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PHOTO / LESLEY BUTLER

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PERT

PREVIEW

+ Neil Bartlett the Man in the Frock fresh from Nottingham this year is touring the Mahagonny Songspiel with a difference 'Bert Brecht with ballroom dancing and a housewife from Blackheath singing Stravinsky' with text by Kathy Acker and featuring Marty St James and Anne Wilson and Annie Griffin (see Nottingham review). Should be good. Starts in December at London's Hoxton Hall, phone for tour details. ●



+ Forced Entertainment are touring their new performance, **Let the Water Run its Course) to the Sea thatMmade the Promise** — one of last year's Nottingham Platform successes — from now until Spring 1987, starting at London's the Place November 20-22. Phone 0742 646395 for tour details. ●

+ A rare visit to Britain by the notorious Anna Banana, self-styled dadaist and futurist from Vancouver, and publisher of **Vile Magazine**. She's performing **Presentism and Futurism** and **Anatomy of a Performance: Red/Black** at Chisenhale Studios on December 13. Also at Chisenhale, Ruins of Glamour, Glamour of Ruins, with Ed Baxter, Simon Dickason, Karen Eliot, Gabriel, Glyn Banks and Hannah Vowles, Tom McGlynn and Stefan Szczelkun, with performance on opening night by Rick Gibson wearing a waistcoat of live worms (Dec 1, Exhibition Dec 3-20) Details 981 6617/4518. ●



DAVID GALE and HILARY WESTLAKE hit back at last issue's swingeing critique on the fundamentals of Lumiere and Son's work:

DOFF THIS BONNET BEFORE IT BECOMES A TEA COSY!

'BUTTERFLIES', STEVE ROGERS' piece on the work of Lumiere & Son, is riddled with so many specious arguments and errors of fact that we are compelled to remark that with radical critics like these, who needs the bourgeois? We would like to use your columns to comment on some of the false premises Rogers uses to advance his argument.

A full page of his article is taken up with an attempt to demonstrate that a show which provides a spectacle for its audience must be indicted for using 'capitalist methods'. After an admittedly generous description of our recent Kew Gardens show *Deadwood*, which dealt with the depredation of the tropical rainforests, Rogers proclaims, in a moment of pure

melodrama, '... I felt very isolated ... the show had a major problem. It was a lie.' It transpires that this major problem, this lie, consists merely of the fact that 'the spectacle reinforces the spectator as the passive consumer of a spectacle over which we have no control.' Did Steve want to feed the animals? No. Has he spotted something peculiar to the work of Lumiere &

PHOTO / SIMON CORDER



From *Tip-Top Condition*

Son? Of course not. He has used, as a major axis of his argument, a quality that *all* shows have in common. Shows that celebrate spectacle, shows that wish to criticise spectacularism, shows that wish to dissolve it, shows that celebrate spectacularly the desire to end spectacle. A show is a show is a show, when we are using the dynamic, scintillating but often tyrannical zen discourse of late sixties Situationism. Rogers writes as though he were unveiling the thought of the Situationists to a dumb and innocent alternative theatre culture of crypto-capitalists who have spent the last twenty years secretly figuring out how to storm the Raymond Revue Bar and then drive home in a Porsche.

Rogers asserts that this 'deception . . . raises some very serious questions' about the role of Lumiere & Son as an experimental or radical theatre group. We would modify his assertion; the questions raised were not serious, they were trivial and misplaced. To characterise a didactic entertainment as deceitful simply because it replicates, on a large scale, a relationship with its audience that persists in nearly all contemporary alternative theatre work, *especially* with the non-British groups he cites later, is to indulge in O-levelism. Rogers begs decent theories in order to make a minor point seem major.

Rogers further contends that Lumiere is in ' . . . an isolated position, since they have not made any significant new development in their approach to performance, whilst their peers from their same background have moved on.' We are surprised that, as a denizen of the tiny world of London-based alternative performance, Rogers does not appear to realise that since the end of 1983, Lumiere & Son has been operating under markedly different circumstances to those that obtained in its first decade. It is tiresome for Hilary Westlake to have the last three years of her work assessed as though it were the product of the partnership that was permanently modified when David Gale left the company in order to pursue other writing projects. Since Gale withdrew from the company salary, although retaining a formal directorship on paper, Westlake has, in addition to directing Lumiere's shows as usual, also devised them. Prior to 1983 most of our shows, with several exceptions, were devised and written by Gale. Westlake now chooses themes, initiates projects, and originates their

structure. She has commissioned Gale's services as a free-lance writer for many of the subsequent projects, but in this role most of the parameters which define his contribution have been prescribed by the show's deviser.

Throughout his article, Rogers quotes from David Gale's 'Against Slowness' piece as though it were a policy document for Lumiere & Son. The piece was written two years after Gale left the company, and represents his personal view, as a writer for theatre, of the state of the art. Although Gale and Westlake still enjoy a very high degree of rapport, both as collaborators and as critics of the scene, 'Against Slowness' does not constitute a blueprint for construing the activities of Lumiere & Son in its present incarnation.

Rogers' eagerness to marshal contemporaneous work into navigable channels is a lamentable habit often indulged by critics, but when he chastises us for 'consciously reject(ing) the recent development of performance theatre towards a more pure, formal abstract theatre' he moves from indulging an academic weakness to exposing a narrow critical despotism that is both dangerous and trendy at the same time. The suggestion that a 'more pure, formal abstract theatre' is the *correct* direction to take at the moment, that it is the *only* direction to take, we find quite extraordinary. Minimality is merely one form of *response* to modern complexity, it is not in any way the *answer* to a particular set of difficult questions. How many practitioners in UK performance groups are pursuing this prescription? Twentyfive? Thirty? How many are tackling the problems in non-minimal ways? We couldn't tell you. The short answer is 'many more'. Do critics discern trends that actually exist, or merely exert a partial vision in the direction of their own personal predilections?

To suggest that social impurity, deformity and the concrete can only be countered by advancing their opposites is ludicrously over prescriptive, and amounts to a style of authoritarian and celibate anti-pluralism that is as asphyxiating as the hopeless, false variety furnished by the spectacular capitalism that Rogers claims to abhor. We'll go our own way, Steve. There's nothing wrong with that. Nothing. Lumiere & Son does not stand outside the current of alternative theatre, it simply exists outside the enclosures

you have chosen to erect and sanctify as the limits of a whimsically inspired orthodoxy.

Europhilia is another distasteful and unproductive tendency in the UK performance coterie, and has contributed to some intriguing instant myth-making. Rogers, in common with other spokespersons for the medium, would have us believe that an age of director-based theatre has been superseded by a new, democratic work style in which that dangerous social construction, the Individual, has been relegated to the Chorus. We learn that the work of these units is 'non-spectacular, non-heroic, usually made by a non-hierarchical group or in a collaboration between artists and audience'. It is 'the really original, powerful, new theatre'. Bullshit. Absolute transparent, wishful bullshit. Rogers is confusing his desires with the easily observable reality. Regardless of the political rightness, or right-on-ness, of a de-hierarchised working structure, only a small fraction of experimental groups actually work in this way. Some groups even have *two* directors, which is actually further from, not closer to, the democratic purity which must seem so attractive to a critic but has been found wanting by countless practitioners, despite their left of centre political orientation. Look at the Europeans! Look at the names of the groups! Jan Fabre, Pina Bausch, Robert Wilson (an American who came to prominence in Europe). Not exactly Belt and Braces, is it? Not exactly Red Ladder Theatre Co-operative, eh? Of the British co-operative groups that emerged in the last few years how many are still operating? The short answer is that many have gone out of business, and their members are reforming along director-writer-performer lines. Text is on the way back — in a year it'll be all over the place. Everywhere you look it's directors, egos, individuals.

Is this unpleasant? Is it wrong? Clear role definition is not the same thing as hierarchy is not the same thing as mainstream 'bourgeois' theatre politics. Your declaration simply isn't true, Steve, thank goodness. Your formula is something that socialist and community theatre groups have persevered with, and with a few exceptions (perhaps IOU, Appeal Products, Forced Entertainment, for example) the 'experimentals' have put aside. It has by no means been invalidated, but currently groups are





relinquishing it en masse. And this does not indicate any form of 'swing to the right', either. Countless alternative groups are producing work of a socialist/feminist/sexually radical nature while retaining directors in what you hastily dub the 'undemocratic' mode. Simplistic connotations of political and artistic ideals have no place in a critical writing that aspires to contribute to the development of the work it considers.

And another thing, what is a 'bourgeois entertainment'? Is it defined by the ideology of the work, or by the audience that goes to see it? By the latter standard nearly all experimental theatre is bourgeois, certainly the work cited in Rogers' article as having a radical momentum. Come on, Steve, you know very well that groups who wish to work in venues with sophisticated lights and sound have virtually no control over who comes to see them. You know that as soon as we go indoors we're preaching to the converted, and, of course, the converted are nearly all from the middle class. *Deadwood* was certainly not a subversive entertainment, it was attempting to persuade, but the broad aspiration of alternative theatre seems to be to subvert or persuade all audiences whenever and wherever possible.

What would you call work that subverts the sexual politics of a middle-class audience, such as gay theatre might do? What about work that travels out to shop-floors and working men's clubs and reinforces class stereotypes by using a simplistic terminology derived from reactionary convictions about the value of 'accessibility'? Do you have a label for these well established tendencies? We hope not. We suspect however that in your campaign for the planned obsolescence of the Individual you are colluding in the promotion of a drab purity-by-omission which reflects and dignifies the true face of the capitalist project, namely an orthodoxy the periphery of which is defined by multiple allergies, with a core paralysed by the terror of impeachment.

And another thing. Your ageism. What's all this 'middle-aged' business? Age is something that happens to you, you don't commit it! How old are Pina, Bob and Dicky? No chickens there, that's for sure. What are we, footballers? A trivial pursuit, Steve, and a rather British preoccupation too.

It smacks of Babyism. There's far too much Babyism in British performance culture, and it's nothing to do with the age of the workers. Babyism can be seen in the dedicated following of fashion, the knee-jerk political thinking, the obsession with purity, the replacement of commission by omission, and the truculent rejection of useful constituents of the bath-water, such as text.

A refusal to talk, a refusal to use speech. As a vital reaction to theatre history, the stance had enduring value and found its time with resounding punctuality. Text can be tyrannical, it can exclude equally valid expressions in other modes. We all know this. It's old hat. Now a new old hat has emerged, that which used to be the new Poor Theatre, the theatre of the 'pure, formal and abstract'. This too has had its day. It's too weak to tackle the issues now. At best it represents the spirit of resistance, but a spirit amputated from a point of social influence. At worst its surliness and multiple refusal throws up a miasma of shallow engagement, trite subtext and dreamy reclusiveness. In other words it looks increasingly Babyish. Doff this bonnet before it becomes a tea cosy, we cry! Let us have an adult alternative theatre culture in this country, one in which impossibility is countered with dogged and unremitting imagination rather than refined and impeccable surrender.

Towards the end of his article, in the course of a bowdlerised summation of, again, passages from 'Against Slowness', Rogers avers 'The myth of the hero is vital to free market capitalism'. We absolutely agree. We would, however, append a vital qualification: the hero, the 'Individual', central to the manipulative requirements of capitalism, is constructed by capitalism in its own likeness. Beneath these constructs there remains a social, psychological and volitional entity still capable of influencing the social, for the sake of the social, rather than for the advancement of capital. Were this not the case, no positive social change could occur. We feel that the 'pure, formal abstract theatre' has now grown too close to a capitulated, co-opted form whose very sparseness and inarticulacy signifies not incorruptibility but a selfishness that is the dying, outraged cry of erased selves. This erasure is the supreme achievement of capitalism: identity is

supplanted by the Consuming Hero, as Rogers himself affirms, but in addition to this basic achievement, the reflective, usefully Selfish power of the residual resistance is seduced into a dream, the dream of refusal, in which the babyised convulsions of anger and despair are mistaken for constructive reactions by their perpetrators. This is junky talk. It is the Stockholm syndrome — the captives grow to love their captors, and learn to describe their captivity in the static language of their captors. But description isn't enough.

Rogers manages to make one of our favourite words, 'obsession', sound like a pejorative when he refers to Lumiere & Son's 'obsession with the individual'. We continue to pursue the notions that we have been attempting to adapt and refine for years — the imagination is infinitely elastic, it can only be temporarily immobilised or impoverished, and when the going gets tough, the language can be changed, often by utilising that profound, interior interface between the embattled 'self' and the oppressed 'social'. This 'social' is both contemporary and historical and its interiority can be turned inside out and used as part of a *collective* imaginative counter to the slash and burn of the contemporary 'anti-social'. These are the lines along which we see our project.

In his closing paragraphs Rogers reveals that 'the real experiment in the theatre of the 80's' is one 'which offers us an opportunity of a direct experience over the meaning of which we have control.' Rogers refers, we are sure, to a theatre which does not resort to trickery derived from or typical of, capitalism. However, the 'we' who must exert control over meaning, is composed of discrete beings. The resistance implicit in that discreteness may, in part, be maintained by the pursuit of obsession, no longer a dirty word but a vital and vitalising project.

Throughout 'Butterflies' the writer has made thoughtful and often complimentary statements about our work. We have always craved serious critical attention, and his article is probably the longest single critical essay devoted to Lumiere & Son since the company's inception. It is therefore a great pity that the piece is flawed by superficial theorising more typical of mainstream critics who do not possess one tenth of the persistence and dedication of Steve Rogers. ●



TECHNOLOGICAL WITCH DOCTORS

Survival Research Laboratories deal in vast arena events where out-of-control juggernaut robots bully each other to smithereens. Their simulated future battlefields are aimed to bring home the reality of warfare to a public who are numbed by the bland calculations of cold warrior politicians. Mark Pauline, one of the Laboratories' instigators was in London recently showing videos of actions — yet to appear in Europe — to a stunned audience. Could it happen here? **ROB LA FREN AIS** delves into SRL's motives:



PHOTO / BOBBY MEENS ADAMS

The lads in the lab

Rob La Frenais: It seems quite extraordinary, in fact worrying, the extent to which the audiences are so trusting of your machines. There was one group of people — the pincers were quite close to them. How did they know that it would not go out of control and crush them?

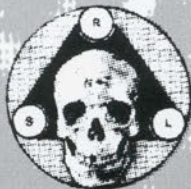
Mark Pauline: Like most people, they probably stood on a street corner and watched cars go by at about 50 miles an hour. Quite a long time ago they quit wondering why they were standing there. I think there is a spirit of unreality about our shows that suspends your natural fears. Aside from that there's the whole question of peer pressure — we're not going to let ourselves be scared by this whole thing, it's just a joke — we're going to see something really wild. It's something we're not going to get anywhere else and we're not going to run away from it, and look stupid doing it. There's a whole audience decorum thing, you know. But it's not really that dangerous, ultimately. Who knows what real danger is? Have you ever been in a war, for instance?

RL: No, I don't know how many of your audience have, maybe in America a smattering . . .

MP: There are not enough people who are aware enough about what real violence is, in a first hand way, to have kind of developed any real superstition about what it really means to be in a situation like that, so you can take advantage of that, like being a sort of technological witch doctor. On the first hand they don't understand how any of it works — you'd need to be an engineer to understand how that stuff works. They're cut off from that, from being able to predict the action except on a very superficial level.

RL: They think that because it's art, that it's safe and it's not going to hurt them. They also assume a benevolent attitude on the part of the artists. I don't know why it's always assumed — I've certainly seen accidents take place during art actions. I've often wondered whether it's a correct assumption on the part of the public.

MP: Well, at least we're professionals. A lot of artists who deal in — you know — heavier



TECHNOLOGICAL WITCH DOCTORS



presentations are very amateurish. We've been doing this since 1979, twenty-seven of these performances and no one's ever been hurt.

RL: I also noticed, during the Area performances, someone in the background shouting 'blood, more blood'. I'm interested in this gladiatorial aspect . . .

MP: The New Rome . . .

RL: Yes, it seems to me that the audience expectations in many ways start to outweigh what artists are prepared to put on for them. It seems less that the artist is less able to push back beyond the audience's sensibilities or perceptions and more a case of the audience demanding more and more in a gargantuan way. Do you find that this becomes a problem?

MP: Not for us, because as the audience calls for more we've been able to accommodate them, very handily. So it's not a problem. I think that is misinterpreted. I think that the fever-pitched mob quality you get in an audience is the natural reaction to any situation where you get that kind of intense stuff. It's more a way of blowing off steam. It can only be inwardly directed, because, unlike a typical mob scene they are a passive audience, but they're in a situation which would normally command a mob action — a sort of welling up, and maybe some kind of culmination in an act by the audience. Actually that does happen sometimes. It's got to the point where the audience is starting to do frenzied and unpredictable things. You may have seen on the last tape all these records being thrown in by all these young punks — they want to be radical but they're basically teenagers — they're powerless — so their reaction to us being able to stage a spectacle like that, under the auspices of a fairly large organisational push — their reaction was to demonstrate their inability to rebel by throwing records — a very superficial and very facile reaction to it. You get that reaction to it and sometimes there's a sort of bloodlust that gets vented . . .

RL: But you mentioned war, and war is really a quite unemotional phenomena — it's quite merciless and deadly. As you quite rightly pointed out, many people haven't experienced a war. Would you say that to some extent you are attempting to simulate a war condition in these performances?

MP: To a degree. It's something that you can't really ignore. It's an element that we obviously

capitalise on — to get people in a state . . . of course aside from war, what's the goal of war? Some sort of honour, nationalism, *Lebensraum* or whatever.

RL: So you're saying that your machines parody that?

MP: Yes, because . . . what are we doing? Obviously the purpose of these shows is not to parallel in any real way the purposes of war. It can't be anything other than a parody because . . .

RL: For a start there's no guerilla war essentially. The big machines always win in your pieces.

MP: No, that's not necessarily true at all. Those small machines you notice are always the last things that run in the shows. Of course it always works out differently, but the props . . . you know you've got to remember that all the machines are made to industrial standards. It means they're very nearly indestructible. You basically have to run over them with a truck to stop them in any positive fashion. Frequently that's not the case at all. It's the more complicated machines that conk out. You have to pay more special attention to a complicated machine because you don't want something that the show is organised around to fuck up before the end. These weaker machines — it's just outward appearances because it's pretty well even all the way out.

RL: Does the hardware get rebuilt and recycled at the end?

MP: A couple of times. The bigger ones we usually recycle, and that was one year's work of work basically. You can see that some of the machines carry on, and there is a shifting mixture of different machines throughout the show.

RL: I noticed that the machines themselves start to develop human attributes, such as the one dragging itself along. I noticed in the East Village Eye interview you said that you would animate a human corpse if it was legal. There seems to be an investment of emotion into those machines, and once you start identifying with the human form you seem to be entering a different universe. I was also particularly struck by the way the large machine raised its arms up at the end, almost as if in triumph. How do you feel about this investiture of human emotion?

MP: Well, it's another step on the road to getting a real . . . using machines in the show to the degree that they have as much power as some

kind of entertainment event or whatever you want to call it. One of the ways of doing that is to take the machines and imbue them with more anthropomorphic type characteristics. That's one thing about machines. Ultimately they're faceless. Sometimes they can exist purely in terms of the powers that they have — the faceless energy that they project — purely in terms of what they can do in terms of what they can't do. It doesn't have any connection to people, but you don't want to rely on that. The anthropomorphic thing is a good trick to draw people into the show.

RL: But where does the road lead? Where do you draw the line? Is it legal?

MP: I don't think it's really a legal problem, there are a lot of people, like Joe-Peter Witkin who uses dead bodies as a matter of course in his photographs, tableaux, stuff like that. It's very well considered work in that genre. He's very well respected and very grotesque. In a very classy way. Stylised.

RL: But you haven't yet activated a human corpse?

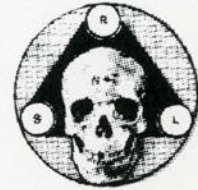
MP: No, I mean it's just a question of . . . our whole game is to get as much bang for the buck, so to speak. We try to take what we have and put it into a situation where it can be as powerful as it can by relating it to other things. We always try to get as much leverage as we can — that's the whole reason for doing shows the way we do, spending all this time. Because you get the kind of leverage that is denied you if you're trying to do something to get people's attention using means that are pretty well fleshed out by other people already.

RL: I suppose I'm trying to get at some question of motivation. For example when you flash some of those slogans — there seems to be some kind of ironic attitude to the breaking down of taboos.

MP: I don't think those things are taboos, I think they're generally accepted as the world-wide yuppie philosophy, the new Machiavellianism — there's nothing secret or taboo about them, they're about as taboo as the half-naked pictures of women in the papers they have around here. It's not taboo.

RL: For example some of the quotations that come out . . .

MP: 'Deceive and attack others for your own selfish gain regardless of the pain or loss of others'. That was in



the *Deliberately False Statements Show*. 'A combination of tricks and illusions guaranteed to expose shrewd manipulations of fact'. So, the programme we're postulating is that we're going to uncover lies, tricks and illusions which is pretty heavy irony, I would say. Sort of satirical. Of course the way these shows work is like a whole back-referencing set of contradictions. Where they just turn back on themselves and back on themselves and back on themselves. Infinitely. That's really what we try to do. And of course the show about lies, which is what that show is about — I could go out and make — say something about lies and say — Well these are the bad lies, and this is the truth — and of course it puts you in the position of making a fool of yourself, basically being totally ridiculous. The stance we thought was the best for that show was kind of an affirmation of the illegitimacy of any opinion about it in particular, and forcing people to come to terms with it. The thing you ask yourself is not

that do we believe that, you ask, do I believe that? And you immediately compare yourself with that. Also the whole focus of the show is the whole thing about human sharks. There is the whole thing about implying that people were human sharks. You tell someone they're a human shark, and everyone at some point or another or in one way or another is a human shark. Everybody is guilty of those things, everyone thinks or fears somehow, if you have any morality at all, of any kind, if they've picked it up along the way, they're going to fear those things in themselves. That was why I picked those particular statements. Those kind of things scare people. The shows, really, to me ultimately are about setting up a situation so that you confront people with their worst and most horrible fears about themselves, and about the place they live.

RL: Do you, though? From a glance at the audience's faces, I'm not quite so sure that was happening.

MP: Well, it's a funny thing, the

stories I hear. People smile when they get scared. People who were smiling at that last show — I've got hundreds of people who say they've never been so scared in their lives. Again it's like this peer pressure. Those sirens were going off at over 126 decibels. That'll literally make your ear feel like there's someone sticking an ice-pick in your head. Yet you saw — half the people wouldn't put their fingers in their ears because it wasn't the cool thing to do.

RL: There was a notorious pyrotechnics artist working here in the '70s, the late Steve Cripps, and people at his performances would be standing at the front and literally be blasted with heavy explosives, indoors. Being a professional performance-goer, I soon saw sense and stood at the back. But nobody else was doing this, because somehow they had the idea that this guy was not going to blow them all up. He probably wouldn't, but . . .

MP: Did anyone get hurt?

RL: Probably not, one or two perforated eardrums maybe. But what

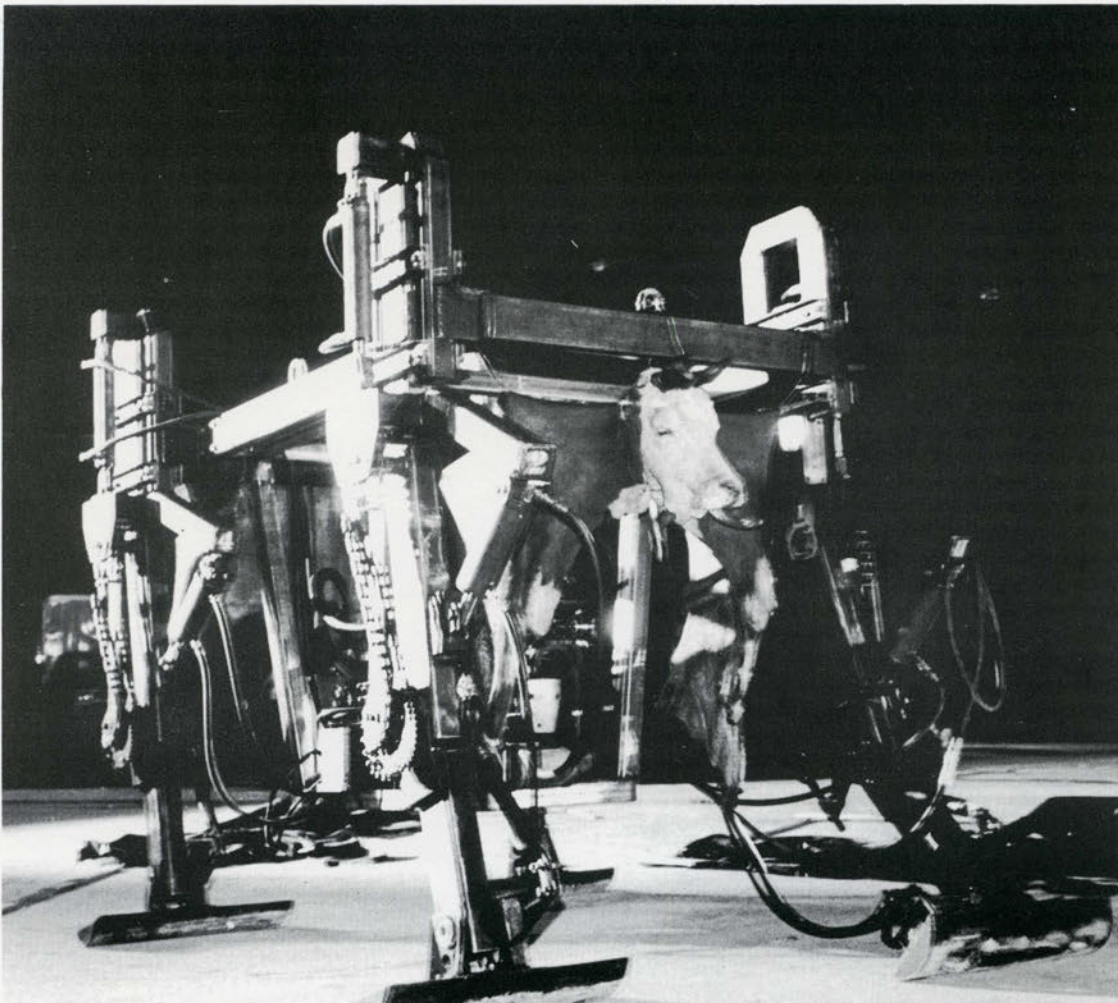
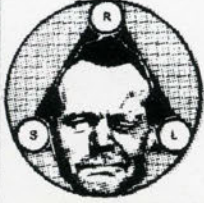


PHOTO / MX CANDLESS / ADAMS

Robot Cow



TECHNOLOGICAL WITCH DOCTORS

was the particular element of the show that made your audience scared?

