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Saturday 19 January approx
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Sunday 20 January approx
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Theatre
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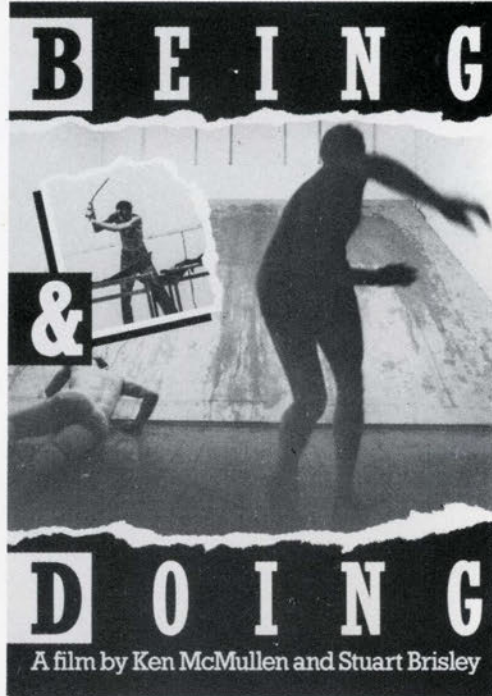
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Saturday 26 January 8.00 pm

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Saturday 16 February 8.00 pm

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Sunday 24 February 3.00 pm

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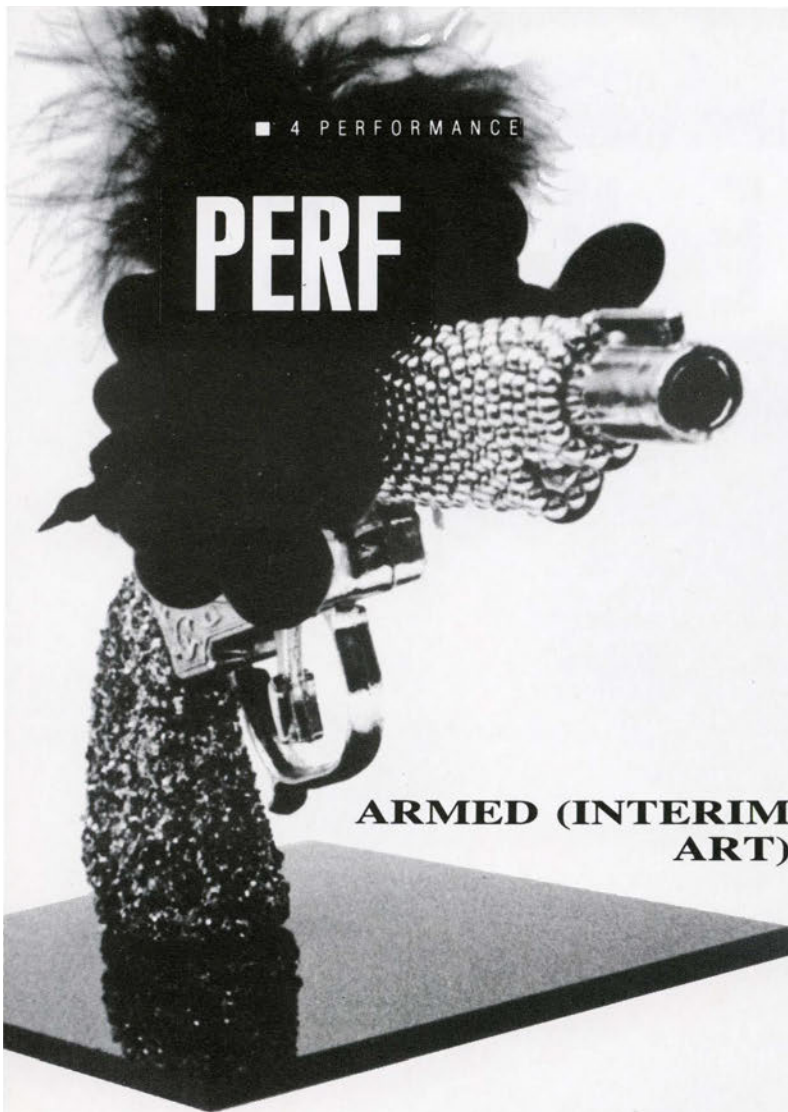
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Cover photo of Suzy Gilmour and Sianed Jones in The Observation Tower (See Perf.) by Malcolm Hazelton.

PERF



ARMED (INTERIM ART)

Molly Designer Guns at Interim Art

Photo: Molly

In our century, when violence has continuously outreached itself in scale and ingenuity, no symbol is more loaded with significance than the gun. Yet today the gun has become commonplace, and tells a posse of tales; detective, cowboy, murder, hunting, war, assassination, suicide tales. Artists have learnt to play with it and to take it for granted. And Interim Art's thematic exhibition *Armed*. The gun as a cultural icon in the twentieth century, demonstrated just how much potential it has. Guns can be made to sing, like *Lyre*, Ian Hamilton Finlay's delicate, wooden effigy of a machine-gun or they can be made to soar as in Rose Garrard's transcendental plasterwork *Freezeframe*. Or they can dress up and have a ball, like New Yorker Molly's *Designer Guns*; a whole cocktail party of ostrich-plumed, fanned guns, fringed, sequined guns, fluffy guns, bearded negligee revolvers and grape adorned guns.

Malcolm Poynter makes men out of conglomerations of guns, George Rouse painted one on a urinal along with a woman and the outline of a corpse and photographed it and Stephen Mumberson makes big, fat, edible-looking guns.

Hannah Wilke's *So help me Hannah* is a photographic series which explores the contradiction of her own naked female body wielding a gun while Mapplethorpe's *Black Jack II* could be said to subject a black man's erect penis to violence by photographing it alongside the pointed gun in his hand.

Hannah Wilke's and Claes Oldenburg's *Ray Gun Collection*, gathered when they used to live together, demonstrates how you can see a gun in almost anything; an empty tube, a cotton spool, a bent ruler, a squashed can, a whistle or a boomerang.

This company of the great and the small was brought together behind an anonymous door in a Hackney terrace by Interim Art, a new gallery trying to break new ground.

It runs mostly thematic shows dreamed up by its curator Maureen O'Paley; *Armed* was preceded by *Dogwork* (dog theme) and prospective 1985 shows should include *Impostors* and *Antidote to Madness* (a collection of things in bottles).

The cast of *Armed* was international; Oldenburg, Wilkes and Molly from America, Parisian Georges Rousses, Italian Vito Acconci; but the show was not internationalist. Contributions from different cultures were welcomed for the different lights they could throw on the theme, but were not sought out for their own sake.

The theme was political but it was not partisan. Interim Art doesn't grind an axe. Mapplethorpe's *Black Jack II* was deliberately shown next to Keith Piper's cardboard relief of a black man pointing a gun at a white middle class American who shouts 'This nigger is sure as hell stretching my liberalistic tendencies'. When performance artist Hannah Wilke lies down like a naked female corpse with the gun in her own hand it is not clear whether she upsets the violence of sexual stereotyping or invites us to see her as victim anew. The work of James Rosenthal *When men were men*, George Rousses and Bill Woodrow activate our detective film associations with the revolver, but Hamilton Finlay, Molly and Rose Garrard reclaim the gun from its traditional associations and recast it lyrically or exotically.

The aesthetic is selective; it is influenced by Maureen O'Paley's own artistic predilection for the moment when sculpture, performance and photography fuse; but it is not exclusive. She includes things she doesn't like to balance a theme.

'I'm attempting to create a bridge between established and alternative art' she says. 'In the established galleries there is only room for so many artists to surface. I'm trying to create a platform whereby a number of people can find a voice'. The shows are one way of cutting through the old alignment of the established and the marginalised. Because she is radical and her experiments make them sit up, the Lisson Gallery will lend her an artist like Woodrow. And by accepting work on the ground of merit and putting on mixed shows she enables more marginalised artists to bring their work into the open.

ELIZABETH HERON.

TRICKSTER (BLOOMSBURY)

From a central theatrical trunk slowly rise six strange protuberant figures, transmuting into droll umbrella-topped organisms through which metallically masked creatures poke their heads. They emerge, exercise and tumble before removing their masks to reveal yet further half-masks which enclose their ears, making them all look uncannily like performance artist Ian Hinchliffe. Barefoot, in simple peasant-like shirts and breeches, they also suggest servant figures in commedia dell'arte. With one eventual exception, they remain a uniform team, undifferentiated as to personality or sex.

Styled 'An Entertainment for the Imagination', this is Trickster's fourth touring production since its formation in 1981 and inspired by circus themes. But 'We did not seek to imitate circus', they explain in a programme note. 'Gone are the red noses and the high trapeze, the sequins and glitter. What we have attempted to do is fuse old skills and traditions into new forms, to try to capture a sense of the theatrical magic that circus seems to promise in the first picture books we read as children, to create a

circus of the imagination'.

They carry on tumbling. They form adventurous if a little shaky acrobatic tableaux. They clamber up and down tall red ladders. They construct a marquee facade across the front of the stage, then perform feats of juggling *behind* it in silhouette. Artfully directed coloured spotlights create beautiful overlapping images of jugglers and balls in multiple profusion. Then various grotesque animals are evoked, elevated by stilts: a gigantic butterfly creature, expanding and contracting its vast wings; elephant-like creatures with weird pendulous trunks; two enormous birds.

After the interval, a kind of alternative opening: this time they climb out of the trunk as if mounting a zig-zag step-ladder, then dismantle the marquee and reconstruct it to form a curtained backdrop. Now for a conjuring turn. The tricks may be conventional but the conjurer is a hilariously bizarre creation. His head consists of a huge grinning mouth and a pair of separately animated disembodied eyes. When endless bottles are produced from a couple of cylinders and the conjurer gets drunk the features of this already somewhat wobbly looking creature go even further awry, a convulsively funny spectacle of facial collapse.

Other routines follow, including a rather conventional one of three performers vying for occupation of a single chair; and a finely performed juggling routine. Against Richard Attree's atmospheric music (weaving effectively throughout the show), the juggler not only changes the rhythm of his motions but simultaneously performs a slow elegant dance across the floor. Towards the end of the show the mood changes and becomes a bit pretentious as a ringmaster figure in top hat and sinister mask, otherwise seen only briefly when he brings the lights up for the interval, puts the other five players through a series of gruelling turns, producing coloured balls and handkerchiefs from their mouths, manipulating and freezing their bodies.

Charivari is not an entirely original conception. Both Moving Picture Mime Show in this country and

Mummenschanz in New York have also created strange new organismic forms by skilful use of mime and masks. And the show is awkwardly constructed – that ringmaster figure should either have been established more strongly from the beginning or, better still, not appeared at all. The separate parts don't integrate to make a greater whole. And one or two items either linger a little too long (the stilted animals lose their wondrous sheen through slight over-exposure) or don't depart enough from their familiar origin, like the dancing dummies animated by a single player. But, on the whole, the show is breathtakingly beautiful in its imaginative fusions.

At the end the masks are removed to reveal the players as a cheerfully youthful team, three female and three male (one of whom really does look like Ian Hinchliffe!) Their declared aim is 'to create a dynamic form of visual theatre fusing movement skills with spectacular design'. Initially they turned for inspiration to tribal theatre forms where they found 'just the extravagant design, stress on physical expertise and sense of surprise and mystery that we sought'. Their work has included a large-scale community production with fifty local people at Edinburgh's Theatre Workshop, an appearance in 'Oz', a Walt Disney/EMI feature film, and a British Council sponsored tour of Japan. Not a bad track record in three years. If they can find conceptual frameworks for their future work as powerful as their visual flair and sensibility, they could become formidable.

NEIL HORNICK

HESITATE AND DEMONSTRATE (MANCHESTER)

Hesitate and Demonstrate are getting to the stage when their props will need Equity cards. In *Shangri-La* they perfected a form of theatre in which one ransacks a large Department store and strews the contents across the floor every night to an ingenious soundtrack. It can be mesmerising, entertaining but ultimately decadent, an effect heightened by the silent, impassive faces of the performers, invariably in exclusive evening wear, who scatter the toys of the rich. The company has achieved such technical sophistry that they can produce shows which are entirely style and no content – such was *Shangri-La*.

Happily, *So No More Songs Of Love* persuaded me that there is more to Hesitate and Demonstrate than gift-wrapping. Paradoxically, for all their innovative techniques, the contents were the stuff of age-old theatrical tradition: a moral story and characters, even flashes of spontaneous performance, by Tyrone Huggins, breaking the glazed-eye tradition of Hesitate and Demonstrate's human puppetry.

The moral warning is that romantic love is a fiction devised by men to ensnare women — who reject it, hence the title. The illustrative story revolves around one taxi rank secretary with romantic yearnings but a sour reality in her office with film pin-ups on the back wall. On a toy theatre, rising from beneath the counter, she demonstrates her moral fable: a dancing girl attracts a man whose embrace becomes a grapple which prevents her from dancing. Men woo you with fairytale endings, they take you places in taxis (like a dark wharf for a proposal scene) then dump you.

Witness various fairytale motifs juxtaposed with ►

Trickster's Charavari



Photo: Coneyl Jay

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Unromantic normality: A 'Mirror-Mirror-on-the (suburban)-Wall', a dying swan trapped in the cupboard under the stairs, and a Cinderella in ballgown followed by a housewife putting her evening dress into the dustbin the morning after. When the secretary and her ballgowned counterpart discover they are pursuing the same Moss Bros smoothy they put a curse on his departing taxi and he drowns off Limehouse Dock. Being Hesitate and Demonstrate, this is superbly enacted by the man squirming beneath the glass coffee table; all the 'story' is thus communicated through the company's eloquent cinematic tableaux.

What made it so enjoyable was arch humour and a density of ideas, such as a taxi eating its driver, expressed without conceding to scripted theatre. Props became visual reference points for real or surreal plots, they triggered relationships, most importantly they initiated action rather than being performance pieces in themselves, and recurring in different places, functioned as cross-references, enriching the show, drawing the threads together. There was the sense of witnessing a thriller being evolved before one's eyes. The element of suspense is what makes *So No More Songs Of Love* a piece of theatre where *Shangri-La* was a performing props circus. Suspense is the crucial ingredient of Hesitate and Demonstrate's work, because it is used to replace narrative as the forward thrust of a piece of theatre. Unfortunately, suspense has only one pace. The kaleidoscope is an enchanting toy but the novelty tires because the pictures can only change slowly. And. Beautifully. That is a problem Hesitate and Demonstrate have yet to solve.

CHARLOTTE KEATLEY.



BACKGROUND VIDEO — THE VIEW FROM TOKYO

The tiny Scan Gallery which is located in Harajuku, Tokyo and houses a large video distribution library as well as screening facilities is practically the only independent, non-commercial video organisation in Japan. Its continued existence is almost entirely due to the efforts of the two women who run it, Keiko Sei and Fujiko Nakaya. As with many other arts organisations in Japan they receive no government support or funding; and commercial sponsorship is only really a possibility when larger, special events are planned, lending a certain prestige and high visibility to the company concerned. Even in the latter instances the search for support can be tricky, after approaching one company, usually through carefully forged personal contacts, whether with success or not, one has to avoid making similar overtures to their market rival or displeasure will be voiced.

For the past few years Scan has run an annual competition open to Japanese video-makers which along with their regular screenings and tape distribution throughout Japan and internationally has done a lot to stimulate new work and to bring new practitioners into the area. I saw a lot of interesting work made by producers in their early twenties. One of the reasons that the relatively young are so prominent in this field is that they are still at college. Practically the only way to continue in this field after graduation is to get a job in one of the large facilities houses and to do your own work in 'down time'. We may often think that the situation is pretty grim here in terms of access to equipment but the hiring of production and post production gear in Tokyo is phenomenally expensive. A one hour U-matic cassette can set you back well over £30. There are other ways to continue working in the medium but they invariably mean a direct involvement with the hard sell tactics of the commercial world where personal commitment and ideas are at a low premium if they don't sell themselves or a product. This attitude is particularly apparent in the machinations of the large department stores, palaces of consumer fantasy. The video monitor is omnipresent, from the interactive VDU store guide through banks of monitors in every department demonstrating the wares to, in one store, tiny circular screens in the lifts all showing 'background video'. This last category, spotted all over Tokyo often means beautifully shot countryside scenes, fields of flowers bending in the breeze. People make a lot of money producing these glimpses of elsewhere and, especially in the confines of a crowded lift, all eyes are rivetted.

The stores will also hold, from time to time, exhibitions of video art but there is often the suspicion in the producer's mind that they are more interested in demonstrating the latest in-playback technology than the software. A manufacturer recently asked Scan to put together a compilation of artists video for transfer to videodisc which was then used as part of their impressive sales display in Ginza Seibu. There is a rumour going round in Tokyo at present that Wakko, a large underwear manufacturer, has plans to set up a video art library which would have a lot of financial backing to buy in tapes internationally — motives would seem to be obscure and the rumour wasn't substantiated despite frequent enquiries but it's a bizarre idea.

Notwithstanding the dearth of venues and support for

independently produced video, I saw some very interesting tapes which displayed a confidence and character which in my extremely limited previous experience I have found lacking in earlier Japanese work. This is a sweeping statement but I don't think it is useful here to discuss particular works in a vacuum as it were but if all goes well there will be a show of Japanese video which will travel to various venues throughout the country during next year. The content of the tapes is wide-ranging but one thing to be mentioned is the lack of confrontational work dealing however obliquely with social or political concerns. The documentary is much in evidence but questioning this 'safe' approach I was told variously:— 'the Japanese artist does not see his/her role as a critic of society' — 'He/she sees no reason to cause disruption or



dissent'. In their daily lives they see little to outrage their sense of justice which would be improved by their intervention. Politics are not discussed, that is the politicians job. Amongst the younger video-makers there is some evidence that this attitude is changing but as yet it is difficult to determine what direction this change will take.

I look forward to seeing more work from the land which provides the technology that makes it all possible.

JANE PARRISH

THE OBSERVATION TOWER (CHISENHALE DANCE SPACE)

The legend goes that two Scottish princes came over the sea to Ulster. In fulfilment of a prophecy that the first to touch the earth of the new land would be its ruler, one of the princes cut off his hand while they were still on the ship, and threw it on the beach. The invasion of Ireland is symbolized by this bleeding red hand: it is an emblem and a curse, lying heavy on the lives of the people of Ulster. From *The Observation Tower*, we view the curse's operation on the lives of 'the two little girls from Ballybum'. Insignificant, small-town Ulster Protestants though they be - and far removed from the Scottish king - yet the curse finds them out, blighting their lives as it blights the lives of everyone in the Province.

One of the strengths of this piece is its evocation of childhood, boldly using the laughter, songs and language of children to uncover layers of corruption. The English alphabet the little girls learn at school includes 'G is for Genocide', and 'one potato, two potato, three potato, four

is the only thing that grows in Ireland. One day a school inspector comes to Ballybum and tries to teach the children to speak properly. 'Black bag', 'black bag' he says, and they repeat it innocently, helpfully, wrongly (Blairk baigr, blairk baigr). They can't hear the difference, it seems; not can their parents. The inspector gives up eventually and a lot of people in Ballybum go to bed confused as to the object of the exercise. But the incident goes deeper than that. Even the children realize that the inspector's inflexion (like that of the 'one o'clock news from Westminster' - the only frequency on the radio that really counts) is the voice of power. And a hard grain of resentment is lodged in the pit of Irish stomachs.

