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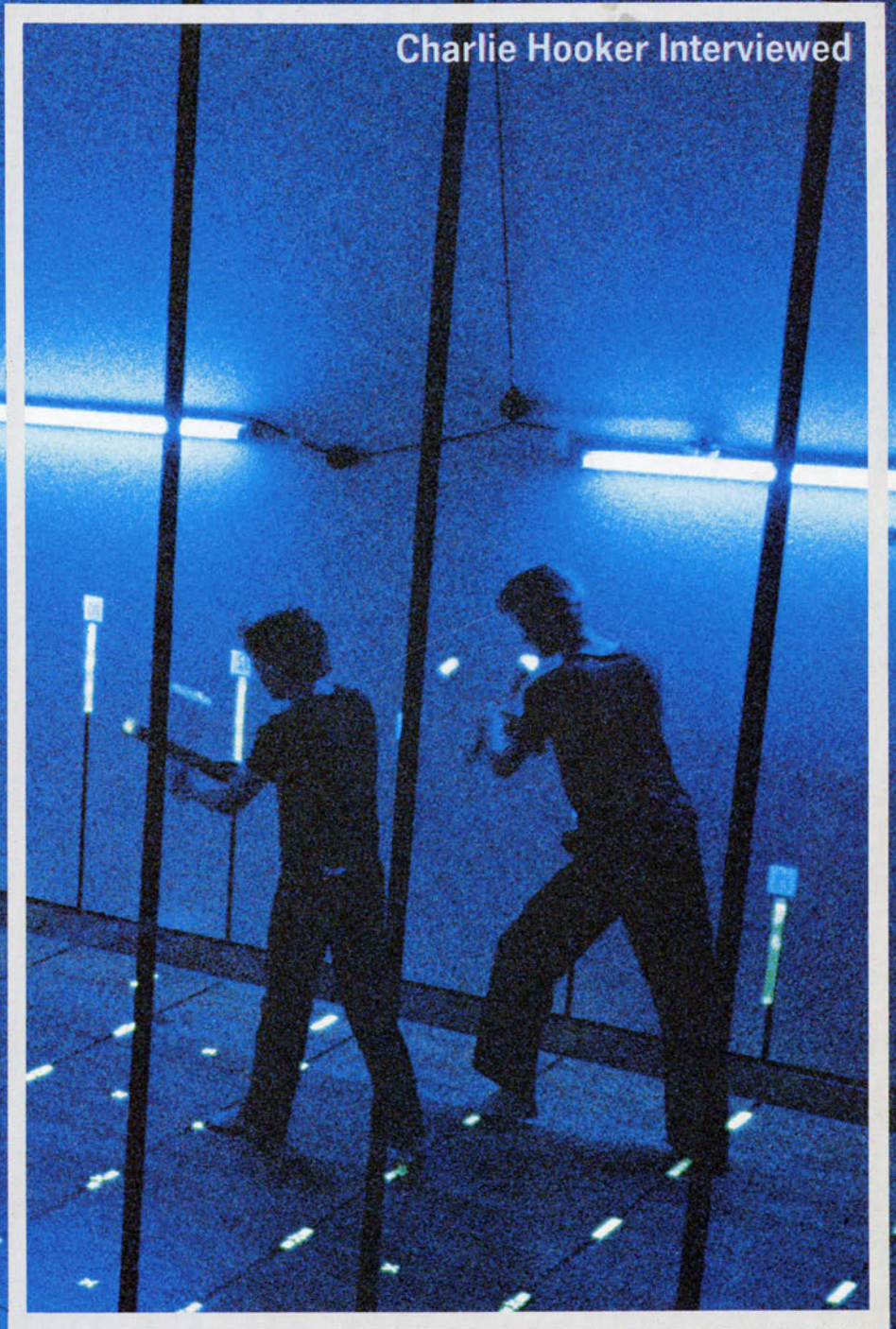
REVIEWS + NEWS + FEATURES + INFORMATION

# PERFORMANCE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

LIVE  
ART  
NOW

Charlie Hooker Interviewed



## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PERFORMANCE ART? We Search High and Low

Georges Bataille Celebrated  
Film on Art Art on Film:  
Rose English and Andrei Tarkovsky

## ICA THEATRE

**PORNOGRAPHY 11 – 29 Sept**

A spectacle created and performed by four gay men

**PERFORMING CLOTHES 10 – 20 October**

New fashion and new dance choreographed by Micha Bergese

**PARASITE STRUCTURES 24 Oct – 11 Nov**

Rational Theatre present Hidden Grin in collaboration with Denis Masi

**BRIGHTSIDE 13 Nov – 1 Dec**

Lumiere & Son present a nightmare journey through the land of the irrepressibly buoyant

**THE CARRIER FREQUENCY 4 – 23 Dec**

Impact Theatre in collaboration with Russell Hoban

## ICA MUSIC

**MusICA 1984**

5 + 6 Sept. Kagel's KANTRIMIUSIK

by Northern Music Theatre

8 + 9 Sept. Rzewski's ANTIGONE LEGEND

**HARP LAGER ROCK WEEK**

**AT THE ICA 2 – 7 OCT**

## ICA GALLERY

**ROSE GARRARD :**

**BETWEEN OURSELVES 22 Aug – 16 Sept**

Talk: Rose Garrard, Marina Warner, John Roberts, Michael Archer 13 Sept

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Catherine Elwes  
Rose Finn Kelcey 1pm 10th-16th  
Rose Garrard  
Judith Goddard  
Lynn Hewitt 11am, 1pm, 3pm  
Stuart Marshall  
Liz Rhodes, Joanna Davis  
Iain Robertson  
Holly Warburton 12am, 2pm, 4pm

**FILM/SLIDE TAPE ALL AT 6.30pm**

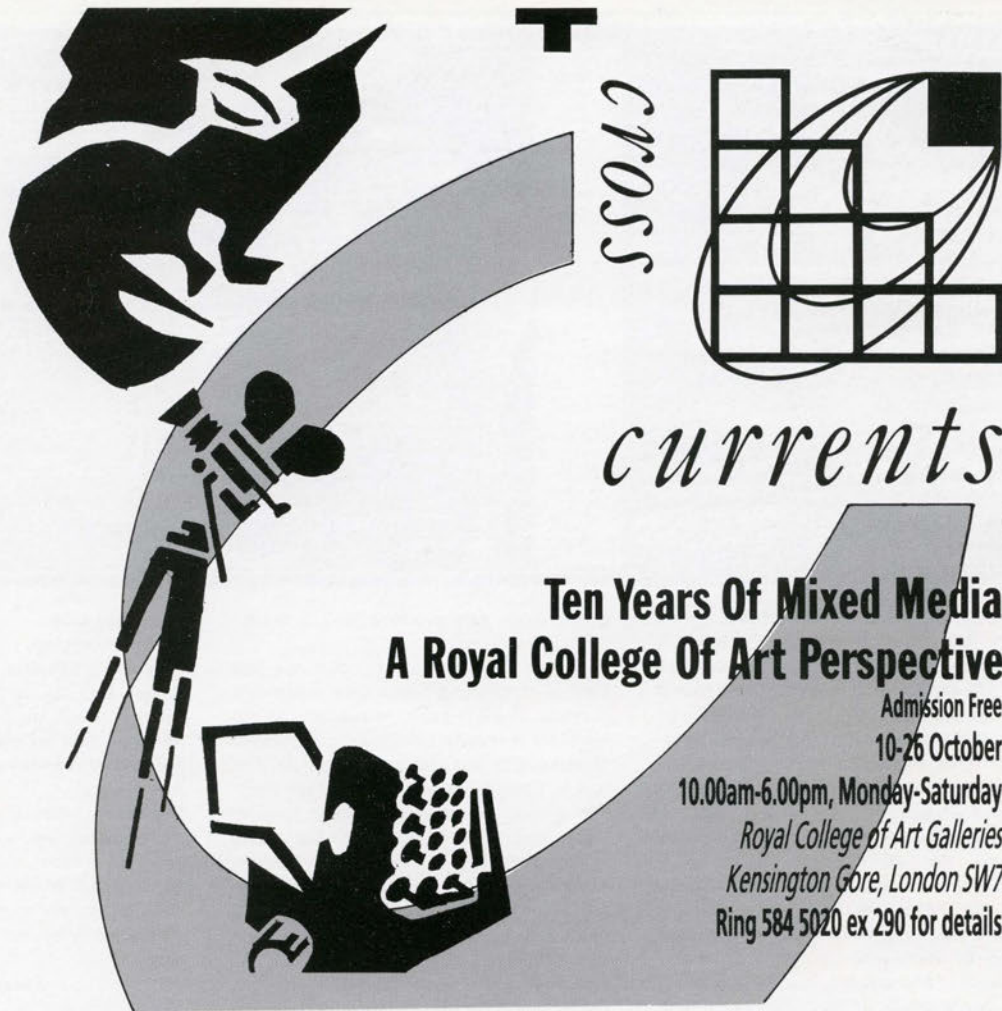
Keith Frake 11th  
Jim Forster 12th  
Sarah Shaw 12th  
Peter Gidal 16th  
Malcolm LeGrice 18th  
Stuart Brisley 11th, 19th  
William Raban 22nd  
Patrick Keiller 11th, 22nd

**VIDEO THROUGHOUT**

Ian Bourn  
Catherine Elwes  
Tina Keane  
Patrick Keiller

**WALL PIECES THROUGHOUT**

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by Natasha Morgan

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**CENTRE OCEAN STREAM**  
Talk by Barbara Harrow

Oct 4th-7th and 11th-14th (upstairs) at 9.30  
**INTIMATE STRANGERS** in 'RENDEZVOUS'  
by Melanie Thompson

Oct 10th & 11th (downstairs) at 7.30  
**INDUSTRIAL AND DOMESTIC THEATRE**  
**CONTRACTORS** in 'SECRET LIVES'

Oct 12, 13, 14th (downstairs) at 7.30  
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Oct 17th-21st (downstairs) at 7.30  
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**Basement Group**

**Dear Friend,**

After 5 successful years of working together on group shows and projects both nationally and globally, the Basement Group has reached its natural conclusion, and has disbanded as from July 1 1984. Individuals are contactable through Projects UK, Saville Place, Newcastle NE1 8DQ, which will continue to provide an expanding structure for exhibition projects, curatorial work, video production and distribution.

As Marcel Duchamp's brother once said 'Bo Diddlely dum diddle diddle'.

Thank you and goodbye,

(a long, unprintable list of names they would like to thank is enclosed)

**Belinda Williams**

**Ken Gill**

**John Kippin**

**John Adams**

**Jon Bewley**

**The Basement**

**Bells Court**

**Pilgrim Street**

**Newcastle**



**BURNING THE MIDDAY SUN**

In the last issue of *Performance* Rob La Frenais treated the ICA theatre's collaboration *Midday Sun* to a mock trial, and found it, on balance, guilty. He made the mistake of judging the show on the facts, and not, as he should have, on the circumstantial evidence. His main criticism of the show was that it typified what he felt was wrong with the ICA theatre policy. Namely that the ICA has become the 'safe' London home for a handful of well-established experimentalists and, the thesis runs, this kind of security leads to dull art. He might well have quoted Gertrude Stein who commented on the Museum of Modern Art, 'It is either modern or it is a museum. It cannot be both'. The Institute of *Contemporary Art* cannot therefore be a home for such boring old fogies as Hesitate and Demonstrate, Impact Theatre, Rational Theatre, Lumiere and Son, etc. The ICA should be a constant fountain of new, amazing, boundary-breaking talent.

However the circumstances are these: The ICA is the only theatre of more than a hundred in London which has developed and maintains a policy of showing only this kind of experimental theatre. All the companies listed above are all uniquely British, internationally renowned, and have the right to at least one decent central London theatre which is sympathetic and supportive of their work. In fact, Britain is bloody lucky to have so many innovative companies even

if the work they produce isn't a breakthrough every time.

Being the only theatre in London with this kind of commitment is a very vulnerable position. There is safety in numbers as the long lists of second-rate publicly subsidised theatres in Britain clearly demonstrate. The ICA is vulnerable to not only an unsympathetic artistic community, reticent funding bodies and openly hostile critics, but also to its supporters who, like Rob La Frenais, expect every ICA show to be earth-shattering. When a disaster like *Softcops* turns up at the Brbican nobody questions the validity of the RSC or the talent of Caryl Churchill. The ICA and the companies it regularly presents all have to constantly justify themselves, their existence cannot be taken for granted. They are never afforded the luxury of occasional disasters, to be an interesting failure. For this underfunded, yet uniquely British form of experimental theatre, the old New York standard applies: 'You are only as good as your last show'.

As a regular at the ICA I would never say that everything they do is great or even OK, and that's as it should be. I actually liked *Midday Sun* more than most. I thought it was an interesting and provocative mistake, which revealed more about the nature of collaborative working, and Andrew Poppy's soundtrack was really very interesting.

**Steve Rogers**

**British American Arts  
London WC2**

**Mr Nigel Cox**

Dear *Performance Magazine*,

I am writing this letter as a tribute, from both myself and the other members of Club Boring, to our much-respected colleague, Mr Nigel Cox, who was tragically killed in May of this year while working in Zambia, in Africa.

Nigel was a talented sculptor and performer, one of the earliest members of Club Boring, working in such pieces as 'The Second Sitting' and 'Modern Poetry—A In-depth Discussion'. We shall sadly miss him, not only as an artist, but also as a great friend. Yours,

**Steven Taylor Woodrow  
Club Boring  
12 Ellesmere Court  
Seymour Villas  
Anerley  
London SE 20**

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# PERFORMANCE

The Review of Live Art  
Performance Magazine,  
14 Peto Place, London NW1  
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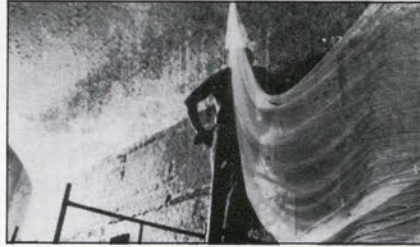


PHOTO: KEN TURNER

## Doubly Exposed to the Wrath of God ■

When ADBC workshop and the Art and Architecture Group constructed and performed their Entrances and Exits project outside York Cathedral this July, passers-by asked them if they were part of the demonstrations against the Bishop of Durham, as he was to become later that day. While in the quiet of the cathedral grounds, artists Ron Haselden, Paul Neagu, and Ken Turner, Pamela Hiley and Ken Turner were preparing their piece, a rural vicar in full clerical garb was leaping into the cathedral pulpit denouncing the blasphemy of the occasion. But as everyone now knows, not only did life overwhelm art that weekend but also natural, or supernatural, forces. Barely 50 yards from the ADBC installation a bolt of lightning destroyed a considerable part of the cathedral on the eve of the artist's departure, provoking speculations of divine disapproval of everything from the Bishop himself to the vast amount of hard-sell collecting boxes littering the entrances, and filling the correspondence columns of national newspapers for weeks. While performance art in the immediate vicinity pales beside these events of a theological and no doubt cosmic nature, a sharp intake of breath on the artists part was occasioned when the photos documenting the work were developed. A series of remarkable double exposures like the one shown above emerged, with ectoplasmic arches and rays of light emanating from nowhere to illuminate the participants. An explanation eventually offered itself, but the coincidence was hard to bear. On a weekend like that anything could happen.



**CONTENT** Perf: Recent performances UK and worldwide 4 Mainbeam on: Charlie Hooker talks about his work with Liz Rideal 9 Whatever Happened to Performance Art? David Briers roams the highlands and deserts in search of it, following the Touring Exhibitionists from Bristol to Nottingham, and settling in for a marathon at South Hill Park 13 Neil Butler believes that performance artists should face up to their audiences, and John Ashford blasts the sad state of critical theory in Britain 26 The Slaughterhouse of Love: The Georges Bataille Festival opens in London this month and Ken Hollings and Roberta Graham mark the occasion with a text/photo collaboration 31 Artists on film — on art: In a special feature, Lynn MacRitchie describes the making of performance artist-produced The Gold-Diggers, while Cathy Courtney describes the recent controversial airing of views on art by film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky 28 Don't Miss! Coming performance events 35

We apologise for the non-appearance of the magazine in August, because of the organisational difficulties generally experienced during a long hot summer! We have taken the opportunity to reorganise our schedule to ensure a more punctual appearance at the beginning of the month.

EDITOR: ROB LA FRENALS

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# PERF(

ormance

## The Ruined Book ■

The summer exhibition at Book Works, Nikki Bell and Ben Langland's *The Ruined Book* is an observation of the death-throes of the book as a key purveyor of society's ideas. Its compactness and witty cross-references, are doubly ironic since it is exactly this which is the plight of the book—fated to become only self-referential as newer technologies overtake its position. In the lower gallery is an actual skeleton in a cupboard; a whippet bought at Brick Lane market, whose silhouette on the 'cover' recalls cave paintings and hints at the contents inside. *The Ruined Book* feels like a wry memorial to a near-extinct species. Langlands and Bell have been working together since 1978 when they made a kitchen installation at Hornsey College. Bell's first work employing books was 'Red Ashes' constructed from the charred remains of a burnt-out Oxfam bookshop which were transported to the reading room at Reading University. The pair have been exploring our associations with and preconceptions of books and libraries ever since.

None of the books in the exhibition can be read; they are either unintelligible, glued together or empty. The text which gives its title to the *The Crisis of Western Education* construction has been cut up and rearranged, sometimes upside down, so that it is reminiscent of a language we might once have been able to interpret but can no longer decipher.

Bell and Langlands discovered a wall of false books in the sumptuous Curzon family library. The titles on the apparently fine bindings were either those written by the former Viceroy of India or reflect his son's passion for the cinema. The contradictions of this find are economically expressed in *The Book Cabinet* which appears to be a solid block of eight books, several of which are entitled *The Lens*, mounted on the wall. However, the surface formed by the spines camouflages a door. Within what is literally the book cabinet, mirrors form an illusion of rows and rows of miniature finely bound volumes stretching to infinity.

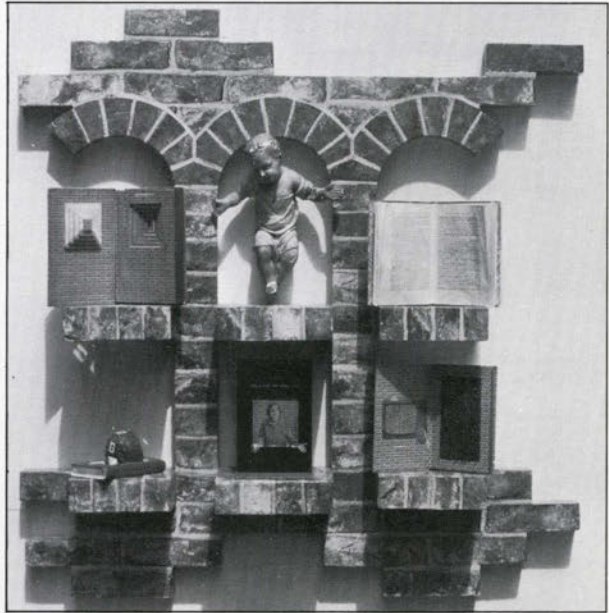
The book stultified by its container so that its value becomes primarily that of a decorative object is emphasised by the strategy of using books from the Curzon collection and set of 1860 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to form shelves upon which a few found objects and the occasional wrecked book are displayed. The careful execution of these constructions, their opulent yet sombre tones and the preserving varnish produces the atmosphere of a museum reverently housing the relics of a forgotten time and postpones our sense of shock at seeing books treated in this way.

The show is intelligent and unsentimental; Langlands stresses that it is not a lament for the book. The work relishes word play and puns. 'Gardening under Glass' is the exposed chapter-title in a book which has been hollowed out to encase a 3-D demonstration of seedlings being potted which is in turn enclosed by a sheet of glass. A similar book contains a bird's nest and eggs, some hatched some 'unopened', plus the displaced lines of text which echo the nest shape, stressing the shared natural origins of the materials forming each.

