component of science fiction — and to actually cross reference the past and the future. You're taking notions and you're actually scrambling . . . it's the stirring of the pot, it's the sort of feminism that stirs the pot around rather than being outrageous, or enraged, or . . . poor little me, I'm interested in stirring the symbols, stirring the metaphors.

RL: How did you get to science fiction after doing body art, or endurance art, or personal installation art . . . whatever you like to call it? For example, taping yourself up to the side of buildings . . .

JS: They were all references to the idea . . . I've always been interested in structuring of my own sense of poetry, in terms of the figure in the landscape. I'm still doing that in the chromakey references in my video. The actors aren't really actors, they're figures of representation, so by putting them in different landscapes, different backgrounds, I'm using similar metaphors to the ones I was using when I was being taped to the wall. I see a really direct reference there. I refer to myself as a figure consistently



From being literally taped to the wall in a number of spectacular performance art works to producing feminist science fiction video, JILL SCOTT is one of Australia's most prolific multi media artists:

and never refer to myself as I.

RL: Unlike the Californian sound artists in the forum the other day. About 20 'I's a second.

JS: Yes. I'm really not interested in that. It was a very important decision to refer to the body as a kind of entity in space. It's how we're given that information now, too. Out of media and out of books, constant references — there's an astronaut, but you can never recognise who it was, in there, in that suit. It's actually a figure, floating in a landscape. So the denial of ego's there, the denial of a direct reference to any particular people. That's why I'm really enjoying at the moment doing this thing in my videos — using all the major figures in the art world in Sydney.

RL: As performance?

JS: Yes, as performance. So the

next one's with Rosalyn Oxley, the main gallery dealer here. The previous one had Anne Graham playing the horse, there was Hilary Mace, who's married to the Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. That seems like a contradiction, in a way, when you think about that I'm trying to objectify the figure, by using certain personalities. At the same time I'm objectifying those personalities! So I'm putting them into a situation where they're almost unrecognisable, towards the aim of what I'm trying to do.

RL: Are they all women?

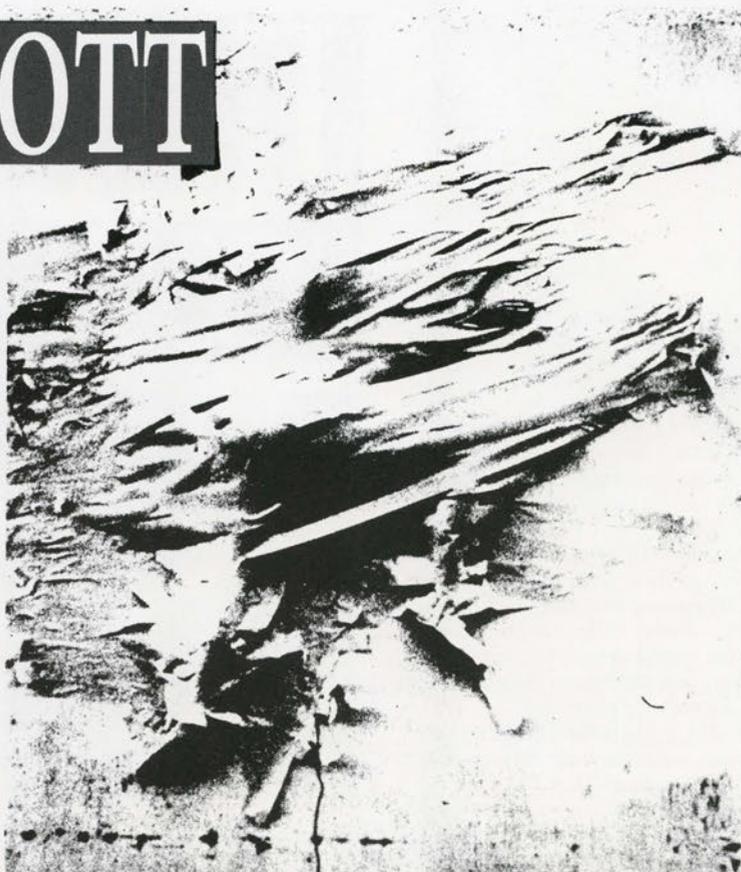
JS: A lot of women, yes. Though the major art critic here, Terence Malloon, his boyfriend Luigi is in the next one as well. So that's quite an interesting reference. I'm in a lot of them too. I am a Muslim water bearer who is saved by the people from outer space. I tend to match the people with the roles that I'm interested in them playing. I've written a pilot for TV geared to adolescents . . . that's where I think the most interesting audience is at the moment . . . It's a science fiction work about a woman called Zera who lives on the Planet X, which is nowhere of course, X being the shape of the planet that never exists, planets being round, and it's a red jungle planet. Who commands the red jungle but Jane, the opposite of Tarzan, who is a computer. She has a real strong attitude towards different ways of education, which means that she sends Zera out time travelling to decipher media on different planets. The first trip she takes is to the Australian desert, and all she finds is the rubbish discarded by adolescents who throw comics out of cars. She has the physical ability to look at a graphic image and bring it to life, make it stand up and have conversations with it. I'm really interested in taking levels of popular culture, and the same time these other levels of symbolism and the idea of the

PHOTO / ROB LA FRENAIS





JILL SCOTT



Above left: Scott taped to Wall.
Right: Scott's planets.

figure that comes out of my performance art. Those two exist simultaneously. So not only does it appeal to on a popular cultural level to the adolescent audience, but at the same time it has these other significant references to a literate art audience, with a cross-fertilisation between the two audiences going on. Anyway, Zera brings to life all these evidences of Americana in Australia such as Wonderwoman, and she's grossly disappointed with them and has the ability to take out her magic pencil and colour in their bodies so they basically end up with no sexuality. In what way? She's coloured in their bodies so they're transparent. They don't have any entity, just a vacant body.

RL: Doesn't that imply a denial of sexuality?

JS: When you lose your sexuality, when you question your sexuality, I think you finally get to know yourself. By not having any, you obviously have to start thinking about what is it?

RL: Does your concentration on

video mean you've given up the physical act of performance?

JS: Not at all. I'm still doing it, but it's for the camera. It's entirely transferred. What I really used to have was not having control. For a time I really liked the whole risk component. Then after a while, I proved all that, that I could take those risks. Now, I'm much more interested in control-performance for the camera. I think that's the case with someone like Cindy Sherman — the references to roleplay and the way she's using herself in those time-warped situations are directly related to . . . she didn't come out of performance but I know she knew a lot about it before she went into doing what she's doing. I think that's quite an interesting point. The element of control can be played with in the pre-production level, not only in the post-production level.

RL: At the point of making it, you mean, it's a performance process?

JS: Yes, that deadline of filming in the studio is like the deadline for doing a performance. ●



PERFORMANCE ART. WHAT THE ... ?

Earlier this year Perspecta, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, introduced some important new performance work to an international audience, SIMON PENNEY cast a critical eye over some of it:

- 1913 Futurist Russolo builds his 'intonarumori' (noise instruments) and performs his Art of Noises.
- 1914 Futurist poet Marinetti performs 'Zang Tumb Tumb' his 'onomatopoetic artillery' on the siege of Adrianople, a combination of concrete poetry, actions and noises.
- 1916 Dadaists present ludicrous and nihilistic performances at the Cabaret Voltaire, in Zurich.
- 1922 Oskar Schlemmer directs his mechanistic 'Triadic Ballet' at the Bauhaus in Dessau.
- 1948 John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Willem De Kooning and Buckminster Fuller

stage Erik Satie's 'the ruse of the Medusa' at Black Mountain College in Nth Carolina.