MP: Probably the noise for one thing. The soundtrack was extremely loud. For that show it was just like implications. Like kind of weird cliches, tons of mirrors that were all over the place breaking, and the noise of sirens. They resonate at frequencies that make you feel real strange.

RL: Rather than being an arena performance, one that was actually attacking the audience:

MP: Not at all. We didn't specifically go after them. We just played with them. That show was a situation where the audience was really more involved. The situation was such where all these sophisticated kind of artworld people had paid 15 bucks to get in. We had corralled them in an area which was really tight. There wasn't much room to move. Fenced in in all directions they couldn't even walk across to get out. They'd paid 15 bucks and behind them there was a commoners gallery, 5000 people who are watching them. So you know *these* people hated *these* people. They could see us manipulating them. It was under a freeway — there just wasn't much room. After the end of the show we had all this fog stuff, activity,

explosions and so on. We had these two military chemical warfare machines kick in, all the action stopped, the sirens stayed on. The machines put in a million cubic feet a minute. They couldn't leave because they couldn't see in front of them . . .

RL: One of the genuine attributes of war is that people are trapped by it. They can't leave a place or a situation. It's that kind of phenomena.

MP: Each of the shows emphasises the particular angle of what has come before in history and has been identified as an intense human tendency, or range of experience. We zero in on a particular one in each show. That show was about the claustrophobic feeling, being trapped and being watched. The ultimate humiliation and harassment, embarrassment, peer pressure and all that kind of stuff.

RL: Going back to the machinery. It's all very much rough cybernetics, isn't?

MP: Oh yeah. It's practical cybernetics. The high tech thing about it, is the application. The control systems of it are pretty sophisticated sometimes. The radio control systems are state of the art, and so are some of the electronics, but basically it has to

be very reliable. You can't have some stupid computer that's going to spin out five minutes before the show.

There is the context that we put these older mechanical systems in as well, but some of the inventions are new. That's my angle there. I come up with more inventions.

RL: Don't you feel that you might get so involved with the hardware that some of the art objectives go by the board?

MP: I would never do that. I'm just not that involved with them.

RL: Do you enjoy using the hardware?

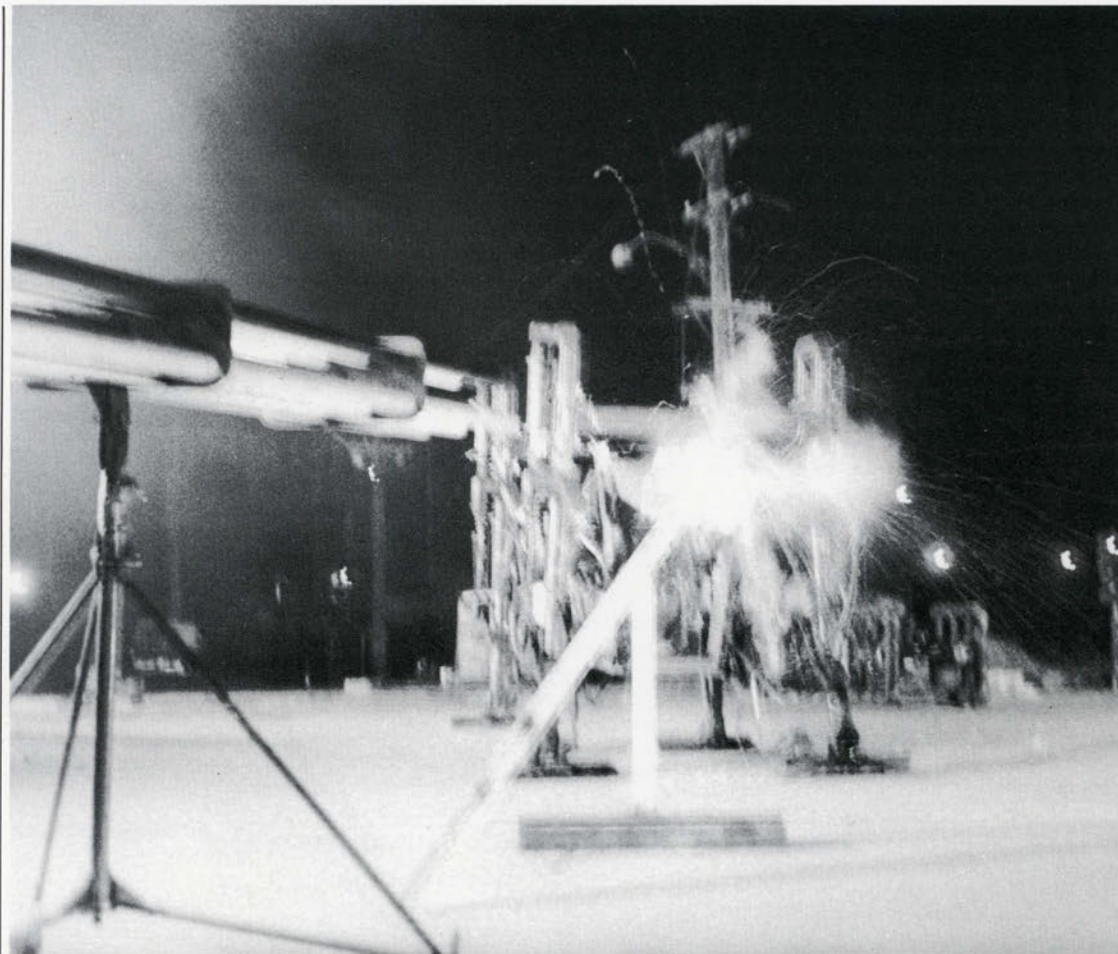
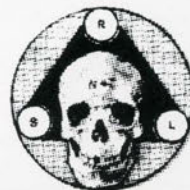
MP: No, not really. I mean I kind of do, but I don't. I do but I don't. I hate working with machines. I hate it enough, so that I'm never really going to get too wrapped up with them. It's something I've always been aware of. I know that's the fatal danger for us. Something I've always pulled back from when I feel like it starts to possess me. Up to this point I've been able to balance it.

RL: A criticism I've heard is that the work is that politically it's toys for the boys. That seemed to be borne out in the shot of the penis shaped car that was being used to smash the other cars. Boys getting obsessed with toys.



PHOTO / MX CANDLESS / ADAMS

Public unfazed by
mechanical crusher



Terminate with absolute
prejudice

MP: There was just this one article, out of 26 shows that really mentioned that (High Performance in LA).

RL: Do you have any reaction?

MP: Well, I am a boy. To a degree you can call anything that I work with a toy. I think it's kind of stretching a point, and misrepresenting the focus of what we do, to say that. That's my personal opinion. I wouldn't want to present myself in an unfavourable light (laughter). I'll leave that to other people. I'm sure they're better at doing that than me.

RL: Just now you said you didn't like machines. How does that connect with this?

MP: I hate machines! I don't get mad, really, at people. That's never been something I do. I get upset and frustrated with machines and inanimate objects and I have all my life. That's probably why I work with them. It's something that's a real challenge, to even be able to, like . . . I've been bitten back by machines. Obviously (displays hand mutilated by rocket fuel

blast) they've fought back at me. It certainly hasn't endeared me to them any more. I'm afraid of them. I'm afraid when I work with these huge tools — I mean I don't work with little toys. We work with giant industrial tools. Kill you in a second if you weren't paying attention. I do that every day. You do that sixteen hours a day for a few months and you develop a very healthy fear. You certainly don't get maudlin about your little tools, or anything like that. You're always very aware of them and afraid of them. I'm not only afraid of them physically, but getting too involved with them. That is of course has always been what's destroyed art that's tried to be involved with technology and so on. To this point, anybody I've seen work with it, that's been a pit they've fallen into. I try to keep the rhetoric a few steps beyond the pure technical aspect of it.

RL: Do you think we will ever get beyond a point whereby we are certain that a machine is made by a human,

ultimately, and therefore will always do it's bidding? This is a certainty which runs through computer science and cybernetics.

MP: You mean take on a life of their own? I think we've proven that at least in a theatrical presentation type of experience, yes machines can take on a life of their own. Maybe by chance . . . more the way people imagine them being. They take on a life of the imagination, in terms of the audience, and also, just the kind of randomness that a machine is always going to be able to have . . . the control that a machine has . . . that's a part of it. They do have a mind of their own. No-one's ever going to look at them the same. They're never going to mean the same thing to people. In that sense I think we can see them proving that it's a possibility at least in a conceptual way. Certainly not in an actual hardware sense. It couldn't be verified scientifically. ●

Jo Ann Callis —
metaphorical
performance

THE CAMERA IS THE ONLY AUDIENCE

Two recent exhibitions in London raised the interesting question of whether you need an audience for a performer. The mechanical process of photography — the camera as hidden observer, allows performance to be 'staged' to create static

images as powerful as the live action. **CHRISSIE ILES** investigates:

Pierre Moliner's *Self Portrait* — displaying his body in classic female pose

EVERYONE HAS, as some point in their lives, attempted to make a self portrait, almost always using that most instant means of creating an image — the photograph. Furthermore, whether in that self portrait, or in portraits of others, we have, consciously or subconsciously, manipulated the figures and surrounding space, either by simple selectivity or by a more elaborate theatrical and imaginative construction. Such activity can be conceived as individual, personal, informal performances staged for the camera, in which various projections of and ideas about both the self and others are explored. The photography which emerged from body art, performance/sculpture and other conceptual work in the sixties and seventies took on a life of its own, as its function as a document was superseded by its power as an individual independent image bearing in some cases little relation to the original performance as a whole. As these images moved into the gallery space as collectable objects, artists began to explore the aesthetic and intimate potential of photography's new role, and in some cases created a separate, metaphorical, often clearly impossible 'performance', as in, for example, Keith Arnatt's *Self Burial* or William Wegman's *Dropping a Glass of Milk*, in which the camera distorts reality in a very dubious way and creates a performance in the imagination.

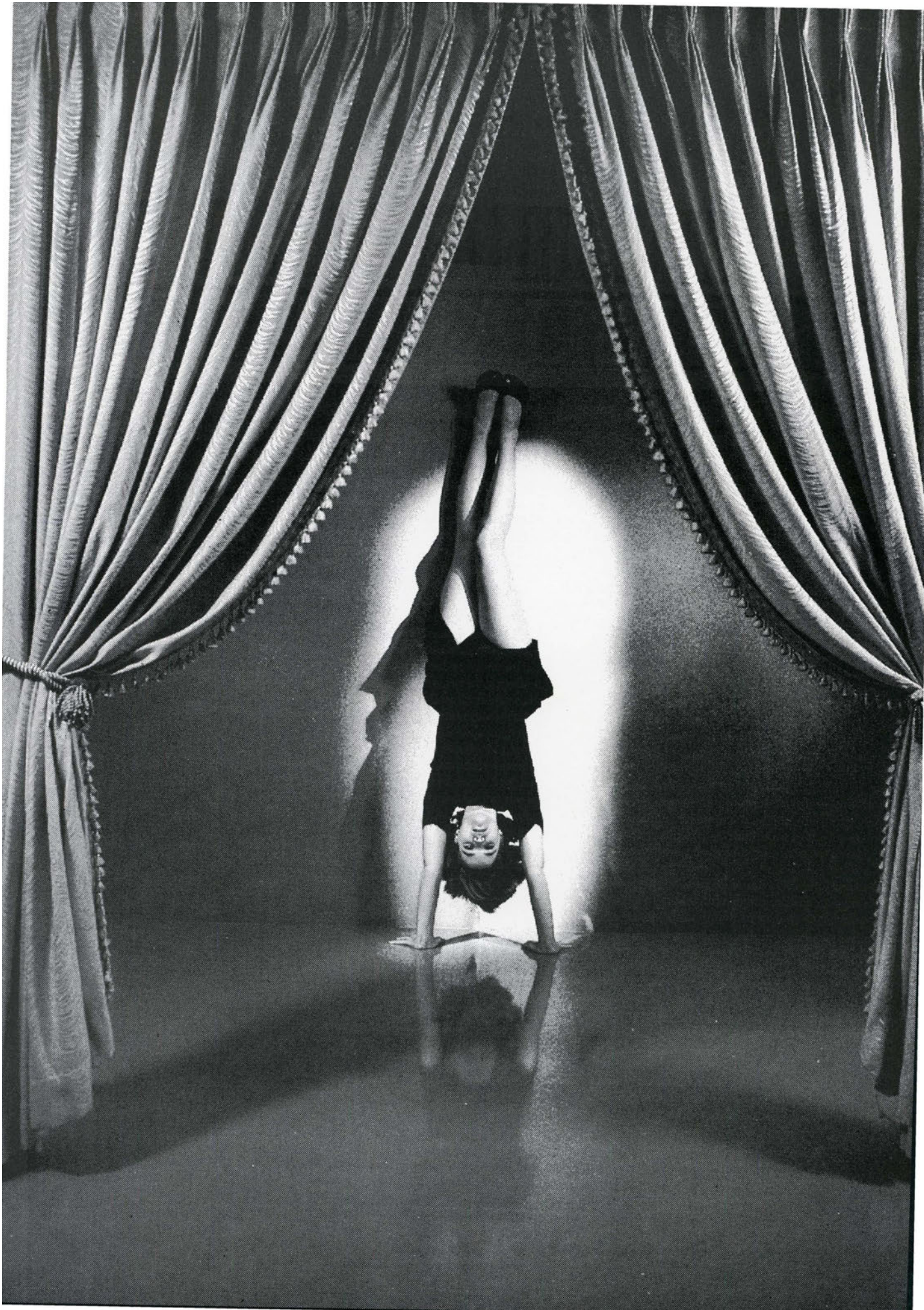
That photographers such as Hippolyte Bayard were creating similar impossible tableaux a hundred and fifty years earlier, as in *Self Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840) says much about the universality of the photography as performance technique. It is interesting to note that both Bayard and Arnatt made their respective tableaux as comments on a

situation in the art world at that particular time. Bayard created the image as a personal protest at a decision by the French government not to award him a particular prize, and Arnatt commented on the dissolution of the art object, which, by implication, would eventually include the disappearance of the artist her/himself. Bayard creates an impossible but evocative image of himself submerged under water, motionless and waterlogged, through his particular romantic and mysterious treatment of the photographic materials used. Blurred and faded images of the artist were adopted frequently by Joseph Beuys, who preferred the mysterious quality of obscured documentary footage to the ordinary pristine photo-documentation of his work, and incorporated some of them back into his own subsequent artworks.

The exploration of identity and self through the photographic image is the subject of a historical survey exhibition 'Staging the Self — Self Portrait Photography 1840's-1980's', selected by James Lingwood, at the National Portrait Gallery. At the Photographers Gallery, the construction of a photograph by, as and through performance, either direct or implied, is examined in 'Photography as Performance — message through object and picture', selected by Maureen Paley and Tony Rafat. Whilst no direct link between these two shows may be immediately apparent, the threads they trace become intertwined at certain important historical and aesthetic points, and in some ways the latter can be seen as a sequel or continuation of the former.

The title 'Photography as Performance' implies what quickly becomes evident — that the images on





THE CAMERA IS THE ONLY AUDIENCE



display are not photographic documentary records of performance which have taken place, but have been created using either an implied or actual live performance, and have a status as images in their own right. This contrasts with the better known and more frequently exhibited photographs as documentary record common in the seventies and best known through the work of Long, Christo, Smithson, Gilbert and George and Beuys.

Whilst the images in 'Photography as Performance' do not function as a tangible record of the ephemeral, they do nevertheless give permanence to the ephemeral, visualising memory, imagination and fantasy by using a performance to create a specific image. In some cases, as in the work of George Rousse or Bernard Faucon, the image is of a place in which the artist cannot be seen but whose presence can be traced. In others, ideas of identity, self image and self portraiture are acted out in front of the camera in a more intimate context than could ever be achieved with a live audience. The camera is used as a mirror before which the artist distorts, cavorts and experiments with different 'selves', in the same way as the photographers in 'Staging the Self' use the camera.

In 'Staging the Self' this exploration

of identity is a frequently recurring impulse in the self portraits. The title 'Staging the Self' suggests a theatrical, deliberate presentation of the possibilities of various 'selves' to the camera in which an informal performance has almost always taken place. 'Staging the Self' is a historical survey, and the catalogue divides discusses the work in three specific sections: an exploration of the self in 'The Image of the Other', a section on women 'So How Do I Look? Women Before and Behind the Camera' and men 'The Watchman, or Notes on the Imaginary Male Self in Twentieth century Photography'. Elements from each of these sections can also be found in 'Photography as Performance'.

In 'Photography as performance' for example, Eleanor Antin shows us two photographic self images —. In one, *Henri (from January 20 1649)* the artist portrays herself as a man, dressed as the subject of a seventeenth century portrait painting, complete with beard, hat, ruffled shirt and sinewy strong hand, looking disdainfully and directly at the camera in a stance of power.

In another, *I Dreamt I was a Ballerina!*, the artist portrays herself as a ballet dancer, acting out a young girl's common fantasy image and conforming completely to traditional female values of grace, softness,

suppliance and display. Only the title of the photograph written across the image, which looks from afar like a tightrope on which the dancer is moving, and the clumsy right foot, bely the real stance of the artist. These two photographs correspond with two from 'Staging the Self' by Alice Austen a hundred years earlier, in one of which she appears dressed up as a man with two other female friends in a group portrait, complete with stances of authority and phallicly placed umbrella, and in the other, *Self Portrait Full Length With Fan*, in which she portrays herself in the full trappings of the feminine conventions of the time.

A similar exploration of sexual identity through intimate photography can be seen in Lucas Samura's four colour self portraits in 'Photography as Performance', in which the artist, naked in his kitchen, conducts an intimate private performance, presenting himself as a feminine type of object for display, dancing and tiptoe holding a piece of white net material coyly in front of himself and clutching a bunch of flowers, distorting the resulting image with a painterly technique. In 'Staging the Self' Pierre Moliner's *Self Portraits* show the artist in stockings and suspenders, displaying his body in classic female poses of sexual desirability in male terms, whilst Cecil Beaton and Hugh Cecil both pout and pose as winsome minstrels and pierrots, and Louise Deshong-Woodbridge stands, pickaxe in hand and miners lamp strapped to her waist, in bloomers over laced-up boots, montaged with her head and shoulders in traditional female style of hair, with accompanying straw hat, in *Self Portrait as a Miner*.

This 'otherness' and multiplicity of identities, fantasised and acted out through the camera, also occurs in the work of Christian Boltanski as a means of expurgating and re-exploring personal history. In his *La Premier Communion* he acts out simultaneously, through four images, the role of both himself as a child receiving the communion and the priest who administers it, rather like a psychological purgative technique used in order to come to terms with childhood feelings.

The problem of reclaiming and taking control of one's image is one dealt with frequently by women in both exhibitions. In 'Staging the Self' Anne Brigman's *The Lone Pine* of 1909

Keith Arnatt's Self Portrait



shows herself naked sitting in a tree, desirous rather than a passive object of desire, adopting a sexually aggressive stance quite radical for the time. Eighty years later Lydia Schouten in *Romeo Lies Bleeding* in 'Photography as Performance' reverses the traditional female role by holding a cardboard cut-out film ideal of a Real Man, yet beyond her seemingly strong stance she looks wistfully at his mocking cardboard stare, and her nakedness emphasises a certain vulnerability and uncertainty.

A similar ambiguity can be found in 'Photography as Performance's' *Performance 1985* by Jo Ann Callis, in which the artist is shown upside down in black dress and shoes, doing a handstand, framed by theatrical curtains and lit by a spotlight. The photograph could be a document of a performance, which could have consisted either merely of this single act or have been of indefinite length; or the title could also refer to a metaphorical performance of the kind women and little girls are expected to produce daily. The vulnerability of the upside-down figure and the way her dress has fallen to her hips has strong sexual overtones, emphasised by a coy positioning of the left knee in front of the right, the voyeuristic and public nature of the event emphasised by the curtains and the spotlight.

This kind of work deals with other issues besides personal identity and fantasy as acted out through performance and portrayed through the photograph. In Bruce McLean and David Ward's *Good Manners or Physical Violence of 1985* or example, the image was created, not as a record of the performance from which it was taken and of the same title, but as an independent photographic image which, although it has a strong figurative element, is not about a personal exploration, but about the visualisation of the ideas dealt with in the performance. The photograph's independence from existing as a documentary narrative record is emphasised by its uniqueness, its high quality, glossiness and by a text printed over the image which discusses the ideas of the performance itself, all of which suggest the status of an art object.

The relationship between painting and photography is strongly evident in both shows, in a direct historical way in the early work in 'Staging the Self' and in the artist's intervention onto the



photograph later on using paint, pencil, montage and collage. This is present in photographs by Egon Schiele, Fortunato Depero, Ellen Carey and Susan Hiller in 'Staging the Self', and in Louis Jamme's painterly portraits and William Wegman's images in 'Photography as Performance'.

Whilst 'Staging the Self' is a fairly comprehensive historical survey of self portraits made over the last 140 years it has inevitable gaps, particularly in the contemporary section. In some senses 'Photography as Performance' can be read as a continuation of and equal to many of the issues raised in the 'Staging the Self' show. Yet 'Photography as Performance' is itself by necessity a fragmentary show with many important omissions, and, as Paley herself has pointed out, the area needs a far more thorough survey. This personal selection has nevertheless brought a large number of names and images completely unknown to a British audience to light, and both exhibitions have brought images hitherto unexposed to public exhibition for the first time.

One significant difference between the work in both shows is that whilst 'Staging the Self' will be accepted without question as a historical

photographic exhibition, its performance elements will pass unnoticed and indeed taken for granted. The work in 'Photography as Performance', although a visually dynamic series of images in almost constant movement, will be treated with suspicion by many in the photography establishment because it does not, on the whole, embrace many of the traditional qualities or characteristics of photography, even though visualising a reality of the imagination and taking as its source and material the performing, actual or imaginary, of social and intimate rituals for the camera rather than an audience is a process common to much photography. It is strongly present in 'Staging the Self', from the very first daguerrotypes of the 1840's to the images of the present day, yet the idea of photography as performance here is not an issue in spite of the fact that in almost every case a performance of some kind has occurred. Nevertheless, in both shows, including the very early work in 'Staging the Self', the dominant culture has been challenged and subverted by the artist/photographer, both through directly ephemeral or implicitly interventionist means. ●

The unseen artist in Bernard Falcon's *La Chambre Qui Brûle*

PHOTO / BERNARDO FALCON



People's art — a familiar roadside sight

AN ARTIST ON THE FRONT LINE OF THE INVENTED WAR

It's all very well to talk about art and politics and issue-based work from the cosiness of the art world, but what happens when you are pitched into a struggle with forces beyond your control? If the US goes into Nicaragua, for example, where will be the artists and intellectuals similar to those who formed the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War? PHILIP WOOD, a visual theatre producer, went to Nicaragua recently, and sent weekly diaries to his artist friends who sponsored his visit. We print extracts from his diaries, along with some of his thoughts since returning:

STANDING IN THE courtyard of a central London converted council tenement watching the group Large Scale International. TV sets are hurled from the neat rows of flower potted balconies by demented white-haired white-clad Brookside viewers, who have had enough of city life. I know how they feel. Rob La Frenais and I discuss amongst the debris left the angle for an article about Central America. We come up with what's it like to be an artist transported to a war zone, how do you cope and what do you do on your return?