The architectural metaphor reappears in two pieces which draw parallels between the word and the brick. Both are small elements from which larger structures can be built. The forms made by one civilisation from both may be alien and mysterious to a future age. *The Crisis of Western*

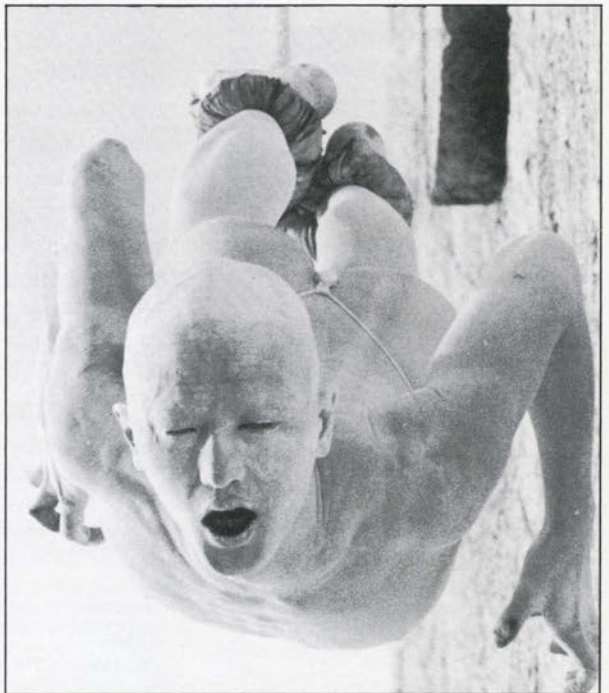
*Education* is an eerie altar-piece formed from simulated bricks. On one shelf is a volume, 'Inside Only' depicting an elderly woman trapped inside her bricked-in vision. The woman's view is as out-moded as that imprisoned within Lord Curzon's books. It is a powerful comment on a society in transition when the pace has been speeded up by technological development. We bear witness to our own obsolescence.

CATHY COURTNEY



The Ruined Book

This is *Sankai Juku*, from Japan, descending the walls of the old city of Jerusalem as part of the opening of the Israel Festival. Also taking part were Lindsay Kemp and Odin Theatret.



*STEVE ROGERS* peruses some recent visual theatre:

### **Mozart at Palm Springs** ■

You will notice that the initials of the title spell MAPS. Clever stuff, this. MAPS concerned a reincarnated Mozart who is born into the American musical culture of the 20th century. As a genius with an enormous ego, he quite naturally pitches himself into the dominant musical forms and sure enough emerges as the great guru of big band swing. His personal life also follows the natural course of a megastar and the hip, cool M. suffers the usual problems of fame and fortune as told by Hollywood and the junk media. Good idea. It sets up the right basis for a textbook post-modern performance piece. The problem for me was that it was only textbook.

When London Contemporary Dance Theatre was first set up it aimed to create for London the kind of company that was flourishing in America. But because there were no traditions of that kind of dance in Britain, the work was sterile and derivative, coming as it did from no deep cultural roots. It took them many years to find their own voice. This problem was shared by MAPS. Obviously the creators were impressed by the New York school of performance and have understood the elements that go to make it up. But there was no real depth of feeling or commitment. It looked all too much like an imitation. Orlando Gough's music is always enjoyable but he didn't here have the inventiveness to sustain interest for a full 90 minutes. The performances tended to produce the inevitable cartoon stereotypes of Americans. The text was dull. Deconstructed narrative and fragmented language requires a greater understanding of the way language is manipulated in common usage and the media than this had. The direction lacked anything more coherent than a rather unimaginative system of repeated minatures, reminding me again and again of Robert Wilson techniques. Director Ian Albery isn't yet a Robert Wilson. MAPS required a much stronger commitment to the post-modern vision than this rather dilettante dabbling. A pleasant enough evening to sit through, nice brief images and even some quite funny jokes, it wasn't enough to satisfy.

### **The Hidden Grin** ■

Alternatively this, created by one of the scions of the diaspora of Rational Theatre, is the kind of show that reassures me in my faith in British experimental theatre. Quite brilliantly bringing together the various elements of music, design, film, performance and text as equal partners producing a theatre quite utterly different from the 'play' and miraculously able to provide new insights and theatrical sensations. The Hidden Grin(ICA) stands as an even greater tribute to the potential of this kind of theatre in that the subject matter must be one of the most thoroughly worked over in history, relationships within a family. Considered in the light of both Freudian analysis and of common experience, the anxiety of sexual repression is juxtaposed with the anarchic incestuousness of the children. The incestuous edge of a mother's love for her son. The of the daughter for her mothers relationship with her father and the consequent resentment for the father who will only treat her as a child. All the familiar angles. Yet articulated into powerful black comedy as the children bemoan more and more beastly to their suffering parents both in fantasy, and at the final denouement, in

fact. Playing on the mother's love, the son seduces her, only to reject her before his sister and father. These themes are all given an immensely powerful theatrical reality by potent sadistic imagery, provocative music, ingeniously simple design and performances timed to perfection. The combination of a theme familiar to all from endless TV dramas, movies and plays, with such a thorough commitment to the creation of new theatre forms is the best kind of evangelism for experimental work. It is both familiar and surprising. It's about something old giving a completely new approach. It would even make great TV. If there was any truth in British fairplay this would, as they say, run and run.

### **Animals in the City** ■

In the letters section of this edition I can be found defending the ICA's right to make mistakes. This was certainly one of them. After Redheugh and Slow Fade I held very high hopes for Mike Figgis who in those previous works showed a passion and commitment that was rare in British experimental theatre. All the same media elements of film, music, performance and design were here as equal partners but the whole concept was cliched. The visual interpretation was unimaginative, the performances mannered, and only the songs had any of the previous strength. Overwhelming all the complaints was that the feeling that the show was so intensely introverted, reeking of bitter memories of some past emotional hurt, and these had not been translated into theatre but presented bare. I only hope he will forget this mistake and start work on something new.

### **Vulture Culture at Henley** ■

Much as I enjoyed Lumiere and Son's new spectacular, Vulture Culture, The real thrill of the evening was the Henley Festival itself. Fascinated by the idea of a 'black tie' closing gala to the festival featuring the world premiere of a new extravaganza by Lumiere and Son, I rented tuxedo and cufflinks from an old fashioned 'establishment' on Ludgate Hill and headed off down the M4 on a glorious summer evening to stroll around, champers in hand among the other penguin suits. Expecting it all to be obnoxiously stuffy, the riverside setting, the marquees, champers and general ambience was in fact delightful. The only blemishes were a few arty young undergraduates from the 'avant-garde' set being silly, and the strange sight of 'members of the police force' escorting jeans-clad teenagers from the festival enclosure. Strange, because when I had entered nobody asked to see my ticket, so I can only assume that the teenage lads were getting bounced not for gatecrashing but for sartorial nonconformity. In addition to Lumiere, there was the Band of the Coldstream Guards playing Handel in accompaniment to the most elegant firework display I have ever seen. There was also an exhibition of Andrew Logan's decadent and surreal sculptures, a twinkling reflection of the whole delightfully surreal evening. Lumiere's show was of course, brilliant. The music, the costumes, the whole mad shebang of a Lumiere show in full flight was most amazingly, unexpectedly, appropriate to the spirit and style of the Henley festival. I will definitely be 'going down to Henley' next year.

## PERF(

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**The Untying** ■

On July 4 1984, Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh completed their one-year performance. Since July 4 1983 they had been living together as an artwork, tied to each other by an eight foot rope padlocked around the waist. Now, amid the tremendous flashing lights of the US media, Pauline Oliveros untied Tehching and announced that the contract that they were to remain tied to each other for a year without touching had not been violated. After a young man similarly released Linda, the two performance artists solemnly embraced. This event, as well as three quarterly receptions, was held in the New York loft where they live. Sparsely furnished, it was now packed with several hundred people to witness the event. TV and news reporters descended on them with a barrage of intimate questions, searching for metaphors in the act of living together. Dressed in black, with a years growth of hair, the two became individuals again. Not surprisingly both had quite different ideas and evolved very different experiences from their year together.

How did they sleep? In twin cabin beds with the length of rope hanging between them. Bathe? One first, then the other. During the trial run, the rope had shrunk, so they had to experiment with different materials. Didn't they ever take it off to perform 'private' activities? No. Twelve different rope lengths had shown them that eight foot was enough to enable them to do exactly those things without being untied. What if one of them wanted to go for a walk and the other didn't? Too bad. As a unit, the individual will was always subject to the agreement of the other. Whose idea was it? Whose piece was it? Who would receive credit? Was it a man's piece or a woman's piece? Would it become one of Tehching's one-year pieces? (He had previously spent a year punching a time clock every hour, every day, and a year living outdoors on the streets of New York.) Or would Linda's own reputation as a feminist artist save her from becoming merely a token partner? Were they glad it was over? On this hot, air-conditioned day it seemed that everyone in the room was bound together to celebrate life and art. Having known Linda for over half my life I was not surprised when this piece came to be. When I first knew her in 1970, she was a conceptual artist, married to photographer Mitchell Payne, arranging performance events in the museum in the San Francisco Bay Area, and teaching at SF Art Institute. Perhaps as a premonition of the year to come, she spent three days handcuffed to performance artist Tom Marioni. She left Mitchell and moved to San Diego with musician Pauline Oliveros, and made videotapes, including the remarkable Mitchell's Death (he was killed in a gun accident in Kansas City in 1977). A former nun, she is very interested in the psychological reaction to given circumstances, hence her first book *Art in Everyday Life*.

While not necessarily compatible, one of the forces that kept Linda and Tehching together was a mutual dedication to transcending the personal to break boundaries in the realm of art. They resolved to sacrifice their individual desires. As the year progressed, it created different types of reverberation in each. Experience itself was called into question. Ownership of experience became an issue. Life together was not smooth. During autumn they became familiar figures in Tribeca, making appearances at all the downtown art events. By winter they were rarely socialising. In the spring their main outings were to walk the dog. Always one of them carried a tape recorder.

Documentation was important, for in a piece as personal as this, who could call upon its existence ten years hence apart from these two whose life it had affected? They took a photo every day, as well as accumulating 700 tapes which would probably never be listened to. They made their living hanging shows in galleries, cleaning lofts, giving lectures, and Talking on the phone to Linda, as I did about once a month: 'So, how are you feeling?' 'Oh fine'. 'Can't really talk can you?' 'No'. 'He's there isn't he?' 'That's right'. In December there were fierce whispers from her: 'I can't take it any more!' and in June it was hard for her to keep the glee out of her voice: 'Oh we're great. Only ten more days'.

BARBARA LEHMANN

Linda Montano: Alone at last



Minette Lehmann

Zoo Man: This is Albert Vidal, performing at the recent Polverigi festival in Italy. Vidal, from Barcelona, exhibits himself in zoos all over the world as 'Urban Man'. His environment and conditions are carefully researched from the zoological angle, and his confinement has lasted up to a week, constantly surveyed by spectators in his pen, which is equipped with all modern comforts. His previous performances have included staging his own funeral in a small village, and Performance Magazine will be publishing an interview with him in a forthcoming issue.





## PERF(

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**Circus Logic** ■

*Disgust is the appropriate response to most situations. This was the insistent message I carried home from John Maybury's Circus Logic, an exhibition and four half-hour films, at the ICA. All the parts of Circus Logic are nothing less than a total assault, which cannot be avoided. Throughout the films I wanted to leave, and didn't; obsessed by the layers of fearsome images, powerless to resist them.*

*There is no freedom in Maybury's claustrophobic exhibition—all comers to the ICA are forced through this terrifying tunnel: an ultramarine cathedral as backdrop to brightly coloured images and objets d'effroi. Blood, anger, torment and terror in a curiously three dimensional display, and images that won't leave when you do. And this static exhibition (though there is a video here too), makes a more lasting impression than the films, simply because of the envelopment which three video monitors couldn't provide.*

*In both exhibition and films, it is the images the artist conjures up in our own minds which are more frightening than the images we are shown. This visual projection moves you before you know it; this terrorism and desire entwined can twist you over and over. The whirlwind is here.*

*John Maybury has learnt from his set designing work for Derek Jarman, in the same way that Jarman learnt from Ken Russell. And, like Jarman, Maybury uses images and sounds that often have more in common with pop music than cinema, if they can any longer be differentiated. He uses the confusion of four or five layers on screen at the same, along with careful repetition, to force even the most unwilling audience to stay, watch, and observe.*

PIERS LETCHER

**Plato's Chair** ■

*The Drill Hall, transposed: auditorium instead of bar: circles of chairs: front row reserved. Programmes of two kinds, one lot have the image of a left arm arrayed with two watches... the other, a picture of a chair...is it Plato's? Why two sorts we ask ourselves? We await Rose English, famed for audience participation, and 'Epic theatre on the scale of a solo performer'.*

*What gives? A whole lotta woman. She begins by building cleverly, not only on her own physical size, but on her knowledge of audience manipulation and basic theatrical technique. Her beginnings make one again wonder about the thorny problem of defining performance...as art? as theatre?...why bother, in the end she convinces us: basically it's live, and it's this that English shouts to us at the top of her voice: LIVE, I'M ALIVE, ALIVE!—thrilling, vibrant, scaring, live. She shouts unashamedly using the power that live performance gives—if one can use it. At one stage in the performance she goes out of the auditorium to change...arriving back in a long flannelette nightie. Not a naughty nightie, just very long, very covering. The sort of nightie that evokes cups of hot chocolate and good-night bed-time stories. She stands on a chair and suddenly it feels like we are at the circus. She's tall and thus so much in control, so powerful.*

*The first half of her performance is near the edge: provocative, unsympathetic, using the power of performer (woman) in control. The audience is threatened, mocked, teased into leaving at half time; she wails, weeping dismally for her inability to sing at one stage, and this is terrifying, heartrending—but all the while tongue in cheek. Despite threats, we return; there is a powerful charisma, and the carrot that Rose English has been juggling before our eyes and ears.*

*On return she wields arty and fashionable plaster pillars to physically contain what she calls the 'void'. Really they become a focus on this runner bean of a woman. The way that she sits holding the Grecian mock phallus in her hands, balancing it precariously on her knees is so witty, so full of understanding that it is the audience who could weep at her perception and interpretation.*

*Gradually one realises how she weaves her diverse bits of reference and props into a crescendo of self confrontation. The audience are still quivering in their chairs. When are we going to participate? Tristan and Isolde pale in the background—just one reference to an exotic (not to say catholic selection of music) they become a romanian backdrop for a realistic amalgum of farce and deadly serious dealing with grass roots. Rose English rules O.K. To reveal all about the night would be to steal the wit and the secret from her fine performance.*

LIZ RIDEAL

## PERFORMANCE

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# PERF(

ormance

## Performance Surfing ■

*Performance Surfing. Performance and surfing? If such incongruous elements are to be placed together, then the Zap Club of Brighton is the definitive venue for such an event. The club has built its reputation around mixed event programming and it is, of course, by the sea. But while the club is credited with being the only venue in the country to present performance surfing, the origins of the form far precede the Zap's interest.*

*Performance Surfing seeks its antecedents in such sources as the naturalism of Henri Rousseau, and the surrealistic imagery of Salvador Dali, in that some might be found in costumes and boards bearing exotic, stylised jungle scenes, while others reflect their affinity with the surreal through the use of the melting watch motif and by surfing on crutches. A more radical element have made use of boards surfaced with metal spikes.*

*Surfers are deadly-serious. Although they use surfing as a vehicle for their art, they reject any comparison with ice skating or ski dancing. Performance surfing is regarded as an act of communication allowed by the surf which gives a speed, dynamism and energy lacking in other areas of the performing arts.*

*Ivan Reich is a structuralist. He lives in a shelter constructed in the form of a tubing wave. He lives in a shelter constructed in the form of a tubing wave. His clothes are interlaced with a system that envelops him and passers by in a salt water spray. His major contribution to surfing has been the construction of devices that bring the audience into closer contact with surfers. Whilst his board with rear facing seats had proved cumbersome and difficult, his inflatable bubbles have been most successful.*

*John Brown is a conceptualist who came to surfing through poetry and experiential theater. His many projects have included an inspired journey on the 'Bristol Bore' (the tidal wave which occasionally surges up the Bristol Channel), featured on Westward Television. His current project involves building a board in the shape of a pair of lips covered in red dralon.*

*These two represent the major schools of thought in performance surfing. Their performance at the Zap club took place over twelve hours. Brown and Reich processed through Brighton carrying a twelve foot board constructed specially for the event. The ritualised movements and hooded costumes provided a dislocating effect for the watching shoppers that achieved a religious intensity when developed in the latter part of the performance in the club. As the audience entered the candlelit basement of the Zap and absorbed the heavily perfumed atmosphere, they discovered Reich and Brown completing their preparation for the final section of the performance. As their insect-like yet strangely dignified movements reached a climax, the audience was guided to the sea front to witness the culmination of the performance. To the accompaniment of a single drum and the chanting of an unnamed colleague, the two men paddled their boards out beside the pier to rendezvous with a boat containing three figures in sombre clothing. Their graceful departure out to sea, apparently surfing on the wake of the boat left the watchers with a sense of fulfillment and unease that remained with them throughout the rest of the evening's events. Performance Surfing will return to the Zap Club when it reopens in early October.*

ALEXI ALEXANDER



# MAINBEAM ON!

Creator of first multi-storey car park performance.  
Charlie Hooker discusses his work.

*Despite current negative feelings in the 'Art World' towards systems-based work, Charlie Hooker persists in presenting tightly structured multi-disciplinary performance fusions. He is the composer/conductor of elaborate atmospheric pieces that exist temporarily, each specific to its own location. Over the past nine years we have seen a development of his own distinctive, formal brand of performance art and witnessed the increased attention given by him towards the 'orchestration' of artistic collaboration. LIZ RIDEAL talked to him about his work two weeks before his latest performance.*



**Liz Rideal:** *Is it difficult for some people who don't know about your work to relate to it?*

**Charlie Hooker:** It's difficult when you try to tell someone who's never seen it, you say things like: it's to do with dance, to do with music, to do with the visual arts, to do with drama...which it is, but that doesn't give them much inkling as to what it's about at all. When I first started working with sound I used to be compared with people like Terry Riley and Philip Glass, now it's Laurie Anderson...

*I was going to ask you about this statement made by Richard Cork, eight years ago...he suggests that you 'occupy a place half way between the experimental music of a composer like Steve Reich and the conceptual strategies of an artist like Sol Lewitt...' Is that a fair comment for eight years ago?*

Yes, you have put things into a context. At the time when I read that, I thought that it was incorrect, but it's not really. I think probably that there's more connection with Sol Lewitt than Steve Reich because the work isn't just about music, it happens out of a process—it's like the end product—of visuals and movement. I

would imagine that with Steve Reich and Terry Riley, the music is all-important. Phil Glass was doing things that were involved with the acoustics of spaces and use of echo, and I'm more akin to that really—because I'm very aware of the interior and architecture of a space and how it will affect the sound and movement. With Terry Riley it's very mathematical, which my work is, so there's that connection. I'm not that particularly concerned about the degree of excellence in the music, the overall atmosphere of a particular piece has to be good. It doesn't matter to me if there are bum notes...it's more to do with one performance in a given situation that I've set up, not an excellent piece of slick music.

*What about the idea that people should perhaps be familiar with your work before they see a performance?*

I don't think they should. I'd like to think that it works on many different levels. There's a video that was made at Chelsea of an early piece, and there was a little girl sitting in the front row, clapping her hands and really getting into it, and that was nice. I think it works on many different levels. I used to work a lot more with people who had no musical background, dance background or

anything...it just so happens over the last year or so I've been working with a group of friends and they happen to come from a musical background...it seems to me, over the last few years, that the work gets through to people whatever background. There's a lot of difference elements that go into it when I'm writing a piece and if people only pick up on one, it doesn't matter to me really. It's better if they pick up on them all but I'm probably the only person, with the other performers, who *does* pick up on them all...

*What about venues? You've performed in quite a few different places, the Tate, Robert Self (I don't know what happened to him)...*

No one does.

*Franklin Furnace...the Newcastle project (Mainbeam)...I thought that was fab.*

It was a good piece, but I wasn't as happy with it as I wanted to be, it was a mammoth project done in a very short space of time.

*But did you do it because you wanted to work in a really bizarre venue?*

*If you had the choice, in Newcastle, between an equivalent of the Tate, and the carpark, would you have gone for the carpark? (laughter)*

I would have done both. I did Franklin Furnace and that within two or three weeks, and it normally takes me six months to write a performance, so I was writing two pieces together...but if I'd really had to choose, I would have done the carpark.

*So why?*

Well, because it was a really big, different set of problems to overcome. I mean the only reason you do a thing, the only reason I do anything, is to learn, and so if a situation presents itself which in theory is going to teach you more and make you think more than another situation, then you plump for that one. But what I didn't envisage was the interest that it generated...