- 1960 Allan Kaprow presents 'the Car Crash' a happening, at Reuben Gallery in New York.
- 1960 Yves Klein drags naked women daubed in blue paint across large sheets of paper to the accompaniment of a string quartet in front of a socialite Parisian audience.
- 1965 His head covered in gold leaf and honey, Joseph Beuys mumbles to a dead hare cradled in his arms in 'Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare'.
- 1970 In 'Conversion' Vito Acconci burns the

hair off his body, hides his penis between his legs and pulled at each nipple 'in a futile attempt to produce female breasts'.
Late 1970's Australian performance artist Stellarc suspends his body by means of hooks through his flesh.

So where did that leave us, in Australia in 1985? Every two years in Sydney an exhibition called Perspecta is presented by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. This seeks to expose significant new developments in Australian art. Perspecta included the work of over one hundred and fifty artists, chosen by several curators; and occurred at the Art Gallery of New



Ideological Sound





South Wales and in several other galleries. Having made and observed performance in Australia and overseas for several years, I was intrigued to read that a performance component was to be included in the most recent *Perspecta*, and it was to be curated by Nick Tsoutas and held at the Performance Space.

The Performance Space is definitely a 'hip' venue. Operating on a shoestring budget and a skeleton staff, it manages to administer a large piece of real estate combining a large conventional theatre space, and a roomy gallery space. Nick has just completed a term as director of the space, and is also director of the savagely experimental All Out Ensemble which was based there. It is also home to the One Extra Dance Company. The theatre space accommodates a full schedule of dance and audio visual events while the gallery affords exhibition space for throngs of younger Sydney and interstate artists. Ultimately the Performance Space is one of the most significant points on the city's culture map.

Occurring over seven nights the series of performances, entitled 'An Act of Reconciliation' included the work of twelve artists or groups. So what exactly are we reconciling? As I sat in the theatre, awaiting the first performance, facing the proscenium arch, under racks of lights, I thought 'the act of reconciliation is with traditional theatre, and performance art has come more than half way'. This was a far cry from the position I found myself in a fortnight before, watching another performance in *Perspecta* but not in the Performance Space series. I was standing in the rain in St Leonards railway station goods yard, watching Arthur Wicks row a wheeled dinghy of his own construction up the railway line, a crackly PA system amplifying his and the machine's exertions. This was known territory, 'traditional' if you like, performance art.

People are seated around the edges of the space, awaiting the first performance in Sydney by Zip, a four man dance/performance group from Brisbane. They are an unknown quantity. The lights fade up to reveal, in the centre of the floor, a white mountainous thing resembling the concrete environments for mountain goats in ageing zoos. Four figures enter, in black leotards, and proceed to examine the mountain, and eventually find their way inside it.

It quivers and reveals its true identity; a pile of old wooden ironing boards, loosely draped. Commence the ironing board dances. Frenetic activity as each dancer scrambles around the pile and straps an ironing board, legs akimbo, to his back. What follows is forty five minutes of often hilarious parodies of social interactions and art forms and ideas, using the device of the ironing boards. At one point each dancer presents a solo in a particular dance style. Classical ballet, tap, Balinese dance and disco are followed by a chorus line, ironing boards flapping about madly. They lope about intimidating each other like rutting reindeer or territorial apes. At one point attention is stilled and centred upon the aesthetic arrangement of the boards around the space which is savagely

reminiscent, in it's outcome, of the minimal sculptures of Sol Lewitt. So the ironing boards, ludicrous in their domesticity, become the vehicles for wash upon wash of references to art and culture. Possessing insight, precision and a sense of humour, they were a pleasure to watch.

From the sublime we move on the next night to what verged on the ridiculous. 'Butchered Babies', from the name onwards, are all that good performance is not. Sensationalist, gaudy, *Gold Carnival* was full of sound and fury, and ultimately, signifying very little. After a somewhat confusing presentation of slides; enter into a totally gold scene (gold walls, gold floor, gold furniture) several gold performers, as cliché as their setting. The King, the Queen, the child, and some Pierrot character; replete with gold sceptres, crowns, rattles and all the appropriate paraphernalia. And so proceeds the most trifling of domestic narratives, iced with mime workshop clichés, stilted hand gestures and precocious posturing.

I wasn't persuaded, it didn't have the taste of desperation. I was reminded of a performance in the St Peters brick pit by the intellectual punk band SPK several years ago.

In an effort to shock our bourgeoisie sensibilities, the front man gingerly licked the eye of a butchered sheep's head. But he simply exposed his own timidity, if he'd had any balls he'd have sucked that eye out and spat it at the audience. Performance art rule one: No pussy-footing!

But I digress. Ultimately the work failed because it had nothing to say. Court entertainment for Louis the Sun King it could have been, but performance art for the 1980's it was not. Thankfully, *Gold Carnival* was followed by another piece *Man's World*, which, with its references to body building and male narcissism, at least gave the audience something to chew on.

A few nights later it was a pleasure to watch one of several pieces by David Watt and Stephen Wigg *Magic Moments*.

Enter two gentlemen in matching ugly brown suits, ties and oiled hair, to two tables, facing the audience. Behind these, two projection screens. In movements and mannerisms reminiscent of a vaudeville magicians routine, the first gentleman takes a small translucent blue plastic bowl in the shape of a clam shell and shows it to the audience. A projector is switched on and the shell throws patterns of undulating blue light onto the screen. With a flourish the shell is whisked away to reveal an image of Botticelli's Venus on the half shell on the screen, to appropriate applause from the audience. And so the show proceeds, visual puns woven from domestic gadgets, projected images and sound effects. At one point an electric toothbrush is switched on, raised to the microphone, and then to the screen where it is used to brush the teeth of an image of a glamour girl. In the last image of the piece, an old rotary egg beater is held up and demonstrated, the lights black out and we find ourselves in the face of a stiff breeze (two large fans have been switched on), while the

sound of helicopters, at high volume, issues from the speakers.

During the week there had been rumours of an extravaganza by the Adelaide group 'Ideological Sound'. So we gathered on the last night, waiting curiously for a work called *Gospel Choir*. At the edge of the stage, under a canopy, sits the virgin, who is in the process of receiving the annunciation, by telephone. Meanwhile, slides of religious imagery are flashed on the screen at the back of the stage. Three nuns have appeared from the back of the hall, carrying candles and dragging a trolley on which is a large cake in the shape of Christ crucified, iced in the manner of a medieval stained glass.

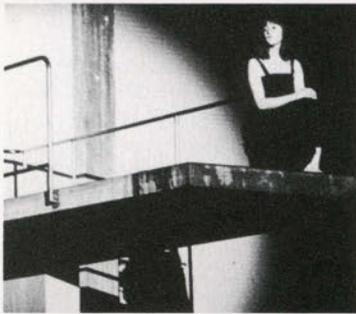
The piece is replete with irreverence (among the slides was an image of Madonna (the singer) in full flight), but leaves me wondering why I don't find it heretical or even saucy. Perhaps we are just too used to that kind of irreverence; its an old joke; or perhaps this time it wasn't told so well. Later, after a costume change, the nuns join a choir, and with many hallelujahs and 'praise the lord's', lead a southern gospel style worship. I had the feeling that someone had just thrown a bag of jigsaw pieces at me, the details were familiar, but the total picture was unclear. Sometime later, as the piece dwindled into an end of season party, the cake was cut. I took my piece, mindful of the references to 'this is my body, take and eat' and 'let them eat cake'. It was found to contain a particularly delicious variety of liquorice.

