

PERFORMANCE

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NEW CONTEMPORARIES 86 11 MARCH — 6 APRIL

M ANNE SEAGRAVE/MAN ACT 3 — 8 MARCH
A GARY STEVENS + JULIAN MAYNARD SMITH
INVISIBLE WORK 11 — 15 MARCH

R ABOLITION IN STYLE 18 — 22 MARCH
The new wave goodbye to the GLC
C Clothes selection Iain R Webb Setting Ian Pollock

H ANGELS OF FIRE 23 MARCH 3.00-10.30
Performances, readings,
music, discussions
Radical Poetry
Collective

MATHILDE
SANTING
IN CONCERT
1 — 5 APRIL



8 APRIL — 3 MAY
HIDDEN GRIN

THE SUBURBS OF HELL

A world that is part Dynasty, part Duchess of Malfi
where everyone wears designer firearms

ICA THE MALL SW1 01-930 3647

A
P
R
I
L

People show No. 91
... a romance



A story about those moments of joy that
civilisations and human beings are able to reach
before receding back into the darkness again.
Or alternatively,
the story of everyones dream of a dirty weekend.

1-19 April 8.00pm

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Camden's fabulous Parkway Cinema opens its doors to six nights of secret films and invisible music. The films range from new work by young artists to underground classics and other rarities, and many of these will be accompanied by live musicians and specially created soundtracks. The films are provided by the London Film-makers' Co-op, the musicians by the London Musicians Collective. The cinema, the films and the music have been brought together for the 1986 Camden Festival.

MARCH

- 17 NEW ROMANTICS
- 18 AMERICA
- 19 HYBRIDS
- 20 ANIMATION
- 21 FIFTIES BEAT
- 22 SILENT & UNSILENT CLASSICS

Parkway Regency Cinema, Parkway, London NW1

Tickets on the door: £3 (£2 concessions)



CORNERHOUSE INVITES SUBMISSIONS
for its summer season of exhibitions
CITY LIFE: Political Life; Private Life;
Public Life.



Three Exhibitions on Urban Themes (13 July – 5 October 1986) will be selected by the visual arts reviewers of City Life, Manchester's listings magazine, from work by performance, video artists and film makers living in the North West Arts, Merseyside Arts and Yorkshire Arts regions.

Submissions should take the form of a cv., together with a single video tape/film or a written proposal of no more than 500 words. Please enclose S.A.E. Students are not eligible. **Closing Date 7 April 1986.**

Submissions to:

"City Life", Cornerhouse, 70 Oxford Street,
MANCHESTER M1 5NH. Telephone: 061 228 7621

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Book now: *Super Savers* discount on postal bookings before 17 March

THEATRE & PERFORMANCE

Carbone 14 from Montreal make British debut with 'Le Rail'; one of most original theatre troupes of our time; a triumph at many major international festivals. Profound, mysterious, erotic, humorous, energetic, a saga based loosely on D M Thomas's novel *The White Hotel*; takes place on a rail track. (Telephone for dates, times, venue).

IOU Theatre — exponents of the visually bizarre; have been commissioned to create a special outdoor residency project for the Festival. (Telephone for dates, time venue).

GARDNER CENTRE

Epigonenteater zlv 'Incident' "one of the hottest properties of the European theatrical avant garde"; British debut; 1½ hr performance in which movement, image, sound, exhaustion, danger and repetition play an accumulative part; 9-10 May; 7.45pm; £4.50, £3.80, £2.75; concession £1 off on 9 May.

Max Wall in Krapp's Last Tape by Samuel Beckett. 2.3 May; 7.45pm; £4.50, £3.80, £2.75; concessions £1 off.

PAVILION THEATRE

Uthingo present "Amakhosi" an exciting new musical set in Zululand at the turn of the century; 21-25 May; 7.30pm; £3.50; concessions £3

People Show No 91 — A Romance "An evening of incomparable invention and lunacy" 14-18 May; 7.30pm; £4; concessions £3.

PALACE PIER

Bright Red Theatre Company — The End of the Pier Show; created for the Festival; 8-11, 13-18, 20-25 May; 7.30pm; £2.75, concessions £2.

THE NIGHTINGALE

Ways of Saying — poetry workshops, discussions, performances organised by Nicki Jackowska on the themes of UN Peace Year and Arts for Labour; 10-11 May; 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 8pm.

DANCE AND MIME

SALLIS BENNEY THEATRE

Peta Lily Mime Theatre — Women's Parts: cinematic piece of superimposing images of women; Hiroshima Mon Amour: biting black comedy; 10-11 May, 8pm; £3.50; concessions £3.