To write this is a struggle. There is an adage that says to understand a struggle you have to partake in it, this is the main reason why I went, not only to comprehend the situation there but to come to terms with my confusions here. Now I have experienced how do I communicate, a common enough problem.

I am a worker in experimental theatre, I started at the Oval House and have worked with many dance and theatre companies who have graced these pages. I am about to tour with *Suburbs of Hell* by Hidden Grin, a Company I co-founded.

How I got to Nicaragua seems pertinent. An Arts Council project grant I had applied for was rejected. This left me with the commitment, a blank summer and a lot of energy. I

phoned 47 friends who gave me between £5 and £50 to buy the plane ticket. Three weeks later I was in Managua.

3rd July 1986. I am sitting here in the middle of a tropical rainstorm. Peter is in the garden rescuing two parrots who have clipped wings so they can not fly out of the torrential rain. We have just heard the news of 24 more murders by the Contra. One killed whilst on the boat down the Rio Escondido to Bluefields, 8 women, 8 children and 7 men killed by a mine under their bus in the Neuvo Segovia region.

I arrived in Managua 10 days ago and spent the first few days trying to get a press pass to travel into areas restricted to visitors. Permission has been granted for me to go to Bluefields but because of the attacks I have to fly. Having said that a Ministry of Fisheries plane was shot down 3 months ago. I am told it is now safe.

My immediate plans at this stage are to travel towards the Costa Rican border to the fishing village of San Juan Del Sur, to see how the war is affecting the local community. A week on the Atlantic Coast and then I will have two days to get to Esteli before the town is sealed off by the military. Esteli has been chosen as the centre for the celebrations of the '19th July' the day of liberation from Somoza and the USA. About half a million people out

of a total population of 2.7 million.

I went out to a *Barrio* on my first Friday here. 50,000 people come together to listen to speeches by Ortega, members of the Government and the military before marching en masse around the barrios collecting more supporters prior to the march through the night to Masaya, 31 kilometers away in the mountains. This is a re-enactment of the original march which took place after the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* had held 15 of the 25 barrios of Managua for three weeks in June 1979 against Somoza's National Guard. On the 27th of June 6,000 people marched in single file for 30 hours and despite attacks from 6 aircraft only 6 died and 16 were wounded before victoriously entering Masaya. Their graves are marked along the route with white crosses. The march was the most moving gathering I have ever attended. A sea of men and women wearing green fatigues waving the red and black flags of the FSLN. The soldiers built human pyramids, five people high, topped with a flag, snakes of piggy-backed supporters pushed like mad steam trains, shouting through the tight packed happy throng. It is difficult to imagine, but the same number of people that attended this rally were killed in the last 8 weeks of the revolution.

People's performance — human pyramids re-enacting victory over Somoza



Some 10,000 people marched through the rain, uphill, trudging along the volcanic mountains, catching a quick sleep, snooze on the way, green curled bodies using the kerb as a pillow. Just prior to Masaya people collect to dance on the local basket ball pitch to the strains of an exhausted, soaked four piece brass band and a disco whose first song was Paul Hardcastle's NNNNNNineteen. Oddly apt. When we had all gathered, on again, still raining guided by burning tyres and mortar fireworks, into the dawn and into Masaya. Bedraggled men, women, children, laugh, chant, applaud, sing, chant, weary and happy. More heart-rending speeches, flags and fireworks then a mad dash to a motley collection of army trucks, buses, vans back to Managua. Charged. I have to admit here that I have been holed up for several days with quite severe food poisoning and have only just managed to get hold of the appropriate antibiotics, they are working like magic. One funny note, whilst in the midst of the attack and sitting in the necessary position with clenched teeth, I heard a splashing sound, on looking down I was confronted by a water rat swimming contentedly in the bowl. I swear it was grinning.

It is an important time to be here now, Reagan has just committed \$100m to the Contra; the International Court of Justice has yesterday ruled that a US involvement here on all counts, is illegal; it is the time of the celebration of the victory of the Revolution, the trade embargo is biting, a new US ambassador has arrived in Honduras with the Green Berets... 'Viva Nicaragua Libre'...

This is a place of massive and very obvious opposites. There are a few very rich people here. I go to the official cambio to change travellers cheques and come out with two large bundles of notes for my \$100. This is the average earnings of a Nicaraguan for 10 months. There are considerable shortages, yet restaurants are always full. Private enterprise is encouraged and Socialist reforms ensures access to education and health care for all. Differentials have been increased in the public sector between skilled and unskilled workers to stop the drain to the private market. Unions flourish, co-ops are more productive than private businesses and you frequently see cases of malnutrition.

An example of how odd I sometimes feel is that due to rationing it is

frequently better to eat in restaurants. There is one I have been to here which overlooks a volcanic crater and lake on the side of which and clearly visible from your dining seat is Somoza's old bombed-out palace. It was from here that the National Guard would hurl victims down the sheer face and into the lake. There are two changes to Somoza's day. Firstly the profits are controlled by the government and secondly the band there now plays music from the Atlantic Coast.

I have been very lucky to be staying with a resident foreigner who has worked all over Central and Southern America as the Director of Operations for an aid organisation for 7 years. He has taught and shown me a lot. His contacts and experience allow me to see more than most visitors and he also translates everything for me.

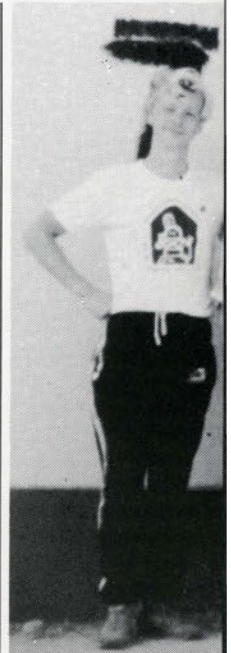
7th July 1986. It's Monday morning and I am looking at some words scribbled on the back of a matchbox, catch words to help me remember San Juan Del Sur. San Juan is 20km north of the de-militarised zone with Costa Rico. We reached it by truck driving through Masaya, which looked so empty now as compared to the barrios in Managua. It is as if the town could not contain all that fervour and had to let it go for fear of bursting. We passed the village where Sandino was born, climbing through the volcanic hills to the flat fertile plains, Lago De Nicaragua on the left, volcanos on our right. Here is grown sugar cane, corn, some rice and vegetables, mainly roots. The pot holed road crowded with people walking, carrying little plastic bags of water, as glass is in short supply. Open back trucks with jaunty, decorated wheels are stuffed with travellers and their wares, baskets, vegetables, rice and crates of Coca Cola in worn bottles. The North Americans left an odd legacy of Coke, Fanta, a passion for basket ball, baseball and chewing gum. Here are the catch words; search light, boy soldier, corrugated iron, Victoria beer, red snapper, firework mortars, contra, radio mast, pelicans, wind and *Una Fiesta*. The guide book said the sunsets have to be seen to be believed. They were wrong, they were unbelievable. The town of 4,000 is a grid format centred on the church, bars and palm trees line the beach, boats lie in the harbour, many requiring new spare parts. All the bars have the same sign: 'No alcohol to soldiers, minors and those already drunk'. No one pays any

attention to it. There is a large drink problem here. They were beginning to ask what the revolution meant. At night a large search light sweeps the harbour, seas and skies, it seems a bit haphazard, a sort of game. It is serious, the harbour is a target, it is used to import from South America small goods, and it exports shrimp, there is a problem however with the freezing plant.

Una Fiesta. I followed the mortars, walked up a hill in the dark past prostrate sleeping bodies, we were welcomed so generously, given maize and chicken which had been cooked in a banana leaf tied with the sign of the cross and boiled in an old oil drum. Rum everywhere. It was a religious festival, garish paintings of Jesus, statues of the Madonna and flags of the FSLN. We talked, listened to the local band and felt at home.

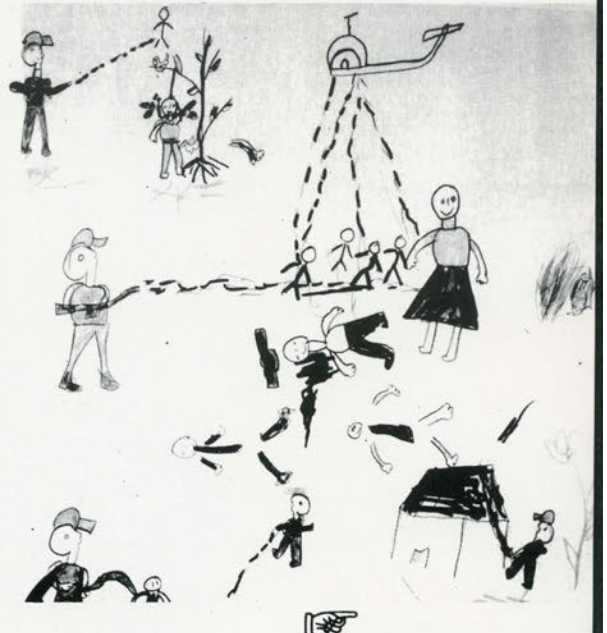
Thursday 17th July. Leaving in an air conditioned jeep, protecting us from the heat and humidity of the rainy season. It was like scooting along in an oxygen tent, with the elements and the reality pushed to arms distance. I was accompanied by a group of project workers both European and Latin American, including Leo, a Bolivian who had fought in the revolution.

The journey of 150 km North-West climbed through green mountains dotted with brown-shirted militia every 200 metres protecting us from threatened Contra attack. We were all excited, expectant knowing that we were going to experience something important. The constant spot checks



The author in Nicaragua

A child's impression of flight from El Salvador



AN ARTIST ON THE FRONT LINE



began with an apology and ended with thanks for being there. Sand bags surrounded by sleepy soldiers and even lazier looking machine guns guarded the bridges. Esteli was cordoned off.

Esteli, amidst the hills denuded by North American foresters, walls, T-shirts, hats, pavements bedecked with the red and black 7 (siete anos), flags, posters, slogans, banners, graffiti mix with the buzzing crowd of soldiers, militia, internationalists and the heroic proud men, women and children of Esteli. They fought hard against the National Guard and the people and town still wear the scars. Photographs to the Heroes and Martyrs in the cultural centre testify to the invasion of tanks and planes; passport-sized snaps of those killed stare blankly at you, row upon row of silent defiance.

Friday and a visit to Ocotal 18 km from the Honduran border. Here the militia protect the town. The campesinos are so skilled at defending themselves that there is no need for the army, but the constant pressure shows. Its difficult to plant corn with a machine gun over your shoulder, constantly watching and listening. Here Leo joined us for a reunion with Phillippe; the head of the local militia, a barrel of a man who nearly smothers Leo, they talk of the past fight and the one to come. Phillippe's toes were burnt off during torture by the National Guard, his elderly mother and father were taken from their tobacco fields in 1983, tortured, murdered and dumped back in the fields, the faces disfigured to stop identification and to scare others. Their photographs are amongst those in Esteli. Phillippe will not talk about this.

In Ocotal there was a local religious fiesta, a line of open-backed trucks bursting with chanting, singing kids, some copying their parents dressed in miniature army fatigues. I was briefly detained by the police as one of the photographs I had taken could have contained shots of army trucks or 'child soldiers'. I appreciated how these images could be misused and left my film. They apologised.

Friday night back in Esteli with Leo and his son, Carlos, talking with Mario, Argentina and their son Carlita who is the same age as Carlos. Carlita was dressed in military greens — he

had insisted that he had some just like daddie's. Mario as a child had played cops and robbers but his version was National Guard and Frente, but no kids would play National Guard. Carlita played Contra and Frente but no one would play Contra. When he pointed his red plastic toy gun at Carlos saying 'hands up', Carlos said, 'but why, I am your friend'. His European mother had tried to bring him up a pacifist and he did not know what to do. Mario and Argentina had tried the same but war was all too real for Carlita.

Mario and Argentina both work for INSBI (the equivalent of our DHSS) and every morning they pack Carlita off to a school that didn't exist prior to the revolution. They then, on the uncleared breakfast table, clean and check their sub-machine gun and rifle. They kiss their own weapons in front of each other, and so say that if they are captured by the contra they will kill themselves and thus save their partner the anguish of knowing they would have been tortured. They do not kiss each other goodbye as this may be the last kiss. 14,000 Nicaraguans have been killed by the contra since 1979.

5 am, pink light indicates the coming dawn, Saturday morning waiting outside Mario's house, the march to the celebration is about to begin. Everyone is very excited. At the start all is organised, groups of 48 in marching bands 6 people wide by 8 people deep headed by a banner proclaiming their barrio and some message of solidarity. We gather under plastic bunting of the FSLN strung between the tightly packed houses. I spot many other chanting bands, snaking their way through the red gloom, burning tyres on street corners conduct us on our tour, gathering others. I quickly learn the responses to the cheer leaders 'Vive Sandino' 'Viva Nicaragua Libre' 'No Pasaran' . . . they shall not pass. The small bands merge into each other, becoming a throng, spirits high, heads high, hopes high, we converge on the local sports ground. Helicopters, new M18s and M21s buzz overhead, we check each other's bags for weapons, a reminder of the threat from without. It is difficult to see how this elated crowd of campesinos could be considered a threat to the internal stability of the US. The joy in their eyes is backed by

a deep sorrow. There should only be joy — the sorrow is forced upon them.

On to the assembly, three hours of shuffling, lines of bulging trucks deliver people from all over Nicaragua to the giddy growing crowd. Serpents of people from the CST or Leon or Matagalpa or wherever swim through the confusion carrying pendants and greeted with cheers and flag waving. We were supposed to keep together, but as the bands played and the armoured cars looked on we all merged together waiting for the arrival of Ortega, El Presidente.

Pyramids of jungle matching soldiers topped first by the black and red of the FSLN and then the blue and white of the national flag. Flags, flags everywhere, 100,000 attentive, chanting, laughing, eating, singing people. Ortega appears, cheers and then calm, we are told to move closer, so those at the back can get in. There is not enough room for everybody and for the feelings released. The speakers' stand has representatives from 128 nations and they sit below a banner declaring 'Seven years of struggle with the Frente for peace'. The speech is long and simple so that everyone can understand, the message is obvious. Everyone here knows the consequences of freedom. A poem by Gorki says that once you have walked the path of freedom you can not step back. There is real fear mixed with the excitement and it is justified, but the overwhelming sense is one of solidarity in determination.

Monday two days later with David, Chris, a Canadian and Massimo, an Italian photographer, we set out overland towards Honduras. We have left behind any tell tale connections with Nicaragua, papers, letters, photographs etc. Contacts made in Managua had led me to access to visit refugee camps in Honduras and Belize for El Salvadorians fleeing the death squads. Our travelling is excellent and we make good progress. We stop in the town of Somoto 15 km from the border, we stand and watch 500 young soldiers in a motley assortment of uniforms march down the road into Contra country; carefully spread out so that if a mine explodes only one of them is killed. Many say hello, some have radios clamped to their ears



listening to radio revolution which pumps out US and UK pop music; quarter of an hour later as we travel down the same road in our crowded bus with two guards hanging on to the roof, there is no sign of the soldiers. I wondered how many would be hearing Michael Jackson tomorrow. In Esteli I was frightened about this journey, but you grow quietly determined, I would not be scared into inactivity, Gorki is right.

On entering Honduras you are confronted with M16s, US uniforms behind dark sunglasses and arrogance. I tried to remain so-called objective. Above the immigration office is a poster in black and red with a silhouette of Sandino and the words 'Murder all Sandinistan Russian Imperialists'. The landscape, the trees, the green and the heat is the same, so is the physical look of the people, but the arrogance and hate glared at me. The other common factor was fear.

We were detained at the border because David had forgotten to leave his Nicaraguan press pass behind, we were aware that we could have been followed by the DIN, the secret police. We arrived in Tegucigalpa at night fall. A smog laden city, garish bill boards, neon, horn blaring traffic, women in high heels and tight clothes, the difference was dramatic. Soldiers guarding banks, hotels, in the cafes, adverts for American Express, Camel, TV beamed in from Chicago, Buicks, Levis, doughnut joints, hamburgers and prostitution. Before arriving I had been told that Tegucigalpa looked like Saigon just prior to war.

The next day we spent gaining permissions from UNHCR, Catholic Relief Services, the military etc. We did a lot of lying. We told the military we were going snorkeling off the coast of El Salvador. At night we read testimonies supplied to us by CRS from refugees and relief workers at the camps we were about to visit. Statements of disappearances, killings, beatings, rapings and drawings from kids of lines of women being beheaded, of helicopters dropping bombs on to peasants. We were warned not to leave these in the hotel but to return them in sealed envelopes and not to get stopped and searched. Later that night David and I heard semi and automatic gun fire and we stood naked pointing our long lenses through the netted window of our fifth floor hotel window in the direction of the noise. We suddenly felt very silly and powerless. It was

probably night training exercises. William Walker, the new US ambassador to Honduras and a military expert backed by the Green Berets were having a good time training the contra. We did see anti-government and anti US slogans painted on walls, and it is known that the Honduran military is outnumbered and outarmed by the contra.

Thursday morning and we left Tegucigalpa by four-seater light aircraft, flying over the deserted mountains, being deposited on an airstrip the size of a couple of football pitches balanced on the summit of some volcanic bulk. The heat was incredible, we had to keep moving to try and make a draught. We were eventually taken by keep into the isolated village of Colomoncagua, cobbled streets, church, school, shop and military barracks. We were refused permission that day to enter the camps and were told of the 9 o'clock curfew which we were certainly not going to test. We stayed the night in the house of the CRS, cleaning our teeth in Coca Cola. We knew that 2km away were 12,000 caged refugees and that in three days we would be gone but they would remain.

In the morning we set out for the camp of San Antonio, 5km from the El Salvador border. Two hours of kidney-grinding, back-snapping bouncing under the fierce sun in an open truck. Wolfgang, the head of the relief workers drove, he was yellow with hepatitis but one hell of a driver. This is an inaccessible area not just because of the war but the terrain is virtually impassable, bumping next to sheer drops, tops of pine trees brush the wheels, their roots sixty feet below, clinging to the slopes.

I was not prepared for entering the camps. Of course we had asked Wolfgang all the right questions, but he had seemed slightly removed and resigned. I soon understood why. You come across the camp as if by accident, dropping through the military cordon and into a sandy brown dust bowl. 1500 refugees herded into a trap, tin roofs glare in the incredible dry heat, the brown shelters hugging the brown mud, and the brown people caught.

We were soon surrounded by staring inquisitive suspicious children, then quickly herded to a meeting with the elected camp representatives. Stories of escape from El Salvador. They arrived in August 1980, three hundred at first, followed by more hopefuls arriving with nothing, starving, many injured,

most with members of the family missing, dead. Victims of Duarte's death squads. The children's drawings show lines of women being beheaded, helicopters pouring down fire. They saw in us hope, we could inform the West about their imprisonment. This responsibility clung to us. It stared at us in their constant glances and stares. We were conducted around the workshops, proudly displayed, everyone clapped and cheered on our entry. Very few visitors had managed to get in and we had to take their message. The children; three hundred huddled in a school room making socks and hats all and every day, bustling communal kitchens serving an inadequate diet of tortilla, rice and beans. Women and children everywhere. Only 15% are male. Six year old children fat, round bellied, bulging eyes which have never seen fruit or any other animals besides chickens, pigs and vultures. The army regularly march through the camp intimidating everyone, stealing the vegetables from the tiny garden, knocking on the hut doors at night trying to gain access so that they can take away the refugees on suspicion of allowing in more refugees or guerrillas, letting loose a few rounds to waken everyone. It is so easy to become a refugee, any age, any sex, any religion, any creed, any colour, any country, any time, it is not difficult.

No contact is allowed with the local Hondurans, some use the scant medical facilities, if caught they are imprisoned. The refugees in their cage are entirely dependent on outside help for food, fire wood, materials for shelter, shoes, clothing, medical supplies and human contact with the outside. They have 2.5 sq metres each of covered shelter, to sleep, eat and live in. They sleep stacked three high. No one would talk about the psychological damage being caused, as if to talk about it would invite the reality to become too vivid. When we came to leave, the whole camp gathered to sing to us, 1500 determined surviving people sang to us, I tried to hide behind the lens of my camera to not let the tears be shown.

The next day into Colo camp. Four camps of 4000 each high on the spartan mountain side. From here they can see into El Salvador and watch the bombing raids on the villages where they were born. Children follow you every where, a single line of barbed





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wire points to the limit of the camp. If strayed across, as did an epileptic in a fit, then you disappear. In August 1985 the Hondurans entered, despite protests from the relief workers, beat up men, raped women and took away the first ten men they found as suspected guerrillas. Due to international pressure these men are now in Canada after being tortured. One of my party Chris had worked with these ten showing them how to make phone calls, get on the metro, order a meal, had photographs of them for their families. They will not be able to see them again until the war has ended and then how will they adjust? These were concentration camps, I have many more testimonies, sitting here they are still alive in me, and they are still alive there. I could not live trapped as they are.

We left the next day, nine hours in a jeep with dysentery over the mountains loaded with film and a feeling of desperation. We were all determined to exploit our desperation to inform. I flew the next day to Belize, ex British Honduras, here some 20,000 El Salvadorians are living. I visited the village of 'Peace Valley'. Here 105 families try and survive in shelters classed as temporary which have been standing against the tropical rains and heat for six years. The conditions here are better. The refugees can mix with the Belizians, sell produce etc, but they have been given tropical jungle to farm, in it can only be grown basic crops and the problems that were in Honduras are here. Meningitis, polio, hepatitis, dysentery, malnutrition, malaria. Here their hopes are falsely raised high, no barbed wire fence but trapped by economic desperation. The rest of the refugees in Belize are classed as aliens. They were originally welcomed here, unofficially as they are farmers and Belize is overpopulated with fishermen. Most El Salvadorians squat on land that is not wanted, but once they have turned it into useful land they are again moved on. Here the British Military are still present, but the US presence is growing rapidly. Trouble is close by.

Ten days back in grey UK, drinking tea, futile golf flickering on the silent TV. Images and emotions of Central America jump into my mind at any

moment. A need to write this before the 'civilisation' wears away the black and white.

I was completely disillusioned with the art world before leaving, I divided theatre into two groups, consequential and inconsequential and most of it fell into the latter. On returning even more does. I wonder what a member of the militia, Kalashnikov strapped to his or her back in a maize field somewhere in the contra region, would think of the flying tellys. The pressure that caused the breakdown would be understood, but would it be considered important? I hasten to add here that I am a Westerner born and bred. I could not permanently live in a Third World Country. I would miss the sophisticated trappings of Europe.

I crave the significance of survival to the people of the revolution. The issue has become so important to me that I now consider that if an invasion by the USA, the reported second Vietnam, happened then I could return as a fighting soldier. I do not say this lightly, Nicaragua now can be likened to the civil war in Spain and the fight against fascism. I feel pushed to make this decision, no longer to stand on the outside, there does come a time when the only option is to take arms. Nicaragua has been pushed to this point and as Gorki the poet says once you have walked the path of freedom, then there is no stepping back. The campesinos do not debate this decision, it is a part of their lives. There is no hate in their eyes, just a sad acceptance. The US cannot win, there are 200,000 guns in the hands of the people and they are experts in guerrilla warfare. The older nations of the world should leave Nicaragua alone, they must be left to try their own imperfect often unwieldy systems, make their own mistakes. The USA forgets it was born out of revolution, disowns its former ideals, and attacks those who still have those ideals with a ferocity which is way out of proportion to the crime.

Currently we are being shown pathetic images of the 2000 victims of the earthquake in San Salvador, 2000 reported dead. President Duarte is seen as the humanitarian asking for international aid for his suffering people. No mention that his death squads have murdered 60,000 peasants,

their thumbs tied behind their backs, shot through the head, whose crime is wanting to have enough land to farm so that they will not starve.

When I managed to gain access to the camp in Honduras one mother told the story of her daughter with whom she escaped across the Sampu River into Honduras. Her daughter, then 8 was shot and severely injured. I asked to take her photograph, but the mother refused because if the image was shown in the Western press it would be seen by Honduran or El Salvadorean and reprisals would be taken against her by either army. I can not even describe her injuries as this would identify her.

I write this for two reasons, firstly to describe the plight and secondly to show how you can be changed, before I went I would not have dreamt of taking such a photograph, but I soon began to search for the most evocative, potent image, virtually at whatever cost. I knew that this girl's photograph would be powerful if published and could help push people here in the UK to do something, to push people from mere objection, but to getting something done.

The question something done is the one I now struggle with, is theatre a powerful enough tool, I no longer want to play to redundant empty arts centres. In theatre I constantly look for images that will jolt as in the 14 year old girl, but we are so hardened as to what will shock enough, and once one image is found another must be found immediately as the power of the first is already waning. I have been asked to work in Colomoncagua for three months, using theatre to help the refugees rediscover their culture and to use as a platform for issues within the camps. Is this the right thing to do?

The visit placed me back in the world. I had become myopic, but the dilemma I am now faced with is how to placate working in the West, which I have admitted I need and yet still remain active in solidarity with the peoples of Central America. ●

Addresses: Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, 23 Beviden Street, London N1.

El Salvador Solidarity Campaign, Caxton House, 13 Borough Road, London SE1.