It had been an exciting, if draining week. Performance artists from all over the country had come together and presented their work to a large, and generally appreciative audience. I say generally as mid week that positive tone received a rupture. It was a piece by Derek Kreckler (see cover this issue). We were viewing a sumptuously set dinner table with a large salad platter in the middle. In the center of the platter, amid lettuce and ham, a disembodied head delivered a delirious stream of consciousness (or in this case, stream of semi-consciousness) monologue, which included a homoerotic reverie, which seemed to be directed at one of Australia's better known sports commentators. Somewhere midway, an irate and obviously heavily repressed member of the audience jumped up, over turned the table, and ran out. This nearly decapitated Derek, as his head was projecting through a hole roughly cut in the base of the stainless steel platter, and in the table below. But it did demonstrate that the work was touching a nerve. Most good progressive art is met with public outrage.

The season had been an act of reconciliation, the anarchic drives within performance had reconciled themselves with the need for a 'form' in which the activity may be viewed and understood. It was not the first 'convention' of performance art in this country, and may it not be the last. Some of the works had been extraordinary, some less than extraordinary, but it offered the artists an opportunity to discuss and develop ideas, and the audience an opportunity to experience the state of the art. ●

ROSE ENGLISH

PHOTO / PAUL DERRICK



Above and below from *Berlin*, a collaboration with Sally Potter



Middle and across: *Thee Thy Thou Thine*

PHOTO / ROGER PERRY



None has trod the fine line from pure art to entertainment more determinedly in recent years than performance diva ROSE ENGLISH. Her recent *Thee Thy Thou Thine* packed London's Bloomsbury Theatre for a week, yet she manages to carry over the experience of her more austere performance work of the seventies. STEVE ROGERS checks her for heroine status:

Steve Rogers: There seems to be two Rose English careers that I'm aware of, there may be more. Did you arrive at doing solo performances partly out of the difficulty of actually getting the money to do the big works, such as *Berlin*?

Rose English: Yes.

SR: Inevitable really. They've obviously been quite successful for you, haven't they?

RE: Yes I think that certainly you have to turn adversity to your advantage.

SR: So do you now look back and think I'm glad the Arts Council didn't give me any more money because I would never have done this?

RE: Well, to suggest that the Arts Council has determined the way I approach my work makes them appear more powerful than they've actually been. I had been working on things which were really large, with large casts, presented in large scale places. I really love that way of working but it seemed to be an impossibility to go on expecting people to do it for nothing. It seemed from the point of view of performances that basically all I had was myself, and I should just take that out there and make a show. In fact, all those early solo shows, the place that they were allowed to happen was not here but Canada. Then I brought them back here and tried to get venues interested in them.

SR: Why Canada?

RE: Because they wanted me. Nobody here did — until the Drill Hall. There was a certain period of time when there was a lot of caution in the venues. So I went elsewhere.

SR: Do you think that your work then was in the category of 'difficult'?

RE: Possibly. I'm generalising somewhat but I remember that after the 'Berlin' piece Sally Potter and I, and also by that time we'd been joined by Lindsey Cooper, the composer, we wanted to stage an opera. But we couldn't find a single venue in this country so that's when we decided to make it into a film instead. I remembered that and thought, 'I really don't want to go through that whole thing of trying to persuade people that it's a good idea on that sort of scale'. So when I came to start doing live work again I thought it was better just to do it wherever.

SR: I suppose that's the kind of challenge that lots of artists must consider — just getting up in front of an audience with little more than just themselves. Was that a process of going back to basics, did it feel like that?

RE: Yes it did. It felt both a thing of going back to basics in that the most basic thing is just being myself, but also it did correspond to things that I was passionately interested in at the same time. So it wasn't a decision that was only made because of an oppositional climate, it's always a bit of both.

Circumstance and design. At the time I was really interested in language. Before, all the work had been basically visual spectacle and didn't involve much of a text,

PHOTO / SARAH AINSLIE



ROSE ENGLISH



or language to any great extent. And I just became extremely interested in speaking. Just language itself. This was something which was behind the change — the idea of actually getting up there and speaking for an hour and a half. I hadn't been at all attracted to the idea before. I wasn't interested in performing by myself or in something based around language.

SR: First there was *Plato's Chair*, then in *The Beloved* there was an assistant, now in the new show there are really two characters. Are you developing back to working collaboratively with a group of people again?

RE: I don't know about going back to working collaboratively but certainly I've become very keen on the idea of the 'cast'. But it's true that the second performer has played a very minimal but extremely crucial role in both *The Beloved* and *Thee, Thy, Thou, Thine*. Certainly Richard Wilding's part in *Thee, Thy, Thou, Thine* was very much a development on the *The Beloved*. He gets to say lines. His presence is much more crucial. It's a sort of anchor to the whole event.

SR: He doesn't just react to things, he seems to initiate things — also, he's not what we would expect, I mean walking into the theatre and seeing two people on the stage was a bit of a surprise.

RE: I was thinking that people would expect the show to have a similar format to before. The idea of the presence throughout of this particular character, Curly — and the different sorts of effects that he had on the show, sometimes it seemed as though he was taking a very traditional sort of 'straight man' part and other times he seemed to embody a constant presence that people responded differently to. Sometimes people said he provided a constant safety from whatever else was happening, they found his presence reassuring. Some people said they found his presence embodied a certain history, a particular theatrical history. Because he's there all the time he throws up lots of different ideas.

SR: Presumably that was true for you in the process of making the show. Did he help you develop your ideas or was he simply acting out a part you'd

already decided?

RE: I had an idea of what I'd like to do with him. We rehearsed together for a week before we opened. During the rehearsal we tried different modes of being and it seemed the most appropriate mode was the extremely minimal mode. But to get to something that's extremely minimal you have to strip things down. 99 times out of 100 it's more potent as a result. It was a very enjoyable week spent arriving at that. Trying out different things and as a result of what he brought to the character it became a somewhat more benign character with a slight touch of majestic severity to it. Before I had expected it to be more a patrician figure. He brought a benign quality that is perhaps everybody's dream dad.

SR: An element of indulgence?

RE: I hope not indulgence. If there was it was a completely detached one. Without smothering he was giving his agreement to continuing along that particular path, however inappropriate it might seem.

SR: At Bloomsbury the proscenium becomes another device for you to use. I actually enjoyed it far more there than I did at the ICA, I felt that I could understand it better whereas in a studio like the ICA you come to expect a certain kind of surface to a work, as though you have to invent your own proscenium.

RE: Yes, for all those theatrical resonances to work you have to go out of your way to make them clear. But I really like this thing of discovering how the context effects the work, both how it can be performed and how the audience will respond. I'm always having my preconceptions shattered. *The Beloved*, which I mainly did in theatres, I also did in the Tate Gallery. I really loved doing it there because its like a dusty old panto and I loved doing it in this great, gargantuan gallery space in front of this really big crowd who'd come in because it was free and they were just coming across it. I especially loved the audience participation things there, with people shouting out the word 'abstract' it suddenly took on this immense significance in the Tate Gallery. I didn't expect it to be so enjoyable there but because the audience were so varied and they weren't expecting anything.

SR: I felt the audience at the Bloomsbury were a bit like that. You are categorised as a Performance

Artist, grouped together with performance artists, but when you see a show like *Thee, Thy, Thou, Thine* you have to ask what this has got to do with visual arts and performance art? It's visually strong, and has a lot to do with perception, but it doesn't seem to fit those categories.

RE: Well if at this moment in history you are interested in a combination of elements I have discovered that you have to adopt the strategy of the chameleon. I find this totally unproblematic, I love doing it, because what remains constant is my intention. Where ever my work may be presented, under what auspices, it seem that taking on the mantle of a particular form like 'theatre' gives you access to a history and tradition. I find myself both outside and within a particular form and tradition at any one time and I like that duality.