Dance Alliance — fusion of music & dance; sound environment is controlled by movement of dancers; 23-25 May; 8pm; £3.50; concessions £3.

Dance Subversions — Women with Beards; Open Secret; 6 Divas; Anne Seagrave; Wild Wigglers; 16 May; 8pm; £2.75; concessions £2.

Brighton Dance Developments — launching Brighton's new group BAD Dance Company & featuring Cipher/Brighton Youth Dance; 17-18 May; 8pm; 2.75; concessions £2.

THE ZAP CLUB

The Brighton Festival Club* 191-193 Seafrost Arches, Kings Road, Brighton; Tickets from 8 Tichborne Street. Tel: (0273) 671545.

Robert Anton Wilson famous for co-authorship of 'Illuminatus'; 7-9 May.

Bob Carroll — legendary American performance artist and raconteur; 14-17 May.

Compass Theatre present a unique & controversial interpretation of MacBeth; 10 May.

Roy Hutchens renowned for solo 'stand up cartoonist' investigations of humans' social & sexual habits; 21-24 May.

Ken Campbell with John Oram — one of the country's most respected innovators of theatre.

Adrienne Althenhaus film, performance and dance by this New York performer.

Merrydown Best of the Festival Slot — every night from 10pm to midnight. Performers from every discipline within the Festival will preview sections of their work.

Platform nights every Tuesday.

* Sponsored by Whitbread

SCANNERS

Video Art Now

Presented by London Video Arts at

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March 14 – April 13

Featuring

THE VIDEO WINDOW BOX:

new multi screen work by

THE DUVET BROTHERS

ROSE FINN KELCEY

JUDITH GODDARD

MICK HARTNEY

GRAHAM YOUNG

BRETT TURNBULL.

Video Installations by:

MINEO AAYAMAGUCHI

KEVIN ATHERTON

JANUSZ SZCZEREK

JOHN GOFF

SARA FURNEAUX

Performance by **KATE MEYNELL**

March 14 7.00 pm

VIDEO POSTCARDS ★ JAPANESE VIDEO ART PLUS:

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Contact Jeremy Welsh, LVA 437 2786

Iwona Blazwick, AIR: 278 7751

AIR GALLERY, 6-8 Rosebery Ave, EC1

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For further details please ring the Midland Group Box Office (0602) 586100

NEW COMMISSIONS; the Midland Group will be commissioning new work by Industrial & Domestic Theatre Contractors, Manact & Intimate Strangers for Autumn touring.

THE NATIONAL REVIEW OF LIVE ART

The Midland Group's unique performance festival will be taking place this year between October 9-12th. The PLATFORM for new, unsubsidised artists will again be a major input. Selection events will be taking place throughout the country during April/May/June. If you would like to submit an application please ring the Performance Director on (0602) 582636.

BURSARY IN PERFORMANCE ART PROMOTION 1986/87

For the first time, applications are invited for a year-long traineeship in the Promotion of Performance Art. The trainee will spend six months at the Midland Group, Nottingham and a further six months at Projects U.K. in Newcastle.

Some knowledge of, and commitment to performance art and two years experience of working in the arts, preferably in administration and/or publicity, is essential. Typing skills and driving ability are desirable.

Closing date for completed applications: Monday, 24th March 1986.

For further details and an application form please contact:

The Training Officer,

Arts Council,

105 Piccadilly,

London W1V 0AU.

Tel. 01-629 9495 ext 285/286.

Arts Council Funded

CHISENHOLE DANCE SPACE PERFORMANCE ART PROJECTS

Applications are invited for two separate short-term Performance Art residencies to be held during 1986/87 at the Space in the East End of London.

£1,200 is available for each project to include fees and production costs.

The Arts Council of Great Britain will be funding the project as part of the Performance Art Promoters Scheme 1986/87.

For further details please send a stamped addressed envelope to:

Ghislaine Boddington,
Project Co-ordinator, Chisenhole Dance Space, 64/84 Chisenhole Road, Bow, London E3 5QY.

Application deadline — April 19th 1986



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Cover photo of Marty St James and Anne Wilson.
This page Epigonen theatre from Belgium (Touring this country April/May, opening at Brighton Festival)



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LETTERS

CHEAP SHOTS FROM A DISTANT SIDELINE

Dear Performance,

What a drag to have to spend the last day before the Christmas holiday defending one's honour against attack from an erstwhile ally. Ken Gill's vicious attack on LVA ('Does Good Video Art exist in Britain?' — No 38) really is galling on a variety of levels; it is misleading for a start, and incomplete in so far as it does nothing to describe or explain the context in which the European Media Network exchange took place. Then, it's a pretty shabby piece of writing whose real critical content is absolute zero. But worst of all, to have LVA dismissed as an organisation that couldn't care less, that is too tied up with its internal problems, etc, etc, by someone who abandoned the British art scene amidst the disintegration of the Basement Group/Projects U.K./Newcastle Media Workshops, is not something I'll let go by without fighting back. Ken Gill would be doing British video artists a much greater service by putting his considerable talents to work on their behalf instead of taking cheap shots from a distant sideline.