The story of the two little girls is pieced together in words, music and images. One has chosen exile and gone to college in England; the other is in hospital, increasingly estranged from her friend, her childhood and any belief in the future. The pressure on both lives is revealed in Suzy Gilmour's narrative fragments, her distinctive voice easily making the transition from accent to accent as she delivers the stories with humour and strength. The images are powerful too: blank paper carefully hung then splattered with red paint; Sianed Jones strutting across the space in a crude terrorist mask, and, strikingly, the two women beaming mercilessly as they thump out a tune on an old organ, having covered themselves in transparent plastic - the safety and cosiness of a church which excludes rather than embraces. Sianed Jones has a beautiful voice which she uses to excellent effect in childish chants, songs, hymns, and wordless laments. Throughout the piece, both artists perform with humour and style. It is exhilarating to watch these two women tackle a complex political subject, and, through the truth of their artistic evocation, refine our perception of the issues involved.

CAZ ROYDS

Video Android in Japanese department store.

The Observation Tower

Photo: Malcolm Hazelton



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THEATRE DE COMPLICITÉ (MIDLAND GROUP)

Theatre De
Complicite

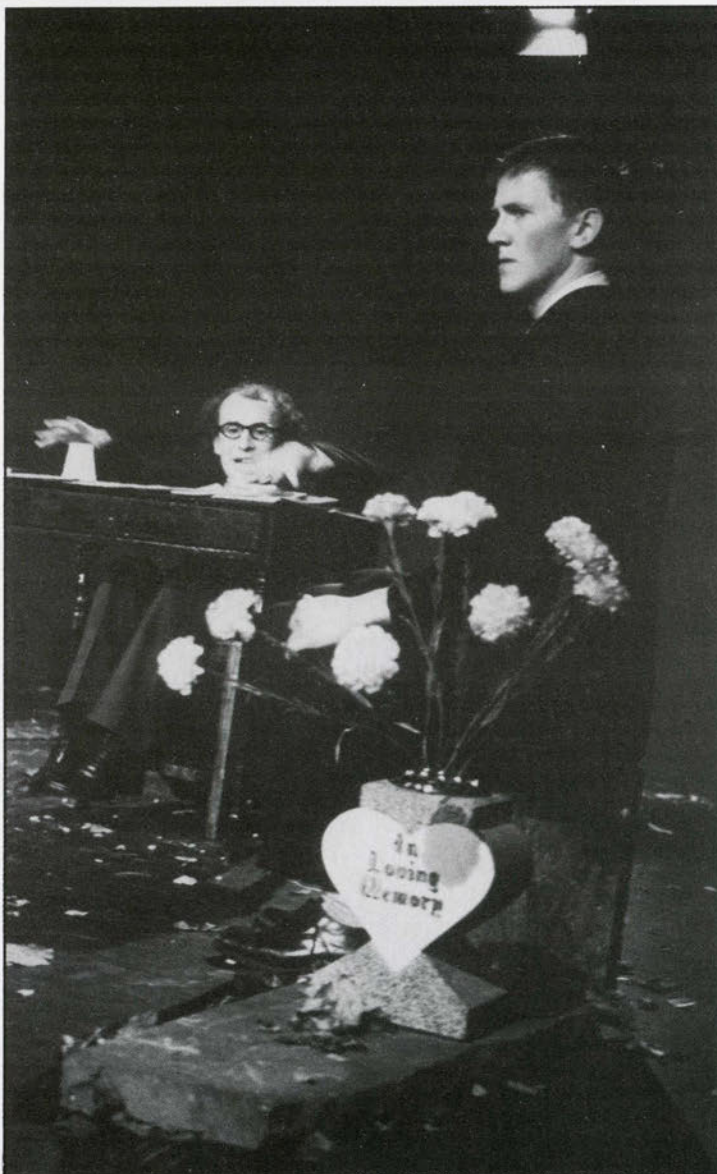


Photo: Robin Ridley

Theatre de Complicité's *A Minute Too Late*, starts when Marcello Magni and Jos Howben strolled onto the stage and explain that: 'it hasn't started yet — it's all right — just relax'. This sensitivity to audience response is no doubt due, in part, to this international group's training at Paris' Ecole Jacque Le-Coq where students are every week required to produce a ten minute piece of theatre for the evaluation of fellow students. 'These pieces were derived from observation and improvisation', said the company's English spokesman, Simon McBurney, whilst relaxing in

the dressing room between the Friday and Saturday night shows. A brief and animated consultation in French, Italian and English ensued. 'Marcello's just been saying that at one point he had to spend a week observing blind people', McBurney explained. 'Yes', Jos Howben, the company's Belgian member added, 'and at the end of the week you had to travel blindfold on the Paris underground, so you got a real sense of what it was like to be blind in a city'.

In a similar fashion, *A Minute Too Late* is based on observations of the ways in which people behave in graveyards, at funerals, in the doctor's office etc., and these observations are used as the basis for improvisations which magnify commonplace behaviour patterns into grotesque archetypes. The images of and ideas about death in *A Minute Too Late* were put together in 4½ weeks for an ICA production. 'We tried out alternate combinations of the improvisations we had on death and came up with what seemed most natural', McBurney said. 'We always have someone watch what we're doing, so we get a good sense of what works and what doesn't'. The product of their collaboration is a bizarre cyclical journey through the landscape of death which starts and ends in a desolate graveyard near a main road. This journey takes place in a strange and disquietingly familiar borderland between fantasy and reality and makes use of such comic elements as parody, slapstick and surrealism to confront the audience with the inadequacy of the modern western world's responses to death. Among the scenes along the way is a hilarious funeral service in which McBurney's bumbling and awkward attempt to follow church ritual undercuts and qualifies the pretensions of his fellow mourners. Each of the company members makes parodic capital out of his national heritage: Magni projects the effusive and self-indulgent sentimentality of a Latin; Howben, the grave and humourless hypocrisy of a Belgian Protestant; and McBurney, the embarrassment of an agnostic Englishman who only visits church for weddings and funerals. Parody shifts into surreal burlesque when, after paying their respects to the dead, the threesome break into a Fred Astaire dance routine. Similarly incongruous and excruciatingly funny is the chase scene in which Howben as manic undertaker gives the bereaved McBurney a lift home - at 100 Mph! *Complicité* calls into question our solemnity about death, and challenge us to recognize it as a central fact of everyday experience.

Another powerful element in the show is the exteriorization of inner reality. 'We always start from the inside and work out', McBurney said, pointing at his chest. 'We're never far from reality, and so the audience usually recognizes and understands what we're doing right away'. An instance of this technique is McBurney leaping up and down in a St Vitus' dance of tortured hope while Magni as an embarrassed and prurient registrar beats out a crazed drum solo on his desk. This is both a natural development from the bureaucratic procedure of stamping a death certificate and, on a subconscious level, an expression of his inability to handle death. Likewise impressive is the dexterity with which the company is able to shift with seeming effortlessness from slapstick to extreme pathos, and sometimes they somehow develop both simultaneously. This versatility is especially evident in the penultimate scene. Comedy is never far away with Howben's brilliant impersonation of a kettle boiling, and the absurd wording of the death grants form ('Benefits from Death'), but this humour serves chiefly to underscore the poignancy of McBurney's

loneliness after his wife's death. He tries to preserve the continuity of domesticity, padding around in a purple cardigan and making a cup of tea, but this activity only reinforces the reality of his isolation.

A Minute Too Late is an evocative, witty and highly individual exploration of the central human experience of death, and it has the haunting impact of originality. 'You know, it's not really mime', Howben says in his introduction to the show, 'we use words as well. Yes words'. Magni gives the broadest of broad smiles and adds, in halting English, 'it's something we made up ourself'.

GIVE MY REGARDS TO FRITH STREET (LONDON VIDEO ARTS)

From its inception in the sixties, video has remained under the stranglehold of television, churning out images as commodity for mass consumption. Trapped within the domesticity of the TV monitor and lacking the formal qualities which mercifully allow some film at least to provide alienation from victimising stereotypes, video has practically forced its practitioners to produce artifacts which resemble the TV medium.

Goldbacher and Flitcroft were two artists to realize the potential of fashionable TV trash, and have as a consequence, become the darlings of video art and the initiators and leading producers of scratch tapes, pirating soap and advert cliches in an attempt to criticise their origin through sheer excess. Revelling in the media and the public's satiety for those iconoclastic moments of fascination, that 'distanced passion for the image' as Barthes called it, Goldbacher among others is hoping to induce conflicting emotions of 'anxiety, sympathy, disgust, celebration' and eventually 'an exploitation of the manipulation through pleasure' which has become TV's trademark.

But as you watch the myriad of seductive eyes glance at the camera, at you, in the haze of lurid green and polka dot purple, you feel as though somebody has said it all before. The promises and Barbie Doll mythologies of the iridescent sparkle of the quiz-show backdrop are simultaneously denied by its blinding surface intensity. Media's catering has taken the image to its conclusion and beyond, and no juxtaposition is going to bring it back from the grave of the unconscious in which it has embedded itself for oblivion.

Such a familiarised medium requires new content if it is to be validated as a valuable oppositional cultural practice, and Catherine Elwes, Rose Garrard and Zoe Redman have done this in narrating their confessions about motherhood, packaged love and deprived identities. Elwes' *With Child* proved to be the most popular tape at the show. Working within the criteria that the personal is political the artist takes us through the experience of being an expectant mother, in preparation/anticipation of motherhood and the eventual denial of the fruits of her labours. Within the domestic situation, she relates to the still unborn child's toys, signifiers of the cultural kidnapping which hurriedly places the child within the social and linguistic order, with a suspicious unease, as they take on a life of their own within the spooky Victorian interiors. The duck knocks the roundabout into orbit, cuddly monkeys tango, soldiers march on horseback later



Catherine Elwes at LVA Group Show

Photo: Catherine Elwes

to be replaced by baby's clothing in anticipation of the mother's imminent duties.

Elwes exposes the didactic absence of woman from the Lacanian male dominated 'Oedipus complex' through a sarcastic finale. French phrases of demand and appropriation cross the monitor, foregrounding the naked mother bearing the spherical bulk of her child as she stylishly dresses a doll, an infant surrogate, in spasmodic slow motion.

Zoe Redman's *Passion Ration* is a development of her earlier *Story of June*, both taking a parodical look at the situation of (Western) woman within the household. Dimly lit interiors reflect the mood of the piece in which a woman, deprived of love and attention, complains and demands more than the routine half dozen paper wrapped roses which represents her man's passion ration for the week.

Whereas Redman deals with kitchen sink dramas, Rose Garrard makes a polemic re-writing of female history within a wider sphere of the hierarchical male domain which has up to now deprived women of the throne of power. The recurring theme of Pandora's Box, within which is enclosed all evil, recalling the seduction of Eve by the phallic serpent, hides the gun with its potential for revolt quietly but determinedly resisted by the perpetual nature of male produced artifacts which feed the memory with myths, such as the photograph which fixates and reinforces women's passive submission.

'I must not let others write my lines for me' repeats Garrard as we watch her surrogate, a fragile plaster figure wander through the narrow corridors of the school, the institution.

As far as video is concerned, it is such semi-narratives which will retrieve it from its commercial and technical impotence into the fertility of the female reincarnation the acceptance of such practices promises. Here and now, in such a stagnant situation art becomes necessity.

SOTIRIS KYRIACOU

AN EVENING IN SWINDON

Da Wu Tang began the evening with a concentrated piece that fanned out of the darkness from the sound of ink-stick ground against inkstone to a confrontational improvisation of movement towards and across the spatial divide between audience and performer, eventually passing through the audience.

In the first section we were given a demonstration of brilliantly dextrous illusion. Upon the portion of a long scroll of paper suspended from a simple tripod which simultaneously displayed and concealed, a single thick straight black brushstroke was made from behind.

Magically, this was later peeled away: gesture become concrete. Da's space/body drawings included a horizontal progress of undulation and chin-hauling unaided by arms that mimicked and mocked the black wrinkle static on the floor; calligraphy become caterpillar. A transcendent metamorphosis.

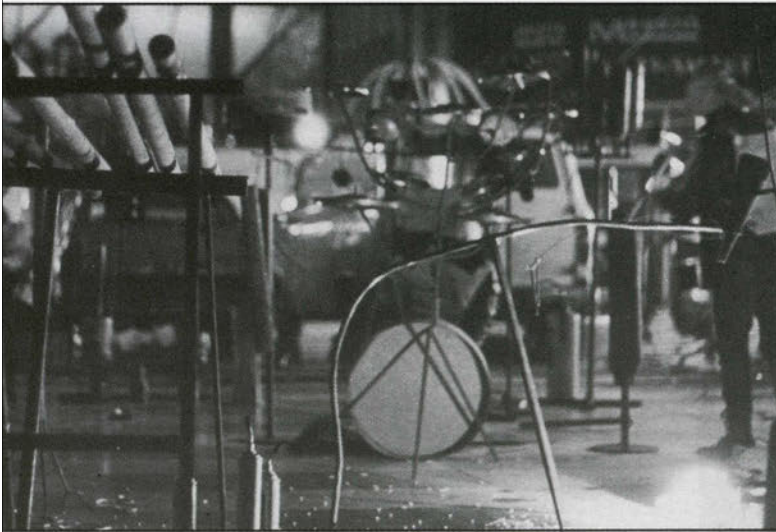
After an intermission, Da pulsed towards the audience, ricocheting off the side walls yet fluid as a tide

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insinuating a beach. Like water seeking the path of least resistance, he clambered through and up, poised, considered, frequently motionless, taking and making energy from and for us, proving with his eyes, measuring, challenging obstruction.

His passage completed, Da made a succinct and clear statement about his areas of concern and his grateful acknowledgement of the interactive role of the audience. Deceptively simple and immaculately executed, such work is stimulating, nourishing and refreshing.

In the shopping-centre, (undesired) lighting by J. Sainsbury, the Bow Gamelan Ensemble synthesized the zany inventiveness of early Bill Woodrow with the fearsome kineticism of Tinguely's *Hommage to New*



York, to produce a mechanical and pyro(hu)maniacal delight of awesome hilarity. They (Anne Bean, Paul Burwell, and Richard Wilson) redeployed urban junk rhythms in an aesthetically inspiring assault on our sanity. In the final tableau, flame fountained from the tin-hatted head of each of them, brighter than any inspirational lightbulb. Go see, hear, and smell.

A fanfare from atop the Wyvern Theatre heralded the arrival of the victorious Field Marshal Alastair Schnee in his all-conquering tank (on loan with full crew) which made many laps of honour of Theatre square. Schnee's tinsel cap and frockcoat (almost ready for a first fitting) confirmed his status. This tyrannical martinet leapt from the massive war-machine and stomped into the adjacent wine-bar. Accompanied by a shiny-pated pianist claiming to belong to the Revolutionary Communist Movement (that he had the music ready proves he was a 5th columnist) his rafter-rattling rendition of the Volga boat-song soon smashed the oenophiles into submissive collaboration. By closing time these turncoats were singing entire choruses, in tune. Schnee's own undercover activities practising and promoting performance art under the alias of Alastair Snow at South Hill Park, Bracknell, having been revealed, this subversive strategist now centres his efforts in Swindon. The evening ended with reactionary slogans such as 'Drink up, please' and 'Your glasses, please' as the art-sated revellers tumbled into the cold. Alastair's benign capturing of the town seems to have been of its hearts and minds too; very healthily-sized audiences for each of these events attest to this.

ALEX X. FRASER

Regular Music

Photo: Steve Littman

REGULAR MUSIC (NETTLEFOLD HALL, NORWOOD)

IT IS A PLEASURE TO HEAR how mature the work of Regular has become. Their earlier interest in the more minimal systems music of America has been transformed by the influence of recent British electro-pop music. The music now has all the rhythmic drive and power of minimalism but has been augmented with simple but beautifully constructed melodies. The line-up of violin, percussion, keyboards, electric guitar and various brass reminded me of nothing other than those Latin-jazz fusion combos of the sixties. It is a line up which can be gloriously robust but can also be smooth and gentle. Jon Parry's pieces all reminded me of Frank Zappa's great years, circa 'Hot Rats', '2000 Motels' days, a complex, jazzy, but compelling sound. The one new piece by Andrew Poppy was a piece primarily for percussion and had a kind of clean sparse sound. I hope that this was a taste of his forthcoming album for ZTT, of Trevor Horn, Frankie Goes to Hollywood fame. It is the kind of sound that will appeal to the avant-pop audience but is infinitely more interesting musically.

'The Lake' by Geoff Warren was a washy, spacious tonal piece with an intriguing lyric. But the work of Jeremy Peyton Jones came over strongest. His own brand of beefed-up systems exploited the line ups range of sounds and textures as well as having the best dance beat of the night. The demands of his still rigorous devotion to the 'system' produces the occasional difficult transformation, particularly in the earlier piece, *Idyllic Rhythms*. In the more recent pieces he seems more content to write what sounds right, regardless what the structure demands. It definitely sounded good. My only reservation is that I would have liked to hear at least one longer work.

STEVE ROGERS



NOTES FROM CARDIFF

I WAS GOING TO WRITE about five major new productions which I saw in Cardiff within the space of a month or so, mostly at Chapter. The trouble was, every time I put pen to paper my efforts became laboured, like writing a school essay on the bus, and the feeling reconstituted itself that had come over me at the end of almost all the performances, of being nonplussed — of wanting to go and make a cup of tea rather than grapple with the issues raised. It is a phase I'm going through? Have I acquired a jaded palate? Do I need a rest?

Impact Theatre's *The Carrier Frequency* was the only one of the five performances which I left feeling genuinely excited. Quite a few other people also left Impact Theatre excited, but not in the same way, and often less than halfway through. In fact, the rumours were that this was the one people were walking out of, so — beep, beep — the signals went off in my mind that this was something I shouldn't miss.

I should not try to describe *The Carrier Frequency* too much, but . . . A psalm is sung, a small world, or minor hell, is revealed, whose keepers, ankle-deep in water, perform mutual rituals, turned into habit or obsession, periodically climbing to the dry seclusion of high platforms, where they don old GPO headsets and, rocking backwards and forwards, hold 'pow-wows' with each other and 'the other side', in a post-nuclear slang like a mixture of ethnopoetry, pidgin, CB jargon, and Raudive voices, occasionally punctuated with a rhythmic keening, like Morgenstern's *Grosse Lalula* sound-poem.

Below, the cyclic *Huis Clos* world recommences its obsessive rota as remnants of short-wave broadcasts waft through the ether, including the intermittent surfacing of the Italian Eurovision Song Contest winner of the 50s, *Volare*, which always did seem to come from another

world. The altar/baptism/livesaving mimetics become more and more frenzied, until the participants fling themselves repeatedly with abandon into the water, like displaying wildfowl, to Mossolov machine music.

Ecstasy is replaced, as others take over, by a sort of eternal impatience, and the actions get out of control, or reach a pre-ordained climax (a bit overdone here, with an over-the-top 1812 Overture effect). We are left with an empty set and quiet music, reminiscent of Geoffrey Burgon's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* signature tune. Now if all I had heard of *The Carrier Frequency* was this description, I wouldn't want to go and see it much, but the night I was there not only did nobody walk out, but they all sat motionless until the quiet sounds faded completely and all you could hear was dripping gantries.

All the other performances I saw that month contained magnificent 'bits'. Jim van der Woude's one-person tour de force *Brainstorm* had some of the best 'bits' I have ever seen, involving stage-sculptures of breathtaking simplicity and maximum effect. And when what you usually get in Cardiff's Sherman Theatre (Chapter's own theatre was too small to hold van der Woude's extravaganza) is productions of mainstream stage classics in which the appearance of a Welsh rugby changing room has unfailingly been interpolated (have you ever seen Goethe's *Faust* with a rugby changing room scene? I have), then a piece about a man getting up, having breakfast, and going for a bike ride holds significantly more promise. But the stretches in between the 'bits' were overlong and oversold, and van der Woude did not succeed in transcending his own stereotype, that of a Marcel Marceau for 1984.