Sometimes I fell completely within it and the next moment I feel, no I'm not. I call myself a comedienne — and I'm delighted when anyone else thinks I am as well, but yes I also view myself as an artist. But then I think a lot of comedians are artists. I'm always going on about Tommy Cooper, I think he's a sublime artist.

SR: Yes but he wasn't a visual artist.

RE: Yes, but I think the idea of performance art as being something that only people with a visual arts background work in is untrue. There are people with training in lots of different conventions, musicians, dancers, traditional actresses or whatever, but this is the forum in which their ideas have flourished. I do have a visual arts background but you don't have to have one in this area. That training does give a different way of looking at things. At their best they are sort of practical philosophy courses.

SR: So you are happy to be in the area of work called performance art because it gives you greater flexibility than being a visual artist or an actress.

RE: I think flexibility is the key but on the other hand I love it when I can get hold of a good tradition complete with matter-of-fact titles like 'comedian', or the use of the word 'show'. Doing a 'show' rather than a 'piece' which always suggests it were a fragment of something else. I really like these good old-fashioned terms.

SR: Is there an element of nostalgia in your enjoyment of these ...?

RE: Oh yes, Sometimes I think

PHOTO / ROGER PERRY





Above: Berlin

Below: *Thee Thy Thou Thine*

I've just come across the thing I'm doing but in fact it was being done at the turn of the century or hundreds of years ago. It's exciting to discover that in some ways you are embodying a tradition and in others you are forging ahead.

SR: That makes it sound as though you are working in a purely intuitive way. Does that mean that you don't have a vision; a clear view of what you hope to be achieving through your work and working towards that? Some artists work that way but not all. Some work completely intuitively without being able to know what effect they are having. I mean it is *Plato's Chair* isn't it? Is it platonic or isn't it, is there an ideal or isn't there?

RE: Well there will often be a dilemma that is a genuine one which has prompted a piece of work. This will often be a question I have genuinely not found an answer for. And it will be a question which I feel other people are baffled by. *Plato's Chair* was prompted by the realisation that only thing I found exciting at the time which was the idea of nothing. The thought of content made me want to go to sleep. The idea of nothingness, and emptiness and the void made me want to weep with pleasure. So the idea was of a piece of work that was about this dilemma, which was both a genuine dilemma and a common one, even though people don't sit down and chat about how they long for the void and nothingness. To give people the opportunity to look at this and acknowledge it as something which is a concern of theirs. In *The Beloved* I genuinely could not remember the true meaning of the word 'abstract'. I genuinely could not remember what it meant. Abstract doesn't just mean 'non-figurative' or 'non-representational' it's something much more profound and much, much more complex. So that was a genuine dilemma and sometimes when I was actually performing it I'd suddenly realise what the answer is and then it'd be lost again. And if people have caught that moment themselves — that's wonderful. But I don't mind if they haven't or if it's merely suggested itself to them.

SR: So the art of the shows is to pose a basically philosophical question that is appropriate to the time?

RE: It's somehow knowing that all these questions are provoked or suggested by an incredible range of things. It's not just articulating them in

philosophical language. It can be suggested by someone walking onto the stage wearing a hat. But the thing about acceding to the audience, it's not that I think 'this is what I'm concerned about and I've got to find a way of making it more accessible.' The form that the shows take is a genuine one. They're not a response to wanting to make them more accessible, it's more that there's the desire to work like that and then work with the audience and the audience is always different. You can never predict who they're going to be or what they're going to think so you can never assume anything. The idea of what people will or won't understand, it's really unpredictable. You can never assume what somebody's going to find profoundly exciting.

SR: For me the best line in the show is 'I hate comedy.' (Rose laughs) because I do, I loathe it and really struggled with myself not to laugh. (More laughter) Part of what made the show work for me was that I left thinking 'that bloody woman made me laugh' and then having to think about why I laughed and why I don't like being made to laugh in the theatre, or rather I'm not used to being made to laugh. You said you liked Tommy Cooper, are you a great comedy fan?

RE: I actually think this whole topic is very interesting. Tommy Cooper is my top favourite because he's deeply abstract. He never tells jokes, or if he does it's only to illustrate how badly he tells them. His jokes are abstract and subtle, he's the Marcel Duchamp of comedians. Harpo Marx is a favourite. I think Julie Walters is very funny and Victoria Wood. But I have to say that I couldn't tell a joke to save my life. There's this idea that's taken over that what's really funny is gag telling. Which is really only one part of comedy. Sometimes you can't actually articulate what it is that's funny and your response is to just laugh or cry about it. You can't explain why, I don't know, Tommy Cooper coming on and sometimes he'd have this little gate on stage, a gate with nothing either side, and as he comes on he'd have to open the gate, it's perfect.

SR: Do you find that some of your choice of words and the way you use some particular words is drawn from listening to comedy. The way in which some very simple words can take on a very surreal, comic meaning just by the way you say them or the amount

of times you repeat them?

RE: I'm sure it must have.

SR: I must tell you. In *The Beloved* there is one line which has entered my home as part of our lives.

RE: Really?

SR: The silver cloth — you know that line 'it's just an old space blanket.' (Rose laughs) that has entered my family life for good.

RE: (Still laughing) I'm deeply honoured.

SR: And from the new show the line that's entered our lives, which has become part of our internal language is 'Am I wearing a bonnet?' (Rose is now laughing very hard) And we know what we mean when we say it to each other and it's got nothing to do with what we're wearing on our heads. (Eventually the laughter subsides and we go back to talking about comedians).

RE: The other person I'm very fond of, she's dead now, have you heard of Ruth Draper. Her speciality was monologues. She was American. She died in the 50s or 60s but there are all these recordings and once I was in New York and I saw this record and was compelled to buy it. She's extremely wonderful.

SR: I suppose that's a theatrical tradition itself — the monologue, a music hall tradition.

RE: And the soliloquy before that.

SR: Yes it is very much a live entertainment. That makes me think of how people used to entertain each other in the pubs or at home.

RE: It manifests itself differently in different cultures. There's this thing of people getting up and doing a turn, reciting poetry or doing oratory and those sorts of things. Or even if it's conversational things, a tradition of ways of speaking with each other, where it's accepted that in the evening you get together to discuss an agreed subject and one person will hold forth and then it will be someone else's turn. All those sorts of things are involved in developing monologues. As well as improvisation. Which is something which has become unnecessarily complex and is surrounded by unnecessary anxiety now.

SR: So what happens next?

RE: Well it's time for a rethink. We may be doing a version of *Thee, Thy, Thou, Thine* for TV but we don't know yet. Having sampled the proscenium stage I'm very keen to continue my researches. Hopefully down the West End. ●

PHOTOS / SARAH AINSLIE



MAGDALENA

Cora Herrendorf (Italy)



A vast international festival of women's work is coming up. JILL GREENHAIGH presents a polemic for the Magdalena phenomenon:

AH . . . I was asked to write a polemic article about why Magdalena '86 . . . I look up the word. 'wordy warfare'. So I'm sitting here wondering what wordy warfare I should be waging and how it should relate to the reasons for organising this festival. Perhaps I should take the line that attacks our culture's art which, in my humble opinion is still hugely dominated by masculinist energy, imagery, ideology, symbology, iconography and pornography. But which, even in our most progressive circles, justifies itself as a true reflection of modernist society.