*It seemed like the audience was very keen.*

That was the problem: the audience was fine, it was the press, TV and that. Nationwide turned up, and because I was being chauffeured around from different radio stations and different newspaper offices so my schedule went all up the wall. I had specific rehearsal times to meet, and because of all this coverage it was pretty hard to handle, but I thought I had to try and handle it for the Basement group, it being the beginning of a new set of open-air projects for them...so it had to be done. I felt myself, although everyone seemed to like it a lot, that it could have been better, tighter, but it was good. It was great working with the CB people.

*How did that piece arise?*

Ken Gill wrote to me and said that they were doing some things out of doors, and they'd got me this carpark: I thought that he was taking the piss, because I imagined some kind of bit of wasteland...and so I wrote back and said 'tell me a bit more about it'. He replied 'it's a multi-storey carpark'. Now, if you think about a multi-storey...it's a three-dimensional spiral which is quite an interesting shape to use. So I thought, if it's a carpark, I want to use cars, they've got to have CB. I want the cars to be sound and light

units...I wrote a proposal saying: I've got to have four Cortinas, black with CB and stereo cassettes, and thinking: there's no way...Franklin Furnace is coming up in a few months' time, I've got a lot on my plate...if I get out of this one it'll be good, and he wrote back and said 'right, it's all fixed'.

*Is the documentation important?*

Yes. It's important to get people to come to the next performance, but it's not important for people to watch it and say 'that's a good piece of documentation'. Like it would be nice to have a record...for instance if you hear a live LP: a friend of mine collects Dylan bootlegs, and it's fascinating to hear Dylan change over the years. In a rock band context you can do it easily...but what I'm after is recording atmospheres, that's what my work's about, and it's very hard to do.

*Yes, from your proposal to the Serpentine, the idea of performing in a London park in the summertime with all the implications that those words infer, associative feelings, history...you can't recreate that on tape.*

You can't, that's what is great about performance, but it would be nice to be the one to discover how to do it. To sit back and look at it leisurely over a couple of pints...but you should be able to reproduce something that contains the essence, so these sound tapes that I've been making don't necessarily sound anything like the performance.

*So you would inject the new sound into them?*

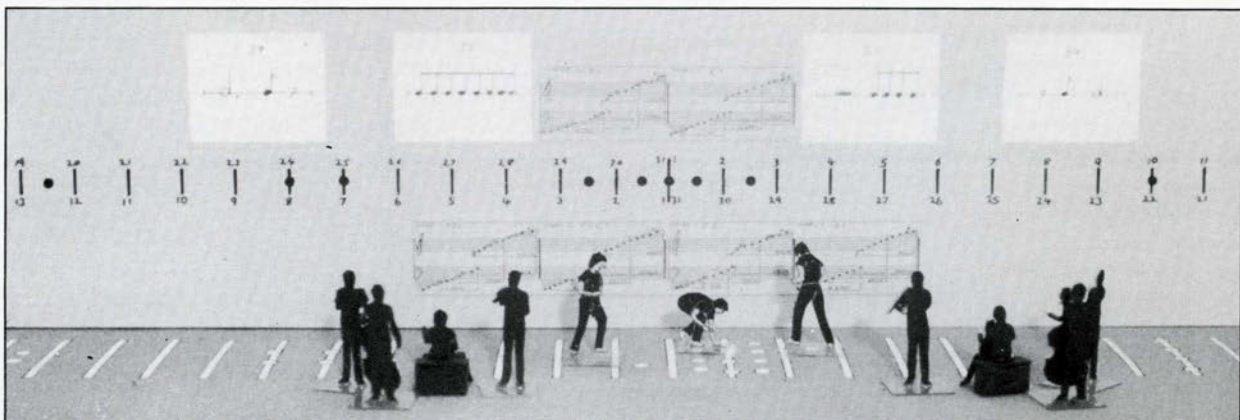
Yes, if they were in context like at Franklin Furnace. The whole time that I was there, I went round with a portable cassette player and I recorded NY sounds because NY really affects you. With Franklin Furnace, when I got there nothing had been done: the space wasn't ready and there were no people to work with. I had to rewrite the piece...it was amazing, New York being so eclectic, I was only out there six days, I stayed with an old friend of mine who I hadn't seen for ten years...I got off the plane with a bottle of Johnny Walker, we had that, then it was a bar, and then I slept for about two hours every day for the next six days...it took me two weeks to get over it when I got back...but I was writing under that kind of pressure.

*But sometimes that's the way one does one's work best.*

Yes, it was great...so I recorded all this material walking around NY at four in the morning...there's always a kind of hum in the air...the subway...It's got an atmosphere all of it's own. Consequently, one of the things that I've been doing recently includes sound from that trip. It seemed to me that NY really influenced that performance. It wouldn't have worked as it did anywhere else. It was a good piece, there again, a bit like *Mainbeam*, I would have liked another half day.

*Do you think you are working in an artistic vacuum, performing only to select and small audiences?*

I hope not. I think in London, where I've done most of my performances, the audiences have steadily got larger. I think that there are people who have seen a lot of my work. ▶



Charlie Hooker

*So in that way it must be quite satisfying to capitalise on the memory people have of your work. Do you like that aspect?*

I don't think about that. Having been presented with a situation, I just do it. I don't think about the audience as such. When it comes down to it, the important thing is how I feel about the piece.

*If you take into consideration the fact that people are more uneasy in their approach to performance, it could be useful that they would have some memory to build on.*

Sure, it's useful, but not essential. You can see art in any sort of context. I'd like to think that anybody seeing any good painting or performance would get a gut reaction to it. It matters that people come back to see more of my work. Initially it doesn't matter on what level they relate to it.

*Do you want them to like it?*

I don't really mind. It's nice if they clap. The important thing is doing it.

*At the Whitechapel, it was the goodbye party and it was a very select audience. Did you find that they were more attuned?*

Just pissed! I was quite amazed that we got clapped on, it really

freaked out the musicians, they didn't expect that at all, which got their adrenalin going. Quite often I'll rewrite a piece overnight after the last rehearsal. I'll do it in such a way that it will be restructured, and sometimes it's quite good to do that if they are getting a bit complacent...Maybe a third or a quarter of those people knew my work, the rest were friends of the Whitechapel. I thought that the event was important enough to do, despite the audience.

*Do you go and see other performance work?*

I do. I don't see that much around that I really like in London. I've talked to a lot of people about this and it seems to me that the art world generally at the moment is a bit 'frilly' decorative. There aren't many tough people about, perhaps one never gets that many at the same time. The worst thing that happened was when Kevin Atherton stopped, although he's still doing things; he was good. I used to see him as your typical British performance artist, a good example, that was perhaps when performance art needed some kind of direction, something to latch onto. I don't think it does now. I go and see as many shows and performances as I can. The art scene at the moment needs a kick up the arse.



Matt Beal-Collins

*Do you think that it's better elsewhere?*

I was quite impressed when I was in the States, there were a few more exciting possibilities. I'm not trying to run down the British scene, there are some good people, perhaps as many as there have always been.

*Don't you think that maybe it's simply the innate vitality of NY?*

The trouble with NY is that everybody is into being an artist, they're not into looking at other people's art, they're all selfish. Britain is healthier in that respect. New Yorkers think that to be a professional you have to live a high-powered life, be very self-centred and really go for it; here it's much quieter and more laid back, people aren't as neurotic, they're prepared to talk about what they are doing and help other people. The only advantage that I can see about this government is that it has made people pull together and collaborate. Different types of artists are getting together, supporting each other.

*You rely strongly on other people to help you make a piece, have you always wanted to combine disciplines?*

I used to be a painter, I never dreamt that it was possible to work with other people. It is a lot of hassle, but the rewards make it worthwhile.

*Do you think it's sexist that you've got all female dancers doing what they're told to do—a sort of power trip on your part?*

No. I can see that it could appear sexist, but I don't think it is. It happened accidentally, five days before the show at the Hayward. I didn't have any dancers, I was desperate; Bruce McClean gave me a phone number, and that led to the formation of this group who just happen to be women.

*Is your work becoming more complex as you get to know your particular format?*

If you couldn't play the violin, you couldn't take part in the piece at the Serpentine, the work has developed and become more complex in that way—before one wouldn't have needed a particular skill to take part. Hopefully the work retains a simplicity, the difference is that the musicians play their instruments very simply...to them it's as simple as walking along a corridor banging a set of sticks.

*What about influences on your work?*

All sorts of things. When I write a piece, I'll very often be listening to a lot of different rock people; there was a whole section of work influenced by Bruce Springsteen...and others: Zappa, the Beatles, Picasso, Oldenberg...the Tate show in 1970, it was the first show I'd been to that physically changed me...I walked out and there was a car transporter going past with all these smashed up cars and they looked like soft cars, there was a parking meter which had been bent...everything was soft.

*Do you think that you are part of a movement?*

No, but I have contact with other artists. I'd like to instigate a big event, not only of performance artist, but also people who are tough and good.

*Can you explain what you mean by 'tough'?*

People who are making work that leads somewhere, that isn't just decoration, but then maybe I can be accused of that. I don't know...Certain people do and make things that you get a gut reaction from. They're going out on a limb and pushing barriers.

*Coming down here this afternoon, I wen through a new shopping centre, slap bang in the middle of London: the Trocadero; marble floors, waterfalls, air conditioning, totally revolting...just like an airport, and I thought maybe Charlie would perform here? A carpark...a shopping centre...*

All right, you organise it!

*Where would you like to perform? If you were given the whole of the world, what about the Eiffel Tower, or better still the real Trocadero?*

If I had anything I'd like to choreograph and work with a fleet of airplanes.



*Behind Bars at the Tate*

John Hilliard

## PERFORMANCE

## THE SEARCH FOR

THE ZAP  
FORMULA

*Neil Butler believes live art  
can be accessible and is  
prepared to prove it:*

*One person who ought to know where Performance is going in 1984 is Neil Butler, of Brighton's Zap Club. He is giving up all his other concerns to open a seven-day-a-week, late-night venue for performance art and related media events.*

Coming from outside established art circles, Neil Butler's initial Zap format provided an entree for artists into what might be broadly called an entertainment context. He found that there are artists who wish to express themselves in a certain way, and find themselves channelled into the acceptable platforms that are available, places they know that get grants. We're concerned with providing a platform where they are guaranteed an audience, but will provide a sympathetic atmosphere.'

Those who have taken up this opportunity have ranged from artists more familiar with dealing with an audience to those who have not, and the result has been surprisingly eclectic. A recent 'preview' season at the ICA for the new club included artists ranging from Rose English to Kathy Acker and Psychic TV, and past Brighton events have included 'serious' artists such as Roland Miller.

Previous (London) attempts to provide such a framework for performance art, such as Richard Strange's Slammer, while an innovation, tended to question, rather than confirm the desirability for artists to appear in the same space as rock bands, comedians, dancers and other more 'consumable' media. But the suggestion that art placed in an entertainment situation then ceases to be art provoked an angry response from Butler—'The currency of thinking of people who say *that* is so-called art, and they want to retain it. As soon as it becomes available to large quantities of people they lose control of it. If you go to Art College, people say to you, "look at that painting", and you look at it, and you respond to it, and they say, "Ok, in three years time you're going to have an informed response, and that is better than the response you first had". I think that is despicable. I think that is an appalling attitude. Anything that mystifies communication, I can't approve of. We consider it is very important to de-mystify art, not to the lowest common denominator, not to say all art has to be cabaret, all paintings have to be obvious, or all theatre has to be narrative, but sim-

ply that it is not the prerogative of Art Colleges.'

Did he think though, that all live artists should be exposed to a non-art audience? Should the live artists get out of the gallery? After all, a lot of important developments in performance art had taken place in 'safe' art situations, where there was a contextual space for expansion of ideas. Wouldn't the club situation restrict that 'space'? 'I think there is an enormous contradiction in saying you are interested in performance and then denying yourself the audience, or restrict the audience to a select few who are amazingly informed about your work. I'm sure you can develop an extremely sophisticated piece of work for three people'.

But what about those who might be influenced through the documentation, eventually into art history? 'I can't deny that. I did, definitely, seven years ago, my answer would have been very simple—it's crap. Just not interested in it. Keep it in the colleges. Once you get out of college, start doing the business. I'm mellowed. I'm a bit more sympathetic to it now. I can imagine people whose work is mostly in confrontation with an audience saying they've got to develop out of that context'.

But did he actually think that in the British situation it was possible for every live artist to an audience with an expectation of entertainment? What was the experience of Roland Miller, for example? 'He did one of the best, most successful solo pieces of any performance artists at the Zap Club. He responded well to the circumstances in which he found himself. Yet I've also seen him do other work which was completely inaccessible!'

While not actually suggesting that every artist has the resources or the training to deal with a nightclub audience he does maintain that the atmosphere developed at the Zap Club is unusually sympathetic to artists who wish to experiment with a wider audience. 'The audience are very, very interested. They know that what they're going to see is going to be very unusual, could be quite difficult, probably won't be too long!' Furthermore, he distinguishes it from previous nightclub experiments by the willingness of audiences to actually *discuss* what they've just seen. He attributes this to lack of cool, lack of the kind of high-fashion sophistication of London experiments in the genre. 'They were set up as being really cool and sophisticated, and people would not discuss what they were seeing, because they were afraid of looking stupid. If you set up a place that's really open, anyone can talk about it, you're not going to be laughed at if you say the wrong thing, then you really develop work, because artists will come off stage and people will say they found that interesting but why did they

do that? I bet nobody asked anybody any questions about their work in those London clubs, Anything that mystifies is bad. If people mystify their art the first question is "why?". And the usual reason why is that it's crap.

He agrees that there is a crisis in experimental work at the moment. Again, he sees accessibility as the only solution— 'If, in *Performance Magazine* there is a dialogue carrying on where people have a sense of direction, that's a start. If performance work is then discussed outside the privileged ranks of those who pretend to understand it, then you're advancing much, much further, because you are opening it out to the general public and making it something which is important. Whilst it lies in the Art Colleges it's not important. It's only important when it's seen to be having an effect, and an impact. It can have an effect by you extending your writing into other journals, it can have an effect by the Zap Club or similar institutions welcoming experimental or difficult work into a situation where a lot of people are going to see it. It'll have an effect when the Art College makes their students work out in the streets, and when you read the *Daily Mirror* and there's a short piece on performance. That is the most important initiative. When people are relegated to submarines and bricks, and as a subject of ridicule and misunderstanding, then you don't stand a chance'. This expansive, populist, zeal could easily be dismissed as empty talk if it was not for the fact that it is to be accompanied by some fairly drastic action. Neil Butler has given up a safe teaching job, and he and his collaborators at the Zap Club have taken some very serious personal financial risks to make their dream reality. Only the Leadmill, in Sheffield, has attempted anything quite on this scale, and that with a large chunk of Urban Aid money and nothing like the kind of commitment to performance art programming that the Zap has. So it seems something of a mad risk, but the sort of risk that the performance world needs to change a situation approaching impasse. ■

**ROB LA FRENAIS**

**The Zap Club opens this October, and is anxious to hear from performance and experimental artists who wish to take up the challenge of working in the situation described above. Among facilities offered will be a videotape of your work. Contact Neil Butler on 0273 506471**



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## HIGHLANDS AND

## DESERTS

## A Performance Pilgrimage

In fact, there has been more performance than ever happening this year in Britain. In the space of a month, following the resourceful Touring Exhibitionists (see quote) from Bristol to Nottingham and finishing at the mammoth Bracknell Festival of Performance, DAVID BRIERS saw, at our request, over forty-five performances and associated live events, many of them twice. Recording his impressions as he went, he emerged from his ordeal surprisingly optimistic ▶



## A FIRST TASTE OF THE TOURING EXHIBITIONISTS ■

As I was waiting for the performance to start, a man, who had probably dropped in to the Arnolfini for his tea, and who felt in the mood to stay for a film or performance, tried to find out more about The Touring Exhibitionists. At first the person at the ticket office averred that they were a touring theatre company, but then changed her mind—'It's, er . . . I'm not quite sure what it is actually.' I do not know whether her magnificent marketing techniques persuaded him to buy a ticket, but had he done so, he would have learned the unwritten but almost invariable law related to the sort of performance I was to see much of over the next month—they always start late, and always go on longer than they are supposed to.

The seating in the auditorium had been removed, and having been preoccupied with installing myself where I could see and not get cramp, I realised that I had walked straight past Alistair MacLennan, without even noticing he was there, his performance already in progress as the audience entered. I only had time to register MacLennan's white head, and the fact that a video camera was recording his slow forward progress.

Straight into a video by John Maybury, which somehow managed to overcome the smallness of the TV screen in this auditorium, and the tinny sound of its speakers—compulsively throbbing noisy soundtrack accompanying thickly overlaid fleeting images in spectral colours, lingering on the elemental borderland between porno films and medical films of childbirth.

The silenced audience was left suddenly in the blue afterglow of the 'dead' monitor. Lots of rearranging of wiring and equipment by men with torches preceded Lydia Schouten's piece. I had never seen her, but had read a lot about her, and was disappointed that her *Romeo Lies Bleeding* did no more than live up to my expectations. The piece involved a videotape, slides of Hollywood film stills, and large cut-outs of King Kong, Spiderman, and Tarzan, who was embraced briefly by the artist (was it her? she was in the dark). It was lightweight and fashionable. There was sporadic applause, and someone opined loudly, 'Boring'.

The technical changeover before the next piece was more interesting—five people moving purposively and unselfconsciously about, and provoking applause when the audience thought they had finished (but they hadn't).

I had looked forward to seeing Joel Hubaut, having been drawn to the descriptions of his *Grand Mixage* in obscure European artists' magazines. Following a video of a pop band, intercut with the artist being breastfed alla Fellini, and a fat male go-go dancer, Hubaut hectored a toy parrot at some length through a loud mike, and ended up gesturing to a 'French punk' song, which went on for far too long. What a letdown, and this the day after Eric Morecambe had died.

The changeovers themselves were by now getting quite dramatic. This time men began to unreel cable over my head. Nigel Rolfe, it transpired, was not actually touring with the Exhibitionists, but was represented by a multi-screen video ('The Travelling Videos', this should probably have been called). But Rolfe's piece was very strong, though it sounds silly in description—on the left, Rolfe had buckets of water thrown over him periodically (tidally), on the right he was unravelling a ball of twine and wrapping round his head, whilst the legs of an Irish dancer appeared in the middle, and all to the sound of *bodhrans* and water.

Rolfe's video was much shorter than the time it took to take it down and set up the next piece, and the audience were getting restless (some had left). 'Sing us a song, tell us a joke', pleaded a member of the audience (who taught at a nearby art college) to Marty

St. James and Anne Wilson. It was a pity that Marty responded defensively. 'Sorry about the technical hitches—these things happen—one night it goes fantastic, the next . . .' He needn't have worried, because their piece got the first genuine applause of the evening, though I was unable to disassociate the beat-box music and preacher/auctioneer-style delivery from Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives* on Channel 4 a few days previously, and there was no contest. The end of the piece, without speech, when Anne climbed on Marty's shoulders and opened an umbrella full of white feathers, worked best.

Local Guest Artist young Dan Bradford's performance/monologue (during which he set light to his hair, sat on the stiff tails of his evening dress, and sang a Bob Dylan parody) was embarrassing and studentish, and would never have got onto the piazza at Covent Garden. By now it was getting past my bedtime. I had never actually seen Anne Bean perform, and was not particularly looking forward to it. Unlike the other Exhibitionists, she was doing a different piece at each venue, responding to the previous night's performance, or the course of the day's events. What she did at the Arnolfini sounds like what Tony Hancock-type 'action painters' were once supposed to have done. She read an extract about painting from her adolescent diary, and to a tape loop of a phrase about 'the painter and the painting being one', proceeded to dip her hair in blue paint and flick it back over the surrounding bay of rolls of paper. What may sound passe was carried out with irresistible conviction and honesty without reserve, temporarily closing the performer/audience gap to a millimetre breadth. I was rivetted, and so was almost everybody else. The strobe light helped to focus our attention, but the accompanying slide projections were unnecessary.



Anne Bean with the Touring Exhibitionists

We didn't have to wait too long for John Carson's *American Medley*. Wearing a red baseball cap and USA T-shirt, Carson sang unaccompanied, in his best pub-singing voice, a flowing sequence of the first couple of lines of pop-songs referring to American towns. In my dulled state, it took a while to realise that the two slides which changed when the songs changed showed a postcard from each town, contrasted with a colour snap taken by the artist in the same place. Carson's performance was popular, and the man lying next to me applauded for the first time that evening.