THE CURRENCY OF ART

Do artists make money? Not often is the answer, because they generally have to travel the most circuituous of routes to get it. Maverick American J.S.G. Boggs has short-circuited all that, he simply draws the stuff. Sailing close to the wind Boggs only escapes allegations of forgery by making sure the goods and services provided to him are legitimately exchanged for his art. JANE JACKSON visited him while he was minting a fresh new fiver — ready for exchange in the local pub — and finds out more:

POOR, STARVING, STRUGGLING for cash, so goes the cliché of the artist. What subject could be more central than the stuff itself and is it not surprising that few artists seem to have based work on it?

Jewellers have often incorporated coins into their work, and artists have designed some spectacularly beautiful ones, but it has been left to the American artist J.S.G. Boggs to approach the subject directly, looking at bank notes in particular.

He may be the only artist ever to do so because cash though it has been around a long time, in the form of shells, tokens, lumps of metal, and as coinage since the Lydians invented it in the seventh century BC, is disappearing fast. Most money today is held in the computers of banks and building societies and doesn't exist at all as coins or notes.

The bank notes we use and which are celebrated by Boggs came into being as the result of the first industrial revolution, with the improvement of printing and engraving machines; they are disappearing as a result of the second technological industrial revolution.

Boggs makes drawings of bank notes in coloured pencil on note-sized sheets of paper, then goes out and spends it; not from the bank but in coloured pencil on note-sized sheets of paper; francs, dollars, pounds, the currency of



Another dollar, another day. Boggs in the studio

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whatever country he's living in at the time. Both his constant travelling — he has studios in Florida, New York, London and Basle — and his art form seem to follow flawlessly and inevitably from his experiences of early childhood. These certainly included travel, cash transactions and a lot of painted numbers and prices. Boggs wasn't actually born in a trunk, but nearly. 'I travelled in a circus from one year old to five with my mother and her second husband, who had side shows. Deep Sea Adventure, Wild Man of Borneo, that kind of thing. We went all over the eastern seaboard of the States. It was constant exposure to different people, different cultures, I remember it very clearly.'

Boggs was telling me this while he worked in his studio in London. I asked him how the drawing of money had started. 'The first time I spent my money was May 1984 in Chicago. I was sitting in a diner making a drawing of a dollar bill and the waitress admired it, asked to buy it. I told her no, but I'd pay for coffee and a doughnut with it, 90 cents — and she gave me the 10 cents change. I thought it was amusing, but I didn't think too much about it, since the work has always been involved with numbers. The monetary aspect came back in the paintings. I started the first large money painting in December 1984, a £1 note of indistinct value, £5/10/3 in different corners, 4' x 8' finished in January 1986, during that time I made the \$10 bill.'

Whilst Boggs was recounting his early ventures, I couldn't help taking in something about his studio which I later came to see was reflected in his work. It contains shelves of art materials and filing cabinets, both of which are in spotless Teutonic order, while everything else, and there was quite a lot of it, was on the floor, in layers, so that walking was tricky, like an excursion along a particularly rocky shore. This second element, the chaotic is often apparent in the paintings, where the numbers seem frenetic layered, disturbed, unable to find their own order; whatever order there is seems to be being imposed upon them. In the drawings though, Boggs recreates the calligraphic patterning and repatterning of the notes, he transforms the designers obsession with

unreproducibility, into skeins of delicate, ordered lines. These bank notes are almost prim in their restraint; the anarchy is in the concept.

All the time we talked Boggs went on making a five pound note.

He began to spend the first £1 notes in London in 1985, and his first Swiss francs in Basle during the Art Fair this year. While there he re-met the dealer and gallery owner Rudi Demenga. Boggs was spending a lot of his own francs, 3,300 Swiss francs, approximately £1,200 in hotel bills, food, clothes and taxis. As a result of a local radio show many people asked to buy notes, but Boggs will only spend them. (A taxi driver who was particularly keen to possess one insisted on driving Boggs from Basle to Zurich, a £400 journey, so he could acquire one, a special non-existent 30 franc note invented specially for him.)

Demenga wanted to buy some notes for his Gallery; Boggs refused, but did say where he had spent them so that they could be bought back. Few people though wanted to part with them. Demenga then said that he was afraid Boggs would end up in prison, and asked him to put on each note that the bearer could receive the full face value of the notes if they brought them to his gallery. Only two people brought their drawings/notes to be redeemed. Demenga promptly sold both to collectors at 20 times their face value.

Since returning to London the Inland Revenue have telephoned the Boggs accountant, worried that it may not be legal to exchange drawings of notes for goods. Various members of the press have told Boggs that the police had approached them enquiring about him. Boggs now feels he has to retain a solicitor to look into the legal questions, though as yet no one has pressed charges. (See postscript). Meanwhile he continues drawing, moving from the now obsolete £1 note to five, ten and eventually twenty and fifty pound notes, for his rent, food and drink.

Boggs has certain Woody Allen affinities. Sex, death and money, these are the things that inspire people, he says. 'I am not bothered at all about death and I have a healthy relationship to sex. It's money I'm struggling to understand.'

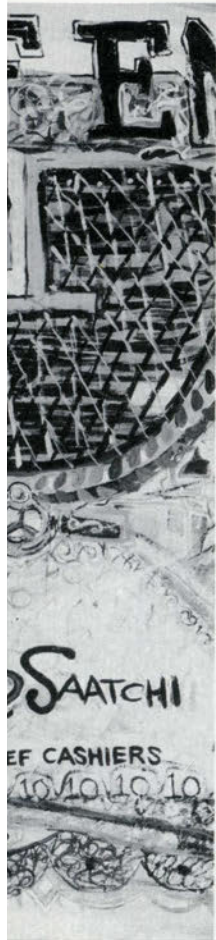
Boggs was telling me about a taxi driver taking him from Hampstead to Heathrow, who wanted to buy some notes but was only allowed to have them in exchange for the fare. Why do you only spend and not sell, I asked him. 'Because I don't want to make money out of them (the notes). I want to illustrate that works of art are valuable; people can see the value of a drawing when it says £5 or £10. This brings art directly into daily life, achieves something I wanted for years. I think fine art can be appreciated by the man in the street — I think artists throughout history have desired to reach the man in the street, without compromising their art. Also here in London particularly, artists have been struggling to do this. I've found a way of reaching people who don't go to galleries and museums.'

Did it change the feeling of life?

'Definitely, I feel much less isolated from society — the loneliness of an artists life can be terrible, unbearable.'

Less unbearable now? 'Absolutely, now I talk to people and say I'm an artist, they want to know what I do and I can show them. They still can't completely understand the work but they like it, and what I find amusing and intriguing is their difficulty in accepting that what they like IS fine art. They seem to have an insecurity, that fine art is something they shouldn't or can't appreciate. Yet when confronted with the drawings of money, their conversation indicates stimulation of these questions; about the drawing, the event of accepting the drawing as art, the value of the money itself, for me this all an indication of the success of the work, because I think fine art should stimulate and challenge.'

But was there an element of performance in the work? 'It's a hybrid of cartoon, conceptual art and performance; also classical much the same way that 17th century artists painted castles, dogs, horses as property. It's a part of my overall work, always surprising. People who accept notes in payment for goods go on to be interested and come to galleries to see shows. It is an introduction and lets people indicate an interest in the work, also the person's acceptance of the work is an essential



part of the transaction.'

The transaction is Boggs' medium for contacting the man and women in the street, who can participate or not, at a variety of levels, as they choose. One woman in a New York bar put the drawing straight into her till. When Boggs explained to her it was not a note, she accused him of fraud and threatened to call the police.

Did he think we need more non-gallery art? 'If galleries were enough, more people would go to them and many things artists have been saying would have been heard. We have a duty and a responsibility to reach people.' A prophetic role? 'More of a warning note and a leading role. Artists tell of possibilities which are undesirable, in the hopes of getting people to avoid them.'

What possibilities? 'Self destruction of the human race through ignorance. Artists are rightly involved in every aspect of life; from still life to the social comment of a performance piece. I don't think it's right to draw

boundaries. All subjects are acceptable, once you begin to censor art you attack foundations of the individual right to freedom. People have souls, and artists are curators of souls. I see art is becoming a dominant religion, mostly because it is nonsectarian. I see a lot of people being disgruntled with the religion they were given at birth, because it demands a condemning of others. People who love art aren't asked to condemn people who don't, and art is spiritually nourishing. I feel our economy was set up to protect the entire population from 'unproductive' people — that is people not producing anything of *any value* either spiritual or financial. Perhaps the best of us, if given the opportunity to sit back and do nothing, many of us might give in to the temptation, society is frightened of that.'

It wanted us to make a specific contribution that can be rewarded? His transactions with the money were rewarding?

'Yes, I'm rewarded with the goods,

the services, the change, the exchange of ideas, response to the work, human contact. I'm surprised by the reactions. I learn about people, about life, about myself, about God.'

Belief in God? 'For the life of me I can't believe how anyone could not believe in God, the existence of God is so obvious. But I was brought up in the South, with evangelists knocking on your door, every Saturday morning, wanting you to join their religion. I don't talk about it but I am intensely religious.' The Boggs pencil completed his £5 note.

Boggs knows as well as anyone how the art world works — the interweaving of galleries, critics, museums, collectors, the dealers and the deals, his transactional performance reflects it. But he has found something beyond it and what he's found, the freedom and joy, the surprises of his transactions show in the work. It will be interesting to find out what happens when the work returns to a gallery base.●

Stop Press: As we go to press (31/10/86) Boggs has been arrested and released without charge by the Fraud Squad while hanging a show of his work. A number of his notes were taken for inspection with a view to action by the Bank of England (acting for the Bank of Troyland?)

The money — would you accept this from a stranger?



BEYOND THE ZIP-ZAP



How has the new technology changed the way artists use it? **NICK HOUGHTON** looks at *What Can Be Done*, and views with disapproval the new obsession with Whiz-bangery:



PEOPLE LOVE TOYS. People like playing with new things. People like novelty and gimmicks and gadgets. Artists are people. Perhaps artists like toys more than most people; perhaps video artists like toys more than most artists. I know I do. Edit suites are very sexy places. Very hi-tech with all those soft clunks and clicks, the hum of electricity, glowing controls, matt black buttons and switches. An edit suite seduced me once. It did. I was in love. Couldn't get enough. Pure sex.

These are some of the things you

now do on most basic edit suites with the assistance of what is called a Time Base Corrector: *Colourise* — Here you can add or subtract colour artificially from an existing image or else use *chromakey* or *posterisation* to effect shifts in the colour of your image. *Mix Images* — At its simplest overlay images from any number of sources to create one image. *Wipe or Shove-on* — The image may be wiped or 'shoved', horizontally or diagonally.

These are some of the things you

cannot do with an edit-suite: *think creatively or critically*. An edit suite is no good at coming up with original ideas. Because of its nature the correlation between technology and artform is nowhere more evident than in video art. Unlike almost any other contemporary art the effects of newly introduced technology is almost immediately felt in video art. Indeed a direct line of cause-and-effect can be drawn between technological development and artistic use of that innovation, the way in which technology directly shaped both the theory and practise of video art.

In the late 60's it was the introduction of portable b&w video systems which introduced video art; by the 70's colour cameras and fine-tuned edit facilities expanded the possibilities and by the 80's the introduction of colourising gizmos, Quantel and sophisticated post-production facilities meant that, for some, a vast array of creative possibilities were opened up to the tape-maker.

Coincidental to the arrival of this technology in the early 80's there was also evidence of a new thinking amongst the video literati informed by the loud noise of pop-video establishing itself in modern culture underlined by an abreaction against the formalised avant-garde and the seminal and influential screening of 'New Wave' video works from the USA.

Video art shifted away from its often slow moving theoretical base toward a faster, slicker and accessible axis. New attitudes and new technology were soon interacting.

A secondary factor was the inability of art schools to create a critical framework for what its video art students were doing. Often you'd come



across situations where students knew more about video than their tutors or technicians. The effect was double-edged as students and new tape-makers set about a playful but sometimes superficial exploration of the medium to the puzzled bemusement of tutors who didn't quite know how to assess this stuff. (Well, you couldn't look at it like a painting . . . Could you? But then it wasn't film either was it? (art schools had had the same problem with 'performance art', of course, and even that one was never fully resolved)).

What this allowed for was a sometimes startling, sometimes silly period of exploration into the possibilities and creative use of new technology matched by an increased interest in producing attractive and accessible video works. For artists like Jez Welsh this moment of re-assessment led to works like *I.O.D.* (Information Overdose) where the whizz-bang of video technology was employed in a paradoxical work which sought to reproduce and intensify the seductive mind numbing aspects of information overload whilst operating from a critical base. Welsh comments on this in the written notes to a more recent tape, *Reflecting*: 'For many artists schooled in the early/mid seventies, this process has been a painful one: in the 70's an ideological message could be completely blunt and literal . . . Now, in the Post-Everything 80's, politics has grasped the Pleasure Principle and Art has gone looking for a broader audience'.

With access to increasingly sophisticated post-production systems which might enhance this 'Pleasure Principle' the problem was how to counterbalance the image warped possibilities with a critical and creative input. With the arrival of 'scratch' even this context began to seem somehow marginal as a wide range of video technology impacted with dramatic imagery now completely divorced from actual 'hands on' production and placing the 'scratcher' in the role of creative editor and enhancer. The artist now produced new meaning from given material, functioned only within the edit-suite, processing and re-ordering the mass of information, both visual and aural, available.

By 1984 this had led to a territory of occasionally innovative and exciting work punctuated by increasingly loud voices of criticism aimed at the glamourisation of violence and warfare often evident in 'scratch' tapes. In a

much lauded tape of the time, Clive Gillman's *Warning Attack Recovery*, for example, images of American gunship helicopters in Vietnam were treated and manipulated through video gadgetry until they became objects of sinister hi-tech beauty. For some the resolution of integrating new technological possibilities with a relevant content lay beyond 'scratch' in the production of a more abstract imagery.

Perhaps most successful here has been Robert Cahen's tape, *Juste Le Tempe*, where a train journey drifts into a landscape of surreal intensity. George Barber, meanwhile, was approaching the problem from a different position by abstracting 'scratch' and producing effects laden cut-ups hypnotically slicing away all meaning from its TV derived imagery. In America, meanwhile, technological innovation was positively celebrated.

Robert Ashley's epic seven-part essay on American culture, *Perfect Lives*, for example, is positively bristling with up-to-date video devices and picture tumbling imagery. Indeed so overloaded is the work with spins, twists and image bending that what is essentially a strong and radical project becomes reduced to a homage to technology. This, it seems to me, is part of the problem with the highly sophisticated video technology now available to tape-makers.

At worst video tech effects are wheeled out uncritically in a gratuitous display of what's possible whilst at a less obvious level effects, employed to make what may be a problematic tape, can partially obscure or confuse the work. No one, well not me anyway, is suggesting that video art ignore technology or discontinue an exploration of the possibilities. Yet we should, I think, beware that technology does not become an end in itself and not what it should be, a creative tool secondary to the articulation and expression of new ideas.

Largely I think video art has come to terms with this and in the aftermath of a playful let's-use-it-cos-it's-there technological spree we are now experiencing a period of more measured practise. Alongside this what we are also beginning to experience is a more determinedly professional outlook amongst tape-makers directly related to a concern with grasping, at the very least, the basic principles of the medium. (The grumbles of discontent you can hear from art

schools these days are often not so much to do with the pursuit of avant-garde practise but with the lack of formal technical training students receive).

'I'm not against video art as such', a student told me recently, 'But what I can't stand are those videos where sloppy editing and bad sound is excused because it's 'ART'' But if this pursuit of quality is on the one hand commendable then on the other it should also be seen that notions of 'professionalism' also relate to the hegemony of television and mainstream film. Simply, we should beware that this aspect of video art does not drift into a position of recreating the constructed 'Naturalism' of a dominant TV/film media. Professionalism should not smooth out the risky rough edges of video art, centering it on the assumed desirability of 'making it look just like TV'.

With all this in mind, however, 1987 is, arguably, an interesting place to be in video arts development as the form begins to fastwind itself out of a period of stasis and uncertainty toward a wide range of new ideas and practises. News of Holly Warburton's experiments with sophisticated video animation systems, the Duvet Brothers 'mass monitor' scratch projects, the increased use of high-resolution cinema size video screens — now installed in London at the 'Metro', 'Acton Screen' and, most recently, the Rio Cinema (Out of the museum and into the public space of the cinema!!) — all point to an exciting potentiality for video culture. Similarly the strategy of Mark Wilcox, holder of the LVA bursary in 1985/6, in attempting to produce his LVA project, *The Man In The Crowd*, on high band videotape for possible broadcast, the continued activities of Analogue — the production company who produced the video art *Dadarama* series, Ian Breakwell's diaries for Channel Four transmission — and the recent news of George Barber's BFI funding indicate a phase of new confidence in video art determined by a coming to terms with video hardware.

Finally I'd say that video art has grown up a bit in the last few years and, while it's still a form keen on playing with new toys, it has also largely transcended the juvenile infatuation with the zip-zappy electronic magic of video technology which at one time threatened its development. ●

PERF

REVIEW

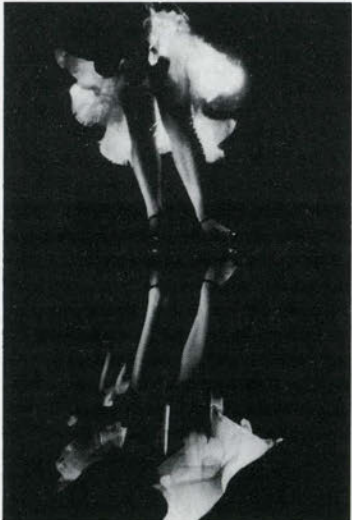
PERFO 4D

STEVE ROGERS and ROB
LA FRENAIS attempt to
make sense of the
controlled chaos of
Rotterdam's Perfo Festival:



PHOTO / LOUISE OLIGNY

ONLY LAST YEAR a serious art journal (*Art Monthly*) published an article which asserted quite categorically and confidently that performance art no longer existed. The supposed death of performance art is taken as the starting point by Rob Perrée in his excellent catalogue introduction for the 1986 Perfo Festival. He concludes his argument with the simple but resonant statement 'there will always be artists who want to present themselves directly to the audience . . . conceptual or emerging from entertainment, influenced by the language of the media or inspired by theatre, humorous or serious, exciting or subdued.' The Perfo festival has now established itself as Europe's premier festival of live art. The 1986 Festival was even expanded to include a major exhibition of static work and video moving the festival towards those royal occasions of the European art calendar, the Venice Biennale and Documenta. Whether or not it will achieve that status is uncertain but it stands as a clear refutation of performance art is dead proclamations.



Marcel Van Bommel, as
the Medusa, never
actually reveals her
identity

I was struck by three general impressions of the artists in the first half of the festival programme. Firstly, and most importantly, many of the artists used a text or speech. Five years ago a similar international gathering would have included a few such works. Artists and critics have made the reintroduction of language into live performance a major issue and the festival offered a variety of approaches to the problem. Dogs in Honey (UK) read poetic texts through microphones and in a barely penetrable whisper. Marie Chouinard (Canada) also declaims poetic statements through a microphone; Save the Robots (Holland), at least the performance I saw (it changed every night), included a lecture on aesthetics; but most revealing of all was Diane Esquerre & Khan who spoke their text directly. Their performance *Notes From Purdah*, deals with clothing, gender and identity, and uses quotations from Othello spoken directly by the performers. The performance is predominantly visual with a length of white cloth being used to make a variety of garments and bonds between them. The images were strong, clear, often funny and even beautiful but the whole effect was shattered by the interference of human voices coming out of the bodies of the performers like traditional acting. It was extraordinary how strongly I reacted against this, but in the context of the festival it was a useful marker by which to measure the attempts of other artists to use texts and speech. Performers historically gave up the spoken word as a rejection of the authority of speech and the assumption that speech conveys the truth, and replaced speech with visual images as the principal means of conveying meaning. Artists are beginning now to deal with the realisation that language is the context of all cultural manifestations and so cannot be excluded from art. They do not however want to go back to the old humanistic, renaissance idea of spoken text at the centre of the live art event. Speech is being relocated at the edges of performance, hence the use of microphones which disembodies the

voice, and on non-naturalistic, anti-spontaneous kinds of speaking like the lecture by Save the Robots and of the taped voice in the performance of Hageman & Zegveld (Holland). Diane Esquerre and Khan used the old humanistic idea of speech and, frankly, it didn't work. It felt false and alien to the performance language they were using. *Purdah* would have been much stronger if they had simply removed the text altogether and just left the images.

The second general observation is that less than half the performances involved the artist alone in front of the audience. I was struck by how many of them were working in pairs. Diane Esquerre and Khan, Dogs in Honey, Hageman & Zegveld, Stichting Voorland (Holland), Post Modder (Holland), Save the Robots (Holland). Again, this seems to be a very recent development. There have always been artists working in pairs or small groups but now it is becoming the standard rather than the exception. Part of the move away from solo performance comes from a rejection of the idea of the individual as



PHOTOS / MARCEL VELTMAN

Marie Chouinard (left)

the focus of attention and the tradition of the artists working alone. Artists working in pairs or groups are often attempting to set up a non-hierarchical way or working with other people and making work as a product of that collaboration. In doing this the old performance art idea of the artist's body as the focus, or raw material of the work is displaced. It is not so much removed as relocated from the centre of the work to the edges.

Stichting Voorland have even gone so far as to use surrogates in the form of large cardboard cut-out type puppets which clearly represent the two artists but being two dimensional are more easily incorporated into the flat surface of their work. The performers have become stage managers, manipulating and positioning the objects that are the real performers. Similarly Hageman & Zegveld are mostly stage managers setting up and executing a series of depopulated visual incidents. They do also take the role of performers at times and become the focus of attention but only to show the performers as no more than objects put to the use of the creation of the work of art. Dogs in Honey use the idea of the dissolution of the individual as a central theme to their work. Just as they disembodied their voices through the use of microphones so they disguise their own identities through the use of grotesque rubber facial makeup which gives the appearance of the face being in process of melting and in the performance individual action and identity are destroyed by the force of the sado-masochistic relationship of the two performers.

Dianne Esguerra and Khan also use interchangeable identities to displace the artists as individuals from the centre of the work. Even some of the performers who are working alone use more than one identity. Peter McRae uses a kind of composite identity made up from archetypes from the cultural context. Marie Chouinard also changed her performance identity between pieces in a way that came very close to theatre. In both these cases the artists body is used as an essential raw material but

not as the main focus. Only Marcelle van Bommel (Holland) and André Stitt (N. Ireland) used their own bodies as the central focus of their work in anything like the traditional idea of performance art. André Stitt's action-based performance is a kind ritualised transcendence of the physical body through an excess of physicality. This kind of performance is dangerously unpredictable but this time is succeeded in creating a powerful sensibility that actually imparts a feeling of elation and excitement.

Marcelle van Bommel's work is altogether different, having a much more static, sculptural intention and language. She creates beautiful and complex illusions of light and mirrors to suggest other worlds and other realities her themes being drawn from mythology. The artist never actually reveals her identity and her face is only seen in a mirror since her theme is the Shield of Perseus and she is the Medusa. It was one of the most achieved and altogether engaging work of the festival.

Altogether the work at Perfo was of a uniform-

ly high standard which in itself is a justification, if any were needed, of this kind of festival. The programme appeared on the surface — as Rob Perree's introduction warned — to cover a huge range of styles, but there was too a surprising unity to the work with basic themes being explored by many of the artists using every conceivable language available. To me the festival achieved the hardest thing of all which was a unity of purpose.

The artists brought together here represented a huge range of working styles and practices but they shared far more than they might at first sight appear to. This gave the festival a sense of purpose as well as a sense of occasion.

Performance art, far from being dead, in fact found a new strength and energy through the identification of a set of themes and ideas which can best be tackled in live performance which knows no restrictive traditions or expectations from the audience. Perfo 4 D showed just how vital live art is and how important it is. ● (SR)

Karen Finley —
nighmarish personae
which possess her



PHOTO / LOUISE OLIGNY





THE ARTIST IS IN THE BAR

THE DUTCH seem often to have an official penchant for surrealism both in art and everyday life. At the large, well-stocked municipal museum in Rotterdam hang in pride of place two of Dali's most celebrated and reproduced works, quite in defiance of that artist's kitsch untrendiness. The breakdown between art and everyday life as officially enshrined in the surrealist policy and manifesto is no more fully celebrated than at Wink Van Kempen's 'Perfo' festival in Rotterdam, an event as ideosyncratic as its author. It somehow manages to happen yearly and is an irresistible magnet for the more irreverent of the Northern European avant-garde.

Although the venue itself, De Lantaren, shows nothing of the administrative chaos that used to typify the '70s Dutch arts centre, there appeared to be a distinct sense of déjà vu towards that period, when at times it seemed that just about everyone in the bar was performing; plus an outbreak of performances being disrupted by dissident audience members.

This was not directly encouraged by, but certainly seemed symbiotic with the extravagant and witty persona of Kempen, who comes across as much more prankster, impresario and instant philosopher than administrator. Given the carnival atmosphere, the world being turned upside down for a week, it was therefore interesting to note the most 'serious' and intentioned work coming from artists hailing from the East Village club atmosphere of downtown New York.