. . . but why should I make enemies? . . . or perhaps a wordy warfare that might viciously reveal the hollow apathy of some contemporary critics who seem to whine their way through comfy salaries and add little or nothing, that's dynamic, to the growth of theatre

. . . but that's been done before . . . or . . . maybe we could examine the repetitive pattern that many women in theatre fall into, of, as a designer friend put it, playing nursemaid to men's visions . . . OR I could put myself on the line and try to talk honestly about a deep feeling and fear of never being heard. Of feeling you've been silenced. That somehow the work that you can feel lining your stomach wall, that you can't quite see because it's in shadow, has got no place. There isn't a language invented to cover or to search for it. And because there isn't this language it's as though the feeling doesn't exist. That's frightening when you know it's not true. It's a funny feeling not being able to explain yourself, especially

when there's a knowing that there is something new and vital and female that is lying latent and untaped. Trapped under thousands of years patriarchal art. You just can't quite grasp it. Perhaps it has something to do with shape, colour, atmosphere and secrets . . . perhaps it is how music weaves with an image an an action to reveal something you never felt before. But mainly it's about not knowing yet and I, for one, am not ready to write polemic articles about this feeling. There are a lot of women theatre artists out there who can't articulate it either.

You have to admit that it's not easy when what exists is a rigid and imaginatively infertile approach to devising new material. And that the work that is held up for us to praise as the brave new theatre is . . . well . . .



why can't we get around to admitting that a hell of a lot of it is just plain boring . . . dull . . . manically egotistical and archaic. When did you last see something that moved you? When did you last get really excited about a piece of contemporary theatre? When did you last feel that you were in the midst of a serious, interesting dialogue about the finer points of theatre form? More often than not, these days, the discussion centres around the financial and administrative promotional coups that are achieved.

It's a fun game, some might say an essential one, but shall we stop kidding that it's got anything to do with a real passionate caring about the state of the art and the things it needs to speak of. There seems to be an insistence that there's all this interesting work around

. . . but there isn't, is there? Of course there are one or two companies with some real guts whose theatre is genuinely evocative and important and some that has been shamelessly plagiarised.

I don't want to sound negative. It's just that I cannot understand why there is such a fear — in artists as well as the surrounding personnel who push the work out — to come clean and say 'that piece hasn't made it . . . it's close but . . .' at which point one could extract the genuine steps forward that have been taken, put them in an overall context and learn something. What is getting in the way of this kind of development? What's stopping this more honest approach that would ultimately benefit us all? We could be constantly opening new doors, seeking fresh influences and we could be listening instead of constantly having something to say. If you've got the courage to share your work, rather than jealously guarding it, it has a far better chance of growth. We're not too hot on sharing in this country though. An idea becomes the property of the person who thinks they thought of it rather than something which has simply been revealed. It's extraordinary the arrogance and selfishness of British theatre art. And what is it really saying these days? — half of it seems to be involved in trite, visually interesting psychologically arty thrillers, while the other half makes banal (and sometimes not particularly accomplished) cabaret. AND please there must be another way to end a show than with yet another stunning apocalyptic vision of man's potential for self destruction . . . with loud taped music.

I've often wondered why the British are so stuffy when it comes to festival. The French, Italian and Spanish type theatre festival admits to the importance of sitting down and eating and drinking together. Talking, shouting and laughing about all the work that's on show could be the most important element of any reason behind organising a festival. It's a very important way to feed the work. And I think we all need to show our work to our peers and we need to whinge and dream about it in the company of those we know are likewise struggling to get it right. And mostly failing. This festival is about bringing a whole load of strong, talented women theatre artists together and seeing what happens. And it's done with love to

theatre and a caring about its future.

All are passionately enthused by the chance to expose their work in an all female forum and are looking forward to intelligent and unprejudiced feedback. The opportunity to share work not only with a foreign public but also with colleagues is rare and always welcome.

For the first week (Aug 11th-17th) the invited practitioners will be conducting public events; staging performances, teaching workshops and leading a number of seminars relating to women's role in contemporary theatre. They will be talking about their work, watching others work and making new work. It will be a time for a lot of women to exchange ideas, share some doubts, try to answer a few questions, attempt to establish some definitions and perhaps even initiate some new vocabulary. We plan to ask a lot of questions on the essence and nature of female creativity. There will be a lot of work on show, a lot of talk and probably a lot of singing.

. . . No. The events are *not* closed to men. There will be something going on for anyone with an interest in which direction the female contribution to contemporary theatre is taking. It will encourage an intellectual and practical debate about . . . NEW THEATRE. At least there should be a good chance.

In the second two weeks the invited women will all be involved in a collaboration that will result in a piece 'The Magdalena Performance' being publicly shown on the 29th and 30th August . . . we'll not be working in a theatre . . . we don't know what the piece will be about . . . we do know it won't be led by a single creative vision but will attempt a collective piece woven from strands made by the individual women during the process of work here in Wales. It will be a piece that we might study once it has been mounted, and then try to understand what it has to tell us. . . . We do know that we take a risk. The alternative, of imposing pre-determined structures or even a process, seems somewhat contradictory to the spirit and reason of the festival. . . . the spirit and reason?? . . . to wait and see what happens when you bring women, from a number of different cultures, together to make theatre.●

Magdalena '86 takes place at Chapter, Cardiff. Info: 0222 45174.

Geddy Aniksdal
(Norway)

PRETENDING TO BE DANCERS

'NOTICE ANYTHING UNUSUAL?' ask Women With Beards. Yes. Their Jane Russell swimsuits don't fit. Their beards slip down to their armpits. They're gauche. They want to be laughed at. And they're not afraid to move (unlike some other performers who seem to have glued bits of their bodies together). They galump and — sometimes — glide round the stage underlining their saline wit with quirky movement. And even if their relentless right-on-ness can get a bit irritating, they are exemplary exponents of the Brighton based 'subversive dance' (their label not mine). They've taken on the problems of expressing ideas through mixed up disciplines and they've added a gratifying belief in entertainment — cabaret style. The hybrid approach was formed through training on Brighton Poly's Expressive Arts course and perfected on the audiences of the Zap. But the Brighton Festival Showcase took them into the Poly's theatre which gave them a distance from the audience that might have been uncomfortable. Because this is peer group stuff — telling their contemporaries what they want to hear. 'Bad Luck Tories' say Women With Beards.

Anne Seagrave, who showed two short pieces, was a little more abstract. Her message was only intimated in her introductory line: 'I dedicate this to those who are not always so happy' she says before drawing a white line round her prone body in Kojak murder style. Her movement flowed in and out of the shape on the floor, frenetic, flailing limbs and hair. She'd lost her usual conspiratorial humour and showed a more introverted, desperate style.

Six Divas and The Wild Wigglers — both working with Liz Aggiss, the Poly's dance tutor — didn't use words at all. Nor did they seem to have much to say. The Divas were six grey suited women using staccato gestures, mostly in unison. Everyday moves turned into dance. But rather than give the gestures flow, the Divas only theatricalised them. They showed the Subversives actually need all the other elements of their performance because movement-wise they are limited. The Wild Wigglers work is a kind of choreographed clowning developed from a basic visual joke. One woman and two lanky men — anything but classically trained dancers — move in quick step unison, ludicrously dressed. They make occasional swipes at ballet but their humour is simple slapstick.

Open Secret, who are likely to be the Poly's most popular product, devise their comedy in the same way that many choreographers create movement — taking an idea and then improvising on stage. The result is a cross between the Dangerous Brothers and Theatre de Complicite

HONEY SALVADORI chases the subversive edges of dance performance, from Brighton to Bow:

with manic, politically barbed repartee underscored by large mimetic gestures. But ultimately movement, for them, is secondary to the spoken word. 'I'm perfectly willing to pretend to be a dancer', says Philip Knight, baiting the audience, 'if it gets me on a stage.'