Silvia Ziranek came on last (poor thing), retaining the attention of those left in the audience through the skill of her 2-part performance, though the inconsequentiality of its verbal content failed to set the audience alight at the end of a very long and variable evening. Muttering 'Happy lot, aren't you?' she threw bananas and plastic knives at us, rather than to us, and the evening just sort of ended, just as the bar was closing.

Poppy's (too loud) music.

Before turning in, I heard John Carson, late on Nottingham's commercial radio station, previewing his *American Medley*. His account of the piece's origination and compilation ran the not uncommon risk of being more interesting than the piece itself.

The next day, the one-day 'edible art' exhibition at the Midland Group was eaten. A fairly modest but good-natured affair, with hardly any 'arties' present, but some interesting people, such as the maker of a scrumptious cake in the semblance of a real heart, severed blood-vessels and all ('I even make my own marzipan', she told me, 'None of your bought muck'), and local Lithuanians, who had made a traditional, phallic mushroom cake.

Later, at the Nottingham leg of the Touring Exhibitionists late night performance, I arrived at the end of local guests Ddart's bit, which looked like two black devils from a Tibetan or mediaeval drama having a lance fight to drum music. I had missed Alistair



**John Carson With  
the Touring Exhibitionists**

### ART TART STAR ■

I arrived in Nottingham at lunchtime. A local news placard caught my eye. 'Scargill Arrested on Picket Line/Earth Tremor Hits Notts.' There was also a partial eclipse of the sun that day, but I missed it. They were still setting up the ephemeral Eat Your Art Out! exhibition at the Midland Group, so I decided to go round the corner to the Old Vic Tavern. After all, their lunchtime Variety Show was part of the Official Festival Programme. It was my duty to go.

It had already started. It seemed that local workers came in their dinner hours to sing or play along with the regular organ and drums duo. A semi-pro called 'Just Colin' sang a medley of good old rock songs with 'just' an electric guitar and a beat-box—dead professional, much better than Shakin' Stevens. 'I don't sing requests, unless asked', he said. 'No-one under 30 is allowed in here', he said. 'Tony' played Glen Miller immaculately on his harmonica, and then, with some difficulty, 'Bring me Sunshine', as a tribute to Eric Morecambe. 'As you may have realised', he confessed, 'I didn't know it. But I had a go.' Some other performers I saw later might have benefitted from making the same confession.

That evening I joined a young video-generation audience to see Impact Theatre's latest production, *Songs of the Claypeople*—a consciously more confessional and intimate performance than *A Place in Europe*, and physically closer to the audience. The well-tried SF theme of a post-industrial society which has lost the capacity to love, but whose renegade members teach the others that sex and togetherness are good for you, is articulated via some stunning Balthus-like vignettes, future ethnopoetics, and Andrew

MacLennan again—I understand that his performance this time for the waiting or entering audience had involved a real pig's head and a dead fish dropped down the Midland Group's deep stairwell.

Anne Bean did it again. Just as before, I recoiled from the initial set-up—writing the word ART on the side of a plinth (oh no, I thought), then changing it into TART, and then STAR, singing 'Act Naturally' the while. Then, repeating the line 'They're gonna put me in the movies', she held a sheet of glass in front of her, as if she were on a movie screen, and attempted to smash the glass with her head, dramatically succeeding. It looked dangerous, and it was. I was to learn later that she had been given a piece of plate glass instead of easily breakable picture-glass, which she was to have smashed with the beads she was wearing in her hair!

Joel Hubaut was wearing goggles, a Mondrian apron, and a green sock on his nose this time. His parrot was funnier (its wings flapped together when you pulled its tail), and his music was much longer. Hubaut pulled a girl from the front row, and mauled her a bit, to which she reacted so passively I thought she must be his companion, but she wasn't. The audience didn't like this much, and I felt sorry for the girl and the parrot.

Otherwise, the order of things had been changed for the better, things went more quickly, and in between each performance slides were thrown up saying things like 'Get ready! Cos here comes . . . The performers performed better, and the audience liked it better. Surely this had something to do with the more intimate space, the time of the performance, receptivity through alcohol, etc. I liked the things I already liked (Anne Bean, John Maybury's video, and John Carson's piece, which now rounded off the sequence) even

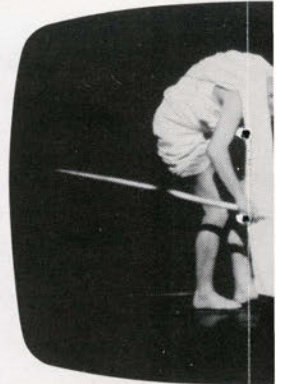
# FEW CHANNELS WO ONE OF THESE, LET A



**Wednesday 5th September.** *Gloriana*.  
The English National Opera Company with their recent triumph in America; Benjamin Britten's spectacular opera about Queen Elizabeth I.



**Wednesday 12th September.** *Punch & Judy*.  
Harrison Birtwistle's opera of desire and aggression, directed by David Freeman and described as "a vivid and violent post-Freudian melodrama," marks the composer's fiftieth birthday.



**Wednesday 19th Sep**  
The first chance for British :  
Opera's controversial pro  
hypnotic opera based on G  
non-viol



**Wednesday 10th October.** *Broken Blossoms*.  
A striking melodrama from D.W. Griffiths in 1919.  
Lillian Gish touchingly portrays life in slummy Limehouse. The original score by Louis Gottshalk is conducted by Carl Davis.



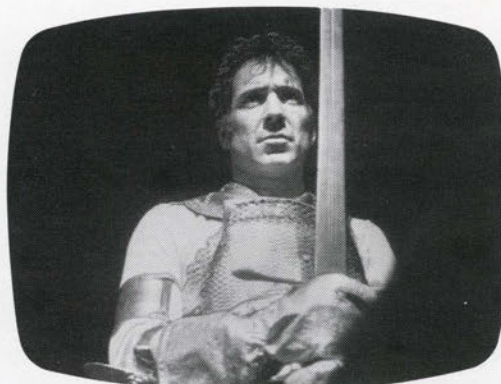
**Wednesday 17th October.** *A Woman of Affairs*.  
A 1928 Garbo film never screened before. The story in which she goes from man to man (including Douglas Fairbanks Jr.) is taken from a popular twenties novel. With new Carl Davis score.



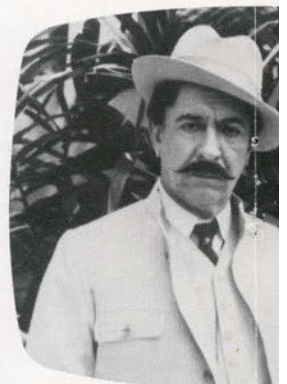
**Wednesday 24th Octo**  
Rossini's enchanting opera  
filmed by Jean-Pierre Ponne  
Frederica v



**Wednesday 21st November.** *The Mabinogi*.  
Caernarvon Castle is the grand setting for this film of Welsh pre-Arthurian legends, combining dancers, actors and local people in a pageant with music by Robin Williamson and 'celtic reggae' by Geraint Jarman.

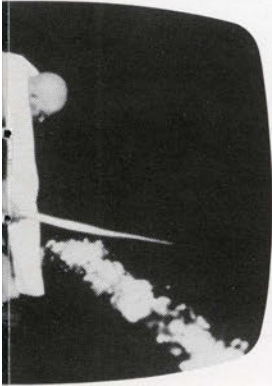


**Wednesday 28th November.** *Starwashed*.  
The surreal cabaret and fringe theatre group "The People Show" appear with guest star Julie Covington, in a rueful fable of tattered vaudevillians.



**Wednesday 5th Dec**  
Tony Palmer's controversial  
Stephens and Virginia McI  
Puccini's marriage against c

# WOULD DARE SHOW ALONE ALL OF THEM.



**September.** Satyagraha. British audiences to see Stuttgart production of Philip Glass's on Gandhi's life and legacy of violence.



**Wednesday 26th September.** The Wind. An original print of the silent film that made Lillian Gish famous. Life on a Texan prairie is so sharply portrayed you can feel the wind and taste the endless dust. With new Carl Davis score.



**Wednesday 3rd October.** Show People. King Vidor's 1928 malicious and satirical comedy of Hollywood. Starring Marion Davies in an amusing parody of Gloria Swanson. With new Carl Davis score.



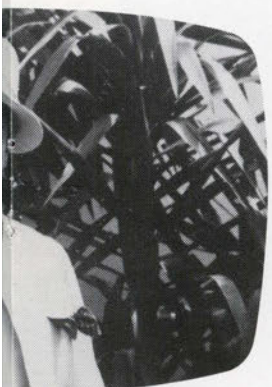
**October.** La Cenerentola. Opera of Cinderella sensitively handled, starring the delicious Anna von Stade.



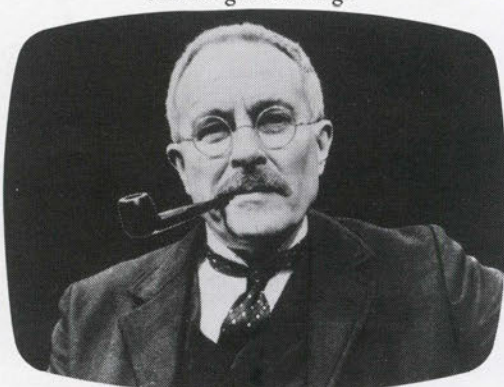
**Wednesday 31st October.** Baryshnikov by Tharp. Three pieces specially choreographed by ace dance-maker Twyla Tharp for the inimitable Mikhail Baryshnikov and his American Dance Theatre. The programme climaxes in Sinatra Suite, a setting of Sinatra's greatest songs.



**Wednesday 14th November.** West.enfant terrible of the theatre Stephen Berkoff has adapted his highly successful "West" a contemporary epic about London gangs in mock-Shakespearean conflict, with dazzling video effects.



**December.** Puccini. Operatic film, starring Robert McKenna, sets facts about extracts from Turandot.



**Wednesday 12th December.** Kipling. Alec McCowen as Rudyard Kipling in Brian Clark's challenging play, initiated by Channel 4. A triumph at London's Mermaid, it opens on Broadway shortly.



Our Autumn Arts season brings you the best of theatre and dance, film classics, virtuoso singers and actors. Enough, surely, to please everyone for at least some of the time.

**Performance. 9.00pm Wednesdays.**

better, but to my surprise, even the ones I didn't like very much before seemed better the second time through. Nothing got worse. Familiarity did not breed contempt.

Early the following evening at the Midland Group, Duncan Whiteman presented his 'Sculpture Performance'. Objectivised dancers totally encased a la Alwin Nikolais in nylon lycra, like stretchy duvet covers, slowly changed shape and moved behind us when we weren't looking. Some effective moments, but I hated the artist's naff futuristic synthesizer doodlings. As Performance Artists are adamant about being Not Theatre, this Sculpture was equally so about being Not Modern Dance, and as the participants finally took uncomfortable poses we were invited to 'examine the sculptures', as if it were an exhibition. Outside the gallery window, a group of young people gesticulated questioningly. From inside, the artist mouthed at them, 'Sculp-ture, Sculp-ture', but they did not understand what he meant.

The assembled audience inside, interestingly enough, was quite different from the ones for the Touring Exhibitionists or Impact Theatre. A performance at a different time, in a different part of the same building, with the overt introduction of one or more predominant elements—textiles, 'dance'—can attract people who would never set foot in an alternative performance space, and turn away those who would.

### **MY STUFFED BIRD HAS FALLEN INTO THE PORTATIVE ORGAN ■**

A different audience again was attracted later the same evening to a marvellous place at a marvellous time—the canalside in the centre of Nottingham, with the giant wedge of the British Waterways building looming in the crepuscular dimness in one direction, a road bridge in the other, and opposite us the backsides of warehouses, from whence issued the locally-based House Performance Co. to perform Fog. Unfortunately the performance did not live up to its setting, and was derivative from the more distinctive work of IOU Theatre. There was one striking point at which a pedalo came out onto the canal from a backlit loading bay with original portcullis, at which point the music too (though its

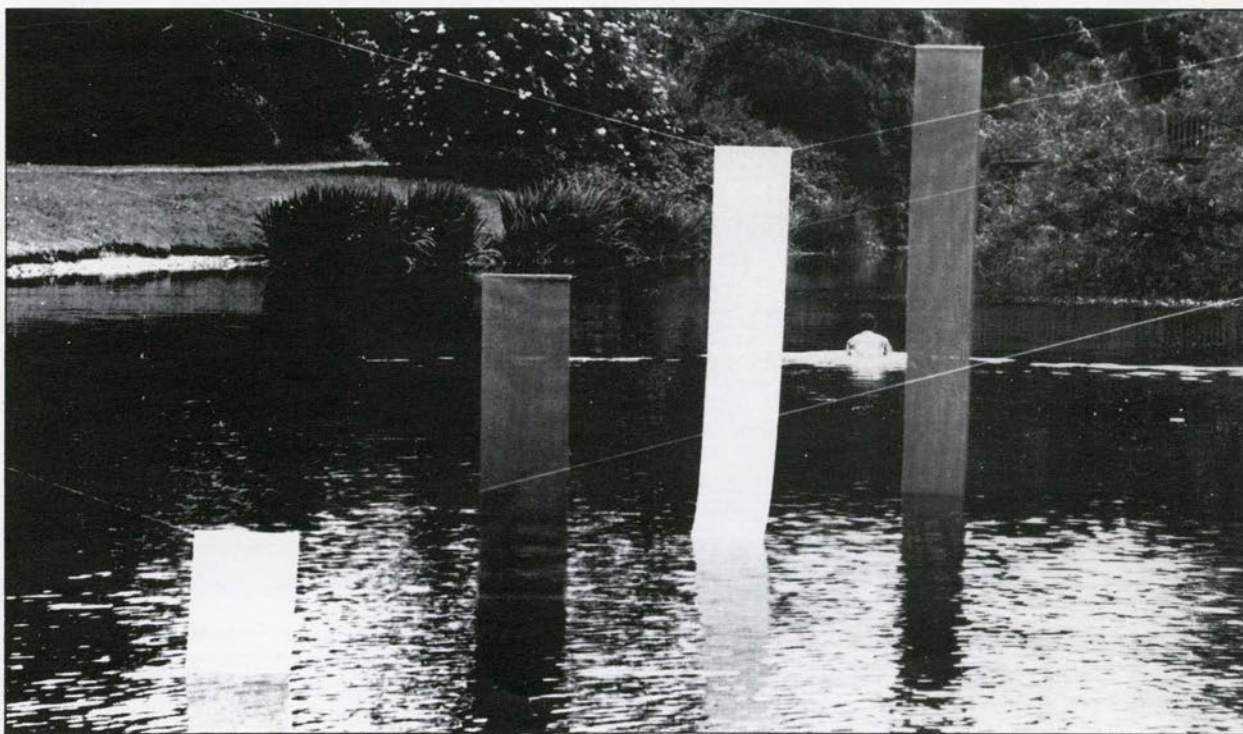
instrumentation was an IOU soundalike) came into its own, with some ace jazz improvising. But the butterfly collectors, dragons, and clerical dervishes and the like, began to bore those assembled, being very much of a dainty genre summed up by a friend with the epithet, 'My stuffed bird has fallen into the portative organ'. We were distanced by more than just the span of the canal, but that didn't help.

The audience was quiet and attentive, though the fluorescent-jacketed St. Johns Ambulancemen got a bit overexcited near the beginning, rushing down to the water's edge and pointing. And the young people continually crossing the bridge above us on their way from the railway station to a Friday night on the town found themselves suddenly with an audience and a desire to perform, shouting and whooping. Any future performance at this time and place should find a way of encompassing the likelihood of being addressed by someone suddenly shouting from above—'I've got a 12 foot plonker!'

(An unremarkable performance can be perpetuated indefinitely if it photographs well. A performance which never happened at all can be perpetuated if a description of it appears in print. A sculptural installation based on Dante which was supposed to have been sited in a spectacularly deep abandoned railway cutting during the Nottingham Fringe never happened, but it has already been reported in Artists Newsletter as if it did.)

### **GO JUST A BIT TOO FAR INTO THE WOODS AND YOU'RE IN SOMEONE'S BACK GARDEN ■**

The weekend started for me after dark under the trees by a fountain in the gardens at South Hill Park. Into this magical summery setting came the Bow Gamelan Orchestra (Anne Bean, Paul Burwell, Richard Wilson), announcing the beginning of their performance as a flaming, ringing alarm clock was sent down a wire from the roof of the main building into our midst. This was Danger Music! The three protagonists knelt in the fountain, aiming blowlamps at sheets of glass, exploding and splintering, then aiming the blowlamps at the lightbulbs illuminating the scene.



South Hill Park

People cringed, and loved it.

The Ensemble proceeded to play various pieces of 'urban junk', appearing intermittently in the gloom like industrial sprites in a Tarkovsky landscape, setting off sputtering, whining and grinding sounds, the boomings of metal pipes with heated ends, a chorus of car horns (like the one at the beginning of Ligeti's *Grand Macabre* opera), and at one point a wailing pair of bagpipes, its legs dangling, illuminated high up in a tree, and operated by a foot-pump from below.

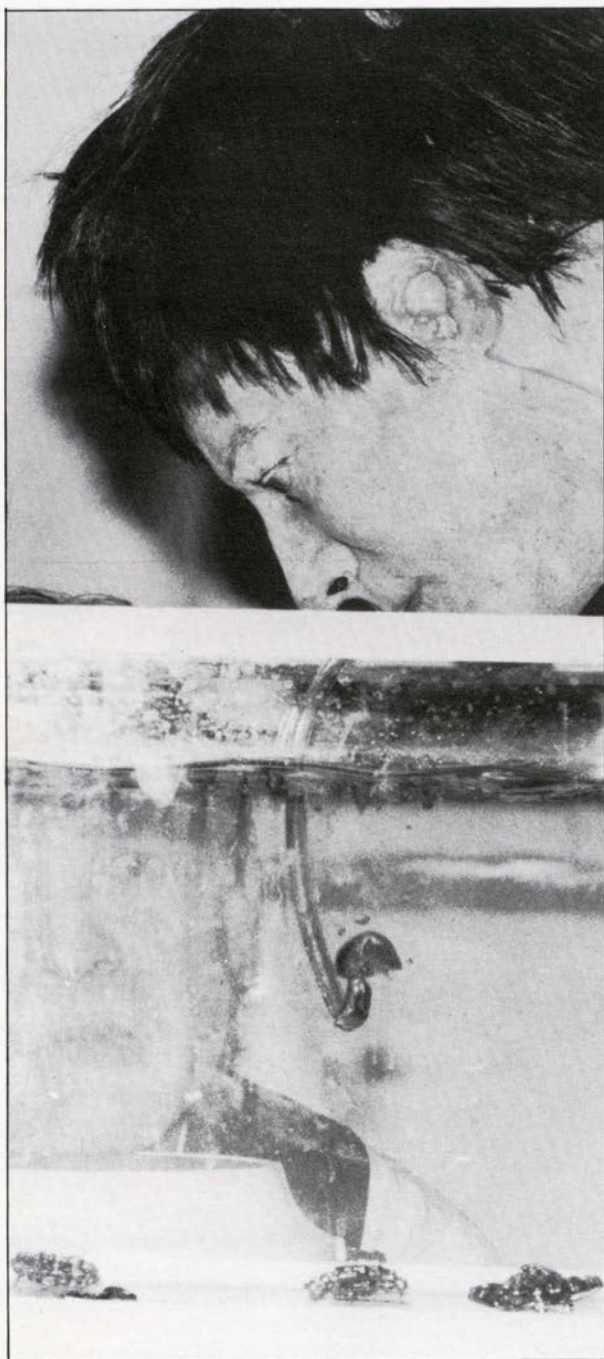
Security and fire precautions had a low profile. An oil can with an electric drill in it suddenly activated, pulling a bunch of tin cans on a string across the ground through our legs. We were intermittently showered with gravel, and also with a short, sharp shower of rain, as if orchestrated by the Ensemble. Nobody moved. A lot of people had come across from the terrace bar to watch, and liked this dangerous, funny, anti-idyllic, anti-high-tech performance. It was tough. Hard work. Really barmy.

Only acolytes came down to the Cellar Bar for a late-night sequence of badly scheduled performance. Mike Adcock's complex *Pieces of Fate*, in several parts, involving performance, slides, film, piano and accordion playing, was obviously a piece worth attending to, which it was difficult to do here, where you could hardly see it, and it was far too long for such a place at such a time. Link man Dave Stephens was not so much offensive, he just was not funny. People stared at their shoes a lot. The Brixton Bank managers rose to the occasion better, but again went on for too long. If all the scheduled performances were to go on as long, we would be there all night (which was not the intention), and I was flaking out. I left early, which was already very late.