Lumiere and Son's *Brightside* was also a simple tale, almost a parabolic fairytale (with elements of the Emperor's New Clothes), interpreted via 'music, song, dialogue, and movement . . . so that no one form dominates the other', but with a resultant 'concerto for ►



Lumiere and Son's
Brightside

Photo: Paul Derrick

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orchestra' feel, with each of these elements surfacing in turn for impressive virtuoso efflorescence. All the attempts to interpret David Gale's original poem in a way not 'enslaved by the serialities of a dialogue text' came to naught however, for they were still enslaved by other serialities, such as the grossly caricatured stereotyped characters, which failed to become even caricatures of caricatures. Many people did enjoy *Brightside* a lot, but those who liked it most seem to have succumbed to the very 'gravitational form of naturalism' which director Hilary Westlake was at pains to eschew.

Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, lately balancing on a financial and estimatory tightrope, have come up, to everyone's relief, with a mostly new and very excellent company, and a new work which is unlikely to threaten their future existence, in fact quite the opposite. *The Funeral (Death of a Fishmonger)* has some marvellous 'bits' too — too many to mention. But the 'black comedy' was too often no more than its stereotype. Larking about by the graveside, however well done, is not good enough. The 'bits' which were best, by which I do not necessarily mean the 'serious bits', reminded me of the dominant rather ascetic aspect of Cardiff Lab's previous piece, *Orpheus*, which nobody was supposed to have liked much, but which seemed to be working laudably against a trend.

Is it just me, or is there a pernicious undercurrent abroad which is working outward from performances engineered to make old-age pensioners smile and history lessons more interesting, to involve 'the community' more by demanding less of it, to be more cost-effective, and successful in the cut-throat competition for grants? Thank goodness, then, for *The Carrier Frequency*. Here at last was something you couldn't take round local schools (well, you could, but you wouldn't), something which drama officers found meaningless, or didn't think of going to see, and which a local reviewer walked out of after 20 minutes but saw fit to publish a review preoccupied with the fact that there was water on the stage ('Wet play damps enthusiasm'). Something which was too rich to be demeaned by one interpretation. It might even have been a *dance* piece, but it wasn't as incredibly *polite* as Second Stride's programme, also seen in Cardiff at the same time, making the 'new dance' seem like the 'studio ceramics' of performance. The young man in Chapter's box office's unsolicited and enthusiastic remark about *The Carrier Frequency* was that it was 'hard'.

DAVID BRIERS

ALCHYMIA (MILAN)

Only Americans could actually *pay* to sleep rough and catch their own food on 'Survival Holidays' but the Milanese have their own way of gleaning entertainment from the confrontation with the elements.

By 9pm on a freezing, foggy November night at least 200 people had gathered in a dense queue lining the courtyard of the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea for a one-off installation by Alessandro Mendini's Studio Alchymia. At 9.30 the doors where still shut.

Some time after the queue surged forward and the first 50 or so squeezed through before the doors slammed shut again. A lucky handful of people got shiny catalogues and long blue cards inscribed '*Nulla: idea per un attualita*' — Nothing-idea for an event.

Nothing to see but a sea of heads and the mirage of Edgar Allen Poe's man of the crowd slipping between the immaculate tweeds and fur collars.

A strictly regulated flow of people passed into a hallway lined with mock reliefs. Seven columns of painted origami extravaganza, cones, nightlights, drawn blades and roses set a Byzantine tone of reverence.

You have hardly begun to look at a creature crossed between a dragonfly and a flying machine, rustling her gold wings in anguish, stretching her arms and shaking her gold knuckledusters, scraping them down the foil of her wings, wading in angular metal footwear and cutting through the crowd with an immeasurably remote gaze, when you are hurried out by burly ushers in favour of the oncoming mass.

In the vacant gallery the congregation mixed and conversed contentedly despite the wintery draughts that blew through a large open doorway. They waved their cards with a spurious satisfaction, born of familiarity, which derives from getting nothing for your efforts, but knowing, at least, that this is an important nothing. Outside, the mist had thickened, and people were still coming. The crowd swelled around the closed door.

ELIZABETH HERON

PERFORMANCE AT ACME STUDIOS

Acme has continued its support for new artists by providing them with low cost accommodation after the gallery's closure in 1981. Three veterans, Stuart Brisley, Ron Haselden and Tim Head were invited to utilize a newly leased space, a derelict multi-storey church hall before it is converted into artist's studios. The one-off use of a non-institutional space is appropriate for one of the most active supporters of non-object based work in the 1970's. By its nature, performance is an instant experience rather than a concrete statement; the space itself becomes the work through the artist's mutual interaction. The reception of the performance process is not conditioned by any pre-existing cultural codes and expectations but merely received as a new perception of the environment.

Finding the space was an experience in itself, as firstcomers ended up interrupting the weekly bible class in the hall opposite. Acme remained in darkness until precisely 7 o'clock when we were allowed inside a large, debris-littered hall to be pleasantly surprised by Tim Head's sparkling *Winter* sculpture. A large branch, retaining more than a passing resemblance to its origins and painted snow white glowed in the warmth of the icy blue winter light of its fruits, large teardrop light bulbs. The whole effect was reminiscent of a Xmas tree complete with lights and fairy, like a bonfire, inviting you nearer to the mysticism and energy within it. The broken gothic windows revealed fragments of the night: indoors-outdoors, light-dark blended, producing an enhancement rather than intrusion of the surroundings.

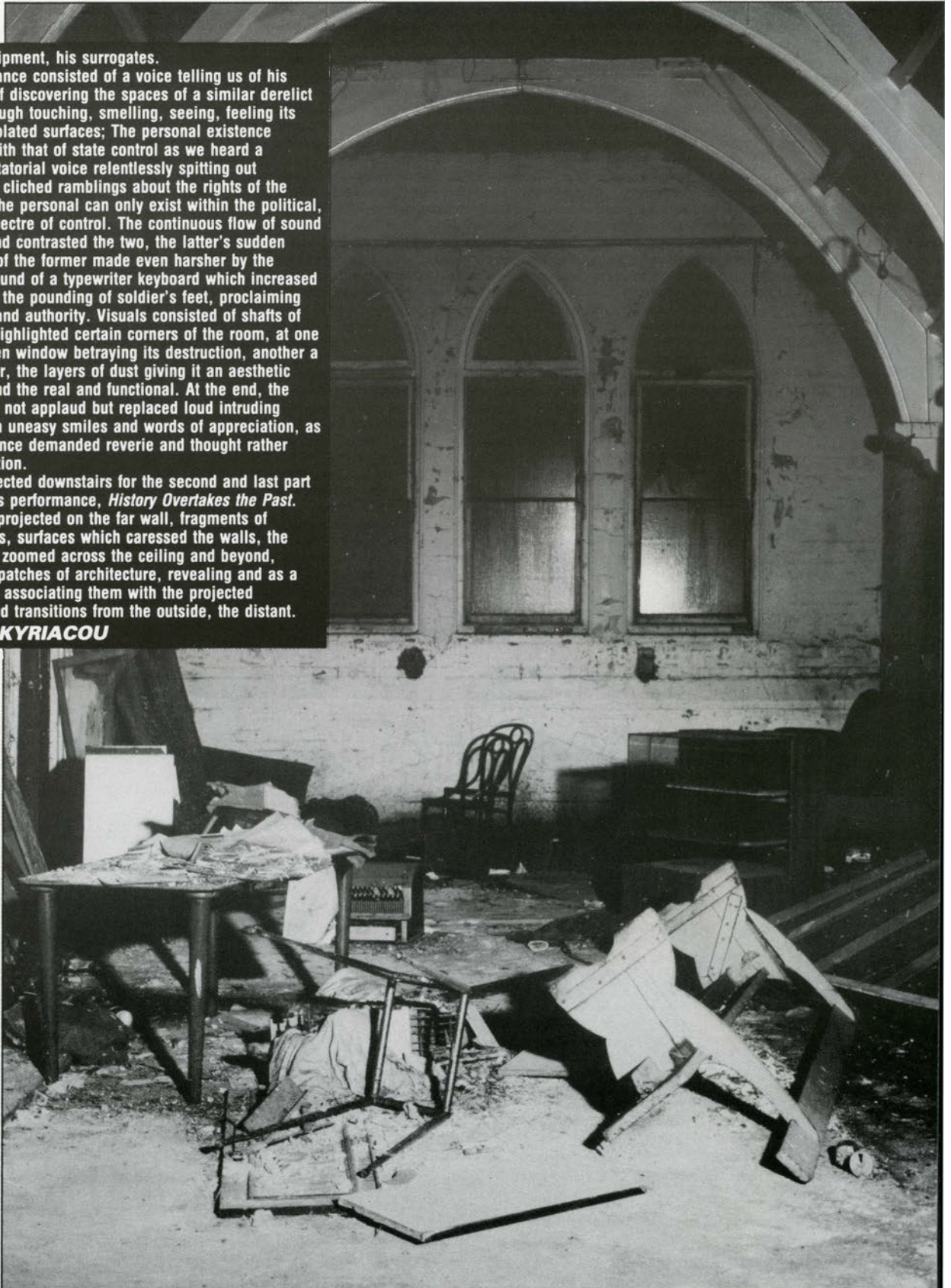
Meanwhile, at the other end of the room, the first part of Ron Haselden's performance was going on, in the basement viewed through a square opening which framed Richard Layzell and Pamela Hiley performing Tai-Chi. They moved within this framed area pushing at the barriers of the space and each other, a communication without words or contact: in harmony.

We were guided upstairs through a long and narrow staircase to watch Stuart Brisley's *Not In Bad Faith*. This was more of a theatrical situation with the audience sat in rows facing the dark expanse of the room, the event anticipated by the presence of the artist and a collection

of audio equipment, his surrogates. The performance consisted of a voice telling us of his experience of discovering the spaces of a similar derelict building through touching, smelling, seeing, feeling its fractured, violated surfaces; The personal existence contrasted with that of state control as we heard a ruthless, dictatorial voice relentlessly spitting out fragments of cliched ramblings about the rights of the individual. The personal can only exist within the political, within the spectre of control. The continuous flow of sound connected and contrasted the two, the latter's sudden interruption of the former made even harsher by the controlled sound of a typewriter keyboard which increased in volume to the pounding of soldier's feet, proclaiming their power and authority. Visuals consisted of shafts of light which highlighted certain corners of the room, at one point a broken window betraying its destruction, another a distant corner, the layers of dust giving it an aesthetic quality beyond the real and functional. At the end, the audience did not applaud but replaced loud intruding clapping with uneasy smiles and words of appreciation, as the performance demanded reverie and thought rather than celebration.

We were directed downstairs for the second and last part of Haselden's performance, *History Overtakes the Past*. Slides were projected on the far wall, fragments of objects, signs, surfaces which caressed the walls, the corners, and zoomed across the ceiling and beyond, illuminating patches of architecture, revealing and as a consequence associating them with the projected fragments and transitions from the outside, the distant.

SOTIRIS KYRIACOU



PREVIEW



Photo: Mike Laye

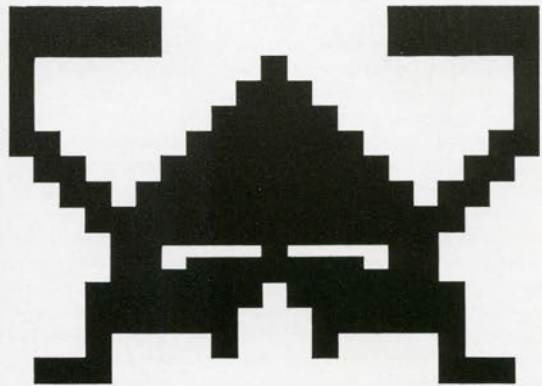
IOU's horticultural fantasies sprout all over Bristol from Feb 7-Feb 10, when they are in residence at the Arnolfini. They design specific events for each place they are in residence, so the Arnolfini's dockside setting should prove an interesting venue. Also coming up at various venues in Bristol organised by the new Theatre Alliance, Bristol, are **Natural Theatre**, **Siren Theatre** and **Burnt Bridges**, among others. *Info 0272 299191.* ■



Photo: Patrick Sellitto

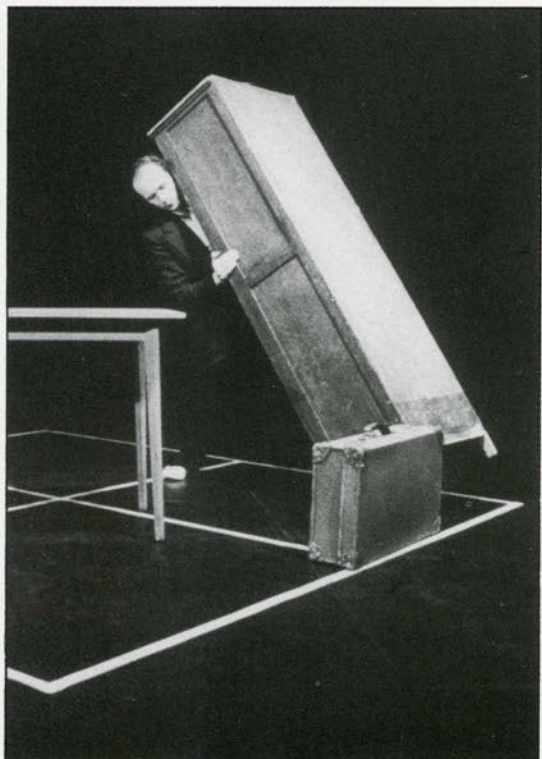
The legendary Belgian performance group **Jan Fabre** come to the ICA Theatre March 7-10, 14-17, we are informed just as we go to press, with their new six-hour long *The Power of Theatrical Madness*. In a ruthlessly demanding show (for the performers) the meaning of Classicism and the limits of human endeavour are dissected. Highly recommended. *Info 01 930 0493.*
 *(Also at the ICA Theatre in Feb/Mar, **Theatre de Complicite**, **Tim Buckley Blue Gene Tyranny**-Video artists, **Mantis Dance**, **Second Stride**, and **Impact Theatre's** new show.) ■

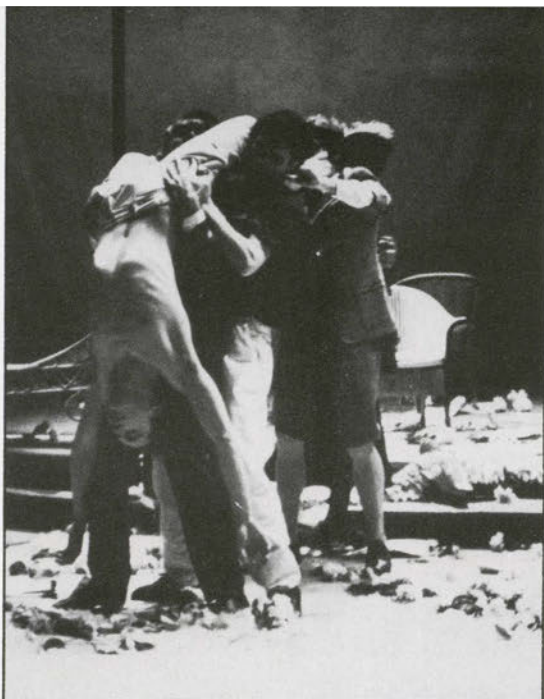
Photo: Bob Van Dantzig



Tim Head brings *The Tyranny of Reason* to the ICA Gallery from Feb 8 to March 17. 'A spatial area of light and sound is created entirely from the insignia of power of plastic money, of cold wares and hard wares'. Also in the Cinema March 26-31, **Stuart Brisley's** *Being and Doing* (see interview this issue) *Info 01 930 0493.* ■

Anthony Howell continues with the British Art Show to Edinburgh with *Table Moves I and II*. (January 25-26), while **Alastair McLennan** continues to be *Buried Alive* this time at the Royal Scottish Academy on Feb 1-3 (48 Hr performance), **Station House Opera** perform *Elevation II* at the Royal Scottish Academy. *Info on 031 226 6051.* ■





Ceremonies-A Melodrama takes place in a Grand Hotel, 'a place of passage, chance meetings, novelty, change and rapture, where life is run according to a rigorous set of rules and conventions.' It is created by the French group **Greta Chute Libre** in conjunction with Wimbledon School of Art. Previous collaborations of this kind have proved unmissable. At The Place, London, from Feb 5-16. Info on 01-836 7433. ■

The Zap Club Brighton is still on the lookout for new performance work, particularly for its increased participation in the Brighton Festival this Spring and the rumoured link-up with the important Nottingham Performance Festival in the Autumn. Contact Neil Butler on 0273 775987. ■



Photo: Rose Finn Kelcey

London Video Arts recently ran a season of Narrative Video, of which this (*Glory* by **Rose Finn Kelcey**) was a part. It was concerned with video of performance art and theatre, but late in March LVA plan to run a season of performance that includes video in the live action, video performance in short. More details, Jez Welch on 01 437 2786. ■

Pictured below: Polish artist **Ewa Partum** in **Stuart Brisley** and **Ken McMullen's** new film *Being and Doing* (see ICA). ■



I

ICA GALLERY

TIM HEAD—THE TYRANNY OF REASON
8 February – 17 March

SHINRO OHTAKE
13 February – 17 March

DUANE MICHALS
13 February – 17 March + Talk 20 February 7.30

C

ICA THEATRE

TIM BUCKLEY
5 – 9 February

MANTIS DANCE COMPANY
12 – 23 February

SECOND STRIDE
26 February – 3 March

A

ICA CINEMATHEQUE

WHAT DO MEN WANT?
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FILMS BY KEN McMULLEN
6 – 31 March
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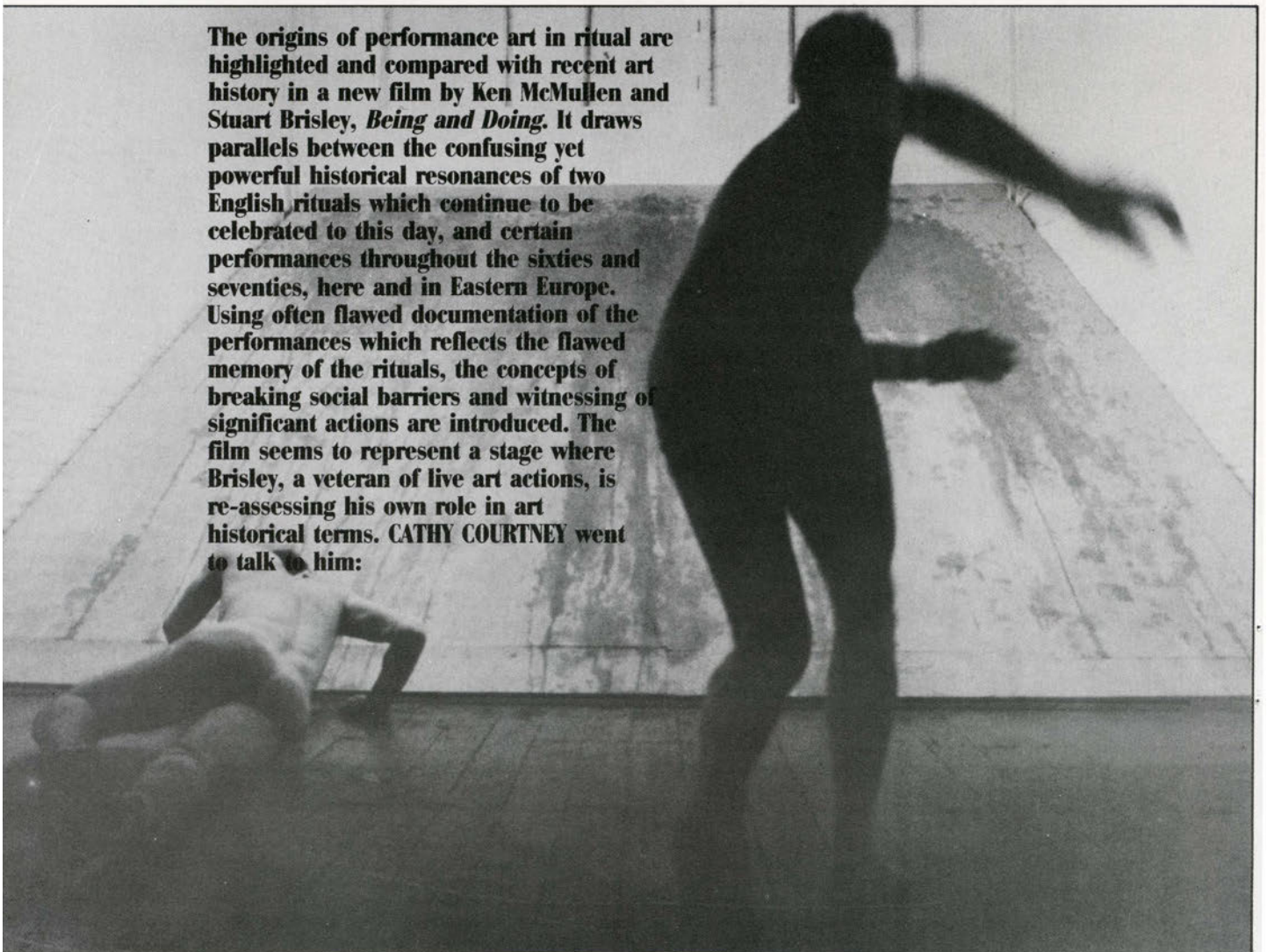
50p per half hour unit All seats bookable

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS,
THE MALL, LONDON SW1 01 930 3647

RITUAL AND MEMORY — PERFORMANCE AND HISTORY

STUART BRISLEY ON BEING AND DOING

The origins of performance art in ritual are highlighted and compared with recent art history in a new film by Ken McMullen and Stuart Brisley, *Being and Doing*. It draws parallels between the confusing yet powerful historical resonances of two English rituals which continue to be celebrated to this day, and certain performances throughout the sixties and seventies, here and in Eastern Europe. Using often flawed documentation of the performances which reflects the flawed memory of the rituals, the concepts of breaking social barriers and witnessing of significant actions are introduced. The film seems to represent a stage where Brisley, a veteran of live art actions, is re-assessing his own role in art historical terms. CATHY COURTNEY went to talk to him:



CATHY COURTNEY: In James Baldwin's 'Another Country' there's a very important passage saying that one of the few contributions we can make is to act as witnesses to one another. In *Being & Doing* you suggest that performance cannot exist without an audience. It's something I'd like to talk about later, but for the moment I'm going to play devil's advocate. Do you see an audience as a sympathetic or antagonistic body?