At Chisenhale I often feel like I've strayed into someone else's tea party. But that Sunday afternoon the heat and the sweat seemed to have loosened up the atmosphere. Since no-one seemed able to survive eight hours crammed into a stuffy performance space they came, put in a burst of energy, and left glad that they'd made some effort. Well I did anyway. So what I saw can't really be labelled as representative of London's new work — the purpose of the day-long performance platform — but it gave a taste, although not a very encouraging one, of what we're likely to see over the next few months.

Sef Townsend had the sharpest ideas: get the audience on your side, talk to them and lull them into a sense of security. Then be offensive and let them react. He began in Greek orthodox style dressed from head to foot in white robes and chanting then he offered a collection of plants and personal objects that he'd made on his way in. He passed round tea and post-Cherbobyl Czech blackcurrants and proceeded to tell a story, encouraging the rest of us to include our own views. No-one was particularly forthcoming. Then he began to provoke, but always with the same placid expression, attacking himself and the room. The audience finally responded — with their feet. He added more and more gruesome images slapping what was left of the audience in the face, metaphorically speaking, while hitting himself on the balls. A good symbol to sum up his work.

Rona Lee had a simpler and more romantic approach. She's interested in personal contact not alienation. Her performance traced a distinctly Freudian trail through the stages of self discovery to An Other using a few natural props — a pile of dried petals and a cane body frame. The emotions she displayed were tremulous and sad.

Bol Majoram didn't have enough ideas to fill

up his twenty minutes unfortunately. A few ditsy notions, charming chit chat, a nice singing voice and some pretty cut-outs to shine lights through. But the bits didn't cohere — they didn't seem to have much to do with each other and no overall purpose occurred to me. When a member of the audience, obviously feeling the same, asked him why Majoram didn't even have a thought out reply. In fact he seemed shocked that someone might question him.

The most satisfying piece, particularly for such a hot and heavy Sunday, was James and Monica Mackessy's demonstration of Capoeira, a Brazilian Martial Arts Dance of shadowy origins that is now practiced as a sport and, in the streets of Rio, as entertainment. James and Monica, the only Brazilian-trained Capoeiristas in London, run courses and workshops but haven't found it easy to instil Latin guile and grace in their students. 'There isn't anything like Capoeira — which is a fighting dance — in England,' James told me. 'They are usually split, so in our workshops we get two different types. And the fighters are so aggressive they intimidate the dancers.'

So they seem to have decided to push Capoeira onto the New Dance circuit, playing on its novelty and entertainment potential as well as its vague similarity to Aikido, already a popular movement form among dancers. In Brazil its image isn't so rarified, it's more like breakdancing — spontaneous and played in the streets. The similarities go further, breaking is considered to have been influenced by Capoeira and some of the moves are similar. They both turn the performers upside down, spinning on their heads with limbs splayed out at asymmetrical angles.

Capoeira is played to the rhythmic music of the Berimbau — a traditional stringed instrument — and usually has a large number of participants who sit round the circle moving in and out of the action at the nod of a head. If it's a sport then the attacker tries to catch the opponent in a scissor action with his legs. But if the purpose is entertainment they turn on the speed and, with their remarkable balancing skills, whirr round and spin at an alarming rate, never actually making physical contact.

We saw bits of all of that at Chisenhale although James and Monica together seem to have too much care and respect to push the other into acrobatic feats. But they also work with Brazilian guests, on this occasion a champion, who pushed them to the limits of their, by now, considerable ability and spiked up the proceedings for the audience to admire. And they did. ●

CUT-UPS AND PIXILLATION

ORGANISER CAROLE ENAHARO put 'Last Requests' together as an attempt to give space to experimental and 'oppositional' works in an accessible context-Brixtons underfunded and struggling Art Gallery. The exhibition encompasses live performances, workshops and seminars thus extending the 'sit-and-see' nature of similar screenings, whilst the programme on show here was drawn from 'putting the word around' at the London Film Makers Co-op and at the Brixton Gallery itself. No selection of works was made.

Without viewing any of the attendant activities central to the exhibition — a programme of performances, by example — it's problematic to give an informed opinion about the exhibition in total but, with this proviso, it has to be said that the main programme of video which forms the backbone of 'Requests' is a bit — OK I'll be blunt — disappointing. Part of the problem here seems to be that most of the work shown is film transferred to video. The reasons for this are obviously practical but nonetheless both context and format — watching a film is a distinctly different experience to watching a television — here tend to work against the tele-cined films. This is certainly the case with *Shadows Of Ignorance*, Allen Fawkes, where much of the impact of this time-lapsed piece are lost on the 'small screen'. Similarly Germaine Hampton's glowing, vivid sketch of sunlit dereliction — 'Not Here' — has a striking 'snapshot' quality when screened but as video transfer loses much of its subtlety and texture.

Likewise Sandra Lahires piece — *Edge* — a frantic collage of 'cut ups' (literally) and pixillation which parallels animal experimentation with 'women as medical and war guinea pigs' (Lahire's programme notes) seems somehow constrained by the video monitor. Here images of atrocity and mock surgery collide frenetically while a Sylvia Plath poem is intoned but finally the very relentlessness of the imagery blunts rather than confronts the viewers sensibility. Michael Maziere's *The Bathers* is, by contrast, a simple, almost painterly piece which uses the video medium to exercise shifts in colour and pace on original Super-8.

The effect is impressionistic and trancelike.

The same cannot unfortunately be said of either Richard Philpott's work or David Finchs demo pop video for *The Party*. In the latter Super-8 is used to little effect — band mime in front of camera, a few 'moody' superimpositions — for the sort of song you'd be embarrassed to take to the dancehall, while in the former the jokey promise of the catalogue notes give way to disappointment. *Beverly Hills Flop*, by exam-

ple, is described as 'The most vacuous promo yet made — a triumph' — a remark accredited to Julien Temple — being entirely composed of slates, mistakes and outtakes yet its an overextended joke without much of a punchline. ('Yes', said the friend who accompanied me to the show, '... and now what?'). This said *Messiah In The Shadow Of Death*, described as 'an inventory of growing violence in contemporary Britain' and also by Philpott sounded like a tougher proposition but one which I was unable to stay and see.

Elsewhere, you see, there were other works to view. *Missionaries*, a tape/slide piece by Anne Robinson/Alison Licorish/Angela Onwurah was one such work. Text and image here act as an analytical can opener to the history and culture of European civilization. Technical gripes aside its a tight, direct and challenging work, controlled in its anger; 'The tape/slide speaks for itself', says the catalogue. It does.

Less coherent, perhaps, is Anna Scheers *Blood On The Rise*, an installation work bringing to mind ritual, magic and fertility through the use of a central slide illuminated 'statue' surrounded by objects and drapes. Menstruation and its mythological significance are the subject. Finally there's *Arthur Coming Out*, an ambitious project using 'sculpture' and some 40 video distorted slide images of Arthur to invoke a 'sense of Arthur'. Ambience is missing here — perhaps I didn't stay long enough — and the form of the piece seems only partly successful, obscuring rather than enhancing the intentions.

In conclusion 'Last Requests' is an exhibition important in that it has corralled new and experimental works into a public space which doesn't quite live up to its brief of being an 'extravaganza' of 'the art of light'... Don't take my word for it — Ask Arthur.

Chicago Shorts: Video Chicago 1986

A collection of short video works, a dozen pieces in total, 'Video Chicago' is a package which, by the time you read this, will have made its whistle stop tour of the UK and be homeward bound.