Karen Finley's work was serious, deadly serious and the shock value of her work was increased by the lateral subversion of the visual appearance of this. She literally, er, stuffs soft fruit and vegetables up her anus, and it is this initial information that both drew audiences and subtly deflected from the real purpose of her

monologues. Her work is about possession and the transgressive acts which precede and assist this pale into insignificance beside the nightmarish personae that mouth words through her. She starts off by deceptively gaining the support of the audience, gently parodying some of the publicity that has gone before, describing the materials she is to use, what they represent, the orifices in which they are to be placed. It is all good cabaret fun, and the Dutch are not shocked as the audience might be in a mid-western state.

But then as she starts smearing the foodstuffs around her person, the tone changes and she becomes a member of a gang of rapists that raid an old people's home, violate the inhabitants in search of a certain aphrodisiac substance that can only be obtained in a cruel and sadistic way. I feel squeamish, the audience are stunned into shocked silence. Her pitch increases — this homely looking American girl is transmogrified into the most horrific characters, obtained, it is later revealed, from true life news stories and accounts. Suddenly, as a particularly exquisite piece of nastiness is being enunciated, a woman jumps out of the audience, overturns Finley's table of materials and stamps out. Concentration is destroyed, the piece is abruptly terminated. The following night the piece is repeated, but with less intensity, Finley has accurately charted the tabooed limits of liberal, tolerant Holland. Surrealism is terminated in the face of real cruelty.

Michael Smith's work is equally about the world of cruelty and unfairness, but in a far more subtle way. Mike Smith's 'Mike', whose real voice sounds like Laurie Anderson through a voice decoder, is the all-American fall guy, into whose empty and malleable personality we stare on a day off work. He tries on clothes, 'nice shirt, huh?' drinks endless cups of coffee, and

sings smutty songs. Slowly he draws us into his world. It is a treacly ocean of melancholic mediocrity, but with an insane sense of self-confidence. He would be the American 'Neil', but he really isn't that funny. He is infinitely suggestible. 'Mike', it is implied, could either be a normal Reagan-voting guy or one of the maniacs that inhabit Karen Finley's imaginative universe. I wouldn't like to meet either on a dark night.

Over to good honest, down to earth European performance art with Andreas Techler from West Germany. He swings around his naked body a long pole, forming a figure of eight shape. At his feet are a string of light bulbs, which, as his concentration lapses as it must over an hour or more of twirling, are slowly broken until it is completely dark in the space. That is the end of the performance. It is about the space between trying to undertake an action and not trying. As he fails the endurance work, the work's end is brought further to a close, thus increasing his pressure to fail further. At the end of this dilemma lies darkness.

By contrast to all this is the infantile 'mauvais artiste' Jaques Lizene from Belgium. He has enlisted a pair of local women (Deux jolies jeune filles de Rotterdam) to bury him in sand beside a turning cement mixer while he howls with laughter. On the video there are messages flashed up in French entreating the viewer to dismiss his work, accompanied by shots of dogs fucking and vomiting. He continues until people leave. On the second night the women appear, garlanded, doing a little dance, holding a sign up. 'L'artiste est dans le bar'. There is a tradition of this in some parts of Europe I believe.

Throughout, there emanated manic chatter, blips, blobs and occasional explosions from the studio of Radio Rabotnik, the Amsterdam pirate radio station operating from inside De Lantaren during Perfo. Just about anyone could stroll in to start with, but later in the week, it became more 'organised' with Dutch media artist Willem Ridder organising manic phone-ins to New York. The best bits were when Marie Kawazu, the famed 'Beast of Paris' took the airwaves, asking artists deeply searching questions about their favourite colours, food, pop stars etc. Even the iron mask of this magazine's editorial staff was briefly prised open one late, heady evening, by this approach.

The last night is taken up with the Perfo Masque. The performance artists and pundits weary, looking on while the jeunesse dorée of Rotterdam shout, underneath bowls of fruit and in over the top fancy-dress, true to the spirit, if not to the letter of the old rogue Dali, 'we can do it too!'

Marie Kawazu screams into a microphone while her escort, mutilation artist Kees Moll terrorizes the bar. Can 'serious' art exist in this environment? Is this a conflict of motives/motifs? Maybe so. But the anarchic irreverence of Perfo performs a valuable task in undermining the high-minded stuffiness of Euro-biennale circuit art, and as such remains the most vital and enjoyable event of its kind. (RL)●

Jacques Lizene,
Bad artist
from Belgium



PERT

REVIEW

THIS HAS BEEN, I think, in the final adding up, one of those shows that most people hear about afterwards and talk keenly about for years to come. As a major show of living contemporary artists, working in or ahead of their time, it surely must embrace all that is original and unique right through the processes to the final conclusion of each individual artists' ideas. To clarify the title a bit more, Sandra Drew, the organiser states that she had used the term 'sculpture' to embrace all media 'concerning itself with real space' and the term 'Third Generation' as a metaphor for the contemporary group of women artists who have developed out of the sculptural ideas of Barbara Hepworth and Elizabeth Frink. It included many political, feminist artists, although I can say certainly everyone fitted into these general associations, (including myself).

But the point was that particular boundaries were breached in many different ways: 'By working directly from their personal experience and concerns, from a reality they know and understand — they have created their own space, new space. The individuality of their work resists categorization and by the constant movement crossing and recrossing of boundaries, they refuse to be packaged.' (Sandra Drew, from introduction and programme.) This, while sounding idealistic, is something I know many artists strive for. Yet not all succeed, as inevitably some of the 'weaker' artists do fall into categories, or slip into a less challenging mainstream sector. Fenella Crighton, who also wrote an introduction to the show, sums it up fairly well! 'It is certainly unlikely that any visitor will find all the work interesting but then it is equally unlikely that anybody will not find work that is new to them and worthy of attention.'

She goes on to say that there did not appear to be any axe to grind. This was a welcome surprise, as often with group shows that are segregated sexually, ethnically, politically or whatever, often have a paranoid stance of self-defence and the way the work is received is coloured by sometimes unhealthy attitudes or misinterpretation. The fact that this was an all women show cannot be avoided and I think has to be justified, as I believe in an asexual attitude towards working as an artist. I also find some women as sexist towards men, as some men towards women. As always there are two sides to every story. I know a lot of women would strongly disagree with me on the subject of 'Feminist Art', and I have a great deal of trouble with some of the more militant women's women, but I can't get away from the fact that I *am* female, so this topic lends to a lot of serious debate and discussion, which I will not delve into now.

Fenella Crighton says again: 'The sole unifying factor is that all the work is by women. Unlike most women's shows of the past, however, this is neither solely a political show in the sense that all the work deals with a specifically feminist content, nor simply a show of artists who happen to be women. In fact it is both these things, as it includes artists from both sides of the fence'. She suggests that some women

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Women and Sculpture was a recent show in Canterbury. TARA BABEL appraises the post feminist condition:

would be fraught with anxiety about taking part in an all-women show, and that audiences were perhaps not sympathetic enough to approach the work in the right spirit, but I think she has hit the nail on the head when she talks of the confidence now apparent in many women artists in not worrying about ways in which the inclusion of other work may affect the perception of their own. The diversity and attitudes of the work presented in this show proved this point that people as people were able to come forward with their own sets of values, present themselves as individuals — some with stronger views than others (many conflicting) — as firstly artists and secondly women.

As a participant and not a casual onlooker my experience of the work and certainly of the organisation is much more intimate and my impressions possibly more extreme, as some of the work made me cringe and some I found incredibly uplifting. I shall go on to give an account which I hope will not sound too biased. Canterbury seems to me a fairly well-off middle-class secure English town rooted firmly in the 'Great Garden of England' — Kent. I heard someone describe the place as the Rome of England, as the Archbishop seems not only to set down the moral spiritual laws but also the social laws, like what times the pubs stay open to, no nightclubs, and 'where do you think you are going with that piece of art', hierarchical type of attitude. So firstly Sandra Drew had a lot of work on her hands to find venues and sites for much of the work. Endless meetings with councillors and strong-arming the top brass for what she wanted. Most of the work could be taken in a kind of package tour arranged from the Drew gallery, couriered by earthy Scot Fay McTavish.

Some of work and installations were quite difficult to find, and inevitably some did not have the audience they deserved. One such instance

was Catherine Elwes, whom I came across just as she was dismantling her video installation. The space was superb, the TV studio of one of the colleges, and a crew of technicians and helpers seemed to be at her disposal. She kindly showed me the video from the installation entitled *First House*, and I was glad I had the chance to see this wonderfully simple but extremely effective piece. She had built a kind of miniature house, reminiscent of a child's wendy house, out of wood, within the structure forming the two windows were two video monitors, as the glass windows. The effect was weird at first. One could see a small child tapping against the glass, with a spoon as if locked in the house. It reminded me of a sort of poltergeist thing. A piano could be heard tinkling the tune 'London Bridge is falling down', then the legs and skirt of the mother figure came into the scene, with the child running to the other side of the room, and the five minute sequence would start over again. The illusory effect of a kind of Tardis and the continual repetition brought the feeling across of a self-imposed prison locked in a relationship of mother/child. Exploring the centrifugal force of a domestic environment not as a trap but as something to come to terms with. She says of her piece, 'This installation allowed me to play with the special illusions of the video image. The "natural" phenomenon of the window produced a tension between the (glass) reality of the screen surface and the illusion of depth it creates. I built a literal space behind the screens to reinforce the illusion, but simultaneously allowed ambiguities to arise. What was previously inside was now outside and vice versa. All this served to emphasise the voyeurism of the spectator, which in turn underlined the exclusivity of the early mother-child relationship. No way in, no way out . . . However it was simply my intention to show them negotiating the tricky tear-stained route to independence through a small daily battle over presence and absence.'

In a small room was the sterile interior of a Rose Garrard creation. She had done wonders with an original dirty, dank and ancient room, transforming it with a professional DIY touch, white paint, neon back lighting to lift her work off the walls and into the space. On a double spread Sun newspaper format of a page three lady, she had made a reverse cast of heads of selected women artists through history, as if a head had been pushed into the paper, and as the piece progressed, using these casts, she took a clay model and as she pulled the clay out the faces were slightly and deliberately distorted. Each new face was placed above its reverse twin. I think the piece basically spoke for itself. No one can question the thoroughness and skill of Rose Garrard's work. I think she will probably go on forever with her endless ideas and technical skill, she cannot cease to be appreciated.

A particularly favourite idea of mine from the show, was Sharon Kivland's *The Space Between* — 'I would intend a work that followed and then extended the conventions of domestic



window displays; where framed photographs of selected objects are presented to the street, in each house thus becoming a compelling walk for the curious (and everyone likes looking into other people's windows)! (Sharon Kivland). A subject close to my heart, and similar in concept to one of my own previous works, *Brick Curtains* where the window and the objects in the window are presented to the street. In this case objects from inside the room, were photographed, printed on gold photographic paper and presented in mini-triptych form, in assorted windows of local people.

One of the major achievements for the exhibition must surely have been the 60 ft *Ladder* of Maryrose Sinn. Situated on a hill overlooking the town, as you walk up the road to the University, one did a double take as this steel pink ladder thrust out from the ground, almost into space. It was slightly curved and narrower at the top which gave a hint of infinity. When I went to see it, I thought I would ask a passerby to give an opinion. By chance the first person to pass was an Irish priest, who seemed rather chuffed to be asked, but somewhat non-committal in his reply. Sometimes I cannot believe such a struc-

ture can just suddenly appear, and people do not wonder about it! He replied 'Well I'd never really taut about it, I don't loik the colour', and then after a few more moments of reflection he summarised thus: 'It's a funny ting fer a woman ta doooo'. I asked Maryrose afterwards if she thought that the site was the most suitable. She said her perfect place for it was in a field of pink tulips. Personally I could see it somewhere like the foyer of the new Lloyds building or on top of the Nat West Tower.

Of the work in progress, with the artist frequently on site the most prominent was Laura

Marion Urch — the word 'glamour' means the ability to cast spells





Ford. Situated in the centre of the shopping precinct she worked on her wooden tower in full view of the public, who even then had difficulty in grasping what was going on. Her presence, sometimes intimidating the crowd, set a distance between the surroundings and the activity on the scaffolding platform around the sculpture. This is an interesting context of the artists' process as the work. It draws attention to the fact that generally when people look at sculpture they feel safe in the security that the artist is not around to confront them or be confronted. The dialogue between observer and artwork is one of detached estrangement, as opposed to looking at the reasons for its existence and taking into account the evolution, process and the relationship of the artist to the piece of work. So working in public can supply the missing link in a chain of creativity and interaction, ever important if there is to be a new understanding and appreciation of working within, and pushing out three dimensional space. These considerations also lean to a basis in which live/performance art can be more widely appreciated. The finished object is only a fraction of the experience, as is the memory or impression of a live action, which in the end optimistically may extend our perceptions and reaction to our surroundings.

The actual sculpture in question began its life as a drawing, a twisted 'Tower of Babel', rising out of a city of flames, an escape from a holocaust into an ivory tower of perhaps a prison. Laura worked intently chipping and rounded off the shaft of the tower, but without it becoming smooth it retained the raw quality of the wood and of the time spent working on it. I felt the actual finished piece had been at the last minute, cosmetically decorated to fit the original drawing. I did like this improvised immediacy, but on the whole I preferred the drawing.

One of the installations which did not appeal to me was Katherine Meynell's *Hannahs Song*, a video documentation of her experience of having a child, the transformation of being pregnant, with the child as physically part of her body, to 'losing her' after the birth, going on to the rediscovery by the child of its own existence. A strong feminist, Katherine Meynell's attitude towards men leaves me somewhat uneasy. I asked her would she have done the piece had her baby been a boy? She said no. I cannot adhere to the theory that the male race is the sole reason for womens insecurities, grievances, fears and position in social structures. I do not feel at a disadvantage against the male race as a whole, (just against individuals, perhaps). Anyway my experiences are obviously a lot different from hers, so I do not have grounds to criticise this way of working. I feel, and the topic is certainly a lot more complicated.

To me a more positive side of feminism was represented by *Out of the Ashes*, a video installation by Marion Urch, in the form of a row of monitors in a shop window. I was exceptionally intrigued by the sources and background information in which she found her imagery. She explored the symbolism of fire as it has changed

THIRD GENERATION

throughout history, and more particularly, its relation to womens sexuality. Her framework for the concept is based in Catholicism, and the distortion of symbols and rituals concerning fire, down through time. She refers to images of the Sacred Heart (of the Virgin Mary) surmounted in flames, to the Catholic idea that perpetual fire is hell and ultimate fire is the apocalypse. She goes on to explain the burning of witches in Western Europe as supposedly being purified by fire for the 'sins of Eve', imposed on women, by man's fear of their 'powers': 'They believed the power of witches to curse or cast spells was said to be destroyed by flames. Nowadays menstruation is commonly called the curse, the curse on women for the sins of Eve'. (M. Urch). References to the pagan goddess Vesta, goddess of fire, and to the vestal virgins or keepers of a sacred fire, are linked up with modern day nuns, but she states that in this case, meanings have been reversed. The vestal virgins were the centre of a community, as a centre of warmth and light. They had eventually come under control of the kings, were not virgins in the literal sense of the word originally, so restrictions were imposed on them. Their hair was cut, traditionally to take their power away, as for nuns today the giving up of worldly things.

She mentions that the word 'glamour' means the ability to cast spells, which is very interesting and true! Also the starting of fire by rubbing two sticks together is related to sex, and leads on to the idea of fire as fertility. There are myths of Aborigine women who have the secret of fire in their vulvas and the constant connection between fire and women's sexuality links to later taboos about menstruation and cooking, 'Fire and menstruation were seen as the life principle — as divine mysteries inextricably entwined! Finally her synopsis centres on the idea that fire was basically stolen from women who understood the earlier meanings (of warmth, light etc) and transferred to the male ideals: 'Male because it is seen as active and as the beginning of civilisation, the ability to melt metal and make weapons. Fire is now perceived as destructive, as hell fire, as apocalypse, the end of the world in a holocaust of artificial fire.'

Zoe Redman had a pyramid of video monitors rising on the edge of a large dark tank of water, reflecting the video images. This was extremely effective. She also did a performance — *For You Mrs Kelly*. She says of it: 'I am wanting to create a piece of work which deals with the question of violence as seen from a woman's personal point of view, through the character Mrs Kelly, who has been accused of man-

slaughter; I explore in her the alternating emotion of love and hate. Her crime an act of defiance and a feeling of powerlessness.' The piece was set up like a 'trial' with video monitors, slides and sound tapes. She sums up the proposal thus: 'My personal obsession at the moment is trying to find a way of living in and understanding a world where it seems necessary that violence begets more violence. Can this be the only way? As individuals there must be a more satisfactory way to use this energy.'

Well, she certainly has a hell of a big job on her hands. I find statements like this a bit too general and under-explicit, though she does go on to say how angry she feels at being powerless in a man's world, her mother as her only 'model', her role and the isolation she feels as a mother herself. I think the concerns of Zoe Redman's work are too wide and all-encompassing of a woman's lot. Although generally I agree with her, I can't help thinking that a more specific context could make her points a lot clearer.

Of the other work I saw, most was static sculpture. I felt rather cheated by Alison Wilding's *Locust*, insignificantly situated in a corner of the Cathedral, but more relevant I discovered that the work was three years old, which unlike the rest of the work did not give an impression of freshness. Perhaps her intention was for the work to be like that of an insect, skulking in the corner?

For a bit of light relief from the major show there was the Fringe Bar, where the old and trendy could relax over quiche and wine. It was here I saw the gesticulations of the 'Wild Wigglers', a new line up, Liz Aggiss the founder and instigator, with Patrick Lee, and Ralf-Ralf. Liz, I think the obvious dominant leader of the group, and what a good job she has done! Short and effective, the dances *Coughing Wiggle* and *Walking the Spotted Dog* hold the audiences incredulous attention as they pull faces at them underneath their yellow and black striped 'dunces' hats.

Finally, before leaving, I saw the colourful decorations of Kumiko Shimizu's *My Beautiful House in Canterbury*. There was definitely a hint of the European about this work. An old house supported by scaffolding had been decorated with painted hub-caps, old household objects, painted in bright colours reminiscent of a sixties-type commune, only much more tastefully accomplished.

Other artists who participated in the show were Julia Wood, Tina Keane, Yoko Terauchi, Lulu Quinn, Joanna Mowbray, Rose English, Sarah Bradpiece, Lorraine Gleave and Phyllida Barlow. To see everything thoroughly one would have to have spent the full three weeks in Canterbury. So, I think the last credit has to be given to the ever energetic and optimistic Sandra Drew, the coordinator and instigator. Apart from being a warm and friendly person, she runs a family, an art gallery, a major annual show and the 'Drew Kitchen', where many an artist, art critic, friend, student, cat, helper etc etc has drunk her Jasmine tea and ate her rice crispies. ●

THE LAST SWEAT OF YOUTH

ALESSANDRO FIORELLA has a suntanned body, is tall, young and athletic, while David Medalla, itinerant, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, has been performing around the major cities of Western Europe for the last fifteen years with the changing contents of a couple of battered suitcases. Medalla did his first event, an island installation (pre-Smithson), at the tender age of nine, so he is something of a veteran. Using the detritus and kitsch of post industrial society; the material superfluity, knick-knacks and cast-offs of proletarian leisure culture, latterly throwing in plastic dolls and bicycle reflectors, he fuses a phenomenal erudition in East/West culture in a storehouse of recycled allusions to late 15th century painting and poetry in perpetuation of life-blood concerns, love, death and the passing of time.

Since the *Bubble Machine* and *Stitch In Time* he has brought his private loves (sorry girls) and affairs (the ongoing objects of his desire and fortune) into increasing focus in a number of duo performances.

Alessandro Fiorella is a dancer from Dolbacco in the Dolomite region of Northern Italy, a performance artist and classical beauty who David met over a hunk of bread and cheese behind the Scuola di San Rocco in Venice.

The Desire And Pursuit Of The Whole (cit. Plato's Symposium 'is love') says Medalla, is the first of a series of performances on the theme and is segmented and structured around cassette recordings of poems and texts read with exceptional poignance in English and Italian (Madella/Fiorella) with or without music. Medalla, hypnotist, half-pedagogue, introduced the piece with an icecream bass voice and the audience fell silent as rabbits. He was beginning to go on a bit, when shuffling from behind distracted attention to some green satin curtains. Fiorella's bare bottom popped out causing titters through the room.

The Pursuit Of The Whole touches on tough subjects, transience of time, does he love me, spent youth, gay love, *Desiò* and Lust. Beginning with a mellifluous rendering of 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day...' and symbolic placing of a tower of Pisa candle and rolling spheres by Medalla in white silk with a tattered wreath that kept slipping off his head, the hour long performance broached sentiment. The texts, including Pasolini, Ungaretti, Whitman and an Auden lullaby, were interpreted through 6 or 7 transmutations, metamorphoses via the dressing up box, in a performance treading the tightrope between culture and vulgarity (animal nature). Alessandro Fiorella as a pink feathered bird is chased by Medalla in a shabby beaver coat and bear mask impishly hitching up

ANNA THEW admires youth and beauty in David Medalla's new show at the Daylight Club:



a pair of beige woolly tights. The bear and bird, so the fable goes, share their honey. Medalla's voice on cassette is stretched to poetic extreme, husky and barrel-deep in Ungaretti's *Meee illumino d'eeemmeno*. An extract from Plato follows, 'the pursuit of the whole is love (in a culture only geared to objects, false ideas, we can only search for an ideal (Medalla/Plato))' and with 'the blanket corroded with the last sweat of youth becomes a swarm of pollen', we find Alessandro is not bad at reading Pasolini either.

Between each sequence the cheap cassette recorder clicks and whirrs. Ragged edges are used to snap the tension. With strains of Mozart filling the space, macho proletarians in waterproof gear and site helmets share a musical cassette sandwich (ref. Pasolini on desire and young men) and then change (on stage) into society studs to do a Beau Brummel tango and sword fight with golden roses. The flâneurs tripping out of step became the crux and strength of the performance. The pull and precision of the practised dancer were at odds with Medalla's charismatic scampering. The personality tugs and differences opened up like a wound. At points it was like seeing life played out for real. The uncomfortable moments, the abject other face of Romanticism, love's tiffs, cupid's leaden arrow, acted as a powerful counterpoint to the heavily over-inferred male *amicizia* hypothesis, cast over the piece by the high poetry and plundering of texts.

For Fiorella it was something of a triumph of youth. Through the multiple intellectual allusions he stole a chunk of the show, being capable of leaping very much higher than his older counterpart. Though at points the dancer's gestures dissipated into contemporary dance man-

nerism, it was this ability to perform on a purely physical level that gave an unprecedented actuality to the interpretation of the texts. Memento mori. The blown up plastic balloon skeleton couldn't be got out of the portable wardrobe in time. Fiorella played on having a classical physique and at least made the inferred desire issue publicly plausible.

The performance was pervaded with sexual inference. A marauding monster with a red phallic head-dress hounds the youth in a grass skirt. Fiorella dances stark naked with a cane. Medalla mocks masturbation with mannekins' arms in interpretation of Whitman's 'I went to the headlands and my own hands took me there'. At 'masculine, full-sized and golden' the risqué Fiorella, classical nude recumbent with a two foot long golden parcel, groans and showers the audience with a confetti ejaculation. Things were getting rude, 'from dawn to dawn, permit me voyage, love into your hands' goes the tape. The two men walk arm in arm 'through neighbourhoods of poverty and light' doubtless in search of the whole, 'capable of any act even a base one, any false belief, any indecency' and so a piece run through with pathos and sentimentality is rescued from the brink with the crude humour of PAN.

Holding up a plank of plastic dollies in red scarves, Medalla and Fiorella in yellow stretch bathing trunks with a palm tree motive, end on a distinctly 'gay' note in a sticky beachboy embrace.

The tension between the poetic, intellectual, high cultural referencing and behind the scenes kitsch and rude humorous interpretation, a kind of sexual reading between the lines of Whitman, Plato and Shakespeare, made for a powerful performance which touched on taboos. Le Fab Medalla's blue silk, glitter and gold, rafia table mats, sandwiches, mock beaver and leopard-skin, high and low taste, were played off against one another tipping the balance away from the possible post hippie-paraphernalia. It got over with the clumsy dropping of things between the high points, the shufflings and interruptions, a kind of tense nostalgia for youth, butterfly love, the unattainable whatnot, unrequitedness, with death and wrinkles only just round the corner. It gets us all in the end.