STUART BRISLEY: Well, one would hope that they would be sympathetic, but there's no way that one can actually pre-determine that.

CC: So when you start to perform are you hoping to engage the audience in a sympathetic way, or is that immaterial to you?

SB: It has to be both. It sound as though I'm trying to avoid the question. There has to be an element of sympathy in the sense that one's actually trying to communicate with other people, so there must be some sympathy in that as a notion to start off with. Yet the process of doing the work may actually demand that certain expectations that witnessing might have will be confronted; they may even become obstructions to meaning.

CC: How do you see the role of the performance artist differing from that of, say, a popular comedian in front of an audience?

SB: I think a comedian tends to deal with stereotypes, to play on conventions and to reveal the absurdity in life. But always, it seems to me, through the engagement with convention and expectation to the extent that the audience may even recognise the pattern; in fact it will recognise a pattern and in that sense it's an agreed process.

CC: But there's a shifting perspective. On the one hand the performer is able to manipulate his audience; as Barry Humphries does when he gets an audience to wave gladioli. On the one hand harmless fun, on the other the same source of power as a Nazi manipulating a crowd. At the other end of the scale the audience acts as judge; it can drive a comedian off stage if it doesn't like his act. I think performance has its own conventions.

SB: That may well be. I think it's something more basic than that. I think conventions come from a notion of the social dimension. . . . The conventions are, in a way, present within certain social contexts, certain social levels. One can almost divide groups of people regardless of witnesses into social groupings to the extent that one would never use the word audience to describe people watching a football match — one would use the word crowd — then there is a subtle

shifting of the notion of crowd to mob. And at the other end of the scale there is suddenly, when the social level gets sufficiently high, an individual at the centre who becomes a very important symbol — then the symbol gives us an audience. So there seems to be to be a whole set of social levels, and at the basis of that is how people behave when they get together and what happens when individuality is somehow subsumed into a collective condition, which, depending on circumstances, can operate in different ways.

CC: One of the main points of the film was about the link between ritual and performance, and also how this relates to democracy. Rituals, as far as we know, began as attempts to placate the Gods and ward off Devils. But it's more democratic now, in the sense that power has devolved from the Gods to man! At a CND demonstration, for example every participant has roughly equal value, and the purpose is to ward off the men who control the threat to our existence. Whereas a performer is closer to being the symbol you were talking about, and thereby creating an audience. Maybe it's a dangerous parallel, ritual and performance?

SB: What I was trying to do was to suggest that there was an aspect of performance; and I was really only dealing with a particular aspect of performance as seen in Europe and in a certain period of time from the sixties through to the late seventies; and to suggest that there was, or there could be, or there might be, a desire, whether conscious desire or an unconscious drive, towards reasserting a notion of ritual; and that the former reaches out from a position of isolation and alienation and attempts to create something which is common. But that commonality or submersion of the individual into the mass or the raising of the mass to the level of an art experience within certain social contexts is very rarely achieved, if ever. So it becomes, it appears, short-circuited. The effect of that short-circuiting allows that performance in those terms to be seen very much in terms of art history and in terms of a central argument about art practice, so one sees a historical precedent. And yet I was trying to suggest that the desire could be to break the social limitations which are expressed by a central notion of art history related to certain sections of society, and that this short-circuited desire was actually to break out of these social restrictions. And on the other hand to suggest that in pre-industrial society, for whatever reason, religious or whatever, that there could have been a point where there was a common agreement as to purpose, even if it was irrational, that

the relations between performers and watchers or witnesses were interchangeable and that maybe there was a point when it would be difficult to define them. This kind of experience persists in highly industrialised European societies for example, in what happens at Haxey Hood, Padstow and many, many others. But this exists at certain social levels, right? I mean one could say the circle of Haxey would be at the base of society. Am I making this clear?

CC: The circle of Haxey has a tremendously powerful effect in the film, partly because of the way you've edited and used it, but isn't it partly because it's mysterious? And doesn't the mystery spring primarily because we've lost the key to its meaning? Once it would not have been mysterious at all.

SB: Well, I don't think that's true. One has to make a distinction between Padstow and Haxey. These two rituals which were put into the film weren't selected, they were determined. The source of Padstow is a sense unknown. It goes back into the clouds of history and we can't exactly define what it is, though it is fairly obvious that it deals with fertility and so on, and it relates to other uses of the horse as a fertility symbol throughout the world — well, certainly as far as Indonesia and South America as well as Europe. We can't actually go so far as to determine exactly its origins. As for Haxey Hood it's very different altogether. There are two sources. One is a popular myth which may or may not be true and the other is the result of activity in the past. I forget which century it related to — the seventeenth or the sixteenth. Now first, the myth. I don't know if you remember in the film the Lord of the Hood says 'I'd like to believe that it went back to the twelfth century'. Now the reason he would like to believe that is because the myth says that in the twelfth century a Lady Mowbray, who was obviously a Norman, was crossing a field, purportedly the field where the Hood takes place, and her hat flew off. Some people working in the field fought for the right to give it back to her as true serfs, and she was so touched by this act that she designated that this event should be reenacted every year at the same time and place.

CC: That's a mixture of something that's disgusting and something that's very moving.

SB: Yes. And also it was January 6th, which I think has religious maybe pagan connotations, so there is a connection. We spoke to a folklorist who had spent a certain amount of time at Haxey. Her view is that it's more likely to have arisen from, I forget which king it was — a ▶

Still From *Being and Doing*: Stuart Brisley and Ian Robertson

Charles I think — who owned some land adjacent to the Isle of Axholme which is where Haxey sits. Anyway, he met or brought over or in some way found himself in contact with some Dutch people who were then employed to drain his lands. Now, I don't know exactly what happened. One can only presume that the water had to go somewhere. It caused a lot of disruption in the community for at least a hundred years — violence and so on and so forth. Her view is that this ritual is a kind of simulation for what set of violent actions and eventually evolved into the ritual which is still enacted.

CC: It's the difference between losing the key to something ancient and not understanding our own actions at the time of carrying them out.

SB: I don't know how to speak for the people of Haxey, I didn't meet them for long enough, but I imagine that they don't have a problem with it, that it seems completely natural in the sense that it has an inevitability about it.

CC: I was thinking about the people in the twelfth century. At that time it would have been completely comprehensible.

SB: Well, if it began in the twelfth century, I can't imagine what it would have been, how they would have responded. I can imagine it a little more, how it could have been if it came out of the conflict. I can see it sort of becoming slowly ritualised in some sort of way over the years.

CC: When performance comes close to working best is in the way you were talking of 'raising everyone to the level of an art experience'. How does it differ, for example, from a church mass?

SB: I think it goes back to the distinction that there may be elements within it that are similar. It may be using the same sensation in people; some of the same sensations, but the activity in the church — there is a hierarchy that's already established and people are taking part in something, by choice I presume, that they recognise as being a relationship between that which they can't understand and can never understand and their own lives. And this is ritualised and symbolised through the church and is articulated by them through their participation.

CC: How would you see a performance, in contrast?

SB: Well, one, there is no church and the social context may be unique. All that in a sense the performance can do is in fact to generate sensations and thought in the witnesses as to their own circumstances, as it were. I don't mean politically, although obviously it would be political, but also in terms of their existence. But there is

no way that that can lead necessarily on to anything else. One has to take that in relation to looking at any other work of art. Maybe one of the limitations of performance could be that if it's not consumable when it happens it can never become consumable at any other time, because it's not repeated. I'm talking about only those performances that are in relation to the film; a very limited aspect of performance. There are other performances which are repeated ad nauseam. So it has to be seen in that context. And also there's something very poignant about that. You know, the fact that something takes place once, it's an event. Even the memory must be suspect and therefore the reconstruction of it must be suspect.

CC: Obviously that's behind the whole film. How did the film come about? One of your main points is that these performances can't be documented — that they are changed by being documented. One would almost have expected the thinking behind the film to defeat its ever being made.

SB: Yes, that's right. Well, I'd been working with Ken McMullen on and off for a long time, since 1972. I felt that . . . it's a very difficult question and I don't think I can answer it . . . Certainly it seemed to me that there ought to be some kind of statement about this area of work and its context because I was dissatisfied by the assumptions on the part of many people that it came very much out of notions of art in terms of high culture. I thought there was possibly, if not probably, another set of bases for it. I suppose I wanted to try and investigate what they might be.

CC: You speak in the film of 'those who regulate the institutions of society in their own image'. Teaching at the Slade, and receiving Arts Council funding, how do you place yourself in relation to that?

SB: I wouldn't claim that one wasn't living in a set of contradictions. Absolutely. I could be clearly looked upon as an individual engaging in that and I could also be looked upon at another period of time, as someone who is acting quite against it and there is no, so it appears to me, ethical position that one can take as being outside it. I mean one is caught in it.

CC: By taking any action one is inevitably caught. Doesn't the statement in the film need more qualification then? Isn't it a statement which is too easily acceptable without much thought?

SB: Yes, maybe it does and hopefully that qualification would come through some of the events in the film. I mean in the sense that Beres handed the dish of paint with the brush to the Communist officials sitting at the end of the line and so on.

CC: Do you feel a performance like Beres' has more impact after a military take-over than before?

SB: Oh, yes, yes. There are two or three things to say about that. One is the power of the media in the sense that all those performances were reproduced to a certain extent or interpreted and, therefore, we can now look at them and therefore your response occurs through that. And also we made the assumption in the film that memory can play a role in that, however impure, because we didn't see Beres hand the dish of paint to the Communist official, we only know that through the voice of somebody who purported to be there, so there's an element of trust in that as to whether that's true or not, and if we didn't have access to the media, if they didn't exist, maybe these tiny actions couldn't be regarded in the same terms at all because we wouldn't know about them.

CC: How do you differentiate between the aggression in your pieces and that of a military force. They're obviously very different.

SB: Yeah. Well military power is there for real. Absolutely for real. It's absolutely concrete. The sensations of violence and aggression that come through the two pieces that I did with Ian Robertson, show how, in a sense, one can learn through violence and maybe people are taught/trained through violent means or implied violent means. The implication behind that is that it's wrong.

CC: A lot of the performances you chose for the film make people very vulnerable. For a start, people are often naked. There's also self-immolation in your pieces, the nail going through the hand. And the walking naked in a crowd could also be seen as a form of self-immolation. A lot of performance is peeling away at layers of ourselves and discovering unpleasant aspects.

SB: No. I wouldn't say that about performance. I have to repeat I was only taking a certain aspect of performance and I think all those acts had metaphoric implications. But it's that curious relationship between something being actual and at the same time being a representation of something else. Hence the hand thing.

CC: Well, you could say that about some theatre.

SB: I suppose the difference between theatre and that would be that those events were actually taking place. The nail going through the hand wasn't simulated, as far as I know according to those two descriptions. One is by the member of an audience in London who'd never seen a performance before, and fainted. Then he tried to come to terms with his feelings and thoughts

afterwards and said in the end that it was almost as though the meaning of the work was reconstructed in his head afterwards, which I thought was a very interesting statement. And second by a professor of logic in Poland who saw the same act done by the same man in Poland and talked about the necessity for artists to be more serious about what they're doing and to always take a risk. To try to be consequential — is that the right word?

CC: One of the performers speaks of feeling free when he performs . . .

SB: It's the sense of release he feels he has. I don't exactly share that, but I do understand what he means.

CC: An actor in a play, when he's achieved a perfect balance with the part and his performance becomes instinctive, could say the same.

SB: Yeah!

CC: It comes from complete focus and a mixture of concentration and instinct. Is that the same for a performer?

SB: Well, that's difficult to say. It can be. It's just that something comes from different ends and maybe are reacting to the same kind of point in the middle. One coming from a set of pre-determinants that the person has to struggle through in order to reach that point and the other where the person sort of steps out of real life and yet still in real life is able to achieve a sense of freedom.

CC: You've been working in performance for a long time. What performances have made the greatest impact for you?

SB: I did see a work of Beuys in 1970 at Edinburgh that I found a very liberating piece of work for me at the time. This is a personal thing in the sense that it gave me an understanding that I could step out of a certain sort of straitjacket which were my own preconceptions and limitations and Beuys offered me that. That was very important to me. After that it's not so much actually seeing performances, it's more about notions and ideas about performances. Maybe about myths, small myths. For example the work by Jan Mlcoch from Prague which is in the film, where his feet and arms are tied. I feel that's a very powerful image and, of course, it's interesting there as a notion of whether there's an audience or not. Obviously it took place in a loft — maybe it wasn't a performance at all, maybe it was a tableau set up for a photograph, I don't know. But recent art history has leached out certain events and asserts a kind of centrality for certain activities.

CC: Can you be more specific?

SB: Yes. In Western terms we can certainly talk about a recent history of art which deals with modernisms, which finds its placement through the marketplace and which seeks to

marginalise, doesn't seek but actually *does* marginalise work which doesn't fall into the broad strata or category. I feel that very strongly in relation to just my experience of becoming an artist, seeing what happened in the sixties, and seeing how things *disappeared* as it were.

CC: What stage are you talking about?

SB: From about 1965 when I decided to do performance. Now I don't do all that much live work. I haven't for a long time. It's moved from the sense of a person as a physical entity in a given situation — really attempting to make statements with oneself in relation to others — to withdrawing to a kind of mental space and in a sense making works which are in my own private language. Imaginative performances through the use of sound, the use of voice and so forth. The last piece I did was with two other people, Tim

Head and Ron Hazeldon. The text was written in relation to the space in which it was to be played. It was a disused church hall so that the people present in the room were conscious of the text expressing or reminding them of their own experience in the room — how they got there, climbing the stairs, sitting down, feeling cold as well as other things. So there was a kind of immediacy that comes really from the sense of the audience being the performer, or the audience being asked to consider their own immediate experience as part of a scenario that will have incorporated other things. That's just the last thing I did. ■

Stuart Brisley and Ken McMullen's *Being and Doing* is at the ICA Cinematheque from March 6-31. A new installation by Stuart Brisley is at the ICA gallery from March 22-31.



Stuart Brisley in Face to Face, Theatre der Nationen, 1979.

D O C U M E N T

GLAMOUR AND GARBAGE

1. A LACK OF PRIVACY

In the time that we live in now
It is sometimes difficult to
separate fantasy from reality
To understand who you actually
are

Amongst the many images of who
you might possibly be
I read a book — I am the hero
I watch a film — I am the star
I ride with former cowboy,
filmstar, President Ronald
Reagan

I shop with Margaret Thatcher
And her husband Dennis is beside
me at every turn

When we visit America
We are convinced that we are
walking on celluloid

Living out a real adventure with a
cast of millions

Tricks of time
Neatly disguised and packaged,
mostly not understood
Controlling our view of real and
unreal

Life experience
More and more.

Amongst the search for perfect
moments

Can any of us find the time to live
life through the flesh

Or have we
Forgotten
How?

A lack of privacy FLOOD LIT

2. HACKNEY HEART BEAT

We live in the London Borough of
Hackney, on the East side of the
city. Hackney has recently been
branded the most deprived area in
Europe.

TO LET
BEWARE

MACHINISTS WANTED!
Nice white town hall. Clean red
flag.

Flowers in the flower beds
The London Borough of Hackney
Street talk. Street walk.
Street life. Street fight.
Street corner. Strength in
numbers

Don't walk alone after dark.
Oranges and lemons
Sweet shops

This is the race of iron
This is England's east side story
Miles high. Feet deep
Black beat. White beat.
Right beat. Left beat.

I and I

Babylon. Babylon.

Low sweeps helicopter talk
Spot my face, watch my feet.

This is my country. This is my
land. This is unfairness what we
planned.

The sky collapsing. The floor is
moving. The buildings are
talking.

And all I hear as I walk the street
Is my heart beat. Is my heart beat.
Hackney heart beat.



N T A T I O N

3. PERFORMANCE ART

For us; As drawing is shape and line

As sculpture is form

Performance is

relationships

It is multi-layered

It has edges and the capacity to fail

It is to be experienced

Real v unreal

Ephemeral and lovable

Influential

And between people in their lifetime

Our life time

Your life time

Socialism does not belong to one person.

'She pricked her finger with the needle and three drops of blood fell upon the snow.

The red looked so lovely on the white snow, that she thought to herself;

I wish I had a child

As white as snow

As red as blood

And as black as ebony.

Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who is the fairest of us all?'



4. COLLABORATION

We are male and female working together

Man and woman

Striving equally towards the collaboration and mutual respect of sex and race in our world and our time

Black White

Pink Blue

Hot Cold

The quality of a difference

An equator between two poles

A design for living

No lovers or victims

No Eden or forbidden fruit

No sinners. No winners

No glory or shame

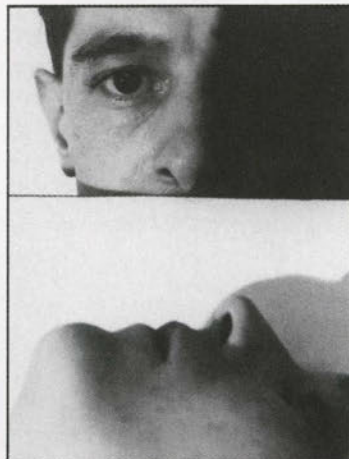
No class

No chip

No apples or serpents

Men without qualities

Women without pain.



5. YOU'VE NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD

In our post-Auschwitz seminars consciousness is a strange case of politicians fees

Life through a ring

Up against a cold wall. After a cold war

It was the climax of a fantasy

W wanted to sow a seed

Questions, questions

Looking for a future.

Invisible people and symbolic back scenes.