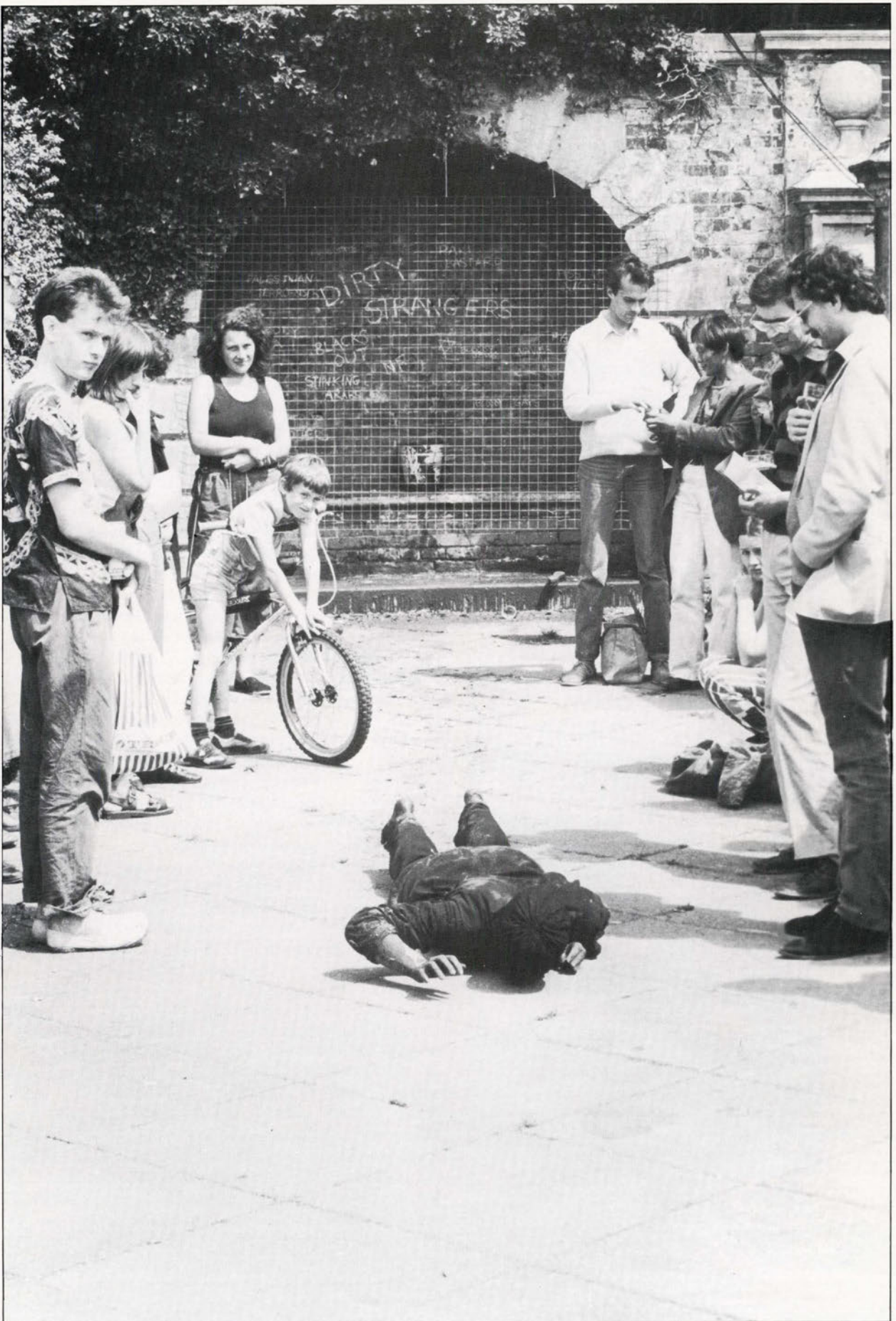
I don't know if you have ever been to South Hill Park. I revelled in my Saturday morning stroll through the grounds—sun, trees swathed in purple rhododendrons, pets' graves in the wood, muscovy ducks splashing on the lake, magpies. What could be more pleasant, or more strange? For suddenly you come across a pathway used by supermarket shoppers, like encountering a trail of wood ants. The arts centre is in the middle of a housing estate. Go just a bit too far into the woods and you're in someone's back garden. Go round the lake and just out of sight of the centre and there's a Waitrose supermarket, a video shop, BMX gangs, and stultifying mass standardisation of desires. This admix cannot easily be dismissed, as Japanese artist Kumiko Shimizu found, placing her installations on the lake and falling foul of both the local populace and other territorial sculptors.

The first performance of Saturday was also one of the best. Richard Layzell did one of his Improvisations in the elegant, panelled Recital Room. Armed with a few props, a couple of videos, and a lot of nerve, Layzell walked a tightrope of complicity. Highlights, for me, were being privileged to a personal demonstration (I happened to be sitting in just the right seat) of the op-art effect of moving his spotted tie behind the holes of a high-tech metal bookend, and an altercation with a member of the audience about Wee Willie Harris, whose photograph, which Layzell was holding, was taken in the same year, and conceivably at the same time, as the person (who had never heard of Wee Willie Harris) was born. I also enjoyed Layzell's 'Dog' video.

I went outside in search of Mona Hatoum's performance, but thinking that it had been postponed, I sat in the sun on the terrace, and suddenly noticed Hatoum, covered head to foot in boiler suit and mask, crawling from one end of the long terrace to the other. Families from the adjacent estate were taking the sun with glasses of iced lager from the terrace bar. As Hatoum crawled in a straight line between their tables, the usual deprecatory remarks about modern art were made, but otherwise she was ignored. She had become an arts centre fitting. In Waitrose, your shopping might be disturbed by a girl stocking the shelves. In an arts centre, your



Max Eastley and Anna Furse at South Hill Park



Robin Morley

*Mona Hatoum at South Hill Park*



Lesley Butler



Jordi Cerda

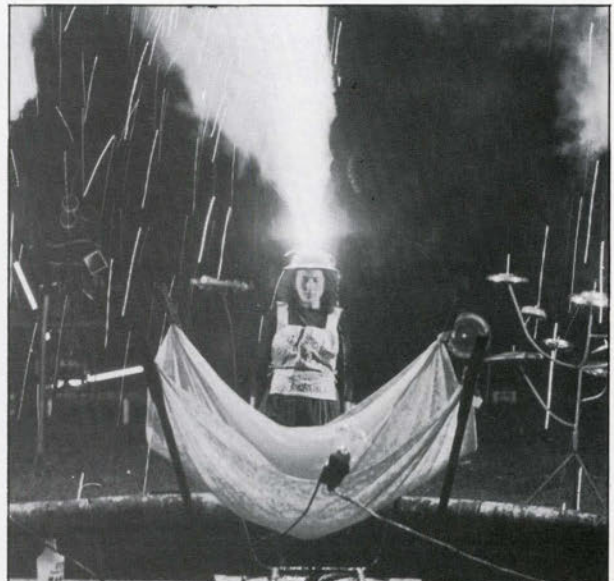


Da Wu Tang

Robin Morley Jim Harrold



Jeff Keen



Bow Gamelan Ensemble

lunchtime drink might be disturbed by a crawling performance artist—it had happened before, it would happen again.

The 'piece' for me, was not Hatoum alone, but Hatoum plus the bemused family, who played their part well. They did not follow Hatoum to her niche with us initiates, who watched her cover its step with red tile paint, and set fire to hanging newspapers revealing a wall covered in racist graffiti, before starting the long crawl back, followed by a polite little boy on a bike. I would say, with respect, that Hatoum's statement in the Festival's full programme (which hardly anyone seemed to have) had more power than her performance in its particular context. What she had written there frightened me.

There is always someone at these events who pollutes the place with marks of their presence. In this case someone had stuck or dropped a rubberstamp of a hat absolutely everywhere—the lavatories, the stairs, even stapled to trees in the wood—I really didn't like that, so was not predisposed in favour of Richard Nicholson's Hat Store performance. Apart from an attractive 1950s Happening look, it didn't amount to much. Overcome by sweat, cigarette smoke, and flash photography, I departed.

It was standing room only too in Jeff Keen's afternoon

appearance, which was like taking a step back in performance history. Looking now not unlike Clive James, but wearing a T-shirt which reminded us that he was at the well-springs of iconography for a whole younger generation, Keen projected films badly like in the old days, read cut-ups, and blow-torched a doll, affably. The mood was respectful, as it should have been, but . . .

I knew I could depend on Max Eastley and Anna Furse to turn up with something nifty. With designer Kate Owen, *Ventriloquies* pursued themes of duplicity with cunning use of doppelganger dummies, tape cassettes, and a virtuosic railway train impression from Max produced by a contact mike on a 78rpm turntable—a sort of 'Childrens Favourites' version of 'scratching'. The whole did not amount to as much as its parts, but I look forward to a developed re-run.

I copped out of a couple of performances here, needing to have a drink and a vegi-burger, and actually talk to someone. Then I took in the People Show in the new Wilde Theatre. Their Show No.88, *The George Khan Show*, has already been slated in these columns by some misanthrope. I had seen the show before, but not in a real proscenium arch theatre (even if it hasn't got one), where it came into its own as being a performance about theatres like this one. At

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this point in the weekend I needed the tears of laughter rolling as much as I needed a sandwich and a drink.

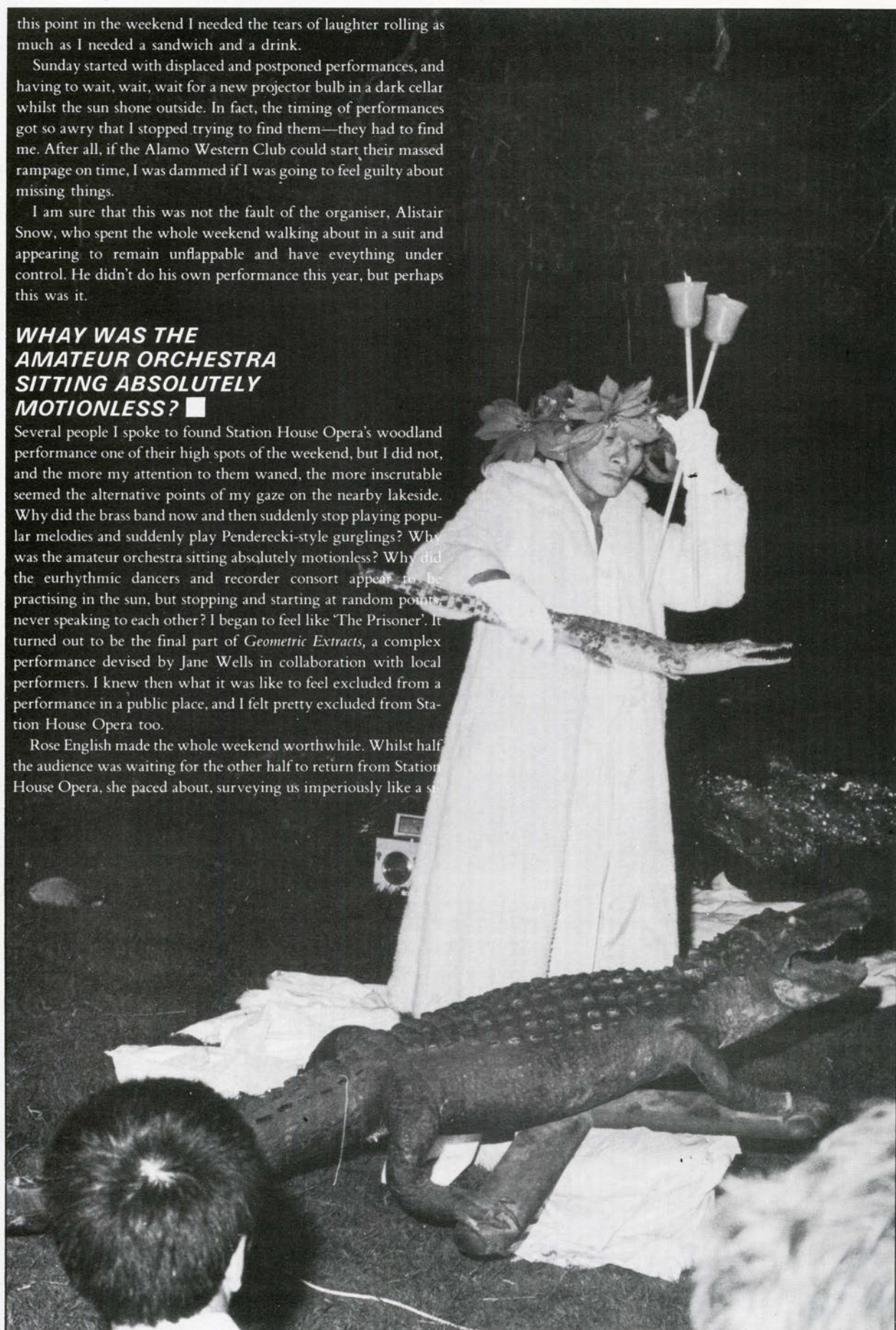
Sunday started with displaced and postponed performances, and having to wait, wait, wait for a new projector bulb in a dark cellar whilst the sun shone outside. In fact, the timing of performances got so awry that I stopped trying to find them—they had to find me. After all, if the Alamo Western Club could start their massed rampage on time, I was damned if I was going to feel guilty about missing things.

I am sure that this was not the fault of the organiser, Alistair Snow, who spent the whole weekend walking about in a suit and appearing to remain unflappable and have everything under control. He didn't do his own performance this year, but perhaps this was it.

**WHAY WAS THE AMATEUR ORCHESTRA SITTING ABSOLUTELY MOTIONLESS? ■**

Several people I spoke to found Station House Opera's woodland performance one of their high spots of the weekend, but I did not, and the more my attention to them waned, the more inscrutable seemed the alternative points of my gaze on the nearby lakeside. Why did the brass band now and then suddenly stop playing popular melodies and suddenly play Penderecki-style gurglings? Why was the amateur orchestra sitting absolutely motionless? Why did the eurhythmic dancers and recorder consort appear to be practising in the sun, but stopping and starting at random points, never speaking to each other? I began to feel like 'The Prisoner'. It turned out to be the final part of *Geometric Extracts*, a complex performance devised by Jane Wells in collaboration with local performers. I knew then what it was like to feel excluded from a performance in a public place, and I felt pretty excluded from Station House Opera too.

Rose English made the whole weekend worthwhile. Whilst half the audience was waiting for the other half to return from Station House Opera, she paced about, surveying us imperiously like a s



David Medalla at South Hill Park

Jim Harrold

byline prophetic, or reprovably like a school teacher, and improvising magnificently to fill in the time, giving us very brief, meaningless 'previews' of the performance to come.

It would be wrong to recount in detail what Rose English did for the next hour or more to keep her audience both present and more attentive than at any other performance I saw that weekend. Her performance responded both to the particular moment, crammed into a small room late on a hot afternoon, and to the peculiar circumstances of the weekend, dominated by other performers, administrators, critics, and their friends. Her performance, then, was critical of Performance Art and Performance Art Festivals. It was also extremely funny. But although Rose English risks becoming the Anna Russell of Performance Art, what she did also had poetic passages and an unnerving edge to it, as when she suddenly began to cry heartrendingly, only to snap out of it in a completely matter of fact manner, but leaving us sniggering with relief. Just take it from me, you must go and see Rose English wherever and whenever she is performing.

I wish I could say the same about Marty St. James and Anne Wilson, part of whose *American Romance* I had now seen three times. They had everything going for them in the way of 6 colour video monitors, a programmed beat-box, and stylish clothes, but they did not have what Rose English could put across with almost no props at all. There was always an element of reserve and slight embarrassment to Marty & Anne's performance as if they realised that perhaps they did not have the live performance skills to carry through what they had taken on. 'That was reasonable', I heard someone say on the way out.

The welcome contrast of Da Wu Tang's silent calligraphic performance was quietly shattered by the shutter actions of three cameras—a photographer with a tripod on the front row, who became part of the performance without realising it, and two 'staff' photographers behind me. I almost stood up to say something, but didn't. Others I found out, almost stood up to say something. None of us did.

Catalan artist Jordi Cerda, whose artworks were exhibited on the stairs (I liked them), performed in the Recital Room on Sunday evening. Dressed in a blue suit, he moved among us, holding a mirror bearing a philosophical statement about naming objects and

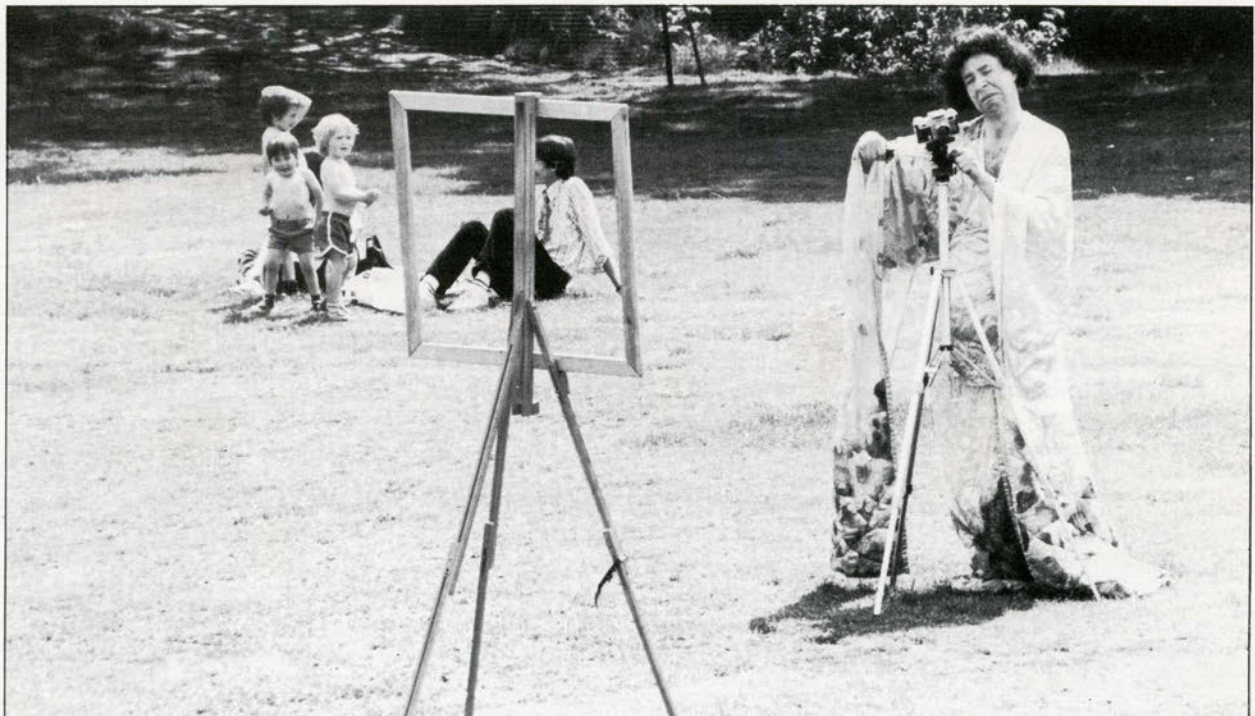
their reality. Advancing towards *me*, he pressed the mirror against my shoe, and taking it away, pulled out from behind the mirror a photograph of a shiny shoe and trouser bottom not dissimilar to my own. The same process was repeated, the artist searching his audience for people wearing items of clothing which concurred with his repertoire of photographic images, and in so doing cultural dissonances sometimes surfaced. What may be acceptable in the new freedom of Spain, has become dubious here.

After 10pm I thought I had just about seen my last performance, but some of us were lured out into the dark woods again by Ian Smith as the naked primeval god of South Hill Park, with some effective shamanistic firelit things in the balmy night air.

## **SURPRISINGLY, I WANT MORE ■**

Dutch performer and painter Boris Gerrets' late-night presentation, *Les Pieces Universelles*, in the Wilde Theatre, involving a dancer and musicians, was visually very sharp indeed, and very fashionable. But my mind wasn't on it, as I had to leave in the middle, and also miss David Medalla's finale to catch the milk train from Reading station.