The main strands shot through — sense of loss, loss of youth, loss of love, love of poetry, the shedding of inhibition with age, the upfront daring, the inhibition of emotion and of sexuality, subtexts and suballusions to the sharing proletarians, cultural academia, base indecency, the secondhand clothes, the bohemian must and renegadness. The artist is the thief of time. ●

David Medalla and
Louis Aragon

PERT

REVIEW

THE ENGLISH DREAM (MIDLANDS VERSION)

It's that time of year again. Wall to wall performance art, not least at Nottingham's Seminal National Review of live Art. STEVE ROGERS tackles the platform, ROB LA FRENAIS on the commissioned artists:

I'M GOING TO break the unwritten rule and quote back at the organisers of the National Review of Live Art a sentence from their own promotional blurb. I know I'm meant to participate in the conspiracy that says we all really know that it's just hype but we have to go through with it anyway. I feel safe in this only because it was that rarest of occasions when the event very nearly lived up to the promise. The programme proclaims '1986 is the festival's sixth and strongest year, reflecting a new confidence in Performance Art in Britain today, shared by artists, audiences and funders alike.'

This idea of a new, shared confidence is an entirely appropriate description of the current climate, even if the inclusion of 'funders' in the list is little more than hopeful flattery. But even in that they may be right since the festival was attended by a staggering number of Arts Council officers and committee members. 'Confident' was however quite definitely the spirit of the festival which was at all times smoothly and efficiently run despite there being twenty or so live events crammed into the awkward spaces of the Midland Group over the last two days. 'Confident' was also the one quality shared by virtually all the Platform events. These covered a vast range of work which stretched the label 'performance art' far beyond any descriptive usefulness, but they were, as a group, distinguished by a uniformly high standard of technical accomplishment and professionalism of presentation. 'Confident' does not necessarily mean 'good' but again the festival was surprising in having few really poor works.

The undisputed hit of the Platform was Annie Griffin whose *Blackbeard The Pirate: A Melodrama in Several Parts* showed her to have real 'star quality'. This was a fast, bright, witty and sophisticated updating of a traditional dramatic monologue complete with voices and identifying actions for the central characters and a brilliantly economical use of precisely selected props. Her story is a parable of male violence and its glamorisation through the tradition of

heroic tales of derring-do. Annie Griffin is herself an extremely assured, seductive and heroic performer and a testament to female strength and assertiveness.

Out of the tale and the character of the teller comes a wonderfully subtle and enjoyable irony that set this apart from the rest of the festival as being the most achieved and articulate of them all. Annie Griffin will almost certainly be grabbed at by the all-consuming pop/art cabaret crossover circuits but she's far too smart to allow herself to be eaten alive by it. I only hope that she decides to stay within the bounds of 'performance' as her chosen practice — she's far too good to lose.

The other hit of the festival Ralf Ralf equalled Annie Griffin for technical ability but came nowhere near her in the application of their skills. Ralf Ralf are two brothers who combine acrobatics and dancing with experimental vocal techniques. The result is a zany and quirky comedy that fits perfectly into the fashionable grey, but I suspect hollow, area between pop and art. Their show *The Hour* is a 'fast-search' through the language of physical and oral ges-

tures of two men together. Like contact improvisation dance it throws up accidental references to images half-remembered from film, television, advertising, art and personal experience. It is funny and sometimes sad, and achieves at its best a surreal slap-stick quality of being half human and half inanimate object, like Norman Wisdom with a deck chair. Ralf Ralf will like Annie Griffin attract the attentions of the media machine but they may not be as ready to deal with it. I am worried that unless their undoubted skills can be harnessed to some richer material they may get no further than a few appearances on children's television.

These were the stars of the festival but in many ways it was some of the less consummate artists and the less fully realised performances that appealed the most. Sarah Bennett's delightful and beautiful *Sinking Hearts* was a short, slightly awkward and shy performance with almost no televisual appeal, but with a warmth and simplicity that made it equal in effectiveness to Annie Griffin, and more so than Ralf Ralf. Her themes of love and the sea had a familiar ring, like a traditional English ballad. Performer and an ingenious costume become the sea and a ship, seafarer and a mermaid, yet throughout she remains a woman revealing her experience of love. It was lovely.

Similarly modest and humane was John Byrne's performance *Friends*. Using the simple format of the illustrated lecture, but each slide of himself with a different friend being duplicated on a second projector, and each spoken line repeated; often with the accent changing from Irish to English. In this way he demonstrated the power and importance of selective information and its interpretation. He revealed the complexity and ambiguity of the idea of 'friendship', and that it can come as easily out of 'difference' as from 'similarity'. I hope we see more from him.

Less resolved and articulate than these but none the less thoughtful and perhaps more provocative for being less resolved were the performances by Steve Jones and by Philip



Shaun Caton —
meditative state



PHOTOS / LARK GILMER

Hughes. Steve Jones, half of Dogs in Honey, has a strong intuitive grasp on the potency of visual images allied to dramatic presentation. His 'Fourth Wall' performance *Men with Hair like Women* had a rough, visceral quality to it that made it compulsive watching despite it being unstructured and at times clichéd. The performer sits alone in front of a mirror which divided the audience from the stage. The performer is engaged in acts of personal vanity such as shaving his legs, beautifying his face and hair, whilst a strong man stands guard. At intervals he is approached and kissed passionately. The performance threw up a range of ideas around the idea of beauty, physical attraction, image, vanity and narcissism as well as gender and sexuality and voyeuristic relationship of performer and audience. It is rich in potential and could be worked up into a more fully realised and probably strong performance.

Similarly Philip Hughes' performance *The Human Blender* had a powerful sense of an aesthetic to it. Electric kettles produced steam, the performer exercises and shadow boxes, before performing a ritualised karate-like demolition of an onion, and a final assault on bag of onions suspended like a punch-bag. There was a range of images and suggested association of ideas that was engaging and provocative. The idea of the human machine, the zen-like power and integrity of the individual engaged in physical and spiritual exercise, the image of food preparation and blending together with the strong, sparse atmosphere of the piece made me want to see it again after it has been worked on some more.

Another performer who relied on achieving a kind of meditative state through his work was Shaun Caton who performed a four day long installation performance. This involved the collection of debris from nearby streets and the constant re-arranging of the materials together with the making and erasing of marks and words on the walls leaving traces of the processes and revealing discovered relationships and patterns

in the materials' shapes, colours and textures. The aim of the work was to give artistic recognition to the aesthetic of the urban environment and to re-evaluate that urban environment as the unconscious product of human activity, the traces, if you like, of human passage.

It is a very attractive idea but which for me relies too heavily on the concept of the artist as having some kind of metaphysical power to transform his materials. Apart from the sensual pleasures drawn from the materials themselves the performance left me cold. This kind of performance can work brilliantly but when it has an edge of some indefinable presence. This didn't. A work that did achieve something more substantial from equally ephemeral materials and practice was David Coxon's *Taking The Veil*. This was a simple, even simplistic, idea of creating barriers between the audience and the performer made of nothing more tangible than light and smoke. The sharp lines of light that crossed in front of the performer are articulated and made solid with patterns of smoke drawn in them from burning extensions to his fingers. It was sensual and lovely to watch and achieved



the same visual effect as laser does of physically dividing space up into defined slices. The idea of ephemeral, insubstantial but beautiful, seductive barriers between artist and audience is a serious one and well articulated here.

Steve Purcell and Co gave an almost equally ephemeral performance but one which lacked the simplicity and resolution of David Coxon. *Preparatory Astronauts* verged on the whimsical. It looked good, and would have looked even better in a theatre rather than a gallery space. The central idea however was unremarkable. Three silent astronauts prepare themselves for flight whilst watched over by a woman who is bound to the wall. The woman is the heavens, a goddess and the hostage of man's desire for flight, which is a not very interesting half digested piece of Freud. The performance had a clean, sparse weightless quality which could have been put to some more effective use if far greater ambiguity were allowed into the performance.

Finally, of all the live events in the Platform there was only one that I really disliked but that one, *The Art of Self-Defence* by Patrick Dineen, I hated passionately. This was a kind of expressionist cabaret of Weimar style, coupled with a poorly concealed lust for success, like Joel Grey in *Cabaret* meets Joan Collins in *Dynasty*. It was a vicious, bitter, unpleasant performance which artificially, albeit cleverly, drew parallels between 30s Germany and 80s England. It will probably find some fans somewhere in fringe theatre.

The only other performer that must, at the very least, be acknowledged here is Neil Bartlett who did a fantastic job of introducing the festival and keeping the audience moving swiftly and eagerly from show to show. His humour was always good, his tone always encouraging and supportive, his timing near perfect and his frocks a treat.

In all the sixth festival Platform lived up to its claims to a shared confidence. I think there genuinely is a renewal of interest in the whole

Annie Griffin — assured, seductive and heroic



THE ENGLISH DREAM

area of live art, thanks in part to the platform itself over the years. Perhaps now the Platform has finished its task and is no longer needed to encourage young artists into making live performances. What is now more vital than ever before is to establish systems of recognition for artists working in the area including all the usual things like more funding opportunities, more performing opportunities, and more and better media attention which will in themselves serve as the sources of inspiration to draw new artists into the area of work and to maintain artists in their commitment to it.

The Platform has served an invaluable purpose, perhaps there should be a festival of past Platform performers to show just how invaluable — but it cannot serve alone to support artists wanting to work in performance. Now we are confident that performance has survived some very lean years let's not make the same mistakes as before. This time let's get into the system and build our own position inside it so that no-one can say, as they certainly did from 1978 till recently, that performance art is dead. The Platform is great, but it's not enough. (SR) ●

Preparatory Astronauts

IT'S AN interesting comment on the state of British performance art that the new unknown work, grouped together in the platform section of the National review of Live Art, seems to command more critical excitement and attention than the specially commissioned work.

With the exception of the quite extraordinary visitors from Poland, it also seemed to be the case this year that, while the unknowns were almost uniformly confident, well worked out, structured and intentional, the commissions, made up of established artists seemed far more works-in-progress. This was particularly true of Peter McRae, selected as the best of last year's platform, who produced a long, rambling media collages about cross-dressing, the trial of Joan of Arc, and a host of obscure referential material about the avant-garde impulse in general. 'I feel as if I am in hell' said one member of the audience afterwards, an emotion which aptly summed up the total confusion of the piece.

Feeling as if one was in hell, or a nightmare or a bad LSD trip was in fact a common feeling as the participants notched up their 24th hour of performance art of varying degrees of coher-

ence, disorientation or just plain exploitation by Sunday afternoon. It is the particular nature of performance art that it demands a lot from the audience, and the extending of one's senses to grasp each different sensibility offered by each artist stretched that particular critical muscle to the point of fatigue. It was lucky, therefore, that the bar and canteen provided a safe oasis of sane opinion and reason on this occasion (unlike the recent Perfo in Rotterdam — see my report this issue). It was precisely this that drew protests from the ostensibly uncompromising Babel, who, on their last performance, smashed their heads against the corrugated iron of their constructed environment, smashed a slab of stone and handed it symbolically to the organiser. They had felt that they were not being taken seriously enough. In the spirit of the laboratory-based Eastern Europeans such fripperies as bars and conversation nearby should be cut out in favour for a pure viewing of the work.

This was all reported to me, as I did not see the piece itself on that day. While agreeing in principle that the social aspect of the event should not be allowed to impinge on the work, my sympathy for them was muted because I didn't find their particular piece at all serious in intention. They are two separate issues really but... I will throw all fairness out of the window and say that the performance I saw was a joke — performance by numbers. They had all the kit — a ton of coke, water, rhythmic actions, references to the region's industrial history, etc. It just left me completely cold as to what their intentions were. It's entirely an instinctive thing. I just did not believe in what they were doing.

Babel are organising some extremely ambitious and useful initiatives in their home areas of Halifax and Huddersfield — 'The Circuit for Performance'. I think that as a group they may be better at being administrators than artists. Then they can be in control of the conditions for art as they wish.

The notion of 'seriousness' fake or real, has often been associated with the work of the Poles. Akademia Ruchu skillfully, jubilantly, toss in the air all those preconceptions and fiendishly juggle with them. Just when you expected them to be engaging in humourless physical theatre 'exercises', they cleverly subverted the direction of work towards humour, vitality, joyful irony. They have weathered the climate somehow since martial law was declared, despite earlier radical political involvement — yet they were able to laugh, and make us laugh at the contradictions in Polish society it must have produced. The most striking sequence of all is at the beginning of *Carthage*, where a group of conspiratorial seminarists slowly edge towards an ominously downward facing diagonal wall, their whispered disputations becoming more manic as this is approached. Suddenly they are launched into open conflict with the barrier — both a symbol and a parody of a symbol — with the crackle of gunfire and the adoption of heroic postures against the wall. The ambiguity of their actions

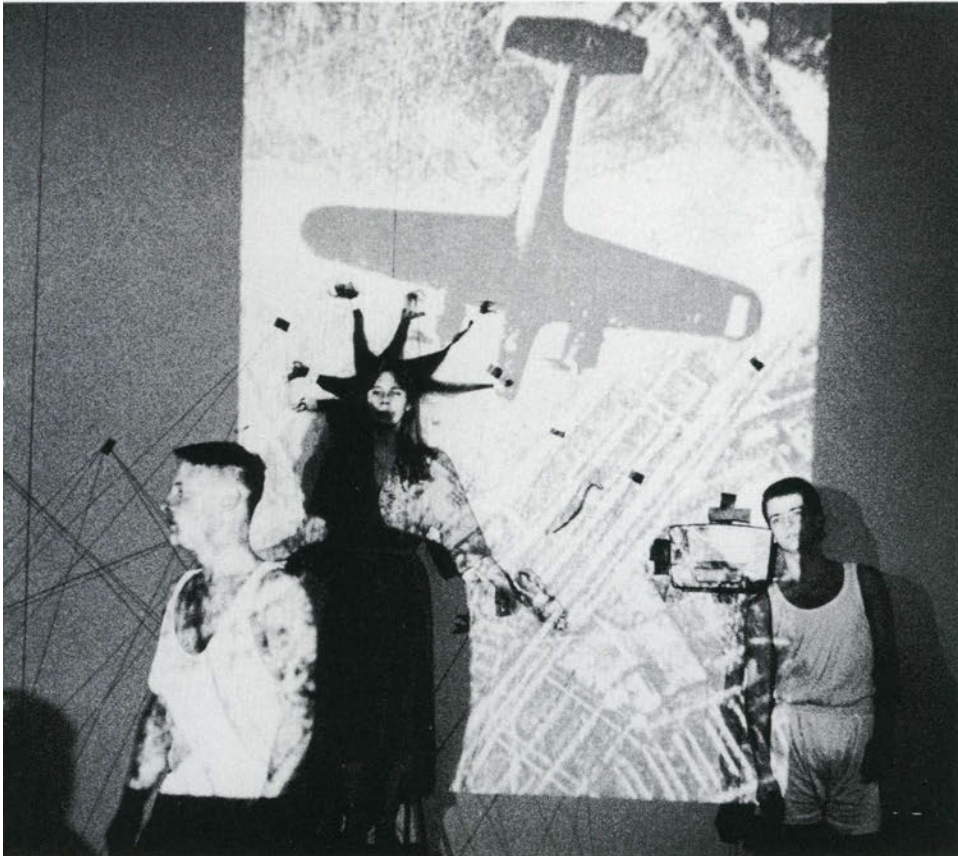


PHOTO / FLAVIA MALIM



directly reflects the sophisticatedness of their radical attitudes — no dogma is to be trusted — capitalism, catholicism or communism. What has become more important are the groups they survive in — mutually supporting a social and artistic fabric which has survived any amount of attack.

As opposed to the purists Babel take their stand from, they use the energy of western rock and roll to buttress their group energy — they can take what they like, appropriate what they can get hold of, like scavengers they want the best of both worlds.

In *Supper Goodnight* the image of complicity is complete — as white screen are moved about, people covertly exchanging little tokens, commodities — in parody of a black market but also emphasising the closeness of groupings within groupings in the close, conspiratorial society that Poland must have become. Two comic dwarfs in trilbies, the secret police, stand

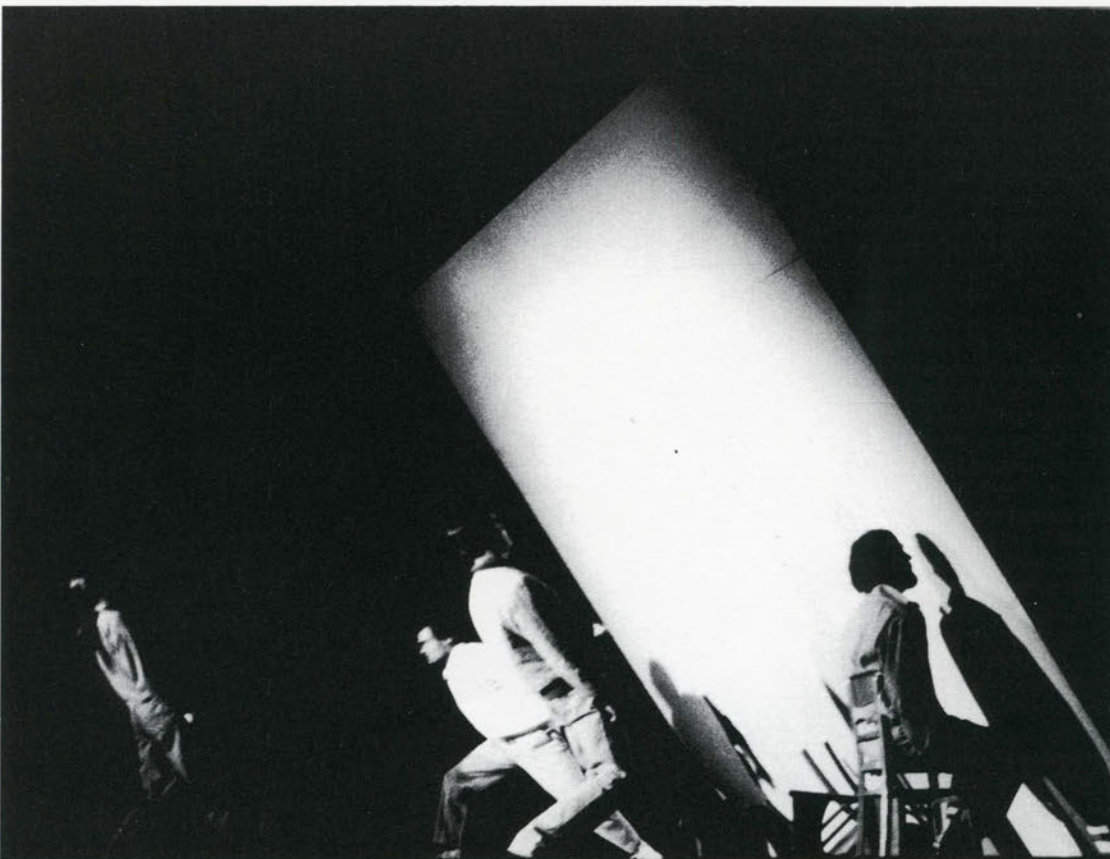
centre stage lighting up cigarettes, while a woman is seen, washing, in her underwear. At the end, a red glow suffuses all the participants for a full 10 minutes while a red hot coil glows in a light bulb. The bulb smashes, the facade drops, to reveal a woman in white, windswept. Stunning.

Finally there is Marty St James and Anne Wilson. These are two highly experienced artists who are going for the Big Gamble. They are trying to create a truly popular performance art spectacle. They enact a kind of anthropomorphic audio visual display of the themes and obsessions of the last three decades of radio and TV programming in this country. Using the techniques of Laurie Anderson, they substitute for the American Dream the English Dream (Midlands Version). Steeped in the lore of Tony Hancock and the Archers, but leaning heavily and uncritically on the imagery of Mills and Boon, they lay out a lengthy ironic saga of all

walks of life, domestic and professional, punctuated by the chimes of drawing room clocks, delineated by progressions from Crossroads through Eastenders and Dynasty. At the end of it all lies Camelot, both the myth and the Englishman's home. Like all dreams it is shattered, symbolised by a video of the recently dynamited Hackney tower block, near which this Midlands couple now live. In this show is contained some of the best images, both comic and thoughtful, I have seen in performance for a long time. However the structure was, at the stage I saw it, was marred by a Gang-show style of disconnectedness. At the end of the final 'exotic' sequence, where the couple come on in elaborate oriental costume, mutated with Sony TV sets, I couldn't help thinking 'what for?'. Too much, too much. But perhaps it was just the critical and cultural overdose, the 'festivalitis' described previously. With work, this project could go beyond our wildest dreams. We shall see. ●

Patrick Dineen —
expressimistic Weimar
cabaret style

PHOTO / JAN PIENIAZEK



Akademia Ruchu —
vitality, joyful irony

P&F

REVIEW



EXPLOITATION-PERFORMANCES

HAD MANY OF the audience (myself included) studied the programme notes more thoroughly before seeing the first of Peter Baren's two pieces, his work may have been better understood and better received. As it was, after the first of four runs of the approximately four minute long *Incident* dissatisfaction was being voiced: 'Is that it?'; 'That was a short ten minutes.' Not that he should be surprised at this response. The programme notes are as follows: 'Obstacles are placed in front of clear pictures which increase disorder to let the Incident take its course.' The first part of this statement is also in the introduction to the second piece. Further, the recent hit 'You're My Favourite Waste of Time' was played during *Incident* and in the second piece, *The Royal Corpse*, the unscrambled word display read as: 'No feelings, you've no feelings at all being here at a time like this. Anyone can tell you've no feelings.' Not exactly warm and welcoming words and music or easy viewing.

The inevitable festival constraints led to further alienation of the audience. *Incident* was intended to be of two hours duration with one 'exploitation-performance' every 15 minutes. This form of presentation was part of a deliberate attempt to break from the pattern of half-hour-plus festival performance. The presentation was consistent with this attempt: the audience assembled, the curtains opened, the Incident took place and the curtains closed to reopen ten minutes later to another or to the same audience. However, due to a late start, programming constraints and the remoteness of the Studio from the marshalling area for the audiences, there were only four exploitation-performances and at half hourly intervals. This had the effect of significantly altering the way in which the piece was perceived. It became in effect a one-off performance. There was less incentive to witness subsequent exploitation-performances.

The obstacle in *Incident* took the form of co-performer Ersi Hatvari who sat cross-legged at front centre making smooth and inviting arm gestures to the audience. Baren gradually became visible directly behind her, six feet off the floor, on the back wall: he appeared to be clinging on uncomfortably. It became apparent he was tied to the wall. Under strobe lighting, Hatvari's gestures became larger and agitated, successfully distracting from his struggling as if to try to break free. A red spot picked out the grotesque and offending gestures he was making with his mouth and face. The desired image of his struggle remained after the flats (in lieu of curtains) were replaced. He was aiming at a cinematic quality, in the style of Tarkovsky: two images superimposed and one shimmering

Also in Nottingham, Peter Baren, a rare visitor from Holland PETER MCRAE assesses:



over the other. She, straight upright and grounded. He, arc shaped, suspended horizontal.

The Royal Corpse was presented on the following afternoon in the Gallery. Sub-titled say hello to the Quark, the programme notes again: 'Obstacles are placed in front of clear pictures which slow down understanding in order to let the Royal Corpse . . . arise out of them.' The 'exploitation-performance' was an hour long and continuous. The thinner daytime audience and possibly a wariness generated from the previous night left not many who stayed long enough to witness the risen Corpse (or Quark). This was a pity. An empty water cannister pointed to one possible explanation for the generous sweep of sand across the floor. However, the piece as a whole was no barren desert. Given a little time, there was much to be seen. Baren included a scrambled word exercise for just the purpose of keeping the audience in the space and occupied: not to be thinking so much as looking. His intention of conveying essence with as static an image as possible usually worked against watching over an extended time. This new audience needed more incentives to stay.

Baren likens the compositions of both pieces to a painting. *Incident* could be seen as background (him), middleground (her) and foreground (the flats). In *The Royal Corpse* the generous sweep of sand upon which all of the objects were placed was possibly the canvas.

There were cover-ups — faces; double meanings — the titles and objects; layers and contrasts; horizontals and verticals and even red herrings. The scrambled words on the Gallery walls and the work-site tape bound the *Royal Corpse* composition. The tape was on the floor and the sand. Its usual barrier function was not being exercised: the audience were invited into, as well as around, the composition. By coming inside they were completing the link to the outside reality. The composition breathed. Hoses, part of the outside link, via a compressor running at operating speed in the back street, quivered under dynamic pressure. Hatvari lay face down, naked, on the sand. Her strongly centred abdominal breathing (via mask and tube through the floor) made Baren's stiff standing figure with ritual arm movement relatively pathetic.

In 'Incident' she wore exotic face make-up and some body decoration. The working pneumatic drills in 'The Royal Corpse' were silver-foil wrapped to make the tool more conspicuous (the tools are aligned with his heels, the weak point of man). In a previous piece he presented the hammer as a jewel. So Baren appropriates for purposes of suggestion, as required, on a temporary basis and without intention towards re-creation. He does not wish to establish motifs.

He describes his work in terms of explorations and 'exploitation-performances' rather than as performance installations. His is exploitation in a temporary sense: human input as performing object rather than installation. He has no definitive statements to make. He presents a range of options, opposite poles, contrasts and different levels (the well-made sound track to *The Royal Corpse* complemented the different levels of the composition, with low and high pitched sound and reversed recording effects). He is not so interested in the big (historical) issues as in the detail of the particular, in the unusual, as subject matter. One recent piece had as subject the first Dutch astronaut. He is not concerned that presenting his female co-performer nude may carry unintended connotations. For him, nudity is a costume: presenting two men would also have connotations.