Watch out for the blood line.

Empress. Goddess. Assassination.

Speak all inner thoughts

The Saint. Decayed

The fall and surrender

Why C.N.D.?

It won't happen to me

Because amongst the glamour and the garbage

I've never

You've never

We've never had it so good???

MARTY ST JAMES AND ANN WILSON



IS THERE A CRISIS IN VISUAL THEATRE?

TWO ARTICLES WHICH ASSESS THE PROGRESS OF
EXPERIMENT IN THE THEATRE, ONE PESSIMISTIC,
ONE OPTIMISTIC

AGAINST SLOWNESS

It is disheartening to note that it is actually possible to fit at least eighty per cent of the country's experimentalists in theatre in a small but comfortably appointed hall, but this happened recently. Hosted by the People Show, they were addressed by DAVID GALE of Lumiere and Son, and what follows is an edited version of his speech. The title refers to a stylistic tendency in contemporary performance that is most readily characterised by its slowness of physical movement. The article itself departs into rather broader territory than this tendency; but restricts itself to the work of theatre groups rather than solo performing or performance artists.

I believe we are experiencing a unique crisis in the shrinking world of experimental or alternative performance. Our theatre has become infected and the infection has made the patient resemble his comfortable bourgeois relation, the theatrical mainstream. This infection has none of the drama of a terminal fever, instead it is a slow, wasting disease. The word 'crisis', is usually applied to a situation that is acute and novel, but something much more novel is occurring here, which requires a redefinition of some everyday terms. Sufferers from AIDS know all too well that they have been invaded by what is called a slow virus — a pathogenic agent which takes as long as three years to produce symptoms. The slow virus is something new — until quite recently all viruses were considered to be fast — you made contact, shortly afterwards you manifested symptoms. A drama of fever then recuperation, ideally, was enacted. You knew you had been ill, and had come through a crisis. In this age of the slow virus it seems that our theatre work has been diseased for at least the last two or three years, that we behave as if very little were going wrong, and that when the symptoms reach their most advanced and obtrusive state it will

be too late, the prognosis will be one of a terminal condition.

**We are enclaved,
ghettoised, few are
excited by us . . .**

I can see a situation arising within the foreseeable future where the value and influence of the work experimental theatre in this country is reduced to a point where the alternative or avant-garde path becomes not just an unpaved and meandering lane, but a cul-de-sac, an evolutionary dead-end.

The work has devolved into a benign tumor easily lanced by the surgeons of indifference, leaving no scars, no lingering discomfort, even no particular memories of the experience itself. We are enclaved, ghettoised, few are excited by us, few are assembling in the wings to follow us or supplant us. Of course there are economic reasons for this state of affairs, and of course we receive no support from the national critics, those ignorant fuckpigs whose uniformed and unpoetic non-contributions have been deftly condemned by John Ashford in his sad, and lucid, valedictory article in *Performance* 31. Ultimately, however we are responsible for the condition I am trying to describe. We have allowed



**EVEN THE PAST
ELUDED ME**

our organism to weaken so that it becomes susceptible to the insidious, wasting infection. Nobody is going to help us, our extinction would, in fact, be convenient to a number of interests. We are an endangered species beyond the scope of any conservationists.

Artaud . . . is a purgative that muse be re-applied

Twenty years ago I read Artaud's 'The Theatre and its Double', more out of a fascination with madmen than in theatre, and was intoxicated and transformed by the extraordinary scourging blast of his pronouncements. These days Artaud is never mentioned in performing circles, and there is a feeling that his prescriptions have been applied and taken to the limit of their useful life. If this is the case, it points to a complacency that is one of the symptoms of a wasting disease. Artaud, back in the 30's and early 40's was addressing his rage to the truly fossilised body of Fench classical theatre — he was attacking the mainstream of his culture. Reading him in 1984 I am convinced that he is a purgative that must be re-applied, not just to the British mainstream, but to the alternative sector. In his essay 'The Theatre and the Plague' he uses the metaphor of a disease to great effect:

If the essential theatre is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorisation of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localised.

Artaud sees the plague as a fearsome force which has valuable effects. The kind of infection I am referring to is merely debilitating, it brings no revelation or new forms in its wake. This stultified condition is again described by Artaud in the same essay:

The contemporary theatre is decadent because it has lost the feeling on the one hand for seriousness and on the other for laughter: because it has broken away from gravity, from effects that are immediate and painful — in a word, from Danger.

It has lost a sense of real humour, a sense of laughter's power of physical and anarchic dissociation.

It has broken away from the spirit of profound anarchy which is at the root of all poetry.

. . . the poetry of the cadaver, the imagined fullness of the bewitched, the bereaved, the disconnected, the romance of the cigarette, the langour of the smoke plume . . .

Artaud was talking about the bourgeois theatre of his time, but his observations are absolutely applicable to the state of affairs in British alternative performance. The reason the punters are staying at home in droves is because they have sussed that they're not going to have a good evening out any more.

They've seen a few shows at the ICA, maybe, and have realised that the same things are happening, or not happening, each time. They've noticed that shows 1 and 2 by Company A are much the same, and even that shows by companies B and C have great areas of overlap and similarity, both in execution and mood. And it's not as if this mood is particularly uplifting. More often than not it's just plain dull. The punters have my full sympathy. Why bother to go to the alternative theatre when the work is dull, vapid, superficial, decorative, comfortable, polite, repetitious, humourless, fashionable, nostalgic, twee, opaque, unresolved, un-thought through, uneventful, banal, undeveloping, soporific, narcissistic, mournful, melancholic, angst-ridden, riddled with barely realised but impossible yearnings, trapped in impossible pasts, languishing in fairy-tales that have no resonance, sodden with the gloom of orphans, the downcast inwardness of the cause without a rebel, the secret addiction to the fireside, the slippers, the snow scenes on Christmas cards, the 60's, the 50's, the 40's, the 30's, Edwardiana, Victoriana, the age of manners, decorum, starched linen, stiff clothing, crinolines, lace, dinner suits, evening dress, morning suits, mourning women, pale faces, the poetry of the cadaver, the imagined fullness of the bewitched, the bereaved, the disconnected, the romance of the cigarette, the langour of the smoke plume, the moustache, the white shoes, the romance of the hat, the hat brim, the coat collar, the cigarette lighter, he who lights the cigarette for her, her enigma, her sadness, her imagined fullness, her inability to cry, to speak, to smile, to run, to dance, his turbulence, his yearning, his mackintosh, his polish, his grooming, his dash, his flash, his cash, his separation from now, her absence from now, the warmth of then, the past as pasty, chocolate cake or pie, the past as not present, as wonderland, as lost magic, as the time when all was slow, slow cigarette smoke, slow high heels, slow mackintosh, slow enigma, slow face, slow feeling, the past of little toys, little boxes, little pictures, little nice past things, the past movies, whose perfect lighting, perfect costumes, perfect strengths, perfect weaknesses, the movies whose world smothered our face like the creature in 'Alien', the movies that

are only visible in dark rooms where nothing happens to the body, dark rooms a bit like the past, a bit like the night before Christmas, dark rooms where wounds are anointed, mother's songs are heard so clearly, seaside holidays are revealed in a grain of sand, cricket is played on emerald turves, Victorians explode silently in the thickness of their trousers, and so forth and so on. It's a catalogue.

There are interesting parallels between the heroin experience and the state of mind that seems to pervade an evening in the modern theatre.

I propose a Unit of Ordinarity, to be called the Ordine. Something that is very Ordinary will have a high Ordine rating, maybe 80 out of 100, where 100 is a measure of complete Ordinarity such as the back of the hand, Michael Aspel or 'Stop it, I like it!' A low Ordine rating indicates that the thing has the power to draw thought towards it, to modify existing patterns of thinking. The items in that catalogue can be seen as Ordine clusters, small configurations of predictability of familiarity that coalesce in permutations to inform the substance of much of British alternative performance. Everyday life, perforce, alas, has a very high Ordine rating indeed. A numbing and befogging luxuriance of ordines, clustering around our raw experience receptors like molecules of heroin. There are interesting parallels between the heroin experience and the state of mind that seems to pervade an evening in the modern theatre.

This extract from the journals of a friend who flirted with junk back in the sixties seems to depict certain awful pleasures very clearly. The writer describes his first intravenous experience:

V slid the needle quite expertly while I watched for the air bubble that could waste a promising young life in an instant. Seconds later I was engulfed by great waves of oceanic and orgasmic pleasure coursing from my toetips to the roots of my hair. I glanced at the standard lamp whose stem was undulating as if glimpsed at the bottom of a rock pool.

V said 'That's the flash. Sometimes people want to throw up, but it can be very nice as long as you do it in the sink'. The flash went on for about ten minutes, succeeding by feeling of enormous bodily well-being, like the tingling from a cold shower after a sauna, magnified a hundred times. We walked down to the river and watched the boats go by. I was sweating all over, but entirely ►

engrossed in the celebrations being held in every cell of my body. V said 'I must split'.

I went to the baker's to get a doughnut. The shop was thronged with old ladies making cake decisions. My patience was infinite, no hurry at all. The present moment was ineffably perfect, nothing could puncture it, no one could move me in any direction.

Back in my room I lay on the bed with the windows open. Boats and ducks splashed past. The sounds of tourists struggling with paddles. It all receded to a comfortable distant horizon. I turned the radio on. A wallpaper of noise formed a drum around the bed. I lay absolutely still for hour after hour. Deep, deep calm. Not a single anxious thought broke the surface of my event-free lake of contentment. From time to time the word 'Sweden' drifted across the front of my mind. Not a muscle moved, other than the essential work of heart and lungs. Nothing to do with sleep. No dreams. No images. Just peace, quiet, calm. Unafraid, could handle anything, preferably at my bedside but would fact the world unblinkingly if pressed. Every cell coated with adequacy. Every organ stroked by mother's hands. Languid, clean, still. [The Journals of W.A. 1963]

Heroin is the Ordine made phantom flesh par excellence. Boredom transmogrified into an exquisite, chill caress, the absolute essence of everyday life's multifaceted trance-inducing ordinariness. But in bestowing immense and Arctic capacities of cool, heroin is merely

extreme. Confusions of temperature can be seen throughout our culture in less dramatic but more pervasive forms. The iceman cometh in mysterious ways, dealing his enticing numbnesses in so many shapes and sizes that we are overwhelmed by cool from an early age. I'm talking about cool — the mastery of non-expression, cool — the insulator of social terror, cool — the pretender to the throne of wisdom and experience. Cool the impedier of input, the prophylactic for the affliction of choice. We're all cursed with this radioactive snow from Day One.

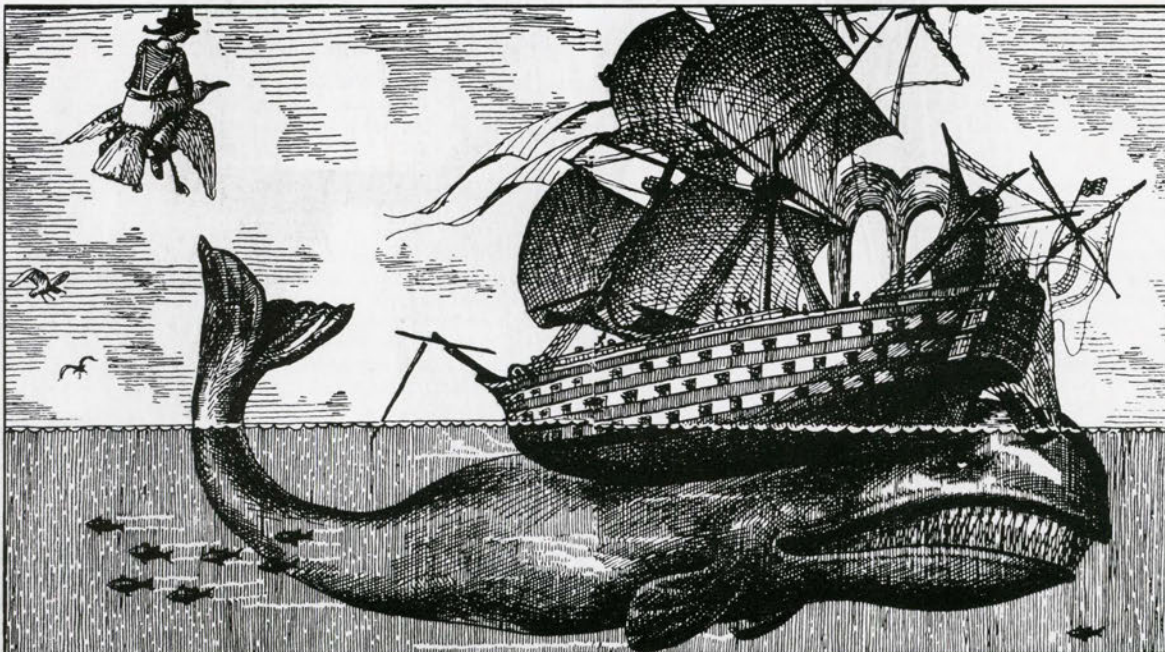
Would I never wear dark glasses for long periods?

Back in 1964 my parents went to Australia for six months and all the beatniks moved into their house with me. Down from Edinburgh came Bruce, who divulged nothing of his past. He wore dark clothes and dark glasses. He never removed the glasses once in the week that he was crashing in the lounge. His speech was slowing and measured, with a slight mid-Atlantic accent. His smiles were wry, his laughter laconic. He was not unpleasant, not unamusing. My friend Paul thought he was a poseur and used to rib him about the shades. I nurtured a secret envy for the fact that Bruce had bravely decided to give in to his terror of eye to eye confrontation. What a luxury never to have to be seen by the devouring eyes of the world! All the tiny fibrillations of fear in the muscles surrounding the eye need never be detected. All you have to

control is the face beneath the rim of the glasses — a relatively easy task. Would I ever wear dark glasses for long periods? To be sure, I could wear them for an hour down by the river where the other beat boys and girls hung out, but I would begin to hunger for daylight and the need to see clearly. My father had told me that they would eventually weaken the eyes until darker and darker lenses were required, but the real reason for my being something of a letdown to the burgeoning Bohemian movement was my fear of greed. I was greedy for that insulation from the gaze. If I indulged it for more than an hour a day it would overwhelm me, I would become addicted, one step away from the lady who stood outside the Kenya Coffee House all day long with a shopping bag over her head, emitting growls of terror.

Our theatre is without humour; dull, lifeless hares raid the cabbage patch.

Problems of coolness, that is, problems relating to the concealment of signs of inner life, are popularly supposed to be problems of adolescence, like the travails of a twenty year old recorded above. As adults we feel we have sorted out how and what we reveal and conceal in our daily lives, how to create, in fact, an 'adult life'. But our dreams and our art give the lie to these steely sculptures that are our adult personas. Contemporary alternative performance is shot through and through with strains of adolescent



coolness. An unresonant yet hollow coolness. Certainly not the coolness of Buddha or Ken Livingstone, but more in the style of Clint Eastwood or perhaps Spandau Ballet. Beneath the serenely dead-eyed face the adolescent conceals a number of passions and further personas. The persona of the child exerts an indecent leverage on adolescents and adults and institutions alike, but does this mean that we are all just naughty children, still trying to kill the fathers? Freud, in his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', states that one of the distinguishing mental features of melancholia is 'a delusional expectation of punishment'. The fact that new forms of theatre will be punished in various ways does not constitute an excuse for succumbing to child-like attitudes or melancholia. The tongue-tied child lurks unacknowledged in the wings in too many performances, leeching their vitality, casting his mesmeric, slow spells over them like fairy dust from the wand of Tinkerbell, right hand women of the boy who wanted never to grow up. The child craves sweets to balance his bitterness, he craves the past with an impossible aching, he wants to be buried alive in the movies, a juvenile lead in a Poe B-picture.

The adult denies the adolescent, the adolescent denies the child, the child denies the infant. Everywhere is melancholy. Our theatre is without humour; dull, lifeless hares raid the cabbage patch. Our theatre is depressed, it needs a cure. Freud again, from 'Mourning and Melancholia' —

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.

Melancholia may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object . . . The object has not perhaps actually died but has been lost as an object of love, e.g. a betrothed girl who has been jilted . . . In other cases a loss of this kind appears to have occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. In the broadest terms, if we are attempting to refer this material to theatre, one could say that what has been lost is a ready access to the profound forces that drive us at our innermost level, and which also drive the world in patterns that are both orderly and deranged. Our culture marginalises every single person in it



— it is our responsibility to articulate our sense of loss, not succumb to it. Where has it all gone, the articulateness, and the refusal? Freud develops his theme as follows:

One cannot avoid the impression that the most violent of the melancholic's many and various self-accusations are hardly at all applicable to the patient himself, but that they do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love.

Referring back to the theatre again we have a theatre that is consuming itself rather than the purloiners of its vitality. A theatre that has lost the ability to radiate anger, the ability to retaliate against the society that orphaned it, but instead stupefies itself with an inturned anger that is only conspicuous by its puzzling absence at the surface.

The psychoanalyst John Bowlby, in his essay 'Childhood and Mourning', describes a patient of one of his colleagues:

'he used to leave his bedroom door open in the hope that a large dog would come to him, be very kind to him, and fulfill all his wishes.

He showed complete blocking of affect, without the slightest insight . . . He had no love relationships, no friendships, no real interests of any sort. To all kinds of experience he showed the same dull and apathetic reaction. There was no endeavour and no disappointment. There were no reactions of grief at the loss of individuals near to him, no unfriendly feelings and no aggressive impulses.

All this, to me, sounds sadly reminiscent of a night out with British alternative theatre. Bowlby goes on to describe one of the compensatory devices that was unearthed in the patient's childhood. After his mother died when he was five, in later childhood, 'he used to leave his bedroom door open in the hope that a large dog would come to him, be very kind to him, and fulfil all his wishes'.

This reminds me forcefully of the nostalgia and sentimentality with which so much Slow Theatre is sodden. The large dog represented the patient's mother but the patient did not realise this. It is important to realise that the patient repeatedly and regularly fantasised this image. To the casual listener it might sound a rather pleasing image — the sort of thing that one would like to see in one of these shows they put on at the ICA. But what if the same image, or one very like it, appeared in a succession of shows, what if there was a large dog in shows by several different companies? What if the image of the dog initially had some resonance, but this resonance was never extended or examined or fully excavated? What if the dog became a merely decorative and almost arbitrary feature of a landscape cluttered with other unresolved images all of which evoked impossible yearnings in a show that was not even about impossible yearning?

Our theatre cowers in a cloud of unknowing and unseeing, cocooned in a subtextless world of fetishised things. Meanwhile the ground itself is crumbling beneath its feet, as the abyss inches towards it. Not suicide but engulfment will be its fate. The cliffs come to visit Mohammed. Undoubtedly there is, in all of us, an unreasonable fear of falling. The fear may be fairly unconscious however. Its immediate effect is to stop us taking risks. But, of course, we must take risks.

Karl Abraham observed that 'in the last resort melancholic depression is derived from disagreeable experiences in the childhood of the patient'. John Bowlby goes on to suggest, in connection with the patient who fantasised the large dog, that 'the task of treatment is to help the patient to recover his latent longing for his lost mother and his latent anger with her for deserting him'. Yearning and anger are to be recovered from muted obscurity, and the objects of those passions are to be recognised. This would seem to be a fair prescription for averting the slow, somnolent decay of British ►



experimental performance. Artaud, who was hitting the nail on the head in 1932, who loved the Marx Brothers, and who died two years after his nine years of incarceration and ECT in the asylum at Rodez, puts the case succinctly enough.

An idea of the theatre has been lost. And as long as the theatre limits itself to showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets, transforming the public into Peeping Toms, it is no wonder that elite abandon it and the great public looks to the movies, the music hall or the circus for violent satisfaction, whose intentions do not deceive them. At the point of deterioration which our sensibility has reached, it is certain that we need above all a theatre what wakes us up: nerves and heart. Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theatre must be rebuilt. The theatre must give us everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity. Humour as Destruction can serve to reconcile the corrosive nature of laughter to the habits of reason. The theatre will never find itself again except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful

precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not countefeit and illusory, but interior.