Hardly anyone sees performance art in such big dollops as I did in May and June. But surprisingly I want more. Only on the last day of my stamina-testing travail had I seen enough to come across a number of performances which remain indelibly in my consciousness, and whose protagonists I long to see again. Any less, and I would no doubt have returned unconvinced and morose. As it was, those performances I cherished bore all the traits of 'classic' performance art—they impressed with their very 'presence', responding to the moment, and evading replication in verbal or photographic form. Live Art, as this magazine sensibly calls it. This may have been the last Festival of Performance at South Hill Park, for both its organiser and the centre's supportive director are leaving. If it continues, it should be bigger, with more real choice (the possibility of seeing as many things, without the feeling of obligation to go to everything), with more performers from abroad, with a Fringe, with wider coverage from press critics, radio & TV. And much less incestuous. ■



**Morrie Minamoto at South Hill Park**

# MAD DOGS AND ENGLISHMEN

## *A Curious Tale at the ICA*

### EXHIBIT A

Extract from *Performance* London, June 1984: 'At least three of the collaborators in *Midday Sun* have a lot to answer for in the past year, and now is the reckoning...Verdict: Guilty. I will now consider your pleas for mitigation...'

### EXHIBIT B

Scribbled notes on the back of a programme found on the floor of the stalls of the opera house in Iesi, Marche, Italy, July 1984, following a performance of Jan Fabre's *The Power of Theatrical Madness*:

'Now eight in line at stage front, running on spot, a race, face out, serious. A shouted catalogue shared between the runners. Significant C20th perfs with people, dates and places. Theatre du Soleil. M. Graham. K's last tape. Joseph Beuys. Dionysus in '69. Bejart. I was sitting on my patio. Heine Muller. Paradise Now. Cunningham. Brook's Marat/Sade. And again, repeated over and over. Sweat, strain, pain as they run. German and French stuff—don't know. Ring cycle's in there too. Cocteau's Parade. Picasso. Trisha Brown. Kontakoff. Foreman. Grot's Constant Prince. Botho Strauss. And more. And again, running on and on. They *must* stop soon. Wesker's *The Kitchen* at the RC, shouted out incredulously, a joke on incongruity. *Sacre du Printemps*. Hamlet machine. Mabou Mines. Pina Bausch. A last spurt. An invisible finishing tape. All collapse. Silence. No winner.'

### EXHIBIT C

Extract from the monthly Bulletin of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London June 1978:

'Not dance, not mime, not performance art, not traditional play, the work is nevertheless highly disciplined and visually fascinating; a pioneering exploration within the dynamics and technical resources of theatre.'

### EXHIBIT D

Extract from published letter to *Performance*, November 1983: 'The ICA emphasises that area of theatre wherein its collaborative disciplines—design, text, performance, music and choreography—can meet afresh as equals.'

### EXHIBIT E

Quotations from some press reviews of work appearing at the ICA Theatre, 1984, with sources:

'Not really a play (*Stage*)...Mixed media work (*Guardian*)...What the ICA chooses to call 'visual theatre' (*Performance*)...Surrealism is alive but not too well at the ICA (*Sunday Times*)...The Outdated avant-garde (*Financial Times*)...Experimental theatre (*City Limits*)...The ICA continues to fly the flag for performance art while dashing one's hopes for the genre at the same time (*Observer*)...They are still mixing the media at the ICA, a fashionable focus for what we used to call the avant-garde (*Daily Telegraph*)...Performance art style of theatre (*New Statesman*)...A writer leavening the performance art mixture (*Times*)...A play—if that's the word (*City Limits*)...The trouble with 'performance art', 'visual theatre' or whatever it is the ICA chooses to call a large proportion of its theatre presentations (*Stage*)...In the eighteenth century the fashionable used to go to Bedlam to look at the lunatics. Nowadays they go to the ICA and pay good money to watch performers acting as if they were insane (*Standard*)...'

### EXHIBIT F

Transcription of notes from a voice on a cassette tape, source open to conjecture:

'The evidence suggests certain conclusions.

(a) The focus of ICA Theatre policy has remained constant over six years. Definition has merely moved from the negative to the positive, bringing a greater clarity and placing it firmly in the mainstream of twentieth-century European and American performance. The slogan 'Theatre not plays' and latterly the words 'performance and 'theatre', unqualified, are the only ones to have been used when the ICA has been forced to encapsulate policy.

(b) That much of the work seen at the ICA is within this mainstream may be demonstrated by the fact that it is reliant upon European resources for its continued existence. In Europe, it is in demand, understood, enthusiastically received and responsibly reviewed. Impact's *A Place in Europe* was produced and premiered in Bologna. *Hesitate and Demonstrate's Shangri-La* was produced and premiered in Rotterdam. Mike Figgis' *Animals of the City* was produced by the Gerard-Philippe, Paris. The cultural context is fertile and propitious.

(c) Critical theory is virtually unknown in British theatre. Whereas commentators within the worlds of the visual arts and dance have found ways of writing effectively about the post-modern, theatre reviewers—whether or not they know of the term and its concepts—flounder around in isolated ignorance. Judgements are one-off, uncontextualised, ignorant of related work, ignorant of critical theory easily obtained in European magazines and American publications like *Performing Arts Journal* and *The Drama Review*, ignorant of the contemporary *idea* of theatre illustrated as a commonplace by Fabre's recitation of antecedents. Such ignorant attempts to disguise itself by meretricious and erroneous label-making. It's ironically apt that the derogatory adjective 'fashionable' is being pinned to these reviewers' labels at just the time when the work is suffering a phase of being distinctly *unfashionable*.

(d) British critics are good at plays. Most are equipped to recognise and analyse 'content' only when it is transmitted by literary means. In a world dominated by a myriad of mediated images, this inability would seem nothing but quaintly old-fashioned if it were not so dangerous.

(e) Informed criticism is a necessary creative act of theatre process. It is an educative mediation between public and performance. Without it, new work suffers through being thrust into a cultural vacuum. Without it, audiences are less willing to take a risk on new work. Without it, funding bodies are exposed and hesitate to renew commitments. Thus a downward spiral is engaged, and can be reversed only through an enforced dilution of theatre policy fuelled by ignorance.

(f) The failure of our little island to recognise and embrace the tradition and practice of twentieth-century performance has led to a suffocating marginalisation of the artists. Peter Brook had to escape to Paris to do the work he wanted to do, Lindsay Kemp to Barcelona. If Pina Bausch had been British, she'd now be doing duo work at the Drill Hall. Those who struggle on do so from the bottom of that undifferentiated garbage heap known as The Fringe—as in Capital Fringe Festival '84. Denied mainstream relevance, support and resources, it's unsurprising if their work has failed to develop to a stature that might merit inclusion in Fabre's theatrical catechism.

(A long gap follows, filled apparently with a recording of John Peel's radio programme. Later the voice resumes.)

Of course, it's not just an inhospitable culture reflected by its critics that's to blame. There is the absurd last-minute lottery of the project subsidy system which demands a new work every six months if you are to stay in business—another new piece, underfinanced, wrenched from the guts of the group in a matter of weeks, which must not duplicate previous work, but constantly make new discoveries.

There are also failures within the work, failures that must often be discovered through performance. Companies associated with the ICA are currently subjecting themselves to rigorous questioning and re-evaluation. The results will produce the most achieved season at the ICA this autumn: Hidden Grin's *Parasite Structures* with sculptor Denis Masi; Lumiere & Son's *Brightside*, a nightmare journey through a land of the irrepressibly bouyant; and Impact's *The Carrier Frequency* with novelist Russell Hoban.

ICA Theatre policy too, although constant, is undergoing continual development. One direction would please Rob La Frenais: active discussion with performance artists like Anthony Howell and Stuart Sherman over the appropriate presentation of their work. At no time, it seems, has the writer been more distanced from the theatre's experiments in form. Perhaps writers are needed—novelists, poets, cartoonists, screenplay writers, not necessarily playwrights—needed not so much for their skills of narrative, character or dialogue, but rather for their unique moral vision which drives them to be what they are. *Midday Sun* was a first tentative step in this direction. Perhaps it was ill thought-out, perhaps it raised more problems than it solved; but at least it was pointing in the right kind of direction.

#### EXHIBIT G

Letter from the officer of the Theatre Writing Committee of the Arts Council of Great Britain in response to a request to a Royalty Supplement Guarantee for the authors of *Midday Sun*, June 1984:

'There was a long debate on the application and your various items of supporting information, but finally the Committee decided that the writing element of the production lacked sufficient substance to fall within what they regard as the brief of the Schemes. That is a conservative stance, I know, but in the light of the continuing large number of applications for the kind of plays appearing in the majority of theatre venues they decided to take a puritan line.'

#### EXHIBIT H

Extract from letter in reply from ICA Theatre Director, July 1984:

'I continue to believe that bridges must be built between writers and the significant new work being made in writer-less theatre, for the health of both. It is the 'kind of plays appearing in the majority of theatre venues' that partly leads me to this belief. What I see are tiny, crabbed, domestic, one-dimensional, dreary dry-runs for television drama. I'm not sure that the TV corporations welcome the free provision of a training ground; but such policies will not lead to the development of writers who possess the breadth of style and vision to fill our major stages. Perhaps attempting to seduce writers towards what is now being called 'the avant-garde' won't either, but I reckon it's worth a try, and at least the resulting work wouldn't be of predictable sanctimony. I look to Europe, the US and Japan, and I see a mainstream of new theatre of which this country is ignorant. And I wonder how some British work can be dragged against its will to join that work in the 1980s, with its accent intact, and this is my answer. But mine seems a lonely voice, and an insignificant one against the roar of those you identify as 'conservative' and 'puritan'.

#### EXHIBIT I

Newspaper report from the *Standard*, 12 October 1984:  
*Art Death Riddle*

A coroners court was told yesterday that a mangled and bloody bicycle had been found on the bridge over the lake in St James' Park in the early hours of Saturday 6 October. The machine had been identified as that of Mr John Ashford (40), Theatre Director of the nearby controversial Institute of Contemporary Arts. No driver of any motor vehicle involved in an incident had been identified, not had and body been recovered after a search of the lake and environs. Friends had said that Mr Ashford's private life had been happy, if complex, but that he had been depressed at work recently, under attack from left, right, and centre. A number of largely incomprehensible exhibits were produced, including a cassette of dictation notes found in a damaged Walkman near to the battered bicycle. The most intriguing, however, was discovered speared by a broken spoke of the front wheel:

#### EXHIBIT K

A page apparently torn from the back page of a foreign theatre programme.

On one side the words handwritten in blue ink: 'Final image. Max Ernst + 2 parrots. Last shout: 'This is theatre like it was to be expected and forseen? Jan Fabre? Antwerp? 1982? The right question: Is the Power of Theatrical Madness a celebration of the redundancy of Classicism?'

And on the reverse side in bold capital letters:

**'BYE BYE FROM JOHN THE BAPTIST. PS MAYBE I MEAN OPERA'**

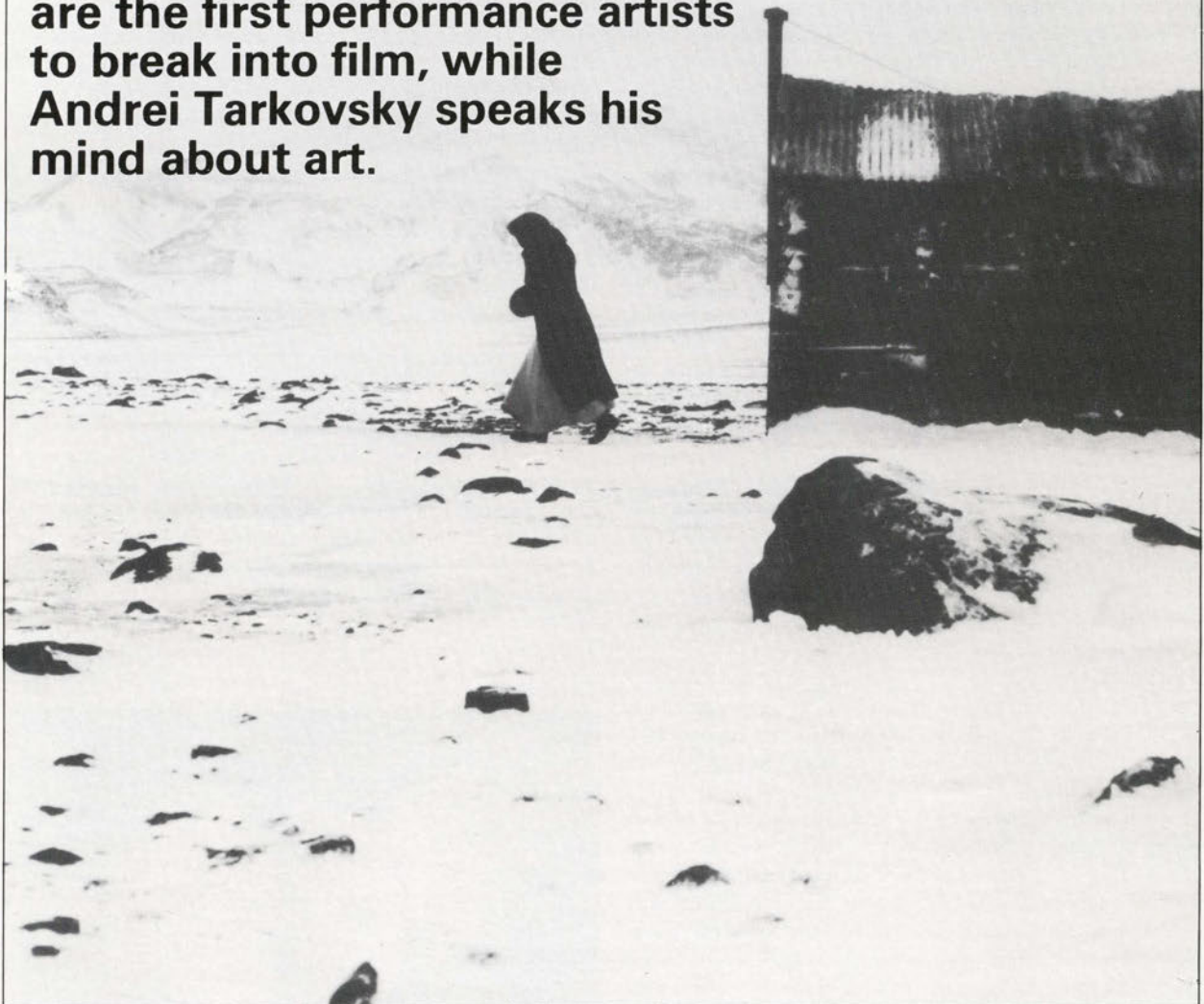
The riddle remains unsolved. Verdict: death by misadventure'.

JAN FABRE



# ART ON FILM/FILM ON ART

Rose English and Sally Potter are the first performance artists to break into film, while Andrei Tarkovsky speaks his mind about art.



*The desire to produce a large-scale work, originally an opera, was the root of the collaboration between Sally Potter, Rose English and Lindsay Cooper which eventually became the BFI-funded feature film, *The Golddiggers* which with its all women crew and unique writing, directing and musical team, must be set to become something of a legend. Rose English explained how the film came to be made in a recent conversation with LYNN MACRITCHIE*

Sally, Rose and Lindsay were already sounding out possible opera venues when the chance to make the film came up, Rose explained. Sally, on the strength of the success of her film *Thriller*, had been invited to make an application for funding to the BFI. The lukewarm response to their opera plans suggested to the would-be collaborators that it might be easier to obtain funding for a feature film—'a sign of the times', comments Rose. And so the *Golddiggers* project came about.

Film seemed an appropriate vehicle for the exploration of the epic form, which had been one of the attractions of opera. The role of the heroine was crucial to their planned scenario, Rose said, where the woman or women, as was finally the case, moved from peripheral to central roles. Julie Christie's early interest in appearing in the

film allowed the part of Ruby, one of the two heroines, to be written with reference to parts she had already played, most notably Lara in *Dr Zhivago*. The critique of the iconic image, the perfect face, could thus be developed fully, explained Rose. The other heroine, Celeste, is a working girl, who becomes an investigator in true Chandler style, of the mysterious processes of capital which she begins to become aware surround her.

Both with a history as visual and performance artists, Sally and Rose found themselves intrigued with the possibility of using a medium which would supposedly ensure the work a wide, perhaps even mass, audience, something the visual arts usually denied. The opportunity of ensuring the work's permanence was also attractive to artists who had been used to the transitory quality of performance work. Rose pointed out that, interestingly, since the making of *Golddiggers* Laurie Anderson and Robert Wilson have both made that elusive breakthrough into the world of big money and popular acclaim, the one with a Warner Brothers recording contract, the other with a production at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. It remains to be seen, however, especially in the case of Laurie Anderson, how long this high profile can be maintained. Rose was anxious to restate the value she still places on transitory work such as performance, which although impermanent, remains with the viewer as a memory trace, thus becoming part of the collective unconscious. She had been pleased to discover that many viewers of *The Golddiggers* said they had dreamed about it afterwards, sometimes several times, working and reworking its images in the unconscious.

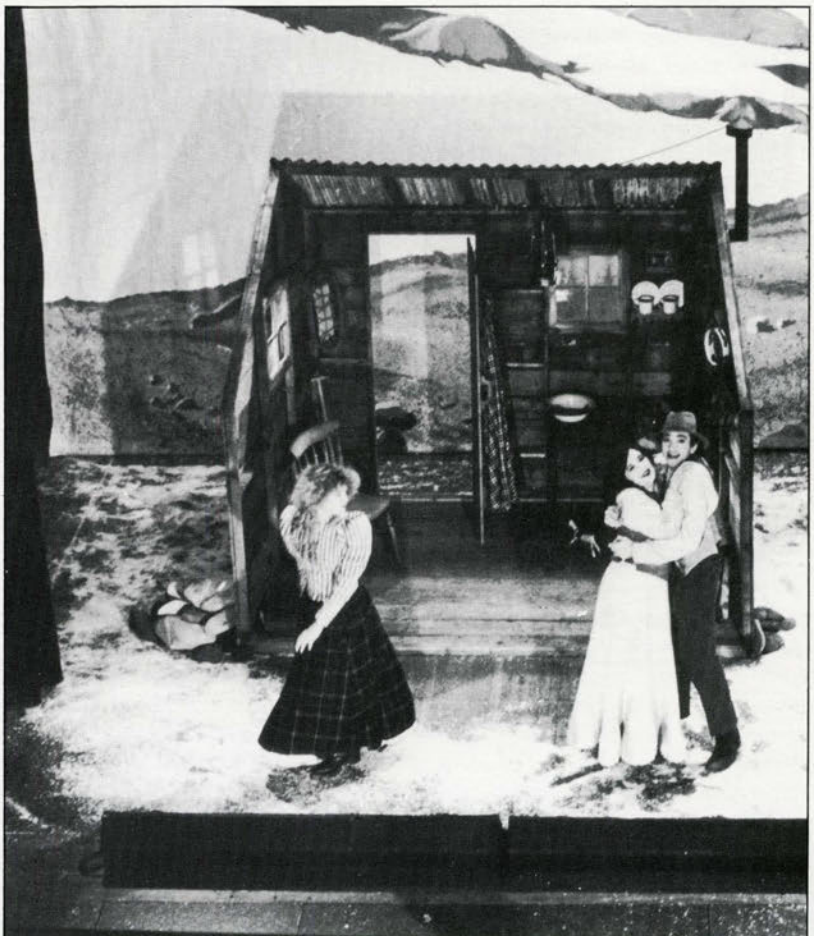
Any contemplation of the film makes clear that much of its 'look' is designed to refer to various film genres—the ball scene, the escape on horseback, the dark city streets. Some scenes also recall silent films in the use of image both for its narrative and its symbolic qualities. In one scene, Julie Christie's face, shot in close up, is shown to have been painted to look like Lillian Gish as Ruby finds clues to her past in the history of the cinema. The film was cast mainly from artists, performers and dancers with whom Sally and Rose had worked in the past. This common history allowed for a more relaxed and experimental working method, and many elements of the 'performance

skills'—dance, movement, group work etc—are evident in the 'look' of the finished film. Some of its most 'surreal' qualities—the use of the chorus of men, for example, are strongly linked to the quality of performance art.