Baren's appearance at the Festival has served merely as an introduction to his work. This long-serving Dutch artist deserves to be seen here again, by a more prepared audience. Not least he has made us question our expectations of what constitutes a performance or performance installation presentation, particularly in a festival context. Like the Belgian artist Leo Kuypers, he can remind us that looking (especially if only briefly) is not necessarily seeing and that thinking doesn't necessarily help looking. ●

LIGHT YEARS

NICK HOUGHTON celebrates with the London Film Maker Co-op their twentieth anniversary:

SHORTS, BACKCHAT AND MAYHEM

20 years ago the *London Film Makers Co-op* began life as a collective idea in the revolutionary fervour of the 60's. Having struggled through crisis and innumerable problems — both financial and ideological — it has become a fixture in the field of experimental and avant-garde film/performance practise. As well as running a unique distribution system for film and offering workshop facilities it also runs a cinema. It is here that many of the now established 'names' of the avant-garde first began, here that innumerable 'first timers' have had the opportunity to screen their work before an audience, here that much early performance work got an outing.

On a personal level I've always had an impression of the Co-op as a slightly ramshackle, friendly place in a constant state of good-humoured makeshift enthusiasm. In the proto-hippie 80's this has not always gone down well with many of the 'new breed' film/video students who often seem to see the LFMC as some sort of badly run doss house for hippies and redundant ideologies. All this despite the fact that the LFMC is about the only place in London that treats newcomers work with any sympathy and practically assists new film makers. It's a tatty sort of place but then anywhere where real work is going on is bound to be a bit untidy — for designer coffee shops a la ICA you need the same level of subsidy.

It's this same haphazard 'have-a-go' spirit which is evident in tonight's first event, the start of a month long series of screenings, events and debate. The idea is simple: a programme of 60 three minute films. This programme was, typically, dogged by various technical problems and interruptions which LFMC regulars have, by now, come to accept. Dogs get trodden on, precocious children yap, drunks shout and the show goes on in a sort of boozy good humour... 'It's all at the Co-op now', in fact. As to the work screened I won't attempt to catalogue it all except to say that this was an inevitably up-and-down experience as films ranged from jerky Super-8 'holiday' movies with artistic intentions to works of concise beauty and control.

Somewhere between the two lies an area of miscellaneous work that lurches from Gareth Mathews *Silent Scratch* — just like video scratch but on film — chipchopping at hi-speed between hundreds of TV images through the glowing weirdness of Nigel Lindley's *Kafkas*

Bones where Kafkas beetle goes for a haircut to the professional veneer of *Roadrunner* (Marek Budzynski), an upmarket but uninspired short narrative. Other film makers had used the 3 minutes in a more abstract manner. Michael Maziere's widescreen piece, *Blood Sky*, for example, reveals a swirling radiantly red world transformed by camera movement while in *Kol'r* (Michael Devaux) it's the high-grain pontillism of the abstract imagery which is of interest. Tim Cawkwell's *Carn Ingli Common* is a thing of similar beauty as the iconography of astrological systems overlay the image of a night sky.

It's possible, though doubtful, that it's from this same sky came the menace of the zap-gun toting alien in *SPFX Test*, a purposefully dingbat 'Space Invaders' style mini-epic with innovative special effects and a tongue firmly in its cheek. In John Smith's as yet untitled piece the tongue was more obliquely situated as what we first assume to be a Krishna devotee faces camera whilst a barber begins to shave his head. Playing with sound, expectations and twisting everyday logic in this apparently simple film, Smith finally reveals the Krishna freak to be a skin-head. 'The mark of a mature film maker', commented one Arts Council bigwig and one could see what he meant.

This comment is a useful point in fact for a more general observation that what a mixed show like this indicates is a quantitative difference between the approach of 'new' film makers and their 'elders' of the 60's and 70's avant-garde. 'There seems to be a difference in aesthetics between... well, different generations of film makers really', mused someone later and it was evident to me that there is a core of truth in that. Meanwhile, back at the Co-op, someone had drunkenly begun to dance in front of the screen. 'It's inter-active cinema', he told the audience. Sometimes the Co-op's like that.

SWIMMING TIMES: The LFMC Go To The Fishes

Day two of the LFMC's programme and I'm stood beside the University of London's swimming pool watching a performance by Peter McRae — *Boys Will Play With Fire*. As McRae, dressed in the 'uniform' of an Australian life-saver marches around the pool, twirls flags and points up the absurdity of his activities with a maniacal formality films flicker above him. These triple-projection movies act as counterpoint to McRae as a sound tape of the Beach





Boys surfing songs is blared out. A low-key piece this, stlyly funny and clever in the way it takes an activity out of context but for me a slightly dissatisfying work.

Restlessness increases as Hermine Demiorane and a whacky bunch of men and women present *Fountain Of Youth*. In this work performers get pitched into the pool from wheelbarrows then swim out to a plastic fountain in the centre of the pool to frolic around with robes and garlands while musicians play a strange dirgelike tune.

Current informed opinion on this style of anarchic performance is framed by the argument that underlining the work is an edge of self-parody and subversion expressed through the naivety of the 'action'. For 'those in the know' this may be a perfectly acceptable theory but for the most of us it hardly justifies what we see — a sort of smirky aquatic larking about. It could well be that I am a) A boring old fart without a sense of 'fun', or b) An unperceptive blockhead — answers on a postcard please — but I can find very little to recommend this stuff. I'm sure it was a bit of a giggle for those involved but as either entertainment or 'art' it was considerably less interesting than my own bathtime activities and I'm absolutely certain you wouldn't want to watch THAT for 20 minutes.

Next was a piece by Bol Marjoram and Sef Townsend which involved cardboard tubes used to create rhythmic patterns and odd gurgles while abstract slide projected images were screened on the walls behind the pool. As the two performers circled each other around the margins of the poolside they communicate to

Julia Lancaster Taking
What's Mine

LIGHT YEARS

aspect of the screening.

each other in a series of oddly haunting whoops and extended mutters. Finally a 'lifeline' is strung up across the pool with one of the performers swimming across below this dimly lit thread. 'What's it all about?', hissed a bemused viewer close at hand. I didn't know. Except to say that all this seemed a little incomplete and haphazard — 'More like a work not yet developed', someone said later — I can't think of much else to say.

The acoustic doodling was interesting, I'll admit, and there did seem some potential to the work but the piece seemed to lack the necessary structure or impact to 'fill' the poolside context.

Missing the second half of the programme and eager for the unspoken 'performance art' of Soho on a Saturday night, I left.

New Works On The Big Screen

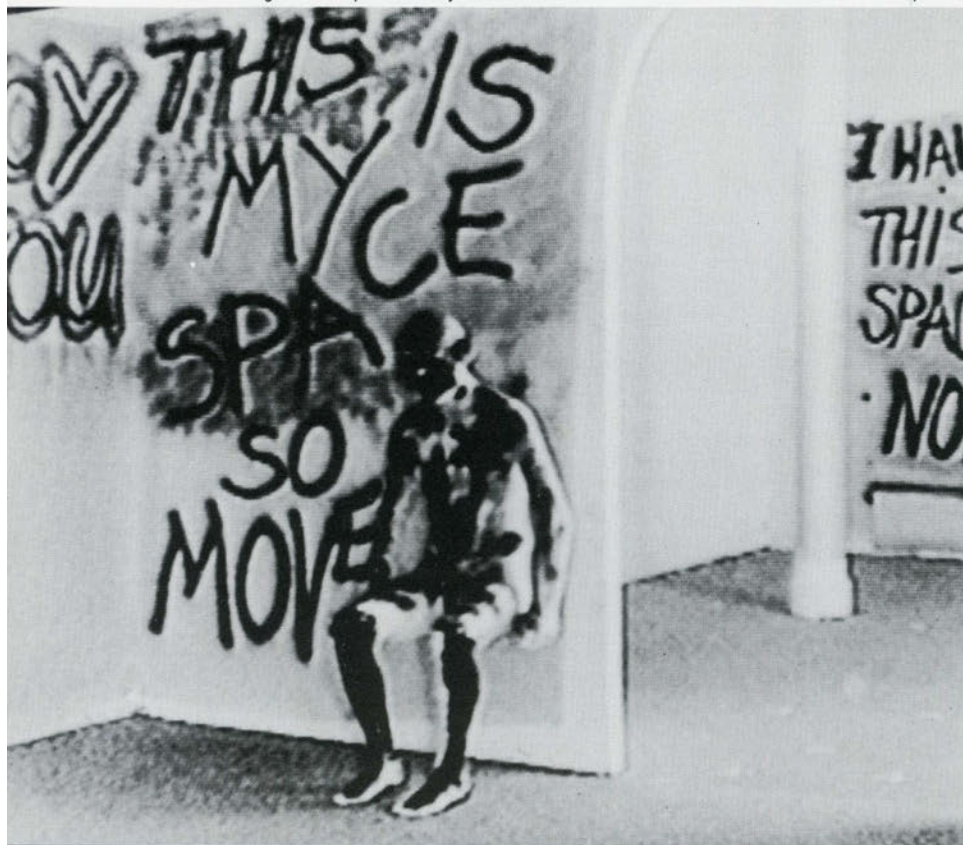
Day Three: The LFMC has here put together a programme of largely new video works for screening at the 'Rio' cinema in Dalston. Video projection, now a fixture here, means that tape-works are shown in 'full screen' glory. When one is used to viewing work on a TV monitor this is, at first, an odd experience although by the end of the afternoon it had become an unimportant

Before I begin babbling though I'd like to throw a few ideas around in relation to this new phenomenon of 'video cinema' as it would seem to me to throw up a number of questions about the practise of video art. Video art as a medium has, largely, been confined by the 'box' and this, of itself, can create a one-to-one intimacy distinctly different to the shared experience of cinema. (With video it's almost as if you're in a closed conversation with the work; with cinema the experience is of a different nature). Beyond this what's also of interest is the primacy of the close-up and mid-shot in video work. The point is arguable but, for me at least, video art has always been at its most effective when it works with a language of gesture, detail and motion framed by the dimensions of an enclosed space — a room, for example. In this it shares the language of television where the reliance is on placing us, the viewer, in close proximity to the subject. This is because longshots — and especially extended longshots — and panoramic or landscape vistas don't have the same definition on a TV monitor as they do in the cinema. TV 'flattens' the image and a shot which, in its cinematic context, may be gripping and breathtaking, simply does not translate in the same way to TV.

Although there are notable exceptions — the 'Landscape' genre of American video, Bill Viola etc., and Brian Eno's pieces — most video work has operated within this simple premise on the assumption that the images produced will be viewed on a monitor. Video cinema introduces a new element to this simply because of the size of the projected picture. It may well be that a different sort of video art will develop which accounts specifically for this particular context as the use of video projection becomes more widespread. We'll see . . .

In the meantime there's new works to look at and you're back to babble, I'm afraid. Kicking off with *Notes* by Joanna Millet, a simple, delicate work which stares at hands on a piano, the programme moves on to a Greek tape, *The Arrows Are Of Eros* (Leda Papaconstantinou). Hands again are the central image which finally give way to the strangely disturbing image of a woman surrounded by a ring of fire. With its, literally, hand-written text in Greek it was difficult for me to fully understand the piece but there was a simplicity about it and a quiet beauty about the imagery which I liked. Simple imagery is evident too in Mona Hatoum's *So Much I Want To Say* where we see a shifting central picture of a static face frozen in a moment where hands cover mouth and eyes. Another direct and strong piece here.

And so to *One Of Those Things You See All The Time* (Simon Robertshaw). I have been a fan of this tape since I first saw it earlier this year and I'll just re-state that its mix of a semi-documentary approach, personalised storyline and political edge make it a work which belies its apparently simple structure. *There Is My Mother*, an American tape, is altogether different; Mary Ann Toman presents us with a slow prow through a suburban street which becom-



es increasingly drenched in shifting colour while a text delivers a disconcerting story. 'Where is my mother . . . She is walking up the hill . . . On her knees . . . When she gets to the top there is nothing', says part of the text of this unsettling and eerily sinister work. It's my kind of art.

Next up is an odd one — Jayne Parker's *En Route*. The tape, frustrating to view, switches between Parker spitting on the floor, driving a car and playing the viola. At its heart the piece is about frustration and self-control but where most of the artists previous work has had an intense, offbeat feel *En Route* seems, by contrast, a slight and somehow uncertain tape. Catherine Elwes' *Gunfighters* is more straightforward being a foray into 'boys-with-toys' territory. Avoiding heavyhanded moralising the tape talks to, and about, two young boys enthusiastically playing out TV-induced games with guns. It's a warm and affectionate piece, funny too, underlined by Elwes' catalogue comment: 'I am left trying to reconcile the fact that I love these little men, but not what they do'.

TV, in particular 'glamour advertising', is again under attack in Karen Ingham's *The Cutting Edge*. Moving between a TV ad which constantly states that 'Beauty is all that matters' and the close-up domestic torture of defoliation the tape explores the taboos of female body hair with both humour and an articulate anger. Where Ingham focuses on 'beauty' Julia Lancaster takes a broader view of her situation in *Taking What's Mine*. Although 'Hawleys Law' applies here — video artist Steve Hawley recently commented that, as a rule, most video tapes needed to 'lose' about a third of their length — Lancaster has here created a quirky piece where a title introduces each related segment of the tape. At one point, having 'reclaimed' her space, the title 'Using My Space' prefaces Lancaster bopping around the area in a series of now-you-see-her-now-you-don't jumpcuts. The subject of the work, rejecting stereotypes and defining oneself, COULD be grim and humourless but Lancaster has rejected this for a tape which works all the more effectively by being both clever in its mix of techniques and the way it uses jokes to carry its content. (Heartening too to learn that this former student of the now axed Environmental Media Course has received a bursary to continue her practise . . . You may try and axe 'em, RCA, but you can't stop that VT rolling).

Sheep Dog, by Clwyd Parry, is short and succinct — it's about sheep dogs and control and lasts all of 80 seconds . . . At three minutes *Fathers and Sons* is a bigger enterprise as we enter the tacky realm of a parodied Western complete with check shirts, big country and hackneyed dialogue. In the land of *Hey Mr Suit* they wouldn't let you wear all that cowboy gear, it's not good for the corporate image and this, primarily, is what Mike Jones and Graham Ellard's piece is about. That and the signals and codes of how business and TV people present themselves. Again a case for Hawley's Law but otherwise an intelligent and pointed addition to a body of work by Ellard/Jones which deals



consistently and articulately with de-coding what are, effectively, messages of power and hegemony. With Mike McDowall it's domestic power struggles which are cut-up and kicked around. *Boloney And The Plastic Set* is an enormously powerful and grubbily violent tape which in three minutes both condenses and fractures a couple's infighting through precise editing, efficient camera work and savage language. It's tempting to dub it 'New Narrative' but it's something more than that which makes this a startling, brutally innovative work.

After the slapcrack of *Boloney* Andy Hazell's *Short Film With A Bomb* comes across as an oblique and surreal effort as fluid B&W imagery places a 1940's styled 'Birthday Girl' in the context of the bombing of Hiroshima. 'Smoke and fire rolled through Tokyo/They must've thought it was judgement day', chunters the C&W song which accompanies this bleakly dreamlike work and, below its surface, there's a nightmarish edge to the tape. Set against this I have to say that Isaac Julien's contribution seemed a little wishy-washy. This may be unfair as I understand the piece is not yet complete but *Gary's Tale*, a gay love story, seemed to be a

curious blend of pop-video technique and romantic travelogue which seems uncertain of its intentions. Jez Welsh's *Reflecting I* have, elsewhere, already talked about; a second viewing only underlines my original feeling that the overkill effects and text only obscure what is an otherwise intriguing and highly complex work.

Where *Reflecting* seems technologically overactive *Hopscotch*, by Tina Keane, is underplayed and subtle in its use of a framed central image slowmotioning us through imagery of kerbside play. Text gently ticks down the screen beside this image informing us of the history and complexity of the seemingly simple game of the title. Its very simplicity is its strength.

Finally I should say that this programme renewed my recently shaky enthusiasm for video art. What's on view here is a new confidence and articulacy that eschews the go-go whizzbang of editing tricks and simple spectacle for an intelligence and genuinely experimental style which not only has content but also vitality in the way it handles its subject matter.

I think the revolution might be back on, chums. See you in the edit suite. ●

Aquatic larking about or deeply meaningful discourse?

PERT

REVIEW

WOMEN WORK OUT

MINA KAYLAN underwent the Magdalena experience:

THE LOCAL Cardiff newspaper had advertised it as a 'Girls Own Festival'. An opportunity to locate a female aesthetic, a feminist politic not just in theory but in the practice of making physical and visual theatre was realised in Magdalena 86, attracting 35 women theatre practitioners from East and West Europe, USA, the Middle East and Argentina, and 100 participants making a (costly) pilgrimage to Cardiff Laboratory theatre for 3 weeks.

Before I could thoroughly indulge myself on the question of 'Female Creativity' (a recurrent theme in discussions), some criticisms. I couldn't help wondering why in this festival there was a serious dearth of the better known women theatre practitioners from Britain, and a total lack of black or Asian artists. Were they all at Edinburgh? Had they been invited to show their work? Could they not afford to come? The

'active participants' in Magdalena had been invited on condition that they find their own funding to pay for travel expenses. Cardiff Lab provided accommodation, food and work space. The artists would not receive any fees. Those who were unsuccessful with sponsorship, had had to dip into their own pockets. It seemed ironic that in the process of giving professional recognition to women artists, Magdalena had to ask them to work on less than (financially) professional terms. Unfortunately, this was not openly acknowledged, nor was it introduced as an issue for discussion. Thus, many of us who paid for performances and/or workshops were oblivious of this political irony. Had we known, we could have had a tangible example for the notion that 'the process as well as form and content determines the politics of a piece of work', (discussion on Female Creativ-

ity). Another confusing factor in identifying the aesthetics of 'women's art' within the milieu of an 'independent Magdalena spirit', was that many of the performances had been directed by men. Many of us became aware of this either by chance or too late in the week. The responsibility for drawing our attention to such a prevalent feature in the work shown at Magdalena, falls again to the all too over-worked coordinators. It could have been a spring-board for a communal investigation into the conditions, restrictions and choices involved for women working in theatre/performance. In fact, for many of the artists there, it was a new step to be working on their own material with women performers or towards a solo performance. Therefore, many had sought the help of a director they had been familiar with and trusted. These directors more often than not happened to be men.

Despite these conceptual confusions, the practical organization of space, tickets and food, etc., could not be faulted. (Well done Cardiff Lab.). This was important because the festival was essentially about making personal contacts over coffee or dinner, about seeing work by women from the other side of the world; work that excited and moved you despite language barriers. During this week, I saw some of the most powerful, (possibly also the worst), performances by women in a long time.

Helen Chadwick (the theatre, not the visual artist of the same name, from England) presented *A Gift for Burning*, as well as giving a week of workshops on voice improvisation and using women's writing for songs. Her performance was a gentle homage to the life and works of several major women poets from Britain, USA and Russia; a sensitive and humorous dramatization of their poetry in song.

Songs of Grief and Hope by Lis Hughes Jones (Brith Gof, Wales) was a series of laments, saetas and songs, interspersed with sentimental scenarios. Directed by Mike Pearson, its subject was the 8,961 people who have 'gone missing' during the 1970s in Argentina — a grave subject not to be sentimentalised. The director, also literally acting as the stage manager and technician, kept wandering around the performance space — dressed as a black-suited undertaker cum butler figure — carrying out peripheral duties. It was performed in Welsh (except for the songs in Spanish). With complete respect for Welsh Nationalism, but none for the melodramatic timbre of the piece, I left



Graciela Serra's
Facundina

wishing they had read out the straight facts for one hour.

Netta Plotzky's (Israel) *The Happiness of the Preform* consisted of three short cameos — improvisations on the theme of 'searching for love': Ophelia with a wheelbarrow of flowers; a lonely woman in a candle-lit room; the dance of a Japanese mask and red dress. She exploited her natural gift for the clownesque with a good deal of eye-tickling tricks with the audience. Ms. Plotzky also gave workshops 'fusing acrobatics, Japanese Buto Theatre and Indian dance.'

Brigitte Kaquet, (Cirque Divers, Belgium), presented a multi-media performance, *Hesitation 3- La Presence D'Esprit*. Slide projections of Magritte's painting (as in the title), films of penguins, videos of fish faces and English translations of the text some of which was a fairy-tale about mermaids. Admittedly, the various fragments did have a marine theme, but each seemed to be swimming in a random direction with no substantial focus for the ideas. Although there was a great deal of sensory information, one felt that nothing much was happening — nor did it 'happen' in our minds and psyche after the performance!

Madame Bovary — Downtown, co-directed by Elsmarie Laudvic and a male colleague Tage Larsen (both of Odin Theatre), was Anna Lica's (Teater gruppen Marquez, Denmark) first solo piece. *Madame Bovary* is simultaneously Sally (an up-to-date version). She lives downtown, probably in Britain. Anna Lica feels Sally is British, thus performs the piece in English. The bored *Madame Bovary* alias Sally is in her middle class garage and takes a fantasy trip, playing out her various personas, including that of husband Charles. A.L.'s subtly tongue-in-cheek style, her lithe and throw-away movements in a tight choreography, allows us to recognize with humour, the self-imposed aspects of some of the stereo types. An entertaining cocktail of Flaubert R. D. Langian riddles, Marianne Faithful and sliced lemon sunglasses!

Geddy Aniksdal (Grenland Friteater, Norway), presented to us the World Premier of her first solo piece *The Stars are No Nearer*, directed by Tor Arne Ursin (male director of her company). 'I didn't want to be her, but I wanted her portrait to speak; her life is in her poetry,' says Geddy, and this approach is probably the key to the success of the piece. Using five of Sylvia Plath's poems, a baby cot, her own pregnant body and strong stage presence, she creates a taut emotional context for the poetry, without interfering in their meaning. She twangs, twitches and resounds the potent and often corrosive words, so that we hear each image clearly as it forms itself from its source in the life of the poetess.

No Man's Land was a collaboration between actress Sandra Salmaso, sculptress Cinzia Mascherin and male director Allesandro Tognon (Italy) who became involved at a later date. The title seemed to make sense. The sensual geography created by Cinzia's sculptures and Sandra's physical language was a million miles

away from the conceptual — downright mental — quality of most performance art created in 'man's land'! They say they try to 'work from a place more profound, more powerful between emotion, feeling and the intellect', that they are consciously searching for a female language in their art. Their performance was one of the rare occasions when I could feel the difference between a male and female theatre language. A woman is wearing a dress textured with fauna and flora you'd find on the ocean floor; her belly and thigh are showing through, a spectator remarked, 'It's like the sea-shells where you can see bits of the creature inside'. Another woman digs in the sand, finds gold, black and turquoise hydra, spirogyra shapes, and hangs them on a curtain of reeds; she washes her hands in a tiny pool of turquoise liquid and fondles the primary-coloured suspended rock crystals. 'The theatre allows my sculptures to breathe; art galleries create a cold environment', says Cinzia. *No Man's Land* was a feast of visual delicacies.

Jolanta Krukowska (Achademia Ruchu, Poland) did *A Dance About . . .*, about every day activities, about 'my play . . . my place . . . habit . . . marriage . . .', about life's dance with rocks that weigh us down, that threaten to crush. It was a powerfully simple performance — simple in scenography, simple in word, but not in overall dramatic language. Jolanta is an enigmatic performer, her movements precise, delicate — with a feline agility. Her actions are charged with irony, with the kind of piquant female wit that made us weep in utter empathy.

Facundina was performed by Graciela Serra and co-directed with her 'companioner' Eduardo (both of Inyaj, Argentina). *Facundina* is the story of a Chiriguana Indian woman, 'the kind that the theatre in Argentina never considers'. Graciela has mainly worked in education, and not as an actress. She herself, has grown up between the dominant Spanish and the indigenous Chiriguana cultures. In the performance she acts out the story of *Facundina* using Chiriguana — a language which is dying out in Argentina; on the one hand she invokes the elemental power and magic of that oppressed culture, on the other she comments as Graciela (in Castilian) on *Facundina*'s story. 'The theoretic aspect of the performance', she says, 'I worked on together with an anthropologist, sociologist and psychologist'. This was a performance where the actress was also the educator, a political shaman who by liberating *Facundina*'s spirit on the stage, engaged our intelligence fully — our intellect, emotions and psyche; as an audience we were implicated in *Facundina*'s betrayal. We were beginning to understand what it meant to suppress *Facundina*. A rare example of real political theatre.