If the theatre, like dreams, is bloody and inhuman, it is, more than just that, to manifest and unforgettably root within us the idea of a perpetual conflict, a spasm in which life is continually lacerated, in which everything in creation rises up and exerts itself against our appointed rank.

In order to understand the powerful, total, definitive, absolute originality of films like 'Animal Crackers', you would have to add to humour the notion something disquieting and tragic, a fatality which would hover over it like the cast of an appalling malady upon an exquisitely beautiful profile.

I'm very angry about it. What has happened to the spark, where are the best minds of mine and subsequent generations?

Themes of mourning or repressed passion are fine material for theatre, but if these themes are not recognised and examined they will exert a depressing force on the vital energies of the whole work. This is

realised in a pervasion of dense and impenetrable moods which strip real enigma of its power so that it becomes merely a symbol of content by means of which nothing is revealed. Worthwhile topics are thus reduced to serving a mask function, in which condition they act as magnets for the pernicious Ordine Clusters.

Beneath the symptoms of mourning, beneath the mourning itself, lie forces of immense power, the most potent of which is anger. This anger is precisely the element required to de-bourgeoisify our alternative theatre and arrest its descent into Steven Spielberg easy watching fairytale and spectacle. The failure to engage with these forces has produced work of a defensively ponderous solemnity. Humour has been banished, its power to link taboo areas unexpectedly has been lost; instead we have a theatre of reverence, religioisity and logic. I want a theatre of anger, humour and indulgence.

I hardly ever expect or get a good time in the theatre these days. I only go out of a sense of duty, research and a tiny, guttering flame of optimism. I an very bored and very sad about it. I'm very angry about it. What has happened to the spark, where are the best minds of mine and subsequent generations? I'm forty years old and I see people ten, fifteen years younger than me behaving like old men and women, broken by a lifetime of servitude. Where have all the young men and women gone? Where have elasticity, danger and daring gone? Has all the energy been sucked into a black hole whose density is so great that even light can no longer escape from it? Has theatre become a collapsing star fuelled with all the quashed refusals of countless people who could at least have kicked the great beast that gives you Indiana Jones for a pint of blood, Boy George for your obedience, and Shirley Williams for your soul? I'm talking about a crisis, not just a passing phase, but an infection that shows every sign of becoming terminal. The prospect is appalling. ■

Notes:

Antonin Artaud: The Theatre and its Double, Grove Press, (1958). Quotes from Preface, **The Theatre and the Plague, Metaphysics and the Mise en Scene, The Theatre and Cruelty, The Marx Brothers, Letters.**

Sigmund Freud: Mourning and Melancholia (1915). Standard Edn. n14, pp 237-58.

John Bowlby: Childhood Mourning and Psychiatric Illness (1961), from 'The Predicament of the Family' Ed. P. Lomas, **The International Psychoanalytical Library No. 71.**

John Ashford: Mad Dogs and Englishmen. Performance, 31, (1984).

The autumn season at the ICA theatre was not only one of the most provocative but it was also the last to be organised by John Ashford, who as Theatre Director for the last six years, articulated and developed his 'Theatre not Plays' policy. This policy, which was originally controversial, has in recent months been accused of being myopic, including some criticism from this magazine. This then seemed an appropriate time for STEVE ROGERS to reflect on the current state of this particular 'performance' branch of current theatre practice, as represented by the ICA autumn season.

GESAMTKUNSTWERK OR BUST?

John Ashford, I am sure, has a lifelong sentence to go on supporting this area of work and I eagerly await the next manifestation of his commitment. So this is not then intended as an obituary. (The mysterious, mangled bicycle discovered in the bushes with strange tape recordings as exclusively reported in *Performance* was not, as was feared, that of Ashford.) Yet it is only right to record here the enormous debt owed to him by the many artists he has helped and the audiences, myself included, that he has taken great pains to encourage during his time at the ICA. The autumn season consisted of *Parasite Structures* by Hidden Grin with sculpture by Dennis Masi; *Brightside* by Lumiere & Son; and *The Carrier Frequency* by Impact Theatre Co-op with novelist, Russell Hoban. The season was introduced in a specially produced broadsheet entitled 'Avant Event Sure Draw' and each production was accompanied by a public discussion at which the companies, as well as other artists and critics discussed the works. In the broadsheet John Ashford wrote 'Each (of the three companies) exemplifies an approach to a notion which has been central to the ICA theatre policy over the last four years: to emphasise that area of theatre wherein its essential collaborative disciplines of performance, text, choreography, design and music can meet afresh as equals'. — and later — 'Do not expect tidy stories, for whatever more traditional forms of theatre would have you believe, life is not made up of tidy stories, Expect to confront your dreams, for we all have dreams. No, no-one is planning to fly; but acts of the imagination will be attempted which transcend daily reality, acts which speak with the truth of poetry'. To what extent were these aims and criteria realised in the autumn season, and how adequate are they as a basis for an experimental theatre in the late 1980s?

Lumiere & Son are, at the age of 11 years, the senior citizens of the three companies. They are also an extremely prolific company. *Brightside* displayed all the skills learnt over those prolific 11 years. It was without a doubt one of the most immaculate and seamless realisations of the criterion of



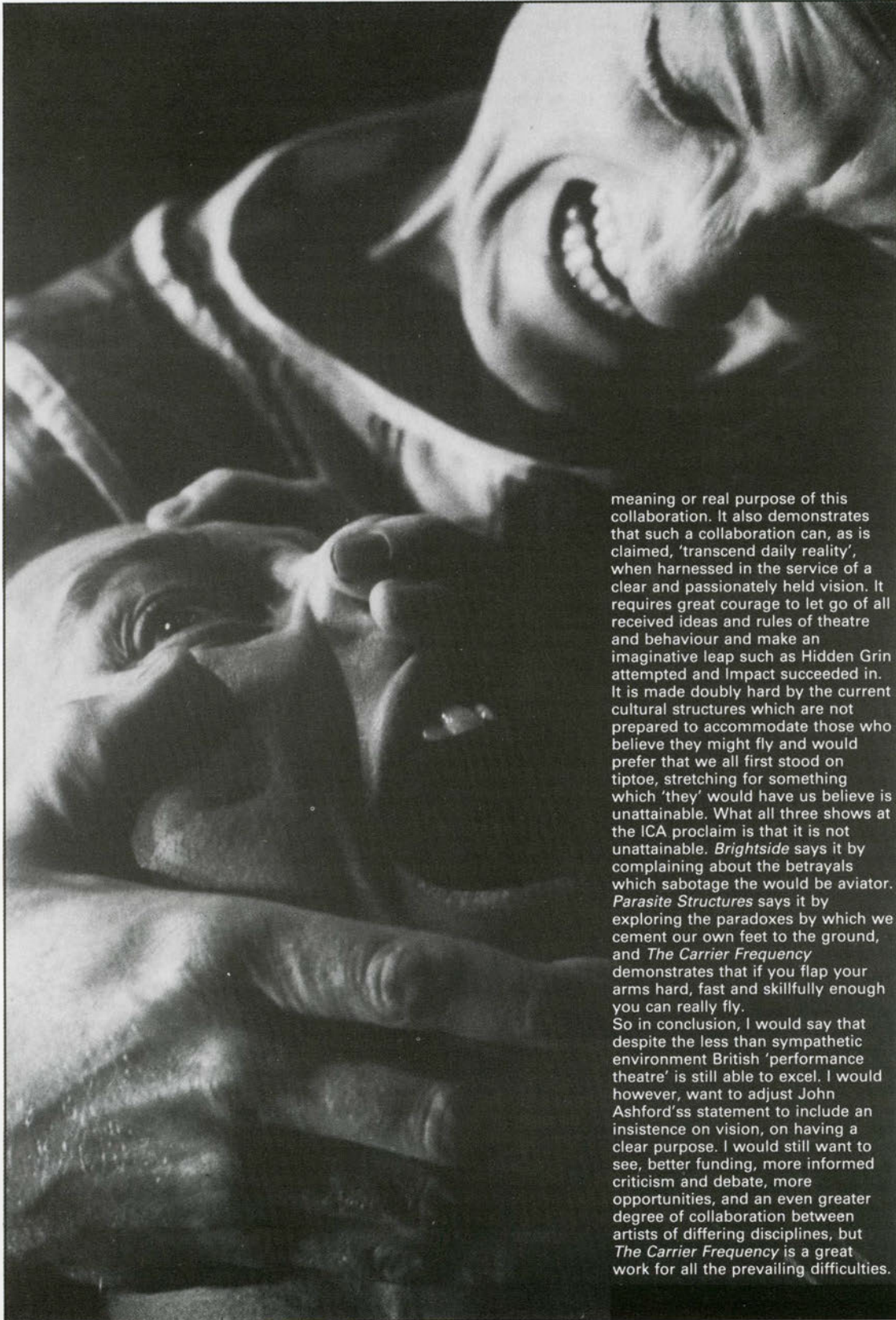
Impact Theatre in the *Carrier Frequency*.

Photo: Matthew Davison

harmonizing the elements of music, dance, text, performance and design. It was also the quintessential Lumiere show. It concerns a dancer, who in preparing for an important debut finds herself confounded by the betrayals of the people whom she most relies on for support: her teacher; her accompanist; her designer; and worst of all, her impressario boyfriend. It is a classic Lumiere scenario which reveals the vile underbelly of a society based on hypocrisy and deceit. It is structured schematically and peopled by pantomime characters. It is whipped along at the pace of farce by a typically maniacal text from David Gale, and directed with finesse by Hilary Westlake. It has pace, some great jokes, a seductive visual presence, evocative music, precise and energetic performances, and an accessible content. All of which make it a very appealing show. But, there was something fundamental missing from *Brightside*. I always leave a Lumiere show with a sense of unease, as I am intended to. But this time these Fellini-esque grotesques failed to transcend daily reality. I could not find it in myself to care too much about the fate of the dancer, either as character or as metaphor of the artist and the creative process. It is a romantic view of the artist in a philistine world and it does nothing more than complain. It offered no new insights and instead of transcending, it merely reclothed daily reality, in a dazzling new sensory wardrobe. The harmonizing of essential collaborative elements should not only restore magic to the theatre but should also reveal an alternative vision. What use then is a theatre which invents a new language to say the same old things? At the forum discussion both David Gale and Hilary Westlake agreed, almost proudly, that they weren't in the slightest bit concerned about accessibility. Perhaps inaccessibility has been used in the past as a disguise rather than a provocation? By comparison there was an almost inarticulate honesty about *Parasite Structures*. Hidden Grin's Passionate striving for a theatrical articulation of a clear vision made *Brightside* look like slick, but nonetheless empty, trickery. The collaboration between Hidden Grin and sculpture, Dennis Masi moved me to great anger. Masi's installation/sculptures primarily concern the clinical laboratories of animal experimentation as a metaphor of our own society in which the manager/bureaucrat is the vivisectionist of human lives and communities. It is a clean, smooth, minimal world in which passions, individuality and faith have no place. It is a world geared exclusively to the

goals of scientific and economic progress. Yet the manipulators are also human and are subject to the same processes. So there is the paradox, and there was the insuperable problem of *Parasite Structures*. It is a fearful paradox inherent in a world where technology has raced ahead leaving ethics staggering far behind. The translations of this vision onto the stage succeeded in recreating human society as a clinical laboratory. A clean white space, in which the action is dictated by the voice of the company director who is present on stage throughout, and by the performers own sense of how they *should* behave. They move through three environments, the gymnasium, the laboratory, the compound, all of which demand a purposeful, goal-oriented pattern of behaviour. Even our most intimate and dark fears and anxieties are treated as so much scientific data. Any deviations from the fixed patterns are corrected either by external control or by the group itself. These deviations and the final projected images of animals in laboratories provide the insights into the real nature of this world. The problem came with the attempt to be true to the paradox. The success of which depends on the seductive and appealing presentation of the cool laboratory environment which gives a sensory disguise to its real purpose. The deviations from norm are generally mild and the correction is generally cool, simple and equally mild. In being true to the nature of the paradox they failed to create a theatre strong enough to move. As theatre, the clean white set and regimented actions are soothing, even mesmeric, which is the point of the piece, but, as someone commented at the forum discussion, you don't make theatre about boredom by making boring theatre. *Parasite Structures* was not boring — it was just not theatrical enough to make its points strongly enough. I would have preferred the animal laboratory metaphor to have been used more extensively. In the laboratory the cool environment makes the most poignant contrast with the nauseating smells of chemicals and animal fear, and with the appalling screams from the tortured beasts. In *Parasite Structures* there were no smells and now howls of pain and fear. However, despite this failure to find an engaging theatrical metaphor for the paradox present, it was theatre with a vision. It attempted to confront and reveal, 'with the truth of poetry'. It too aspired to a harmony of its essential elements. It achieved this with less success than *Brightside*, but unlike *Brightside* the harmony was vital to the revelation

of the vision. I am sorry that *Parasite Structures* failed, but it was an honest failure and it certainly was testament to the power of a total theatre to confront issues large than 'tidy stories' or ordinary reality. The final event of the season was *The Carrier Frequency*, Impact Theatre's collaboration with Russell Hoban. I am generally in awe of the power, passion and theatrical dexterity of Impact Theatre. Yet in the past I have always been perplexed by an indefinable quality about their work which I have thought of as a kind of naivety. I now feel I understand what this quality really is. It is a striving for a pure theatre. The collaboration between Impact and Russell Hoban is a logical one. Both are concerned with a visionary reality in which language, and even the lack of language, are more important as texture than as primary medium. Impact have produced shows in cod-German, cod-French and the argot of a dead subculture, and Russell Hoban has invented new languages. They all rely on sound values to communicate feelings and textures rather than using words as signs. Reading a book like *Pilgermann* gives a direct experience of the reality behind the mirror, the truth of poetry, rather than a description of it. As Russell Hoban wrote in the last issue of *Performance*, *The Carrier Frequency* is not about something, it is something. A substantial claim, but not an unfounded one. *The Carrier Frequency* is not about another world, it is another world. It successfully brings together, 'afresh as equals', text, music, design, performance and choreography in the service of a greater goal, the creation of a pure theatre in which the only reality is what is happening on the stage. What you see is real, actually happening, and not a representation, a reflection or a recreation of some other world, real or imagined, outside the theatre. It all takes place in real time, it does not condense, fold or cut time. It all takes place in real space, it does not suggest or imitate any other space. It is performed in a physical and oral language which has no existence outside the theatre. When John Ashford wrote about 'acts of the imagination', 'which transcend daily reality', 'which speak with the truth of poetry', he had *The Carrier Frequency* in mind. In theatre such as this it would not be unreasonable or surprising to see people fly. What the ICA autumn season demonstrates most clearly that a harmony of 'essential collaborative elements' alone is not enough. It is all too easy to be seduced by the sensory pleasures of this total theatre, without regard for the



Lumiere and Son in
Brightside.

meaning or real purpose of this collaboration. It also demonstrates that such a collaboration can, as is claimed, 'transcend daily reality', when harnessed in the service of a clear and passionately held vision. It requires great courage to let go of all received ideas and rules of theatre and behaviour and make an imaginative leap such as *Hidden Grin* attempted and *Impact* succeeded in. It is made doubly hard by the current cultural structures which are not prepared to accommodate those who believe they might fly and would prefer that we all first stood on tiptoe, stretching for something which 'they' would have us believe is unattainable. What all three shows at the ICA proclaim is that it is not unattainable. *Brightside* says it by complaining about the betrayals which sabotage the would be aviator. *Parasite Structures* says it by exploring the paradoxes by which we cement our own feet to the ground, and *The Carrier Frequency* demonstrates that if you flap your arms hard, fast and skillfully enough you can really fly. So in conclusion, I would say that despite the less than sympathetic environment British 'performance theatre' is still able to excel. I would however, want to adjust John Ashford's statement to include an insistence on vision, on having a clear purpose. I would still want to see, better funding, more informed criticism and debate, more opportunities, and an even greater degree of collaboration between artists of differing disciplines, but *The Carrier Frequency* is a great work for all the prevailing difficulties.

Photo: Paul Derrick

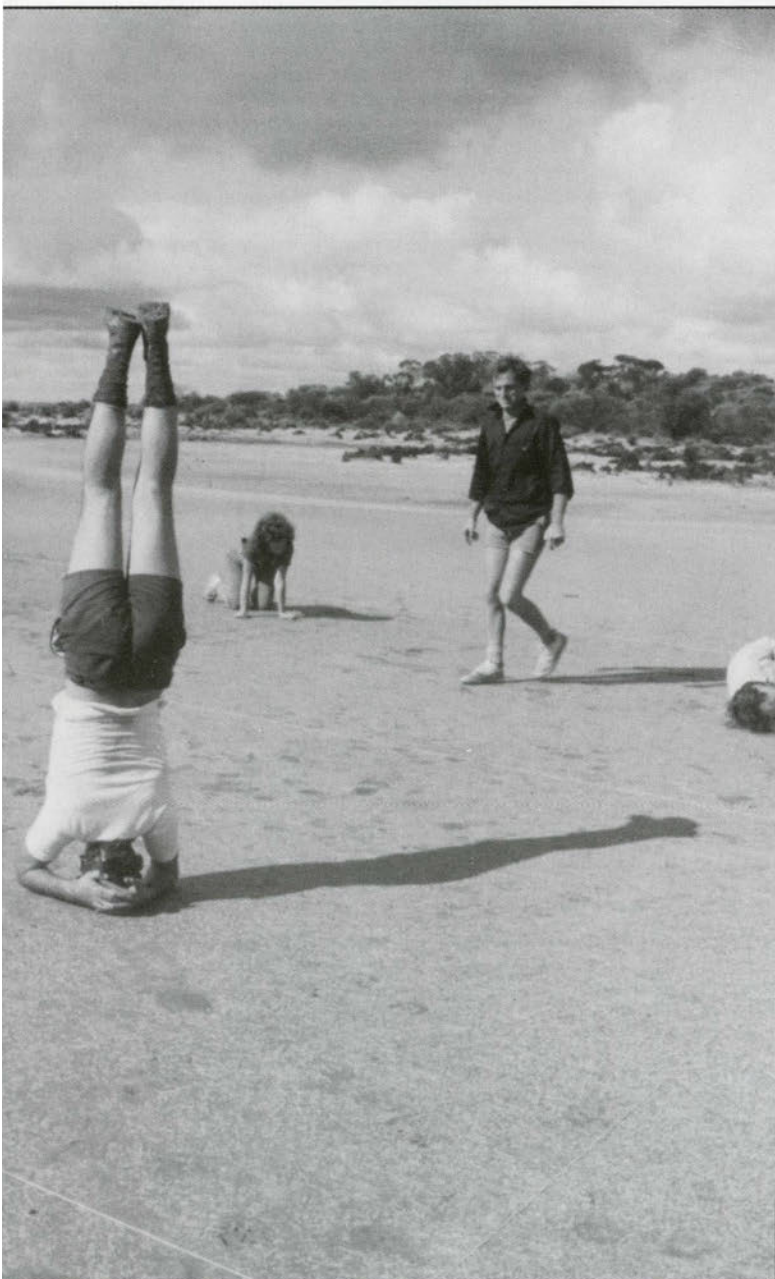
The story so far: After having performed at the Biennale of Sydney in April, 1982, ANTHONY HOWELL, of the British performance company The Theatre of Mistakes, was invited to Perth, Western Australia, by the art organisation Praxis. From Perth, an expedition was set up to go out to the dry lakes of the goldfields to research the largest available performance spaces in the region. Another group, Media Space, collaborated with Praxis in creating a team of six performers in addition to Howell: Patsy Bradbury, Martin Davis, Lyn Halliday, Pamela C. Kleeman, Lindsay Parkhill and Allan Vizents. Howell decided to keep a log of the expedition.