*The Golddiggers*, of course, although drawing on many of the elements of Sally and Rose's performance work does not include them in its cast. Rather, in making the film, Rose explained, they had had to find ways of allying their practice as artists with the methods of an industry organised to work on a large scale. One area in which they had not adopted the industry 'team' approach was in editing the film. Here, in a process which lasted more than a year, Sally as editor and Rose as her assistant, determined many of the film's most particular qualities—the length and pacing of shots, the use of repetition of a shot or sequence, the overall shape of the film. The end result has often been called 'un-British', and compared instead with French or Spanish films, such as those of Bunuel. Rose explained this by the film's carefully controlled and contrived use of images, aided by the visual artists' particular consciousness of the power

such images possess. Rose regrets the suspicion with which such use of imagery is often regarded in this country, suspecting that it might be rooted in the general distrust of the visual arts manifest in such a literary culture. Some of the very hostile criticisms which the film received in the press and on television might also be rooted in this fear, essentially a fear of being given space to think.

Rose was pleased that in some ways making the film represented a process of coming full circle—for much of the earlier work on which she had collaborated with Sally had been influenced by films. It was exciting now to have let loose into the world a new work, a film which, Rose said she had been interested to note, had seemed different each time she had viewed it, picking up something at every screening from the different natures of its audiences. Thus an apparently fixed process and product—the feature film and its making—was itself subject to manifestations of change much as performance had been, and the contribution of the audience, the basis of the alchemy of all live work, remained essential. ■



Still from *The Golddiggers*

*A series of stimulating challenges to our thinking about art have been recently thrown down by Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky, in a series of lectures which have almost amounted to performances. CATHY COURTNEY reports:*

During his recent talk at the Riverside Studios Tarkovsky was enjoyably tough on his audience, taking it to task for its lack of 'spirituality'. Indeed, he questioned whether we had grasped the meaning of the word at all. There was a delicious incongruity as Tarkovsky's sweeping statements, writing off most of the artistic achievements of Western civilisation, were translated for us by the unruffled Irina Kirilova's dexterous command of both languages. Down from Cambridge, dressed in a smart oatmeal suit, pearl earrings and necklace, she looked and sounded remarkable like a member of the Royal Family (albeit an unusually intelligent one). When she repeated Tarkovsky's directions to 'Take Eastern Art... 'Take Classical art' one had visions of Princess Anne commanding her tardy table staff. Clearly one's previous thinking was misguided and quite inadequate for the task in hand and one had better shape up. The talk was delivered swiftly, rather like a barrage of shot-guns, the humour was black and the content hard-hitting. What was most fascinating was that during question time at the end no one put up any defence for Western artists.

Tarkovsky displayed an unswerving vision of the role of the artist and of art. Anyone attempting to work outside this boundary was not in fact an artist since he or she would be addressing the wrong problems. Tarkovsky and his wife, Larissa, have recently chosen exile from their homeland, a decision made all the more painful since the Soviet authorities have, so far, refused to allow their thirteen-year-old son to join them. Whilst acknowledging the value of freedoms and guarantees found in Western democracies, Tarkovsky perceives that this freedom at the same time emasculates the West's perception of spirituality and deprives man of faith or belief in anything other than himself. Paradoxically, there can be greater freedom within a totalitarian system where one is forced to confront what is permanent within oneself. The public loneliness and isolation of Westerners might be contrasted with the

inner certainties of the East.

Tarkovsky's assurance of vision seems very Russian and itself has dogmatic aspects of totalitarianism. Equally, the flaws which he berates in an art 'industry' drowning in commerce are undoubtedly there. But there seems to be no room for deviation from the true path. Tarkovsky is certain that life has meaning, that man was created in God's image and that the question which the artist must constantly and directly confront is 'What is the meaning of life?' Anyone who explores territory other than this is necessarily a person without spirituality and, therefore, not an artist. Apparently Picasso made the mistake of delving into other problems, of attempting to show man among men. Preoccupied with the external rhythms of life, he was 'a sociologist to his bone marrow'. Lacking spirituality, Picasso fails to meet Tarkovsky's criterion. It's not really surprising since, in his view, all Western art from the Renaissance onwards has been essentially selfish and egotistical. Music, too, has fallen foul of the way and suffers misguided intentions. 'Obviously I don't want to be sweeping, in Western music there are some great names, Bach for instance...but then Bach was an exception.'

The paradigm is the fourteenth-century icon painter who, instead of concerning himself with his own role as a painter saw himself as primarily praising and serving God. His absence of pride and arrogance is emphasised by the fact that the icons were unsigned. Similarly, Eastern music and its disciplines reverses the virtuoso approach, with its aims of disappearance and dissolution—'the phenomenon of spiritual indrawing'. However, the danger signs are clear; the East is shifting towards Western sensibilities and the West towards the void.

To some extent Tarkovsky embodies the divide between East and West. Engagingly prefacing his condemnations with 'Of course I don't want to belittle X's achievements', he accuses himself too and admits guilt. His wholesale dismissal of contemporary

art does leave the road marvellously clear; if the powerful forces at work in the cinema have proved catastrophic—'well, so much for the cinema'. But the picture is gloomy and urgent. Since contemporary humanity is under greater pressure than ever before it is no time to lose our spirituality. Even in democracies we feel as if we've lost control of our lives and have no interest in tomorrow. We have reached a state where good manners demand social indifference. Tarkovsky sees it as the artist's responsibility to articulate what is within his tongueless public rather than to create spiritual and moral frameworks which must be imposed. Since humans are made 'in God's image, the creative and spiritual instincts can be quarried from Everyman. This can best be done through a realism which assesses both the physical and spiritual qualities of mankind. There is only one path for the artist—he must serve his talent. In order to do this he needs to explain what he lives for, and to define certain spiritual and moral ideals which will enable him to tend to his public correctly.

It was refreshing to hear somebody who is prepared to strike out and declare his dissatisfaction with established heroes, who is willing to chastise young artists who set equal store by fame and money as they do by artistic concerns and are quite prepared to prostitute their talent. He wasn't saying anything particularly new, yet Tarkovsky's inflexible exaggerated position inevitably has an alienating effect too. Declaring that 'artists have never had it so good'—this being one of the main problems—he was unable to resolve the problems of how an artist should eat once he had turned his back on public success. The questions, of course, remained unsolved. The West's spirituality must come from within itself; any imposition of Eastern disciplines could become a form of genocide. And, who knows, we may find that our spirituality has been expressed all along, though maybe in less lofty forms than Tarkovsky seems to allow.



# IN THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE OF LOVE

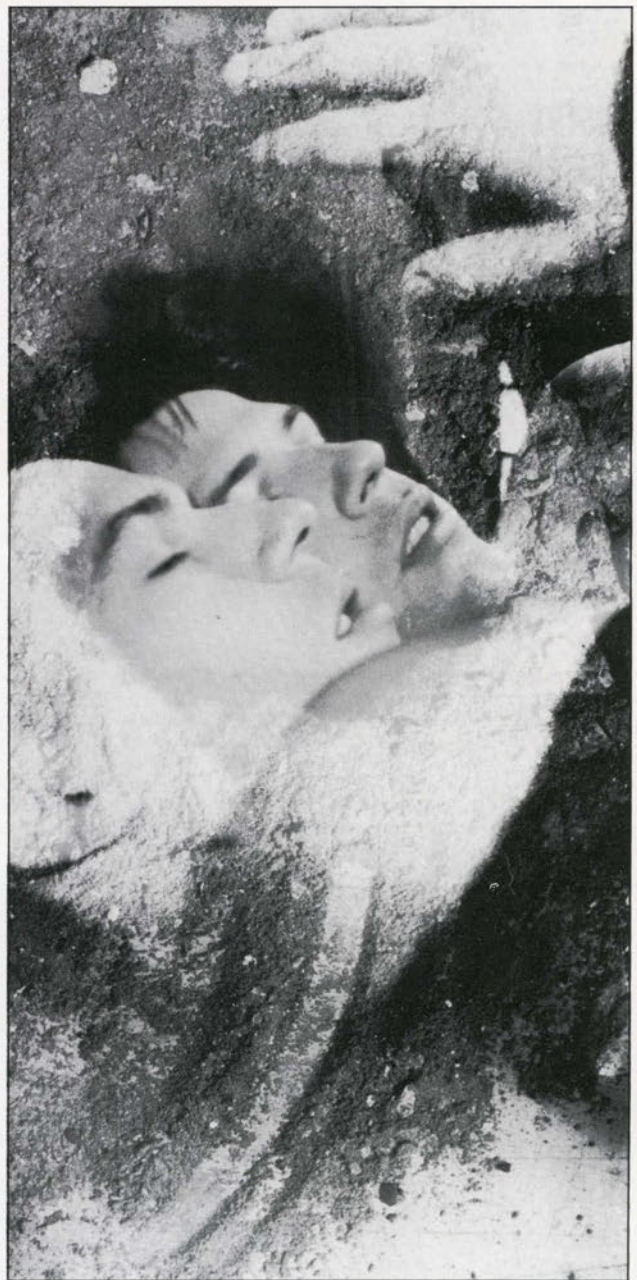
**Bataille, the sexual act and beyond.**

In September at the Bloomsbury Theatre the festival 'Violent Silence' celebrates the life and work of Georges Bataille. Twenty years after his death, Bataille's ideas are only now beginning to receive the recognition they deserve in the English-speaking world. The novels *Story of the Eye*, *Blue of Noon* and *L'Abbe C* are all that are currently in print in English, although translations of *My Mother* and two volumes of theoretical writings, *Eroticism* and *Literature and Evil* have been available in the past. However, the vast proportion of his philosophical writing, including *L'Experience interieure*, *Sur Nietzsche* and his economic theory, *La Part maudite*, remain unpublished in translation.

Although initially involved in a brief and turbulent liaison with the Surrealists, in which he fell out with Andre Breton, Bataille's writing remains in many ways unclassifiable. Often first identified as the author of erotic novels, Bataille's work in fact goes beyond this narrow definition, treating religion, anthropology, politics, art, economics, history and literary criticism. He is unique in his complex and uncompromising examination of sensuality, eroticism and death and in his ambition to 'totalise' human experience and culture.

Bataille's contribution to twentieth-century culture and ideas is seminal: Foucault said of Bataille's death that it had 'sent us the pure transgression of his texts'.

KEN HOLLINGS and ROBERTA GRAHAM are currently working together on a performance to be included in the 'Violent Silence' event. They have also collaborated on the following piece which forms the basis of a series of lectures/performances to be given later this year.



## DARKNESS

I do not distinguish between freedom and sexual freedom because deprived sexuality is the only kind produced independently of conscious ideological determinations, the only one that results from a free play of bodies and images, impossible to justify rationally... Because rational thought can conceive of neither disorder nor freedom, and only symbolic thought can, it is necessary to pass from a general concept that intellectual mechanisms empty of meaning to a single irrational symbol. *Ecrits Posthumes, 1922-1940.*

Lucidity excludes desire (or kills it, I don't know); it dominates what remains. *L'Impossible.*

Night falls, certainly, but in the exacerbation of desire. *L'Experience interieure.*

The death of Georges Bataille placed a language, already corrupted by its own limits, in a state of duress from which it can never free itself. The sexual act forces language onto the threshold of direct experience – which is language's own limit – and in so doing opens a dark wound in our consciousness. The eroticism expressed in Bataille's writing springs directly from this inescapable awareness. Beyond it there is only the violent flux of our own sexual experience through which corruption is revealed as coherence in the last throes of its being. Experience offers the possibility of communication without coherence, something which was termed in *Eroticism* as 'continuity': a condition in which the individual is opened up and exposed in one disruptive moment.

The sexual act poses a threat to our being because it places no limit on experience. During the act, the body no longer has limit or definition: it is dissolved into a storm of sensations which are violently superimposed and fluctuating. The effect that this has upon our consciousness can only be expressed negatively: in terms of exclusion and absence. The contemplation of the sexual act begins and ends in darkness and silence because it is contained by a law of exclusion which operates at the extreme limits of language and lucidity. In this darkness lies the beginning of a sexual knowledge which responds to the disruptive superimposition and confluence of desire and horror, affirmation and destruction. It is a response which lays waste and pollutes the purity of a historically dominant sexuality which, cleansed by social and cultural discourse, has been absorbed and rigidly defined by language.

Darkness therefore is neither static nor immutable: it is the fiercest expression of conflict. However, it does not resolve this conflict in expressing it, but affirms it. Since to resolve is finally to dominate and conserve meaning through exclusion, darkness is the denial of resolution. Seen in terms of social order, resolution establishes an economics of experience in which the sexual act is rationalised out of existence. It is replaced by sexual transaction which comprises every practise – including social behaviour, language, representation – which renders sexual experience safe without banishing it completely. Whilst the act itself is performed in isolation, secrecy and silence, sexual transaction is socially pervasive. It helps regulate desire within a regime of production and consumption, giving it value by finally transforming it into work and exchange. Through this process it confers an identity upon us which the sexual act can only annihilate.

This identity is constructed out of exchange and conservation, manifested in the deployment of commodities and energy, in which the act and transaction must inevitably oppose each other. This opposition also marks the origins of Bataille's philosophic inquiry into eroticism.

As language, consciousness and action can never establish a unity, sexual experience must by necessity be approached obliquely. In this respect Bataille utilised anthropology, literary criticism, history, economics and mysticism, all of which were radically transformed by their contact with the

dark areas of sexual experience which had been forcibly placed outside discourse. This transformation exerts an influence which reaches far beyond Bataille's writings. History habitually blunts the effects of influence by incorporating them within the homogenising processes inherent in our culture. Bataille's death, however, has not rendered his writings subject to this fate. Instead it endowed them with a profoundly disruptive power. The sexual act has been so closely circumscribed and defined by those processes implicit in social and cultural discourse that have rejected it, that its absence is clearly discernable. Eroticism is thus the extreme embodiment of an absence which Bataille's writings dramatised and expressed in terms of violence. As such, they constitute a break with the rationality of socially imposed identity. This is entirely appropriate to an age in which action has been refined into the purest dynamism of the gesture.

The gesture asserts itself through the rejection of language and logic. It found one of its most audacious and perceptive definitions at the beginning of this century when the Parisian journalist Laurent Tailhade said of a Black International bomb attack: 'What do a few human lives matter, *'Si le geste est beau?'*

Bataille, in linking gesture to the violence of transgression and its discursive relationship with limit, reformulated them in terms of the social convulsions implicit in the art of sacrifice. Giving such precise form and meaning to violence affirms eroticism's status as ritual and makes it overflow all social boundaries. At a meeting of the secret society which he co-founded with Klossowski and Waldberg in the late thirties, Bataille called for 'an irrevocable ritual gesture – the enactment of a voluntary human sacrifice'.

Such a declaration has an optimistic, naive certainty to it which provokes both laughter and an uneasy sense of the impossible. Although doomed to failure, it at least trivialises language's power. It is also symptomatic of a writer who never permitted his work to be reduced to an endless and hopelessly inadequate representation of sexual experience which is the fate of so much of our literature.

As a consequence Bataille's writing forbids interpretation by constantly obliging us to go beyond it. This leads us to a direct confrontation with the locked muscles, the cracking bones and the volatile communication expressed in the dark sacrifice of the sexual act itself.

## NUDITY

But true nudity is bitter and maternal, silently white and fecal, like a cowshed; it is the nakedness of the bacchanthe with pricks between her lips and legs; it is the ultimate terrestrial truth, both pithiatic and desiring to remain hidden. This truth like all Gods with their dying eyes open, always accepts condemnation. *Le Petit Nudity is only death, and the most tender kisses have the after-taste of the rat. L'Impossible*  
It was a question of confounding the human spirit



and idealism with something *base*, to the extent that one recognised that the superior principles were irrelevant. *L'Anus solaire*

Nudity is not a finite or absolute state: to be stripped naked is an experience which perpetually exceeds itself. The tearing away of clothing which exposes the flesh becomes a tearing away at the flesh itself. Naked, our being is laid open before the material reality of the body; but this body is no longer the idealised flesh handed down to us by a history of representation. The body is divested of the image of itself; an image which is static, unmarked and ideal and which confers value upon existence. In being stripped, the flesh ceases to be a sexual commodity; that is, a product of the social ordering of the physical presence in which identity remains intact and unviolated. The sexual commodity is the law of conservation, production and consumption made flesh. It is the imposition of history, and it converts our skin into a boundary which both contains and conceals us.

True nakedness is a confrontation with the charnal house of the body: the knowledge of physical mortality and frailty. This knowledge exposes us to unrelenting risk and places us in a state of complete vulnerability which exists prior to humiliation, torture or sacrifice: the experience of nakedness has been employed as a standard intimidation technique in prison cells throughout the world. Without the brutal horrors to be discovered within nudity, tenderness can be nothing but the pale and distant reflection of spiritual fear.

Being so close to death, the naked body will always be perceived as being on the point of embracing its own corruption. It is a permanent reminder of decay and generates a contagion in which lubricity reaches an unparalleled climax. Corruption is the stimulus of extreme licence and exposes our codes of sexual morality as the mere contours of desire and disgust. Putrefaction shows the body in disorder and sets itself against the rigid structures of socially regulated behaviour so violently that these structures will inevitably collapse. Bataille discovered the clearest manifestation of this socially destructive principle in the rituals of several oceanic cultures where a whole community would react to the death of their chief by entering into a prolonged period of frenzy. They gave themselves over to murder, looting, arson and sexual excess, continuing to do so until the decaying flesh had fallen away from the dead chief's bones. At this point normal patterns of behaviour reasserted themselves.

Social codes and discourse can accommodate the bare bones stripped of all flesh and can even endow them with a certain power. This implies that the breakdown of order and the degeneration into frenzy are not predominantly motivated by the experience of death, but by a specific perception of the body which is normally suppressed. Thus, putrefaction, in revealing the body to be unstable and base matter, deprives us of our sense of cohesive and inviolate identity. The artifice of propriety is torn apart: our flesh becomes dirt, and we actively embrace its foulness. In this excess the body's limit is transgressed, and it is exposed as a liquefied flux of blood, urine, tears, sperm, sweat and excrement.

Nudity dramatises to the point of destruction the duality of discontinuous being by throwing it into violent conflict with itself. In its purest state, true nudity is the birth of the perverse, a phenomenon which fragments and multiplies itself into any number of specific practices which arouse social condemnation. It is possible, however, to glimpse the perverse, unfixated and denying the imposition of meaning, refracted at random through various texts and events.

There is, for example, the entry in Richard Meinertzhagen's *Kenya Diary (1902-1906)* in which he describes, how, as a young army officer, he ordered the massacre of an entire village after it was discovered that they had captured a white

colonialist, staked him out in public view and then taken it in turns to urinate in his face until he was drowned. His body was found just prior to the massacre, stripped naked, disembowelled, mutilated and covered with excrement. The actions of both parties in the committing of these atrocities can hardly be said to be motivated by simple aggression or the need for vengeance. It is impossible to find a limit to the responses which this account provokes: it bears the mark of a frenzy initiated by the violation of the body's order and sanctity which, like the stripping of the flesh, must perpetually exceed itself.

This experience is reflected in Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne'; a poem in which, over a series of carefully wrought stanzas, the image of a woman in the throes of sexual delirium is superimposed over a description of a cadaver rotting by the roadside in the summer heat. What begins as an intimate conversation with his lover becomes a passionate exultation in the inevitable corruption and decay of her body. Here the flesh becomes alive with larval insect life and graveyard vermin which both bite and kiss as they burrow into the corpse. A remarkable and unique text, produced by a man haunted by a traumatised morality; it is the expression of an erotic excess in which the body, fertile but doomed, is eternally laid bare.

## PENETRATION

The act of violence that deprives the creature of its limited particularity and bestows on it the limitless infinite nature of sacred things is with its profound logic an intentional one. It is intentional like the act of the man who lays bare, desires and wants to penetrate his victims. *L'Erotisme*

I imagine a nail of great length and her nudity. Her movements transported in fire makes me reel physically, and the nail that I drive into her, I cannot leave there! *L'Impossible*

Behind the curtains, the front room of the shop with its stone tiled floor was invitingly cool. Two freshly slaughtered lambs, hanging by their feet, were still slowly leaking blood; on the chopping block were some brains and large bones whose pearly white protuberances had an aggressive sort of nudity. *L'Abbe C*



Erotic experience demands the total submission of the self to the immediate. By being forced into the present, physical sensation provokes a crisis of awareness in which consciousness inevitably exhausts and squanders itself. It is effectively displaced by the impossibility of grasping direct experience whilst being opened up to it. Eroticism is therefore a surrendering of the self to fear – but it is also an assertion of the will.

For an act to be decisive it must involve a certain amount of cruelty; that is, a complete disregard for the consequences. Guilt, remorse or

pleasure – all that constitute the 'sense' of an experience – exist solely in the future. Since they can only confer meaning, the intensity of the moment renders them meaningless. The convulsions of the sexual act lay waste to everything but the deliberate commitment to an experience which violates the self. Fear and assertion exist together in that one moment beyond which there is nothing: no expectation, no object and no safety.