Zofia Kalinska (Poland) who has worked with Kantor for 20 years, now directs her own Akne Theatre company with actresses Jolanta Biela Jelzymk and Jolanta Gadaczek. They presented 'The Maids' by J. Genet. Z.K. (who played 'Madame') says that she was interested in doing this play with women acting — not what Genet intended. 'I hate conventional theatre',

she says; in her work she wants 'to achieve a form of transgression'. I entered a trance state just watching the performance. It might have been the stuffy (real) cellar we were in, the old lace gowns strewn and strung up around, the candle light, Madame's footsteps upstairs, and then her entrance . . . the hairs were up on my spine. They seemed to be acting — or being — from another source; I had never witnessed it in Western theatre. A critic apparently had called their quality 'demonic'. The power in their performing was exhilarating — the kind of exhilaration you might experience if you put your palm on the underbelly of an iguana! I went to Zofia's workshop named *Demonic Women*. She was working towards a trance state; 'It can happen by chance, you must be concentrated and the accident can happen; it's very important, the accident and stupidity . . .'. She pushes the force barrier of stereotypes to reach the power of the archetype. One of the participants exploded during the workshop (not with archetypal power!). She objected to the work, saying it was superficial and ideologically (in terms of feminism) unsound. Ironically, it was one of the most important and challenging workshops I'd attended, (I was not alone in feeling this). Moreover, as a feminist theatre practitioner, I strongly feel that this uncharted area of the furious, the terrifying, the 'demonic' female power that men have interpreted negatively, should be explored and reclaimed by women. What better place to start than in the act of performance.

Part I of Magdalena came to an end with a beautiful concert by Ida Kellarova (Czechoslovakia) of Eastern European songs; she was later joined by about 60 women who had been working with her all day, who filled the Cardiff night air with powerful mountain top singing. There had been a tremendous variety in the form, content and working process of the 'experimental' theatre language of the performances I saw at Magdalena. What I found thrilling to witness were two distinct qualities, which were areas of breakthrough for women in performance. The expression of a full and wholesome female sexuality and sensuality; and unrestrained humour, unashamed hilarity. The evidence of these gave me courage and inspiration. It is a sign that as women theatre practitioners, we are slowly liberating ourselves from the subtler shackles of 'the male observer' in theatre . . . in our lives; and (to borrow organiser Jill Greenhalgh's phrase), 'we are engaging with our own energy — not playing nursemaid to men's visions'. Jill Greenhalgh's inspired idea for such an event, realised with the help of her 12 women colleagues from Cardiff Lab will become an *herstorial* landmark, the beginning of a tradition in international theatre events. In the hope that the Magdalena 'independent spirit' lives on to inspire many more such Festivals for Women in Experimental Theatre, I'll let Zofia Kalinska have the last word: 'I think that women need in their creation, some irony, some sense of humour. Often we are very serious because we want to be accurate and better than men.' ●

PERT

REVIEW

THE NATURE OF REALITY

Has Richard Layzell really seen the future?
SIMON HERBERT demurs:

AFTER SPENDING MANY years watching performances whilst squatting uncomfortably on a cold concrete floor, or witnessing outdoor events where the notion of 'public art' didn't seem to stretch beyond consideration for the artist's bravery, rather than consideration for the on-site audience, it was interesting to enter the venue for Layzell's new performance *The Nature of Reality* and find a warm, small space with adequate seating. The Gate Theatre is above the Prince Albert pub in Notting Hill, and is equipped with an extensive lighting rig and six rows of pew-like benches layered down to a tiny performing space.

Given the intimate lay-out of the space, and Layzell's history of presenting work that directly confronts his audiences, there seemed to be the potential for an active and tangible link with the work. Unfortunately this wasn't the case, as Layzell's overall methodology couldn't have distanced me further from his performance if he had been performing under a proscenium arch.

My reaction was not based on any particular pre-conceptions of an overtly theatrical format. (Layzell's struggle against pigeon-holing is refreshing in practice. How many other artists would attempt to develop a new audience on the London fringe circuit that consists of less than

the usual 70% of students/artists?). It stemmed more from my disappointment in that the subject matter of Layzell's piece — the cumulative alienation and confusion people experience when confronted with a natural environment that long ago ceased to be 'natural' — was not broached with a clarity or originality that such an issue, with its much wider ecological implications, demands.

Nature of Reality was presented in two parts, each of which showed Layzell playing various characters situated in a future time, when the human race, in the words of the programme, 'has virtually no contact with the natural world — largely because their predecessors have already either destroyed or polluted it, and partly because they are afraid . . .'

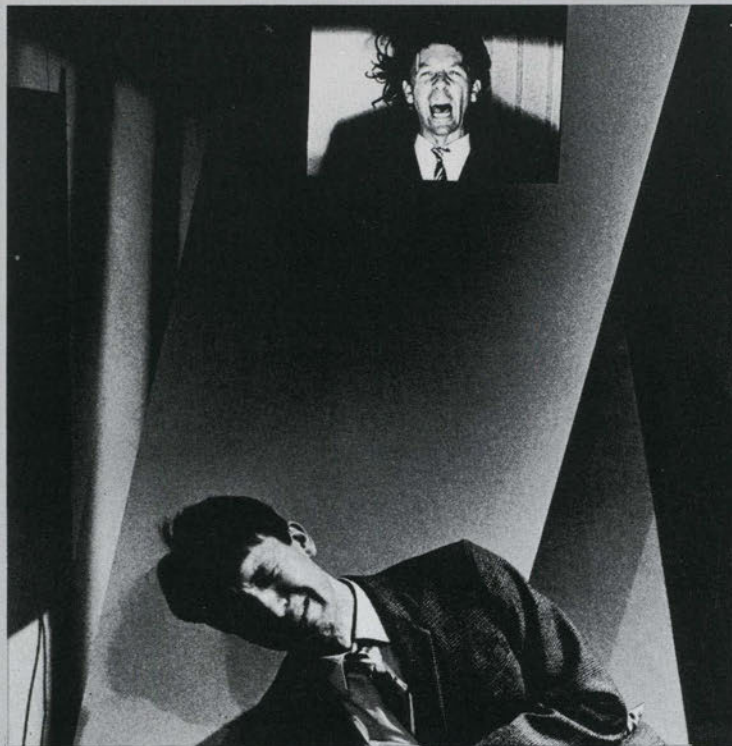
The trouble with creating an imaginary world is that any issues created as part of its fabric appear imaginary also. For decades writers have constructed fictional environments to provide an arena for extrapolation of particular contemporary themes — such as genetic purity in Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World' or repression of individual freedom in Orwell's '1984'. Whether good or bad, most are diluted in that the issues raised seem merely *parallel* to our own (hence that wonderful non-sequiteur 'sci-

ence fiction'). Layzell's approach was to present a *lateral* future of a tragic nature, yet an hour and ten minutes and a slick set just wasn't enough to make me believe or care, and without provoking that emotional involvement, Layzell's commentary functioned almost in opposition to his subject matter.

The first half of the performance began in low light, with Layzell entering into a minimal post-Caligari set of angular grey frames which incorporated various doors, a video monitor and a spot-lit lectern, to the accompaniment of synthesised piped wind sounds. After divesting himself of a gas mask and overcoat, he delivered a lecture to the audience, informing us that we had 'come a very long way', and that we shouldn't listen to those subversive elements amongst us who say that 'things were better in the past'. He emphasised the foolishness of such behaviour with projected slide images that filled the set with pictures of trees and plants, and pointed out with disgust 'Messy . . . isn't it?'. Layzell's character was extremely mannered, a hybrid of an après-rat Winston Smith and Graeme Chapman's Monty Python colonel. The effect was a continual montage of many of the post-apocalyptic dictator/controller clichés, so it came as no surprise when the character began to display self-doubts about his particular brand of bullshit, eventually suffering a sudden seizure. Whilst Layzell moaned, collapsed on the floor, a monitor image showed Layzell wearing a fright wig telling callous jokes. (Q. What happened to the man who forgot to take his protein tablet? A. He got hungry.) — presumably to signify authorities' contempt for individual welfare.

The second half of the performance was very different in tone, presenting the flip-side of Layzell's future world: a man, in various cameos, dedicated to literally re-discovering his roots. Between silently reading a book to a voice-over of Wordsworth's poetry, and directly addressing his audience with bewildered questions as to what do bees, clouds, flowers smell and feel like, Layzell began to incorporate a wider visual sense into the piece. At times he at least hinted at the pathos an ecologically destructive society, when intangible films were projected over the set; searching for a goose only to have it disappear as he 'touched' it, surrounded by rotating clouds in a blue sky, donning the gas mask again and miming slowly to the screeches of an elephant whilst enclosed by iron bars.

What *Nature of Reality* lacked was a knowledge on Layzell's part that the mass media has shown it to us all before, and we constantly sweep it under the carpet until the next time it flickers across our vision. If a performer is to hit the deadened nerve within an audience and, more importantly, sustain this sensation after the lights have gone up, s/he has to do more than pay an ultimately comfortable and ingenious lip-service to vital issues. By unearthing many of the old clichés surrounding his subject matter, Layzell failed to go beyond an exercise in surface realisation. ●



Messy, isn't it?

RACING START TO SUMMIT

**KATY SENDER on an
installation at the Diorama:**



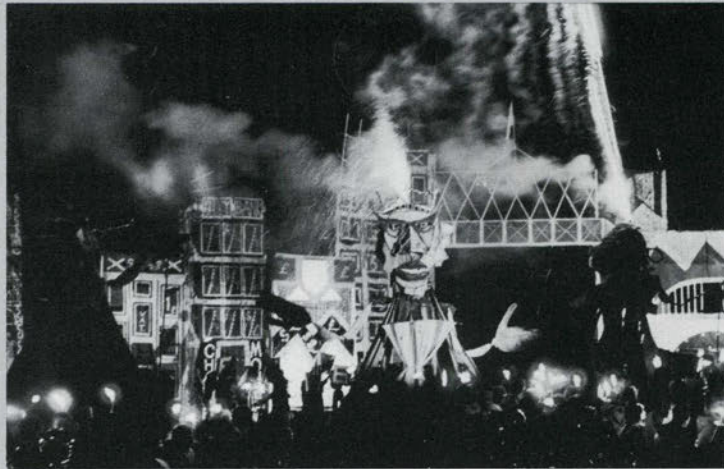
IN A BLACKENED room, the inverted image of a racehorse is thrown against the back wall; superimposed on this is an image of the same racehorse, the same newspaper cutting which changes angles and focus. The projected racehorse in turn is reflected in a pool of water enabling the image to be seen the right way round. Initially curiosity intrigues and there is a fine point of irony in the fact that *Racing Start*, an installation by Ron Haselden, is a reflection of inactivity and calm. Is there a parallel to be drawn with the Diorama itself, champing at the bit yet crippled by lack of funding? By placing an installation in this way, Ron Haselden inevitably invites a comparison with video and television, both of which are primarily concerned with communication. *Racing Start* is scenic, pleasing and demands concentration from the viewer but what it communicates remains a mystery.

The 'exhibition' which consists of one painting by Rasheed Araeen — *Summit* and a number of paintings and a video installation by Thomas Lisle is not only confusing but irritating. Badly hung, poorly lit and without even a tenuous link between the work of the two artists (apart from the fact that both work in mixed media) the Daylight Club has done a disservice to both by showing their work in this way. Minimal funding, understaffing or many of the endless administrative problems faced by countless art organisations today provide poor excuses for what is an apology of an exhibition. While the Daylight Club should be encouraged in their projects, the apparent lack of consideration behind the exhibition mars the overall effect.

Summit is a powerful painting. At first one is seduced by the blue and the surging gold only to be arrested by the aggressive image of the tumbling goat, an iconographic motif which Araeen has employed frequently in many of his works since 1978. The conspicuous use of Urdu script creates a barrier, intended to invoke a sense of alienation in European viewers. In this lies the success of Araeen's work. It is sad that further pieces by Araeen were not included as his work has a strong cumulative effect.

The inconsistency of Thomas Lisle's work reduces it to decoration, a more selective editing of the images would have provided a stronger representation of Lisle's figurative concerns. ●

ACCEPTABLE/UNACCEPTABLE



**ROB LA
FRENAIS at the
Manchester
Festival:**

In march the Top
People

IN AN UNUSUALLY eclectic way, the Manchester Festival has recently become one of those events which bring together a breathtaking variety of arts experiences in a short space of time. The efforts of mercurial organiser Jeremy Shine meant that in one weekend a visitor could: attend a debate of national importance about public attitudes to art ('the Unacceptable Face of Art' — organised by the Artangel Trust); a hard-hitting public art poster campaign by Contracts International, (artist Tim Head in disguise); the haunting of a Tudor Mansion by those 'ghosts' of the art scene, Fork-beard Fantasy — (visual theatre companies will come and go, but the Britton Brothers will never be exorcised), flooding of a city warehouse by IOU; an all-night Indian Music concert in Manchester's cavernous town hall, featuring stunning crossover music by a combination of ex-IOU musicians and an Indian pop group; and finally a vast spectacular performance by Action Space Mobile, based on a Brecht poem, *The Cities Were Built For Us* — a mini-riot of fireworks, giant puppets and marching bands.

There were even, to spice the weekend up, two controversies. One was at the Cornerhouse gallery over David Mach's *If You Go Down To The Woods Today*, a powerful installation on the theme of unfairness using multiples of Sindy Dolls, Teddy Bears, and anglepoise lamps. Each of the clusters of dolls, bears and lamps were labouring to hold seemingly vast weights. The Sindies were holding up a swimming pool on which basked a single Sindy, the bears were holding up a vast log of wood (all of them under one, a single pathetic bear under another), and the anglepoises, four video images comprising a single naked woman shifting about restlessly 'getting comfortable'. This had caused protests by firstly families coming to see the teddy bears, and secondly, some women at the gallery who objected to the female nudity and the video dissection of it. Mach, no stranger to strife himself, seems to have ducked out of the situation by replacing the nude form with a clothed one. It's a pity, because it a) ruined the piece, and b) ducked any discourse or debate on the issue of

female representation in new forms of art. It was also a matter of concern to see the feminist debate mixed up with issues of public morality, as I suspect it might have been. Mach also failed to respond satisfactorily to questioning about this work at the 'Unacceptable Levels' debate, which came up as an unexpected issue there. Mach produces highly accessible, popular and pertinent artworks and it's turned him into a public figure. 'If you can't take the heat . . .' might be unfortunately worded advice, but then his last piece was named *Fuel for the Flames*.

Also having problems with heat were Action Space Mobile, who somehow managed to get hit by the local papers afterwards for what is fairly standard pyrotechnic practice during their spectacle with claims that it would set a bad example to kids in the audience. Artists are not nannies, nor are they a public information service. I suspect that the real hidden agenda for it was that Brecht's message, 'The Cities Were Built For Us' is an even more subversive message today. Action Space Mobile had mustered together the experience of all their past spectacular work to produce a compelling and ambitious piece, staged for a vast local audience people, utilising literally hundreds of performers with military precision. No punches were pulled with the austere, often archaic sounding, amplified text, which somehow really seemed to hit a chord with a section of the crowd I was standing in — though one might have had problems at the back. Talk of the Bailiff, and the March of the Top People, set in a constructed city of fantastic architecture, simplistic though it might have been, seemed to send a shiver of recognition flashing between the Thirties and the Eighties. When it culminated in a simulated inner city riot, there was a sense of a taboo being broken — Are these people, paid for by the council, telling us to get out and riot? Disbelief. And weaving in and out of the torch waving revellers, the marching bands, brought in from all over the local area, for one night playing the role of people's militia. A difficult and risky project — it worked. ●

PHOTO / PHIL HYDE



YOU ARE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR LAST EXPERIMENT

NIKKI JOHNSON
views with
disbelief the
latest advance in
particle physics:

LISTEN TO THIS: the smallest known charge is a quark. To begin with there were two which were called 'up' and 'down', there was also a third unexplained charge which was called 'strange', because it was. Gell-Mann, who proposed these phenomena, doubted his own sanity and said that his ideas were '... too crazy to be taken seriously.' However, as time moved on, it was found that not only was he right about 'up' and 'down' and 'strange', but that there were another three: 'charm', the opposite of 'strange' and two others which they called 'truth' and 'beauty'. It was subsequently discovered that the average person contains about an ounce of 'strangeness' an eleventh of an ounce of 'charm' and virtually no 'truth' or 'beauty' at all.

Any Particle Physicist reading the above may be shaking his or her head in dismay. Let me make it clear that I am speaking as a non-scientific layperson, and my exact understanding will be limited. Two days is not really enough to grasp the principles of Particle Physics in all of its impenetrable complexity, and two days was all I had in this weekend course in Particle Physics at London University.

The weekend began with a very clear and concise introductory talk given by Professor Eliot Leader, from Birkbeck College. It outlined the history of Particle Physics, dating back to 1808 when Dalton stated that '... each element is made up of a number of indivisible atoms.' What he called atoms we now call molecules which are, of course, divisible. Over a century

later when it had been established the molecules were made out of atoms, Rutherford discovered, through a series of experiments, that each atom had a hard and 'massive' core, a nucleus, which, in its turn, was made up of constituent particles. At first there were only three types of elementary particle: the neutron, the proton and the electron. Then a means of smashing these particles against each other was devised and it was found that, instead of simply shattering into smaller bits, they produced more, different particles. These they had to call elementary as well, because they bore no resemblance to the particles that had been smashed together in the first place. It was concluded that although these manufactured particles did not exist now, they may have existed at the time of the Big Bang that created the Universe.

The whole weekend required a considerable suspension of disbelief on the part of the uninitiated. Particle Physics deals with events involving unimaginably small things in unimaginably small amounts of time. What does a hundred millionth of a second feel like? How do you photograph something that happens in that minute space of time? Most Particle Physics experiments take place at the CERN laboratory in Switzerland — the equipment is too large and too expensive for every country to have a laboratory of its own. The underground accelerator, in which particle behaviour is observed, is 27 kilometres in circumference and crosses the border into France. It has to be that big in order for the particles to have

time to reach the speeds necessary for a fruitful collision. Every milli-microsecond is photographed, the information collated, fed into a computer and perhaps seven years later the results of the experiment are revealed. Each experiment may involve 150 people working for all of that time with no guarantee of success. They begin with a committed belief in a theory and the end result could be that the theory and the theorist behind it are discredited. You are only as good as your last experiment.

What first interested me about physics was its apparent capacity for accommodating the unknowable. In the past anything that was inexplicable was attributed to 'God's mysterious ways'. What physics seemed to say was that everything is explicable, even in terms of uncertainty. For this reason, I was looking forward to the talk on Quantum Mechanics. Take an atom and a cat and put them in a box. Assume (more suspension of disbelief) that when the atom dies so does the cat. Obviously, for as long as the box is shut you cannot know exactly when the atom has died. So, what do you call the state of the cat for as long as the box is closed? It is not half dead or half alive but Quantum Mechanics has an equation for it.

Erwin Schrödinger, whose cat it was, said of Quantum Mechanics: 'I don't like it and I'm sorry I ever had anything to do with it'. Neils Bohr, another quantum man, said: 'Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood it.' Such outbursts of emotion do not seem uncommon in physics and yet Dr Thompson, from Queen Mary College who gave the talk, stubbornly denied that there was anything emotional about Quantum Theory.

'But', I asked, 'is there not something very human about uncertainty?'

'We are not dealing with uncertainty', he replied, his voice shaking slightly.

'You mean it's completely logical?'

'It's got *nothing* do do with logic'.

'What is it then?'

'Probability'

'Oh'

Then he told us that particles behaved like waves and waves behaved like particles and my imagination failed me once and for all. I believed him though.

The next talk was called 'Are we all Strings?' By this time I was willing to believe anything. It was given by Prof J. G. Taylor from King's College London. The 'String' theory came about in the search for what he called the 'holy grail' of physics; proof of G.U.T.S., the Grand Unification

Theory. The idea of G.U.T.S. is that all of the forces of Nature have the same source. The problem with it is that one of the forces, gravity cannot be unified with the other three, for as long as we think in only four dimensions. To accommodate G.U.T.S. then, it was necessary to find some more dimensions. Calculations were done in 10 dimensions then in 26 now in 10 again. But who decides how many dimensions there are? Do they all have names? Prof Taylor could not explain to me whether or not the new dimensions were real, although he did own up to being one of the people responsible for proposing their number. Does he wake up in the middle of the night with a number on his lips and decide that is how many dimensions there must be? No: '... what wakes me up in the night, what I have nightmares about is what the background of space/time is. If I can't find a theory that doesn't depend on anything ad hoc being put in then it's inelegant, that's not the way the universe can be'. The String theory itself requires more knowledge and understanding of physics than I possess, so I will not attempt to explain it here. What was most interesting about this talk for me was Prof Taylor's obsession with 'elegance'. He explained that his aim was to articulate 'the nature of the universe', he spoke of finding a theory that would stand the test of time and, he said '... the assessment as to whether it is a lasting theory is whether we can build a beautiful theory, whether it is so simple I can write down a one line equation and say 'that is the universe.'

Dr Cobb from Oxford, who talked about Proton Decay, made one passing remark that seemed significant: 'I hope ... I am a physicist so I should not say 'hope ...' Physics seems to me to be entirely to do with faith. Not blind faith, not faith without foundation, but faith nonetheless. The obsessive energy and time that is thrown into a theory that has a 95% chance of being discredited shows something, if not a belief in the fact that $E=MC^2$... probably definitely.

Particle Physics is not a soft option, unemployment is high and funding inadequate. Many choose to sell out and go commercial, Nuclear Physics has found a market. Particle Physics does not afford such immediate satisfaction, it is a long process and its results are not always tangible. This process, however, distinguishes itself from other research sciences by seeking to understand and not disturb, what already exists. Where Genetic Engineering, say, plays God, Particle Physics seems to be looking for Him. Aren't we all?●

SUGGESTED READING● The Cosmic Onion F. Close (Heinemann) Key to the Universe, Einstein's Universe N. Calder (BBC Publications) In Search of Schrödinger's Cat J. Gribbin (Corgi) The Quantum World J.C. Polkinghorne (Princeton) The Discovery of WZ P. Watkins

DISNEYOTICS

CAROLINE GRIMSHAW
witnesses strange goings
on at Florida's
Disneyworld:

Stay Younger, Longer

IN
Orange County
FLORIDA

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION terrifies me. For Americans it seems to be an opportunity to lose a drab identity and become part of the fantastic performance that is America.

So here I am in Orlando, Florida, at Disney World's 15th Birthday celebrations, which, incidentally, coincided with the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution. I am overwhelmed. 15,000 press people invited to the biggest press conference of all time.

The Orlando/Orange County Convention/Civic Center slowly fills to the sound of a rousing military band. American flags hang high, illuminated; there are two gigantic screens surrounded by stars. 'Touch the Magic' is the theme for the dream, and I am caught up in a celebration of the glories of America. Red, white and blue, the Stars and Stripes, and a standing ovation for Mickey Mouse. Children in military costumes, marching bands ... the audience applauds, cheers, and then the room's attention focuses





DISNEYOTICS

on a giant projection of Reagan himself. The massive face contorts, smiles and speaks — spooky. We are told that this is a 'celebration of immense national significance', 'an exciting patriotic weekend'. The face performs, the audience reacts to the projection, the audience is filmed, the event is projected across America.

The Honorable Warren E. Burger, Chief Justice of the United States, talks more on constitution and history, and then into the limelight steps the highlight of the morning, the freedom-loving American hero of the moment — Nicholas Daniloff. THIS is America: Warren Burger, Daniloff AND Mickey Mouse united on stage, receiving a massive standing ovation.

Finally we are treated to a 'star spangled spectacular' with fireworks, more bands, music, flying dollars, balloons, and an enormous statue of liberty revealed through a cloud of smoke. Just by being at the event I am part of the performance. Without audience reaction there would be no performance.

And so the celebrations that are to last a year commence. The next two days thrust me into an unreal world that smothers me with wealth, warmth and glitter, leaving fantastic images in its wake. Baby Shamu, the year-old killer whale, receiving a birthday cake in the pool at Sea World; the main street 'electrical parade' at the Magic Kingdom, Disney World — amazing creatures and shapes made from millions of tiny coloured lights; the spectacular laser and fireworks show over the lake at the EPCOT Center. The philosophy is 'if we can dream it we can do it' and they insist we all do it with them.

Disney World, with its characters and fairy castles, is like entering a cartoon and becoming one of the characters. Everyone is pleased to see you, and — for the press at least — everything is free. It is a dream made real.

It is at the EPCOT Center that I am taken in the most. As far as I am concerned a human dressed up in Mickey Mouse gear is NOT Mickey Mouse, but in the EPCOT Center you enter a space-age world that you can believe in. Once seated in your carriage you are whisked into darkened environments which then come to life with lasers, holograms and frighteningly real models that look at you and talk to you, and all the time the American velvet-voice commentary explains, soothes and pacifies. Suddenly the whole place revolves, with you in it — you really travel through space and time and believe it.

The ultimate miracle of science at the EPCOT Center is the new 17 minute 3-d film Captain EO, starring the gyrating Michael Jackson, turning evil to goodness and saving the world. You become so wrapped-up in the performance that you literally duck to avoid rocks hurling towards you, and weird cosmic creatures leaping out of the screen to confront you.

In Disney World the real and the imaginary merge together to enthrall and dazzle the spectator. It is a place where real life becomes part of a massive performance. It is 'a world built on dreams', dreams you have to buy (\$24.50 a day). There is no rainbow to follow, the pot of gold, if anywhere, is at the centre of the fantasy, right in the middle of Disney World. ●

PHOTO / CHRIS TAYLOR

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