PERFORMANCE LAND ART

SUNDAY, MAY 23 — DAY 1

Allan and I get up at 9 a.m. to collect our Budget Bus by 9.30. We drive out along the airport road to the Budget depot. There are no hitches — the bus looks roomy and clean; it's a 12-seater, so we should have the space to stretch out. Allan drives it back to Media Space while I follow in his battered white 'chook waggon' of a Holden. We start packing provisions and sleeping gear. I argue for an embarrassment of blankets where sleeping gear is concerned — the desert can get terribly cold at night: better to carry more than we need than to squabble over who's got what. We make a list of everything under the sun — including compasses, toilet paper, zoom lenses — and decide to look at our list in Kalgoorlie tomorrow morning, when the full team will have assembled with all the gear from all possible sources. Kalgoorlie will be our last large town before we turn off the bitumen roads in search of the largest flat area in the Goldfields. It's there that we'll have to pick up the gas-lamps we still need if we wish to take extended time, open shutter shots of *Active Circles* being performed at night; the shots we hope will convey our circling — ordinary daylight stills come out as little dots lost in a field and convey nothing. So we plan to try it with five portable gas-lamps. Three which we've already got. Otherwise, we've chatted about documenting our preparations and our trip out to the salt lakes — Marmion, Goongarrie and Yindarlgooda — but performing in a privacy uninterrupted by either still camera or portapack. Performance, after all, is its actions, not its documentation.

In the afternoon I sit re-reading the instructions for *Active Circles*. It's a performance The Theatre of Mistakes abandoned in 1977 because the company couldn't find a flat space in England large enough for it. It's like a game really, the performers forming two radii of a circle which can accelerate towards the centre or towards the perimeter — and when both radii form a single straight line, a new, larger circle can be started, with either end of the line-out as its pivot. That's the basic idea — which leads to ramifications too complex to go into here. In the long, hot summer of 1977 we did perform it on Hartley Wintney village-green, which has a sizeable cricket-pitch, as a dance to bring down the rain — or so we told the press! It had to be abandoned after 9 hours though, because performers were beginning to circumnavigate the village during their circling — thus losing



sight of each other. However, as we packed it in, the first drops of rain fell — as the *Southern Evening Echo* duly noted — though the R.A.F Met. office claimed, post hoc, that they knew all along the weather was about to change. That was the last performance until now. As I glance through the instructions I see quite a few details which date the piece — obsession with extrinsic details, clumsy use of walking backwards, somewhat pretentious choice of the pronouns for signals. I change some of the instructions. Somebody phones. We're a woman short — and my notes specifically state that the ratio of sexes in the performance should always be N:N+1 (that is, one more man than there are women, or vice versa). So Allan rings round frantically in search of one more woman. If we take seven people out into the desert and perform *Active Circles* as a five performer piece, then we can count on two reserve players at all times, ensuring that everybody gets a two hour break — but if we've only two women that'll mean that the girls never get a break. Finally somebody somewhere in Perth says Yes, she'll bring a sleeping bag, warm clothing etc and meet us at Media Space at 7 p.m.

The afternoon goes slowly. Allan and I have loaded all our equipment into the bus. We sit watching the 6 o'clock news. Patsy arrives. Then Pam. But we give up on Martin, Lindsay and Lyn — from Praxis, in Fremantle, several miles away — and take off to Fast Eddy's for a last hamburger, T-bone or plate of chips. After all, we may not be eating much besides dried lizard for the next few days.

The Praxis crowd join us a few minutes after our return to Media Space. They're loaded with tents, sleeping gear, provisions; but Martin packs energetically, and we're off at about 9 p.m. — hoping to reach Boulder, near Kalgoorlie, by 4 or 5 in the morning. Out past the airport again, and then on, and on, five or six hundred ks — negotiating a few low hills, and then the flatness of the wheat belt; ghostly eucalypts; wattles looming out of the red darkness on either side of the practically always dead straight road. Everything more red and green than usual because of the recent late autumn rains — which worry us quite a bit because we'd hate to find our salt lakes filled up with water by the time we get to them. On one side of the road, the pipeline carrying water to the goldfields from the hills accompanies us — its engineer committed suicide when the pipe was completed, because the water arrived in Kalgoorlie a few hours later than expected. The miles of pipeline travel along beside us, meeting as we do the freight train rushing along towards us which takes over thirty seconds to pass, although we're travelling at 120 ks per hour! A ghost train in the darkness. A road broken only by railway-crossings, corpses of kangaroos — notorious jay-walkers — rare truck-stops and filling stations, and the odd town — Southern Cross, Coolgardie — towns which are one enormously wide main street, hotels of corrugated iron with wooden pilasters in a row along their verandahs, the offices of mining companies, an occasional ultra-modern motel.

We pull in for petrol, and take coffee at Yellowdine — in a cafe where a tame wallaby eats the stubs out of the spitoon while his partner, a massive alsatian, snores by the fire. Above the counter hang dishcloths decorated with Aboriginal scenes: local sacred sites and painted caves. The cafe itself is a sort of painted cave; with murals of Captain Cook, dancing Aborigin-

als, blacks (or maybe sunburnt convicts) being flogged — the tribal history of an Australian truck-stop: one entire wall covered with visitors' business cards — real estate, insurance, topless dancers, Praxis Art — everyone passing through. Outside, the bullfrogs chant through the light drizzle, and an enormous moth the colour of the dirt crawls blearily towards the light of the petrol pumps.

We pile back in. Drivers change. I doze and wake up again, change seats, stare at the ever vanishing, ever approaching, sleek, black tape of bitumen — eucalypts like burnished bronze in the headlamps; giving way to low shrub. We pull into Boulder and knock on Andrew's door at about 5 a.m. — Andrew and Diana are English friends of an English friend in Perth. They've been out here prospecting, and live within a mile of the Golden Mile Mine — the richest goldmine in history; once abandoned, but now being reworked. Diana lets us in and we collapse — on beds, floors, sofas, anywhere.

A child starts coughing in the night.

MONDAY, MAY 24 — DAY 2

Between 8.30 and 9 in the morning we struggle awake and sip tea. Andrew shows us a nugget of gold flecked with iron ore which he found during his days of serious 'fossecking'. He keeps it in a battered matchbox. He and Diana live in a dilapidated shack of a house, albeit with a pretty enough verandah. It's quite ramshackle inside as well — stuffing coming out of the chairs, the walls much as they found them when they moved in, except for their daughter's paintings — odd wall-papers, hardboard, unfinished paint-jobs. There's something rickety about the whole of Boulder anyway. Prospectors don't seem to care much for material niceties — they're too busy playing the desert's version of 'Lotto'.

Andrew lends us geological maps, a shovel, a prospecting pan, two fine compasses, and advises us against getting lost. We drive off to Kalgoorlie, where I sit in a cafe, writing up the log, while the others grab more breakfast and then hunt up the equipment and provisions we still need: two more lamps with gas cannisters, eggs, chops, powdered milk and so on. By 11.30, we're heading towards Menzies — a desert town with dry lakes in all directions. The shimmering surface of the dead straight road is often only one lane wide, which means that drivers play chicken with approaching cars or trucks, until one or both drive left hand wheels onto the red dirt shoulder — a wide area on either side of the road, bordered by a wire fence most of the time, either denoting the edge of 'station' properties or simply to keep the 'roos' off the road — though apparently these have no trouble jumping the fences if they see you coming and feel like committing suicide. Beyond the fence, redgums, scrub, abandoned cars, outcrops, mines — and the occasional corrugated lean to supported by a caravan surrounded by typically Australian junk.

Even though it's basically a single lane road, widening only on the brows of the hills, there's so little traffic that the ks fly by and we overshoot our first target — Lake Goongarrie, a relatively small lake between Kalgoorlie and Menzies — and we have to

An Audible Line: Left to right, Anthony, Patsy, Martin, Pam.

Photo: Allan Vizents

double back. Our maps are either too sketchy to be of much use, or they're too detailed to be read simply. Anyway, we catch sight of Goongarrie from the road, and pull off to take a look at it. It's enormous — and would give us a performance circle of about 3 ks in diameter. It's not covered in salt. An endless stretch of flat red earth. It's horizon is a mirage. The arms of the lake vanish as they try to encircle it, and the vast table ultimately becomes the sky. Given the rain holds off, this would be an almost perfect site for *Active Circles* — but it's decided that we press on and look at Lake Marmion before starting to play, in case it's even better — it's certainly going to be bigger; allowing a 10 or 11 k diameter circle of utterly flat ground, according to our maps — an inconceivably large arena. So we pile back into the bus and drive on.

40 ks beyond Menzies, we find Jeedamyia and pull off onto a red dirt road towards Lake Marmion. Our destination is still some 45 ks further on, but there's a ghost town marked on the map — Kookynie — about 14 ks out of our way, so we head for that as an interesting lunch stop. As we drive, we notice how the water from the recent rains is pouring off the bush and along the road. The sky glitters. The bush is awash, but the water never seems to sink into the hard red ground — instead, it slides over it, like liquid split on linoleum. Now we find ourselves careering through flash-flooding brooks: one has to accelerate to get through these — orange spray exploding around us, detonated by our impact. A lorry passes us, axle-deep in red mud. Eventually we find ourselves travelling down a river; a river which flows up to the front verandah of the pub in Kookynie — the only building still occupied.

Conservationists may worry about man destroying nature. Kookynie is proof that in the Australian bush it's often nature which has the better of man. Overgrown, deserted ruins of a shopping precinct; rust eating into old jalopies, cans, oil-drums, girders. It's all blackened and forlorn — the eject of mining: crumbling man-made hills, like old scabs on the turquoise-green skin of the outback.

In the pub, they advise us against going down to Lake Marmion in anything but a four-wheel drive. Even if we reach this huge lake it will probably be full of water, and therefore useless. So we head back up the river of a road, having opted for Lake Goongarrie after all. At sunset, we find ourselves camped on top of an outcrop overlooking one of the world's most beautiful performance spaces, and certainly one of its most unfrequented. It's surrounded by crickets and gum-trees, several ks in from the road. We light a fire, as the clouds pour out of the sky into the dying red glow of the west. Allan builds a hole, fills it with embers and covers it with an old iron mesh we picked up in Kookynie. We bake potatoes and grill chops liberally flavoured with eucalyptus leaf and port. Several of the party, including myself, get very drunk on red wine and port, then bourbon in our 'Milo' chocolate night-cap. The evening erupts into opinions which disintegrate into unconsciousness.

TUESDAY, MAY 25 — DAY 3

I wake up with a terrible hangover to the drumming of rain on my tent. My headache is all the worse for my

having slept without a pillow on the hard ground, and my temper isn't improved by the rain. Luckily the shower ceases after about twenty minutes, but the lake, which was a bone-dry, reddish-grey sheet yesterday, is now like a wet mirror. I manage to stomach a cup of tea but feel too queasy for bacon and eggs; so I wander off to inspect the surface of our performance space.

We've pitched camp above a sort of inlet, a lagoon of flat sand about the size of a cricket-pitch, which proves hard enough to stand on; but beyond this inlet, the lake proper is quaggy underfoot, and the heels of my shoes give beneath me with every step — which makes very unpleasant walking. Still further out, mud cakes the shoes, and walking becomes a slog. This will never do — but it seems as if it hardly matters, our site is so beautiful. To the left, some sort of Australian wood pigeon croons a chord: its notes are a harmonic — it gives throat to its tune on several levels simultaneously. Then there's what I decide to call a 'morse-bird', because its call sounds like a signal in code. Then the squabbling, grating screeches of the parrots — 'twenty-eights' mostly — viridian flittings, tumbling out of the trees. The sky is becoming blue. To the right, there's a high dune of bright red sand on which the tussocks of scrub stand out turquoise, grey and green after the rain.

Like everywhere else in Australia, the bush is permanently charred — the outback being a phoenix, ever rejuvenated by the fire in which it perishes. It sometimes feels silly to talk about 'seasons' here, where so many of the trees lose bark all the time, rather than leaves at a particular time; where there's always something blossoming at any time, and where everything looks half-dead, half-alive most of the time, instead of either one or the other.

On the dune, red peelings, shards, husks of bark fall from each gumtree onto its black circle of dead leaves, and the burnt remnants of some former tree. The sand vividly red, the dead embers black, the peel grated on top of the embers vividly red again — while the naked orange trunks of the trees reach up out of the centres of these debris strewn circles, wrinkling like human skin at all joints and junctions.

I return to camp, still feeling woozy, sleep for an hour, then walk down with the others onto the sandy pitch below. I suggest a few practice exercises — additive spins, when one revolves for one turn in one direction, two in the other direction, three in the original direction and so on — as a method of unwinding and rewinding when spinning fast in the centre of a circle. Then everybody in the group pairs off (except for Martin, who is still slightly under the weather from last night), and we try changing instigation of the circles; gyrating at speed, or slowly, in the centre — or walking at speed, or slowly, around the circumference of a circle whose centre is your opposite number — a slow centre causing a fast perimeter, and vice versa. I then teach everybody the rules of *Active Circles*, and by noon most of my performers have more or less got the hang of it. We break for lunch and a siesta, during which I write up the log.

After lunch, we venture out further onto the lake, which has dried up considerably in the noonday sun. We try a seven-person circle, talking Martin through the piece, since he's now recovered. Certain rules are changed, in particular the instructions for what happens after an audible line — denoting the moment

when two radii are at 6 o'clock position — is called during a circle walk anticlockwise by the longer radius, with its velocity increasing towards the perimeter.

This particular moment used to lead to the formation of a smaller circle than the one during which the audible line was called — but the formation was achieved in a very roundabout manner. After that audible line in our revised version the performers on the shorter radius arm walk towards and in between those on the longer arm; then the performer at the centre is found by the performer originally at the perimeter of the longer radius singing out A, the performer next to him singing out B and so on, until the central performer is discovered — D in a 7-person circle, C in a 5-person circle. Instead of singing out, those in the line beyond that central performer walk in between those who have sung out, and thus the new (smaller) circle is established — its longer arm stretching between A and D, or A and C, depending on the number circling.

Also, we noted some tentative ratios for the vortex circling — when velocity increases towards the centre:

- Performer 1 (anti-clockwise): gyrating at the centre.
- Performer 2 (clockwise): 1 full revolution to performer 5's $\frac{1}{4}$ circle.
- Performer 3 (anti-clockwise): $1\frac{1}{2}$ circles to performer 4's full revolution.
- Performer 4 (clockwise): $\frac{1}{2}$ a circle to performer 5's $\frac{1}{4}$ circle.
- Performer 5 (anti-clockwise): moving slowly as the perimeter of that circle.

So to get an audible line from a vortex — always more difficult than a 'clock-hands' type of circling — 5 walks $\frac{1}{2}$ a circle; 4 walks a full circle — moving twice as fast as 5; 3 walks $1\frac{1}{2}$ circles — moving two thirds faster than 4; 2 walks 2 circles — moving $\frac{3}{4}$ faster than 3; 1 spins.

Poorly expressed, and not particularly mathematical, considering each circle is larger than the next anyhow — but these rules of thumb work well in practice, given a 5 person circle — clockwise and anti-clockwise, as suggested above, can of course always be reversed.

As the sun goes down we break for 'tea', as the Australians call supper, and prepare for our night project. Allan takes a large gas-lamp, a tripod and a camera, and sets up on the highest piece of land overlooking the performance space. Five performers, each equipped with one of the five smaller gas-lamps, perform circling exercises and then specific moves from *Active Circles* on the flat sands below. Since there are seven of us, we still have one reserve performer, so everyone gets a chance to watch the ellipses of our performance from the higher ground.

I have the sensation that in a small way we are contributing to the universe, as our wheeling lights twinkle below the larger wheel of the milky way; our lamps adding to the general nebulosity.

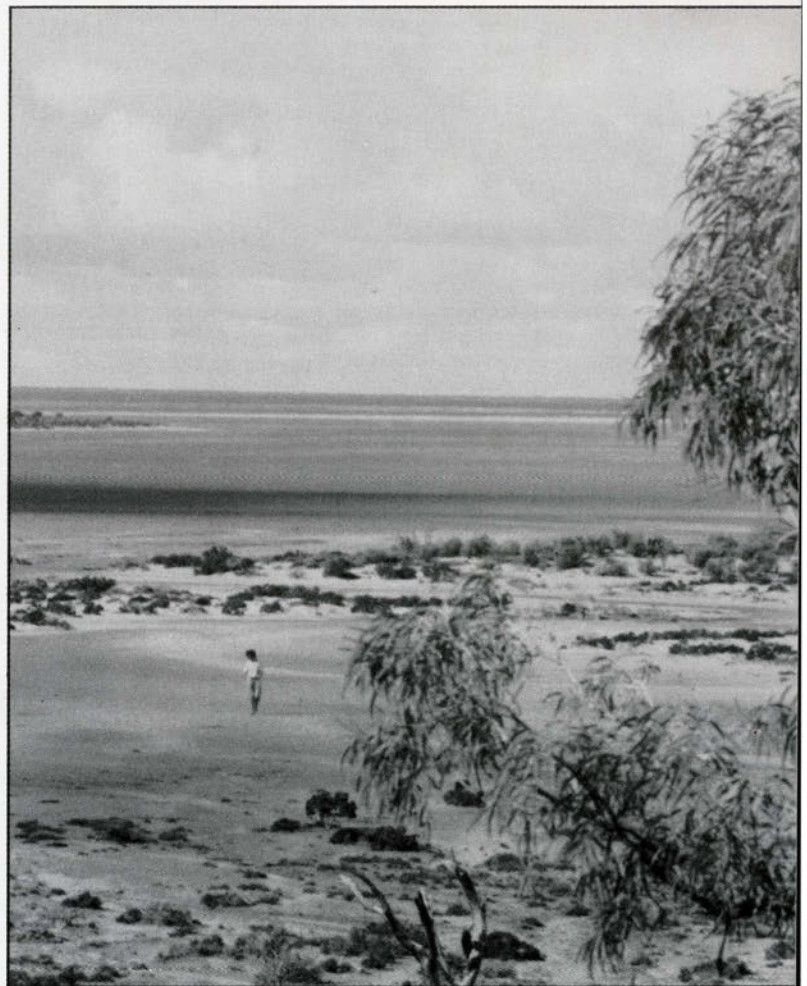
Inside the performance, during a vortex circling, one gets the impression that this lagoon of sand is a wide shadowy circus ring — all one can see are feet, lamps and the looming and veering shadows.

Working at night with lamps seems to me the best way to perform *Active Circles*. Only the arcs are visible; nothing distracts from the intention of the work. As Lindsay remarks, the afterimages keep burning in the back of the head. We also try an extended audible line, finishing up on the opposite headland to the camera, where Martin sets a tree alight. This 'burning bush' flickers at the far end of our line of lights which continues up into the stars. It keeps flaring and flickering as we make our way back to the tents. We sit chatting around our campfire, some of us even braving the Jamaican Supreme or the rich Muscat wine. There's still a little Invalid Port left — guaranteed to put one straight into hospital!

Allan tells me that the wrecked, overturned hulks of cars to be seen at intervals beside the roads and tracks are actually repositories of parts — possessions which have become part of Aboriginal culture. They're useful if something in your own battered vehicle conks out miles from anywhere. A roadworthy assemblage can be built out of spares. These skeletons of autos are often owned by someone in the bush, whose permission must be sought before one can raid the repository for a bolt or a rusted spring. I've no wish to repeat my performance of the night before, so I turn in, soberly, at about midnight. ■

Lyn on Lake
Goongarrie

(To be continued next issue).



With the American Festival almost upon us, we are sent three reports from the contemporary art arena over there. STEVE ROGERS at swish revival of Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*, CINDY OSWIN at the Santa Cruz Festival of Womens Theatre, and our NY correspondent BARBARA LEHMANN gives us the current view from the Fashionable East Village.