To reduce this experience to a series of physical components is both to limit and denature it. Whole symbol systems have been constructed out of the presence or absence of the phallus, the vagina, seminal fluid, blood and the anus. However, in granting significance to human sexual anatomy through such systematic interpretative configurations, they are deprived of much of their power: the pursuit of a universalised order of meaning can only reduce and constrict. Erotic experience thus becomes congruent with the limits of the interpretative system imposed upon it. Most importantly the violence of the experience will be excluded from this relationship, since action is rendered subservient to the object and its place within the system. Violence, however, will not remain mute, although ordinary language cannot express it. Only in the dislocated logic, the limitless and enigmatic correspondences of metaphor can violence find its voice.

Metaphor dramatises experience by not being subject to the reductive power of the intellect. By its very nature it cannot universalise.

Penetration, although central to procreation, is a mere fragment of erotic experience: it is not always present or even necessary. It can represent, however, a powerful metaphor for the decisive and irreversible commitment to act. Penetration is a stimulus to cruelty, it expresses the trauma of immediacy. As a metaphor, penetration is refracted and transformed throughout Bataille's texts and embodies an eroticism of laceration in which the body is opened up and the flesh violated. The piercing or the tearing out of the eye, the butcher's hacking away at meat to expose the bone beneath and the lover's desire to drive sharp nails into the loved one's flesh all bring penetration close to murder. Casual, instinctive, deliberate or compulsive, these actions all affirm the possibilities which correspond to the crisis of fear and assertion. All certainty is lost.

Action transgresses all limits through the excesses of the violence it releases and, in so doing, places consciousness in a condition of crisis. A dark fissure opens up in experience, and the self is lost within it: the physical dynamics of penetration are transformed into the liquefying and overflowing metaphor of the wound. This marks consciousness indelibly with both terror and intense pleasure and tears open all rational responses to action. All the contradictions inherent in commitment and the clash of sensations provoked by action are expressed in the open wound which throws conflict into a state of limitless play.

The perpetually open wound is the violence of direct experience in its most tragic aspect. Its origins as a metaphor are complex and date back to – and beyond – theosophic conceptions of ecstasy and sacrifice. Out of it flow the fluids of sexual excess through which the trembling of the body and the closed, upturned eyes are experienced in the disruption of our senses. Penetration, sacrifice and murder place no limit on action: they are the fullest realisation of thought and sensation. Severed from their consequences, denying all possibility of survival, decisive yet torn by conflict, they indicate a point at which deliberate transgression gives way to the condition of absolute freedom.

## SACRIFICE

Hence love is based on a desire to live in anguish in the presence of an object of such high worth that the heart cannot bear to contemplate losing it. The fever of the senses is not a desire to die.

Nor is love the desire to lose but the desire to live in fear of possible loss, with the beloved holding the lover on the very threshold of a swoon. At that price alone can we feel the violence of rapture before the beloved. *L'Erotisme*

The sacrifice that we consume is distinguished from others in that he who executes the rite is affected by the sacrifice himself; he succumbs to it and loses himself along with his victim. *L'Experience interieure*



Anguish is the fear of loss, the expression of the desire to possess. Recalcitrance in the face of communication stimulates desire as well as fear. Acknowledge the desire to possess and suddenly anguish turns to ecstasy. *L'Experience interieure*

What finally frightens you and throws you into disorder is the knowledge that desire makes you its victim. In becoming an object of desire you become flesh, without identity and without meaning. In extreme forms of erotic experience, you become meat. Stripped of the identity imposed upon you by social and cultural discourse, there is nothing within which you can contain or preserve yourself. Possessed by desire, the individual is denied further recourse to exchange or transaction. Desire throws identity into turmoil: you cannot buy your way out.

The object of desire itself possesses the senses like a nervous disease. Desire inhabits – takes possession of – the body by subjugating it to the demands of intense need. The sexual act is a moment of total possession, rendered all the more extreme in its passion by the fear of loss. The possibility of ruinous loss throws the individual into disequilibrium because it destroys the precise balance of exchange and consumption which supports identity. Within any social order founded upon the conservation of objects, resources, energy and experience to be set against future transactions, deprivation becomes a source of real anguish.

True desire exists in the inescapable presence of unbearable loss. It invests the object with such high value that its absence becomes painful. The fear of this possible loss demands that the object of desire be experienced to the point of exhaustion. Debauchery is the affirmation of possession. It demands a total outlay of the self. This total outlay enters into a complex relationship with loss which carries over into the general economic ordering of behaviour. However, both are essentially anti-social in nature as their existence is explicitly hostile to the principles of conservation.

This hostility can be formulated in terms of sacrifice; an act of conscious and ruthless devastation with no other aim than its own completion. The sacrifice of objects, animals and humans endows them with a higher worth than that imposed by normal patterns of production and consumption. Impending destruction elevates them above mere exchange. This evanescent quality exhausts the order of values inherent in the society in which the sacrifice takes place. The shattering of objects, the spilling of blood and the tearing open of the flesh provoke a delirium which

is not denatured for having been considered in terms of outlay and conservation. Sacrifice bestows a value beyond value: the point at which desire and its object meet. It provides a violent correlative to the sexual act. In this respect it indicates a movement from the purely instinctual to the deliberate which is dependent upon excessive indulgence rather than self-denial: it will as a consequence infect an entire community.

The transitions involved, however, are not possible outside an economic system. Bataille traces a history of eroticism which parallels and is dependent upon a history of economic activity and its relation to work. It details the separation of eroticism and work from the reproductive urges of animal sex. This separation is conditioned by the awareness and fear of death as loss and absence to which the responses of eroticism and work are markedly divergent. Where work conserves and regulates human energy, eroticism squanders and exhausts it: they exclude and interpenetrate each other in a play of limit and transgression.

Like sacrifice, work and eroticism are highly organised forms of activity which require preparations through which desire is granted a presence within the cultural life of a society. In this respect Bataille is correct in describing eroticism from a shifting series of historical perspectives. As a cultural product, eroticism has no fixed or established conventions: as a social phenomenon based on fluctuations of desire and horror, it perpetually changes. However, in being linked to work and a system of production and consumption, eroticism's historical presence is severely conditioned by them. Production and consumption structure history in terms of progress and it is hard not to consider a history of eroticism from the vantage point of some idea of advancement. To speak today of sacrifice as it relates to the sexual act is to invert such a conception. It exposes an industrial society's nostalgia for some form of pre-capitalist culture based on a utopian intra-uterine life of desire and emphasises its falsity. It negates any dream that remains of a fall from sexual grace which can be regained by a social and cultural progression towards the eradication of licence. Instead sacrifice reveals the origins of a harsh and delirious excess.

## VIOLENCE

Only literature could escape the game of the transgression of the law, without which the law would have no meaning independent of an order to be created. Literature cannot assume the task of ordering collective necessity. . . . Literature, in fact, like transgression of the moral order, is dangerous. *Literature and Evil*

But silence cannot do away with the things that language cannot state. Violence is as stubbornly there just as much as death, and if language cheats to conceal universal annihilation, the placid work of time, language alone suffers, language is the poorer, not time and violence.

### *L'Erotisme*

If one were to ascribe me a place within the history of thought, it would be, I believe, for having discerned the effects, within our lives, of the moments at which discursive reality disappears, and for having drawn from the description of these effects a disappearing light: this light may be blinding, but it also announces the opacity of the night; it announces only the night. *Oeuvres complètes*

Violence exists in the moment when the eye turns upwards into the head, when inversion is complete and total. The darkness of the upturned eye is not the absence of light but the process of seeing taken to its limit. It is therefore impossible to speak of a conflict between darkness and light but rather a thorough derangement of the senses. The violence of this experience constitutes the end of the eternal separation of the ideal from the base and the pure from the polluted. They are no longer in opposition to each other; their relationship is inverted. Inversion transcends opposition; conflict is not resolved but placed in a state of play within which

no limit is imposed upon desire: all that violates the sensibilities becomes an intense delight. To desire that which is base, deprived on degrading is an act of revolt without aim or reason.

Beyond sense and logic and the divisions they foster within our experience there is the severe disequilibrium of the senses which disrupts and holds sway over consciousness. In Bataille's fiction this imbalance takes full possession of the characters, consuming them both physically and emotionally. Anguish, desire and fear provoke a delirium in which bodies shake and convulse, becoming prey to fever and sensations of extreme cold. Simultaneously awareness is heightened and intensified to almost painful levels of clarity. Stark correspondences are established between this turbulence and the malevolent skies under which the figures in Bataille's fiction move. At times the firmament is a vast dome of unending darkness which is terrifying in its unchanging monotony, at others it becomes one of a glaring, almost unbearable light which infuses the scenes being acted out beneath it. Most often it is a sky violently agitated by a howling storm: at night the lightning flashes in the darkness. This flash, as it is described by the un-named narrator of 'Histoire des rats', the first section of *L'Impossible*, is an instantaneous moment of inversion. The lightning and the night sky illuminate and obscure each other simultaneously. The moment is gratuitous and random, following the dictates of its own reason. Like the gesture, it rejects common language and conventional logic, not by negating them but by giving free play to the conflicts which they engender. Through inversion, experience is rendered both limitless and tragic at that moment when subject and object have vanished; when it is no longer possible to see who is speaking. In the intensity of sexual experience inversion occurs when the voice becomes an exhalation of breath, a transition which releases the full power to communicate. It is communication made total.

An approach to this transition through language, however oblique, creates a vocabulary of elision, superimposition and unqualified contradiction. They indicate a totality of experience even if ultimately they cannot replace it or articulate it fully.

Bataille employs a large number of terms and expressions without limiting their meaning through precise definition: they become viscous, and their power to communicate stems from their perpetual flow, and regrouping. This is most apparent in his theoretical writings which offer a virtually unlimited series of points of departure rather than a cohesive linear argument. Similarly, a whole study could be made of the use of simile in Bataille's fiction where normally unrelated images strain and buckle under the pressure of being linked together in unstable union. By overturning systems of meaning in which an exclusive definition is guaranteed, Bataille releases the violence of thought. No longer abstracted or contained, thought embraces sensation and becomes debased and polluted. Darkness and light are suddenly and instantaneously reversed.

Perhaps there is nothing beyond this violence except the will to endure and survive it, however much it may alter or disrupt. Language exists permanently on the edge of a state of collapse beyond which there is the eternal possibility of an experience freed from division and the constraints of a system of relative values and meanings. Order fragments consciousness, but the annihilation of order is not enough and never will be enough: that is merely a return to some mythical state of grace, a cellular, animal awareness. The inversion of order excites not only violence – that is the derangement of the senses – but also the consciousness of that violence. The play of transgression and limit in this respect is crucial. The limit which is broken without a thought means nothing and nullifies transgression. There is no ideal, no code, no ultimate aim except revolt for its own sake: that is an assertion of the self which is at once dark, violent and irrevocable. ■



# PERFORMANCE

■ FEATURES ■ NEWS ■ REVIEWS ■ INFORMATION ■

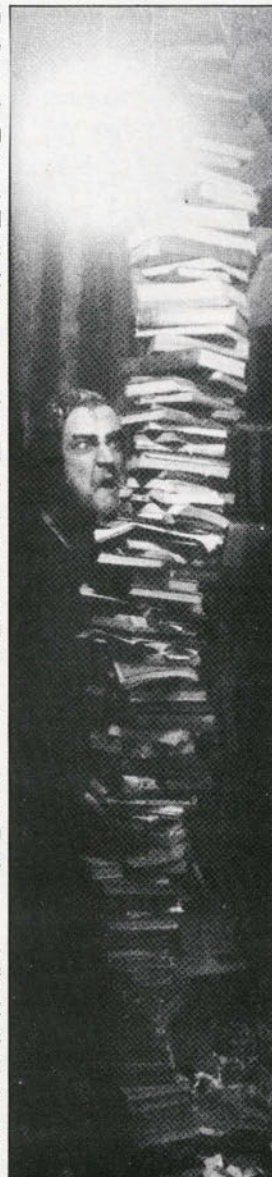
**Violent Silence.** Subtitled Acts of Transgression, is a festival celebrating the work of Georges Bataille, (see article 'The Slaughterhouse of Love' this issue) organised by Paul Buck and Roger Ely, and taking place at the Bloomsbury Theatre from **September 25-29**. Featuring John Maybury, Derek Jarman, Marc Almond, Steven Dvoskin, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Michael Clark, Roger Ely, Roberta Graham, Ken Hollings, Terence Sellers, and Last Few Days in a mixture of performance, film, music and poetry, this will be the first major acknowledgement of Bataille's work in this country, and promises to be an intriguing and quite possibly highly controversial event. **Info from Roger Ely on 01 515 6542**

**Zap Club** Grand opening of the new 7 day-a week performance and mixed media nightclub in Brighton. In this issue Neil Butler talks about his aims and intentions. Opening night is **September 21**—performances still to be announced, but there is promised a display of performance surfing by Ivan Reich and John Brown (See Perf) Zap are also organising a special event at Brighton Polytechnic on September 27 with Ivor Cutler, the Wild Wigglers, Theatre of the Bleeding Obelisk and Ian Smith. **Info from Neil Butler on 0273 671545.**

*Last Chance* to catch one of the eventful Live Works on the South Bank. Combined with the GLC's incredible multi-cultural summer festival, the live visual art shows outside the Hayward have been gaining a wide audience. On **September 15**, British events perform in the afternoon, with P.D.Burwell's 'Sketches of what might have been' is in the evening. Details from **Jennifer Walwin on 01 629 9495**

**Forkbeard Fantasy** make one of their rare visits to London from **October 17-21** with 'The Uncanny Tale of Holcombe Rogus, Investigative Journalist and Ghost Hunter, whose daring research earlier this year led to his mysterious and still unsolved Vanishing' or in short 'Ghosts'. 'It shot forth, gibbering from the ancient four poster camp bed' and 'Recent Investigations suggest that Rogus may be trapped in some form of limbo, peopled by spirits who cannot agree on who is dead or why' are but two extracts from the show by the company who describe themselves as 'comic visual theatre', and are performing at Oval House

Also at Oval house is the Womens Theatre Group in 'Pax' from **Sept. 26-30**, with Anna Furse of Bloodgroup who will also be performing 'Ventriloquies' with Max Eastley, and from **October 3-7** Natasha Morgan's Thats Not It company in 'An Independent Woman'. **Info on 01 735 2786**



"Doormat the butler brought me some bedtime reading."

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**New Instruments/New Music Festival** at the London Musicians Collective runs from **September 6-9** Water, air, steam, wind powered instruments, baliphones, film cannister and a dog named Horlicks, will all be playing in this festival, which will be concentrating on 'invented instruments. Naturally the Bow Gamelan Ensemble's industrial music will be featured—other performers include Hugh Davies, Max Eastley, Hans-Karten Raeke, Sylvia Hallet, Sturat Jones, Bendle, The Logos Duo (ex The Door and The Window), Peter Appleton, Will Menter, David Sawyer, Paul Shearsmith, (with the dog, Horlicks) and a new instrument Supergroup. Throughout the festival there will be an installation by David Wheeler of IOU. **Info from 01 722 0456.**

**The Edinburgh Festival** is always impossible to list because it would fill this magazine. But during and beyond the festival is running a visual art show that 'has been seen by more people in America than any other work of art by a living artist'. For the first time ever Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party has been transported in its entirety, a complex monolith celebrating women's achievements that was jointly created by 40 women and men, and is on show at the Victoria Hall, Edinburgh. **Info on 031 225 1768**

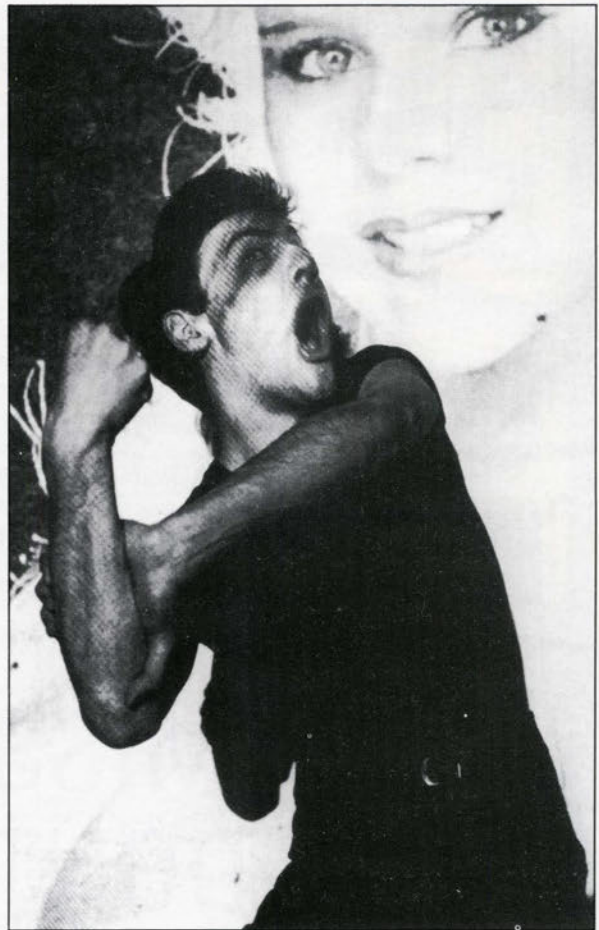
**The Arifuku Kagura Company** from Japan, 'the ancient and magnificent ritual dance drama which preceded and influenced better-known theatre forms such as Noh, is coming to London as part of the World Arts Season. The fifteen member company comes from a small village in Japan in an area which where over 130 Kagura troupes are based, and which 'demonstrate to the spectator the power of the gods' through depiction of deities and mythical beasts, including a fire-breathing serpent. Performances at Bloomsbury Theatre. **Info on Arts Worldwide 01 359 5256**

**The Midland Group Performance Platform**, in Nottigham is absolutely vital for those remotely concerned with performance art in this country. Established artists show work in a festival which runs alongside the platform, which consists of a selection new and relatively unknown artists. Selection this year is by performance artists Silvia Ziraneck and Editor of this magazine., Rob La Frenais. There will be a forum, with a discussion on key issues concerning performance, and the chance to question the artists about their work. The festival, which includes performances by Roberta Graham, Rose English, Silvia Ziraneck, and Max Eastley, installations by Robert Ayres, Kevin West and Max Eastley, and cabaret by the Omelette Broadcasting Corporation and Crazy Legs Breakdance Crew, runs from **October 11-14** (with the platform and forums on **October 13-14**). Also coming up at the Midland Group are Industrial and Domestic Theatre Contractors (**October 19-20**), Natasha Morgan's Thats Not It (**October 19-20**), and Theatre de Complicite (**October 26-27**) **Info on 0602 582636.**

**New Contemporaries at the ICA** Film, video, and performance as emerging from Britains art schools. Performances include Kevin Carr's Cancer Deaths in Lowca', Simon Herbert's 'Insults that made a man/Cor', Joanna Eastons 'Actions Speak Louder...', E. Axten and C. Mulvenna's 'Provo-No-Fun, Deborah King's Passage', Anne Seagrave's 'Waxing don't make me what I am. The rewards of risks', and Terri

Frecker's Death submerging Life Emerging. Installations include Tara Babel's 'Brick Curtains, Chris Rowland's 'Step on Through Frankis Shaw's She The Child 1' and Terri Frecker's 'Life Emerging New Contemporaries runs from **September 22-October 21** with performances from **October 16-21** Rose Garrard's exhibition 'Between Ourselves' continues at the ICA and in the theatre (**September 11-29**) a season entitled 'Pornography'—an examination through performance of the politics of male homosexual fantasy. **All information on 01 930 0493.**

**The British Art Show** opens its tour at the Ikon Gallery and the City Museum, Birmingham, on **November 1** It has taken the Arts Council two years to assemble what they consider is 'some of the best art produced in Britain over the last five years' and appropriately contains a high proportion of performance work, as well as installation and photo-pieces by artists involved in performance, including work by Kevin Atherton, Stuart Brisley, Helen Chadwick, Marc Chaimowicz, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Gilbert and George, Anthony Howell, Bruce McLean, Alastair MacLennan, Gerald Newman, Station House Opera, and Steven Taylor Woodrow. This is the second show of its kind put on by the Arts Council (the first was in 1979) and the pundits are likely to be out in force, as will the compilers of imaginary Salon's Refusé. Should be very interesting. **Info from Arts Council on 01 629 9495.**



SIMON HERBERT

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