Accompanied by selector Bernard Haskens

**NICK HOUGHTON
recovers from another
bout of edit-suite fever to
round up the latest in
hot video activity:**

the works all have some connection with the Art Institute of Chicago and attempt to 'represent the experimental spirit and some of the methods of Chicago video'. Difficult, perhaps, to assess Chicago style from viewing a programme only 59 minutes long but initial impressions of a strategy of tightly controlled form and a slickly formalist content soon give way to a mood of homogenous coolly modern video art. Disrupting all this is Mindy Fabers 'African Suburban Queen', a tape refusing the edit suite effects which infect most of these works, where Faber seeks to recreate her mother as an exotic, strong willed woman. Its simple, direct, funny and intimate where other tapes tend toward a well produced formalism.

'Trim Subdivision', by example, uses video keying, wipes and careful composition to create a jigsaw puzzle impression of suburban architecture. Robert Synder, the maker, has here produced an intriguing neo-cubist work but beyond its obvious cleverness there's something missing. Its still missing in Haskens own tape, 'Videovision', a smoothly structured piece centred on Haskens formal interaction with a deconstructed video signal, whilst in 'Getting Out' Raphael Franca almost connects with an oblique freeze framed moment of drama.

Haskens freely admits that much of the work may tend toward a similarity in look and indicates that this has much to do with a system of post-production whereby tapemakers are obliged to visit New York for editing. 'Its not a "hands on" situation — the artist gives the work over to an editor and the editor is the person who physically presses the buttons... That tends to engender a very particular New York style to the works. A very slick feel'. Discussion moves on to cover critical dialogue — 'There isn't any, really... No one ever says "This tape's crap"; video festivals tend to be very celebratory' — and broadcast access: 'Chicago Public TV broadcast video art twice weekly'.

The impression Haskens gives is of a video practise which is largely self-referential and college bound, a practise tied to a certain orthodoxy and attitude which is coolheaded, technically proficient and experimental yet empty of vitality, passion or upfront expression. 'It looks like the 70's all over again', mumbled someone as they left the screening and while this is not wholly true there is a sense in which 'Video Chicago '86' indicates a video culture disconnected from risk or struggle.

Having said this I'd happily see the works again if only to confirm my feeling that's what's missing is the roughedge of something rude, deviant or confrontational. As it is 'Video Chica-





go' is too polite to truly engage; 'interesting', for sure, but next time lets have some screams, dreams and fistfights.

Shorts: Snapshot News From The Edit Suite Of Post-Modernism

Say 'Duvet' and the chances are that you'll be thinking 'scratch'. Arguably the most intelligent and artful of 'Scratchers' the Duvet Brothers now have two new works out — 'Blue In Heaven', a pop promo, and 'Man Or Dog', a 3 minute 'scratch' piece.

The pop promo is odd, a vivid piece jampacked with ideas and moments of snatched innovative devices set to a fairly mundane mid-tempo rocker of a song. Moody blokes in leather jackets are central images and despite some jarring editing and fractured structure there's nothing very startling going on. David Jacobs would, I suspect, give it 7 out of 10.

'Man Or Dog' is, by contrast, a subtly worked piece of understated entertainment which splices two old black-and-white movies together to create a giggler of a tape. Not earthshattering in intention or realisation 'Dog' is, nonetheless, a sharp joke well handled.

'Boxing For Boys' is the title of an ambitious and, as yet, unfinished videotape by Mark Wilcox. Producer of the much acclaimed 'Calling The Shots' and a less successful tape called 'Celebrities', Wilcox has been touting the trailer for 'Boxing' for some months now in an effort to get the thing completed. The trailer itself indicates an attempt at something close to mainstream cinema or television with a narrative structure centred on the fortunes of a young boxer.

Set in the 1950's it's an ambitious project which, for me, seems a bit stilted by its attempt at achieving a sort of stylised filmic mood. This said it'll be intriguing to see the finished product... Meanwhile gossip has it that Wilcox's latest venture, 'Man In The Crowd', a production funded by the LVA was beset with production problems. At one point it's rumoured that the cameraman walked out — it looks as though he came back again because the finished tape will be in LVA distribution by June. ●

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MORE

At the cutting edge of music-theatre is the New Arts Consort. DAVID BRIERS takes a closer look at the hybrid form:



Lol Coxhill . . .

COMPOSER CHARLES BARBER'S list of compositions comprises no piano sonatas or symphonies, and consists almost entirely of 'scenic works' (you could say the same of Carl Orff or Mauricio Kagel), including unorthodox chamber operas, music theatre cabaret, multimedia performance events, and much music for or with dance. Most often his works are performed by the new Arts Consort, an ad hoc group set up by Barber to perform programmes of his own devising, often involving dancers, performance and video artists.

Charlie Barber's most ambitious work to date, *Sex & Death at Covent Garden*, which was commissioned by Chapter, had a three year gestation period, but finally saw the light of day (or crepuscular gloaming) at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff on 2 May. It has been performed again since then in the very different ambience of the Midland group in Nottingham, but these remarks refer to its museum performance only.

This was not the first time that the cavernously conservative neo-classical entrance hall of the National Museum of Wales has been used as the setting for a performance event. In 1981 Chapter commissioned the Swiss group Theatre Onze to create a piece for that space — *L'Escalier* was an evening never to be forgotten.

Charlie Barber's *Sex & Death at Covent Garden* intriguingly called 'an orchestral installation', is basically an extended composition for chamber orchestra, whose members are 'constantly re-distributed, splitting into mobile groups to create a wide range of spatial effects'. Sections of the piece came from the heavens, in the gallery of the museum's high rotunda, other parts from the widely distanced staircases at either end of the hall, and from other more obscure parts, all in the tradition of the spatial antiphony of Gabrieli at St Marks.

The audience was not static either, and before and during the performance could perambulate an exhibiton of working scores, mementos, slides, and

SEX AND DEATH

generally relevant and irrelevant graphic detritus. They could also watch various video monitors dotted around the place, and the performance began with a video of the Queen's recent visit to Covent Garden, intercut with the arrival of a downmarket shop doorway busker to the same *quartier*. The piece as a whole is supposed to 'explore the complacency and lack of relevance of the rituals surrounding high culture', and is probably unique in having been inspired by an article in a back issue of *Performance* magazine. Lynn MacRitchie's *True Romance — Sex and Death at Covent Garden* (*Performance* No 16, March 1982) is included in the highly detailed programme brochure in a bibliography of works which have in some way contributed to the formation of the project by the composer and his collaborators — a list as trendy as you like, including Althusser, Barthes, Foucault, Cocteau, Eco, not Eno, but also Marc Chaimowicz and Colin Wilson, whose fifties books must be getting trendy again (will there be a musical film version of *The Outsider*, with David Bowie as Colin Wilson?).

Not doing an impression of Colin Wilson was Lol Coxhill. You never know where Lol Coxhill will turn up next. Mostly these days he seems to turn up on obscure French record labels. I certainly didn't expect him to turn up at the National Museum of Wales, and was completely taken in at first by his appearance as a museum guard, lecturing us about bringing in bits of grass on our shoes, while the real National Museum guards (whose Superintendent, asked once which of the old masters in his care he most admired, replied 'I am so busy with all my work that I am unable to admire the works') played their parts admirably, standing grumpily to the rear with arms folded. It was at this point that I noticed a stuffed weasel grappling with a snake on the museum reception desk, and I have no idea whether it was put there specially for this performance, or whether it has

always been there.

As an interlude at the mid-point to the orchestral composition, we watched an extremely funny video by Mike Stubbs of Lol Coxhill giving a basic saxophone tutorial, including choosing the right carrying case, and which end to blow into. There was another Mike Stubbs video later (they are always worth watching), but in the end all these ancillary goings on seemed incidental to, and distracting from, what was really an extended *piece of music*.