TALKING AMERICAN

Demigod of the Demimonde

One of the key moments in the development of my interest in 'performance' came in 1978 when I listened to a friend giving a detailed and rapturous description of this thing called *Einstein on the Beach*. At that time the names of Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, & Lucinda Childs were barely known to me. Since then of course Philip Glass has become unavoidable. Everywhere you turn, especially in New York, there is a score by Philip Glass. The work varies of course but Glass has definitely figured as an important voice and influence over the past six years. Lucinda Childs' reputation has also developed much since *Einstein*. And the myth of Robert Wilson just goes on getting bigger. At least in New York and London it does. He has become, deliberately or not, a demi-god of the demimonde of the avant garde. Everybody has an opinion about Robert Wilson despite the fact that few have seen his work. The hype surrounding the commissioning of *CIVIL warS* for the LA Olympics arts festival and the subsequent scandal surrounding its cancellation have served to heighten the myth. It must also have been seen as perfect timing by the Brooklyn Academy of Music who had announced that the jewel of their 1984 Next Wave season was to be the first ever remounting of the fabled *Einstein on the Beach*.

I left home at 9 am, arrived at JFK at 3.00 pm, local time, arrived in Manhattan at 6.00 pm and into my seat at the Brooklyn Academy opera house at exactly 7.00 pm curtain up. I had been travelling non-stop for 15 hours. I was suffering from the peculiar mixture of tiredness and disorientation that comes with jet-lag and culture shock. This was the perfect way to see *Einstein*. It is 4½ hours long, with no interval. It is a demonstration in real time of Einstein's theories of relative time and contiguous space. It is also a kind of biography of the great man, as well as a dissertation on his deistic theology. In my exhausted state I found it easy to enter into this world where light bends, where time folds, where space and distances depend upon the actions of the observer and where God is a force which binds it all together with an unswerving logic. It was as truly mesmerising and powerful as I had always prayed it would be.

What however was a little harder to enter into was the audience. The Brooklyn Academy was

full, 3500 seats. Ticket prices \$45, that about £40 to us. The average age of the audience was no different from the average age of the audience at Covent Garden. Most of them stayed to the end and most of them loved it. What was going on here? *Einstein* is not an easy work, even for those who have become familiar with the music of Philip Glass. It requires of the audience that it leave aside its usual awareness of narrative, classical structure, emotional rhythms, and appreciation of the skills of the singers and dancers. There is almost no narrative, the structure is 'Einsteinian', there are few emotions anywhere and there is no singing. I cannot believe, however fashionable the work is, that this audience only appreciated it for appearances sake. The Sunday *New York Times* headlined its feature on the Next Wave season 'The avant garde is Big Box Office'. It too found the success of the work surprising. Nothing to do with the quality of the work but what this particular audience should have appreciated it so much. The article quoted *wunderkind* of the American theatre, Peter Sellers, as saying that this kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* was natural to the pluralistic all embracing nature of American life and culture. Nice try Peter but I'm not convinced. I just think that in America people want to see you succeed. The more daring and outrageous or courageous the attempt the more America will support you. If *Einstein* had been half the length, half the scale and half the price it would not have been as great a success. In Britain of course people want to see you fail, they will try to trip you up at every stage. If *Einstein* were ever to be produced in London, unlikely as that is, the cynics and the doubters and the 'waste of public money' merchants would have a field day. I am glad I saw *Einstein on the Beach*. It truly deserves its reputation as a great watershed of the recent avant garde. It is a consummate realisation of the potential of marrying together, as equals, music, text, design, dance and performance and it is testament to the insights and the joy it can bring to large numbers of people. It also means I can now justify the opinions I have of Robert Wilson, at least in part.

(Rumour has it that we may soon be able to see the segment of *CIVIL warS* made in collaboration with David Byrne of Talking Heads. Don't miss it.)

STEVE ROGERS



Fat Lip flaunting it against society's prejudice

Networking Out

Reagan may be back in the White House but the quality of dissent in his native California is rich and flamboyant. Santa Cruz County, known as 'The Brussel Sprouts Centre of the World' as well as 'The Lettuce Growing Capital' does produce more than mere veg. One of the last outposts of hippydom — 'Spare a dollar for your friendly street-freak' the town of Santa Cruz also boasts:— a boardwalk with bikers and their Harleys — ubiquitous surfers threatened by premature deafness — a large number of beautiful seals who sleep every evening under the pier and a great love of celebration.

On my first Saturday there was a marvellous street parade. The Gay band was undoubtedly the best. Their 'twirler' (is that what you call them?) wore sequined shorts and danced, while the band behind him swung their hips slightly as they marched. After the parade there followed a topless demonstration with both sexes protesting at the law that forces women to cover their breasts in public.

It is this atmosphere that has encouraged youngish radical Americans from other States to move here. Three years ago a group of women decided to organise a women's theatre festival and make it *national*. A brave decision — the sheer size of the US made the task of contacting performers nationwide on a small budget, a formidable one. It worked however, and this year saw the second occasion of the event.

I was invited, nay hustled, to the festival as unofficial UK representative by Judy Slattum, one of the original founders, noted for her keen energy. Armed with my movement shorts, I prepared myself for 8.0 am warm-ups, followed by daily play-readings and workshops, thirty-five performances plus some heavy 'socializing', as they say Stateside. The 'socializing' proved somewhat difficult in the early part of the festival, since no meeting place or club had been provided for the duration, other than the three venues. One had to grab performers and directors in the intervals between shows, or accost them on the street. The Cafe Pacifica, scene of the opening night (Californian) champagne party, would have made an excellent meeting place, but it was closed down the day after the party, because of industrial action by the waiters. However, I did meet people, 'Networking' the Yanks call it, and that is probably the most satisfying part of any festival for a theatre practitioner — the exchange of ideas, the new faces and the jokes.

There was a great deal of comedy on offer in the performances. Split Britches from New York presented their epomymous show about three women living in one room of a West Virginia farmhouse. This show was hottest for presentation and content among the groups appearing, and I got the feeling that their brand of performance based work surprised an audience perhaps more familiar with traditional forms of feminist theatre. I found the lack of didacticism refreshing.

On a large scale, *Fat Lip* celebrated their size and personal struggles against society's prejudice to a tense audience coping with it's own fatness fears.

Some of the best work came from solo performers. Maybe it is the long and fine tradition of female stand-up comics — going back to Sophie Tucker and Mae West, that inspires American funny women. Notable moments came from Kate Kasten who held a large audience in her hand with an oven glove routine. And Ruth Zaporah who demonstrated ways of crossing arms and legs, that have changed my whole outlook on body language.

Way down at the other end of the scale was *Voices From the Well* which I can't tell you much about because it was inaudible. All I know is that it involved people performing vague eurythmics in quasi-classical costume. And does the theatre really need a modern 'Everywoman' complaining about her lot while Antigone bursts in upon her clad in net curtains? This happened in something called *Pride of Heroes* from which I could not escape having seated myself on the front row in order to at least hear the performance. I know that the chronic lack of funding in the States (even worse than the UK) makes it almost impossible for practitioners to work full-time at theatre, and thereby prevents standards from improving, but a festival can at least provide a forum for artists to give and receive feedback. There was no such forum at this festival and many performers may have gone away without knowing what people thought of their work and consequently not having a chance to develop. It is probably considered unsupportive to express negative thoughts about another's work, but standards are only going to improve in Women's Theatre if a more rigorous approach is taken to matters of content and presentation.

In the area where things worked, 'Women Warriors' succeeded brilliantly. Forty martial art exponents demonstrated their individual disciplines to a percussion accompaniment. This obviously touched a nerve with the audience — the presence of all that physical female power on stage was moving and exhilarating.

Kaleghl Quinn, well known for her self-defence programme on Channel 4 'Stand Your Ground' lives in Santa Cruz. After her early morning warm-up we had breakfast on the veranda of the now re-opened Cafe Pacifica. We talked of life and martial-art; how she is developing her own form of self-defence called 'Erogenics' based on generating feelings of acceptance towards oneself and building up courage, together with many different creative skills. Also sounds like a good formula for theatre. We both agreed that the voice is probably the next thing to be liberated, and I demonstrated for her a vocal technique that caused a workman on a ladder opposite to wobble.

On the final evening there was a dance in the Vet's Hall — good disco, gloomy lighting. I soon found that people were meeting in the better lit toilet for a chat and a look at the festival photographs. I was chatting to a photographer — it was getting quite crowded in there, when one of the organisers stuck her head round the door. 'Are you guys networking?' she asked.

CINDY OSWIN



Which way now
Reagan's Back?

Angst from Avenue A

Dear English,

It's such a DRAG without you. You leave me cryptic messages on my phone machine, pass me strange notes full of plans to visit Australia, and you send instead of yourself, your best friends' friends to meet me at my doorstep, at the local Vazac's or at Blanche's Ukrainian Pub. Though for the latter at least, a solo girl so cool in a relatively hot neck of the woods doesn't complain. (I like them best tall, dark and accented.) I have such a weakness for good conversation. My friend MARIANA TRENCH, rocker, says, if you're shy (and I am) and you want people to find you interesting, wear something they can talk about. Give them something interesting to say about your clothes. But then, I often feel that I live in my body the way other people live in their buildings. 'Softly your skin/ pressed up against the window/ do they see you/ with your face/ with your face pressed up against the window?' sings performance artist, ANN PALEVSKY, to IAN DE GRUCHY's slide images of the bombed-out buildings of the Lower East Side in a piece called POLITEXTS which showed over in Soho at the KITCHEN. As the face of the city changes and it begins more and more to resemble a shopping mall (or 'Galleria' as we say in California), life as you know it in a little enclave known as The Fashionable East Village is being threatened by yet more gentrification. When places like the PYRAMID become jam packed with New Jerseyites, or worse, Upper East Siders, a Single-Girl-About-Town looks for alternatives. Like the LIMBO LOUNGE, 8BC, DARINKA'S, CHANDELIER, or the SHUTTLE.

Over at P.S.122, for instance, the crowd is so local, it's hard to stay away. A converted school, P.S.122 is the largest serious performance space in the neighbourhood, rapidly expanding their programs and facilities. My favorite offering is still their every-other-month-or-so AVANT-GARD-ARAMA, featuring a dozen performances in two nights. Travelling performance artists should send proposals pronto (hey, YOU!) for a ten minute spot of attentive exposure. Pieces range from monologues, poetry readings, audio tapeworks and slide shows to films, new operas, and puppet shows. EVERYBODY performs at AVANT-GARD-ARAMA (MYSELF included), either initially or eventually.

Other ex-aramas include KARAN FINLEY whose piece, TOUCHING THE UGLY, was recently shown at 8BC, a happening club on 8th Street between Avenue B&C as the name might imply. Hosted by the charming CORNELIUS and DENNIS, 8BC picks up where the PYRAMID left off. The few Yuppies visible in the audience (suits, ties, sweaters and loafers) were obviously disgruntled by FINLEY'S monologue. With language running faster than your wildest nikes or addidas, FINLEY uses handy visual aides, such as Chef



Our correspondent, Barbara Lehmann

Boyardee canned spaghetti, to simulate what it must feel like for Bruiser to shove his hand up (censored. Ed), passes on invaluable information, such as the fact that Christopher Reeve is a lousy lay (sorry Supergirl), and moves from character to philosophy only pausing to spit a wad onto the stage floor. The audience was transfixed, not knowing how to laugh or where to turn away at the indelicacies. I asked one blonde in a trenchcoat, tie and tennis shoes if he enjoyed her performance and he said, 'Yeah! But I wanted it to end with a bang'. (I'm game, shoot me.)

At the SHUTTLE, on East 6th Street, ex-PLEXUS, GUISEPPE SACCHI and SANDRO DERNINI have provided another club for local talents to converge. There is a feeling of community in the basement space which has a diverse program of entertainments such as film, performances and live jazz. I was there last week to catch the ALIEN COMIC, TOM MURRIN (and what a cute catch he would be!), who performs down town at least once a week. Accompanied by a multitude of costumes and accessories, this evening the ALIEN COMIC addressed the change of season with the decision to go through an annual sex change, since the magazines are saying that Women are Warmer. Why not go for a temporary operation that would let him be a man when he wants to be a man and a woman when he wants to be a woman. His expression of the ambivalence we all feel in the limitations of each sex role were quite hilarious. I particularly enjoyed his nipple mask.

It's hard to talk about Performance in America without mentioning the horrific televised Presidential Debates. Three weeks after the election, MONDALE's name has been all but forgotten while RONNIE continues his career as America's most powerful performance artist. When the media take control of the political climate with such force, all of a sudden to be a democrat becomes subversive, as if one is taking an aggressive stance far to the left. Then, along comes TIM MILLER's piece called DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA in the Next Wave Festival at the BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC. MILLER's promo explains that his is the voice of the 25-year-old, white, educated, middle class TV generation. He gathered the material for this work by travelling across the country with a video camera asking the general populace, What does Democracy mean to You? (At least LAURIE ANDERSON has been kicking it around in her own mind for some time.) With a cast of close to thirty and immense slide and video images to boot, MILLER's piece made less sense than REAGAN's concluding statements. To surface from the East Village performance scene (TIM is one of the directors at P.S.122) to such high visibility as afforded by BAM is in itself MILLER's greatest performance so far. One hopes that his vision will find shape before too much public exposure imposes its own limitations.

Let me just add here a fast footnote to the detachment of LINDA MONTANO and TEHCHING HSIEH. Disbound, they are the greatest of 'soulmates' confessing that they do miss each other. Ah, the dilemma of Art and Life. While TEHCHING structures his next year, LINDA embarks on a 7 Year solo piece for the NEW MUSEUM on December 8th. More information as it progresses.

And so I close, dear English, with a message of love for you and my favourite SILVIA C. ZIRANEK.

Keep those cards, letters and friends' friends coming! love,
BARBARA LEHMANN

Photo: Barbara Lehmann

WHAT WOULD BLAKE HAVE THOUGHT? ●

Dear Performance Magazine, I am very saddened by the article by Gray Watson on the Bataille event at the Bloomsbury Theatre (Performance 32). It would appear that a genuine, honest, and for me, very exciting event has been changed into an arena for personal acrimony. No wonder the general public has little time for contemporary art and sees artists themselves as ridiculous individuals with an enormous sense of their own importance, who spend most of their time squabbling among themselves for attention and recognition. I am surprised that Gray Watson takes his responsibilities as a critic so lightly. Surely a critic should at least attempt to interpret and explain the work under review, and act as a kind of intermediary between the artist and the public who wish to understand more fully. And surely words like 'debacle' and 'fiasco' both used by Gray Watson are for the ignorant and prejudiced who see the arts as a waste of time and would rather they didn't exist at all.

Why, Mr Watson? Why the attack? You must realise that other people, with perhaps more open and searching minds than yourself, witnessed the performances at the Bloomsbury Theatre and came to different conclusions.

In what way did the performance of My Mother, the play adapted from Bataille's novel, fall short in your opinion? You say 'it was a shoddily amateur production'. What perceptiveness! What insights into these writings which (you have also said) 'are crucial for an understanding of a major stream in contemporary art'. In any case, I disagree entirely. The two performances I saw were very different and very convincing. But notice here the key word 'amateur'. What ever are we talking about, Mr Watson. Lawn tennis? I wonder what those 'amateur' artists, Gaugin and Rousseau would have thought about your use of the word. And that poor professional engraver but 'amateur' painter, poet and

LETTERS



Georges Bataille,
homage or
outrage?

publisher William Blake. What would he think? I wonder if you have actually bothered to find out whether Bataille himself was an 'amateur' or 'professional' writer and philosopher. I could make all the difference!

Enter Bernard Noel, poet and writer on the arts, perhaps the most important participant in the whole event, who needs no praise from me to enhance his reputation. And Mr Watson's comment? 'Fair boredom'. I assure you that I and many other people were wholly absorbed in listening to Mr Noel and the translations by Glenda Geprge, and that for us, his reading was one of the most exciting of the evening's events. Perhaps, in this world of obvious images and instant gratification at the push of a switch you need to be reminded that there are serious and subtle aspects of human experience which must be searched for by artist and spectator. Softly spoken words can contain and release a violence, can provoke transgression, can create a revelation and revolution within the recipient which is just as potent and moving as that prompted by the sight of physical violence.

As regards Paul Buck's readings, is it possible that Mr Watson's condemnation of 'sniggeringly adolescent cheapness' is his first perceptive comment so far? Is he, in his effort to ridicule the festival and its organisers actually pointing out a genuine strand in the highly complex, many-layered poetry of Paul

Buck? Think, is it not possible that this aspect of adolescent misunderstanding and consequent sniggering, (I have never found adolescents 'cheap' in their attitude to anything) and which has caused so much tragedy in young people's lives, because adult society conspires to keep them ignorant, is it not possible that this was an intentional and important part of Buck's reading? Is it not possible that this sniggering behaviour is evidence of the most potent act of transgression many adolescents can commit in the face of enforced ignorance and repression, and Buck simply integrated this, with much else, into his reading? If you were to get to know more of Buck's work, you would realise that this has been one of his preoccupations for some time. I do not intend to take any notice of the allegations about the controversy about Roberta Graham and Ken Hollings' Of Them That Slept which seems to have been created primarily to advertise it. I must say that I admire their work and am only sorry that what you have written is so obvious and banal that it will probably dissuade many people from making the effort to show it.

I apologise for any anger which may have crept into this letter, but I am fundamentally disturbed that an event of such importance should be treated with such disrespect, and for the sake of plugging one item, the organisers and many other contributors have been sacrificed ►

out of hand. Paul Buck and Roger Ely spent an enormous amount of time, effort and hard-earned money in order to allow many people the opportunity to participate. They contributed less of their own work than many other artists, and in no way can be accused of pushing their own work at the expense of the whole.

I do not believe you will publish this. I did not enjoy writing it, but in the face of such destructive ignorance inflicted on these who are deeply and seriously involved, I felt that I had to at least attempt to repair a little of the wanton damage.

Yours faithfully,
David Barton
45 Wellmeadow Rd.
Hither Green
London SE13 6SY
(Ed. note. David Barton was half right in his last paragraph — we have had to cut this letter by about half for reasons of space, but we hope it conveys the general tone of it. We of course welcome correspondence on any subject, but please keep it reasonably concise).

ARTISTS DUPED? ●

Dear Performance Magazine, Acts of Transgression, A Celebration of George Bataille, was grandiose and pretentious publicity for a very expensive disappointment. Having read a half-page spread in the Dutch national newspaper (my place of residence) about a Bataille festival at the Bloomsbury Theatre, London, and being inspired for years by his writing, I decided to go and see what promised to be an interesting celebration of his work. I was shocked by the low standard of work (the play My Mother in particular) and also by the fact that a lot of the performances had as much relevance to Bataille as a camera does to a blind man. What, I ask, has Marc Almond and his sugary-posed songs to do with interpreting Bataille?

The only work I saw which saved the festival for me was a slide/tape piece by Roberta Graham. For some unknown reason I was deprived of seeing it again, as it was withdrawn

from the programme. I found it deeply moving and central to the relationship of death in the erotic; a sublime yet painful willingness to experience the excess of total love.

Transgression of limits. It was the only work I saw with integrity, insight and sensitivity. I felt quite outraged that Buck and Ely (the organisers of the festival) appeared to justify their self-promotion of their work, mostly parodies of Bataille who was probably reeling in his grave, they were so second-rate. I was also incensed that the handful of participating artists whose work in other contexts is worthy of attention, became dupes in the midst of crass intermediary slots in the programme.

I was left questioning the motivation of the organizers behind the festival. One line out of a poem dedicated to Paul Buck rather sums it up. 'Empty Intellect'.

Yours sincerely,
Vivien Cook
Anjeliersstraat 150
Amsterdam 1015 NJ

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