Despite Charlie Barber's former rather predictable compositional flirting with the likes of Cocteau, Mishima, and Genet, there always seems to be in his work a rather austere musical composition underneath trying to get out. This performance would have worked better had its audience been seated conventionally in the centre of the museum, just listening to the music revolving spatially around and above them. As it was, the audience drifted about like lost electrons in a cloud chamber, and part of the audience, lured there by the title of the piece, but unable to see any sex or death, became bored and restless.

All along, the problem with Charlie Barber's New Arts Consort concerts and performances has been that they promise more than they can deliver. Offering fascinating programmes of such things as contemporary Japanese music and the more *recherche* repertoire of the 1920s, they have always 'left something to be desired' with under rehearsed or unprofessional performances, and badly planned stage management, with classic cases of huge percussion kits taking longer to set up on stage mid-concert than the piece then performed. All part of the vicious spiral of underfunding, of course, up to a point, but usually narrowly or widely missing marks worth aiming at. *Sex & Death*, the most ambitious New Arts Consort project yet, is fortunately also the most successfully achieved, with the music itself benefitting from the blurring of the museum's 3-second

echo delay. But even here the video screens apparently conked out halfway through, thus running true to form.

Barber's very fine orchestral composition is an extended piece in eleven short movements for thirteen players, entirely derived from ten bars of the opening chorus of Gluck's opera *Orfeo* systematically dissected, displaced, and subjected to various compositional procedures. The music stands apart from run of the mill (an apt phrase) 'son of Michael Nyman' systems music, however, in being rigorously organised but not static, and well able to hold its own



developmentally for its 50 minutes duration. Parts of the score, and particularly the final Allegro, echo Stravinsky's hardcore neo-classical *Symphony in C*, and so could, I suppose, be described as neo-neo-classical.

But the 'real space' (as opposed to 'headphones space') spatial dimension of the score, as performed at the museum, is essential, and the flattened out cassette recording of the score, though enjoyable, has its longeurs. But it's worth hearing for Lol Coxhill's saxophone cadenzas, contrasting suddenly with the angularity of the piece itself. The passage at the end, where Coxhill's saxophone slides in eerily above the orchestra, is spine tingling, and leads to the end of the piece on a superbly unexpected informal note.●

(The music for *Sex & Death* at Covent Garden is available on cassette, for £3.65 including post and packing, from the New Arts Consort, 19B Miskin St, Cathays, Cardiff CF2 4AQ.)

... with the New Arts Consort



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A NEO-NATURIST

CHRISTINE BINNIE
writes:



HEY CHRIS!

Yes Jen?

I'll see you in the Bull and Gate tonight for Firewolf's gig.

All right then. I can't wait to see what Eternal Fires are like this time. They always seem to be different. Firewolf says he's got some dancers. I wonder what they're like?

I don't know. I bet they're not as good as when we were in it.

Well they couldn't be really could they I mean the Neo-Naturists and Eternal Fires together must be the best combination in the world. Still never mind maybe we were too good. And a bit too highly strung.

Yea c'est la vie. Bye. Bye.

I arrived at the Bull and Gate to find all the others in the bar. St Luke, from A.D., was chatting to Cerith Wyn Evans and Angus Cook. Sophie the last of the International Film and Video trio was already inside with Kermit weathering the first band. I was only half way through my first half a Guinness when Jen, Wilf, Grayson and Maria arrived and before I knew what was happening we were filing through the gents toilets into the main gig area.

As I was pusing my way to the front I happened to look up and there was Firewolf hanging upside down undoing a knot with his teeth. After a bit of a struggle it came undone and one of Firewolf's speciality banners saying ETERNAL FIRES UNDER THE SUN was unfurled in front of our eyes. The next piece of preparation was Firewolf's stage. He had made his own stage especially to go in front of the existing one and the erection of this little platform was entertainment in itself. It's a circular construction and sort of swivels on a central piece of scaffolding. Then the ultra violet lights came on, so did the girls, and so did the Kaftans (the Kaftans were of course all made by Firewolf himself). The little white trim was very effective. Firewolf picked up his guitar and Eternal Fires were off. The first number was Love is the Law. Jen and I were ecstatic and sang along enthusiastically, our own experience has drummed the chants into our heads never to be forgotten:
LOVE IS THE LAW
LOVE UNDER WILL
THERE ARE NO GODS
BUT THE UNIVERSAL MIND
EVERY BEING IS A STAR

LOVE IS THE LAW
(ETC)

The girls and Firewolf danced round the little stage and the rattling of a couple of loose planks could only be heard by those at the very front and it all seemed to add somehow to the very special atmosphere only Firewolf knows how to create. I turned round and saw Cerith and Angus.

Do you like it?

He's fantastic! Why don't you do your next article about Firewolf.

Oh that's a good idea I think I will.

After the act I took Firewolf a barley wine.

Would you like it if I did my next Performance mag article about you and Eternal Fires?

Yeah Cerith told me.

Oh all right then well do you think it's a good idea?

I suppose so. It depends what it's like.

I thought you'd be pleased.

Yeah it's great on a certain level.

What level's that? Never mind. We'll discuss it later OK.

Right.

After that it was Dencil's new night club, The Sexy Chocolate Bar, and home to bed.

A couple of days later I went round to Firewolf's pad in Kentish Town to do the interview.

Hello

Right! This way please. Mind the tree.

How did that get there?

I found it on Hampstead Heath.

Your house is like an obstacle course.

I know! It's meant to be.

Why?

To make it difficult for people to get in and out. Once someone just walked out of my house with a whole bowl of bluebells.

Oh I see? Whoops! I just tripped over a bone.

Have an orange.

That's a big box. Where did they come from?

I bought them for the gig but never used them. I thought fruit all over the stage — great — but I changed my mind.

Let's do the interview now. Turn the tape on.

Right, one two one two Equinox one two one two Equinox Equinox.

Start with the name. Why Eternal Fires?

Because of the whole thing with the

fire. The fire keeps us alive. And after we had gone, or after I'm gone, or after whoevers gone. Right! There's always the fires burning. My father and his father etc going back the sun was the same for them. I mean it was the same fire burning that grew the plants as it is for me.

Have your fire eating performances got something to do with this idea?

Well part of it, I didn't eat the fires I used to blow the fires and dance. I was known by other names when I did the Fire. The Wizard, Wizard of Heldon.

Wizard of Heldon, that's a good one!

I mean just 'cause your parents have called you a name y'know do you have to continually use that one if there's other names that you feel are more appropriate to what you're doing. Right? Mmm

The fire is very interesting. Instead of just accepting the fire for cooking and lighting, one can say, right, why do plants grow when there's sunlight? It isn't just a morbid curiosity or just an idle curiosity.

Do you think your curiosity has become less morbid since you turned from Last Rites to Eternal Fires?

Yes. I think I preferred Earth Rites though. Last Rites was like the Last Rites of the Earth. Whereas Earth Rites is like guarding the Rites of the Earth. Like a ritual.

Did you ever do any work with Bruce Lacey?

No only that we were at the same fair at the same time. The Fairie Fayre. He lent me his teepee. I just put the poles up. I used that as part of the performance, it was like poems and drums and songs. Just me and my dog.

I thought you might have done some rituals together.

As some of my lyrics say all is the ritual. At a fair. Everybody makes the fair. So we're all working together.

Who else was at the fayre?

Oh yes Pegasus by Andrew Logan which was this large flying horse. Its a grand piece of sculpture.

Who else have you worked with?

There's the Neo Naturists! Killing Joke, I used to read words prior to their performances. Trying to understand Babylon, Eros, Psyche and Chaos, just those four words, is something I'm still trying to do . . .

Firewolf, I don't think I can concentrate much longer. I think we'd better call it a day. ●

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