As the selector of the British tapes for the exchange, I'll defend my choice absolutely. The basis of the exchange was that each participating group should make a one hour package of work that they considered to be a reflection of some aspect of the 'media arts' in their own country. A one hour package could not in any way be a comprehensive overview, and rather than presenting a fragmented and contradictory programme that attempted to deal with a diverse range of practises, I deliberately chose to foreground a particular strand of work. The choice was between the more formal video art tapes that I eventually selected, or a programme of the scratch tapes that Gill would evidently have considered more acceptable. However, his absence from these shores is clearly illustrated here; Scratch became the most over-used word in the Media Language during 1985, and the illusion that video art began with scratch threatened to obliterate the 'lost' history that stretches back 'in a tenuous line to David Hall'. It seemed that every package of British video focussed sharply on scratch to the exclusion of other traditions (I myself have been party to this, programming scratch tapes for touring programmes in the US and festival screenings elsewhere) so I consciously decided to look at another area of work in this selection. And while Gill finds it 'flaccid and marginal' I am certainly not alone in considering it important, worthwhile, deserving of serious critical attention. Not that the

ensuing statistics are necessary in my view to validate the work, but for the record, Triple Vision's tape Circumstantial Evidence was a prizewinner at the International Television Association festival 1984, and was nominated for the BFI Grierson Award in 1984; Mark Wilcox's Calling the Shots won prizes at Video Culture '84 in Canada and Video CD 85 in Yugoslavia; Catherine Elwes With Child has been broadcast recently on Channel 4 as have Graham Young's short Accidents in the home pieces and both have been selected for many exhibitions.

Gill describes these tapes dismissively as 'art school work'; as an inveterate art school prankster, he should know. Perhaps his review is just another prank and perhaps I should not let it get to me, but when a highly opinionated and distorted view, riddled with contentious assertions and factual errors, gets circulated in an international magazine, I worry about the damage it does to LVA, to the artists concerned, to the work itself.

I don't want to indulge in Gill's either/or analysis of the state of British Video, it's puerile and useless. I share his enthusiasm for the work of the Duvet Brothers, I have included their work in several international selections and screening programmes in the UK. Furthermore, various other UK artists (including myself) were featured in the Duvet's Berlin screening. Obviously not worth mentioning this fact, since it takes the sting out of his argument a bit. And far from being an obstacle, far from 'not caring less', LVA is eager to get more British video artists into Europe, either through our own exchange projects, or by providing information and contacts so that artists themselves can promote their own work by following the example of the Duvet Brothers, getting out and DOING IT.

Finally, Gill's piece said precious little about the event as a whole: LVA's selection formed one eighth of it, along with programmes from Spain, Italy, France, Hungary, Germany, Holland and Belgium. And what does he say about the rest? The German tapes were 'weird in places but lacking any genuine madness'. Since when has 'madness' been a pre requisite of any art or a guarantee of quality? And that the Belgian work made such a strong impression on him that he couldn't remember a single name out of a selection that possessed 'wit, acuteness and diversity', while the Dutch programme was entirely delineated by the word 'turgid'. I presume he didn't actually see the work from Spain, Italy, France or Hungary since any mention of those participants is entirely absent. Had

he bothered to think about the selection as a whole, he would have discovered that the eight national compilations each contributed one variant on the theme of 'European Media Art' ranging from the Italian selection of t.v. commercials and fashion features, through the performance documentation of the Hungarian programme to the post-structuralist neo-narrative tapes from Britain. And finally, to utterly reject the facile and negative description of the tapes by Catherine Elwes, Triple Vision and Mark Wilcox as 'lacking in imagination', I would offer the alternative view that they are thoughtful, thought provoking, challenging and indicative of a developing tradition that both finds its roots in the practises of the seventies, while extending those concerns to an eighties context. And with specific reference to Mark Wilcox's Calling the Shots I can report that having shown it to audiences in Yugoslavia, Holland, America, Canada, and all over England, it has never failed to generate laughter, and usually gets applause. Unusual for any video tape. Living too close to the wall must have blunted our correspondent's sense of humour.

Jeremy Welsh,
LVA,
Frith St, London W1.

NAMES, STARS, LEADERS

Dear Performance,

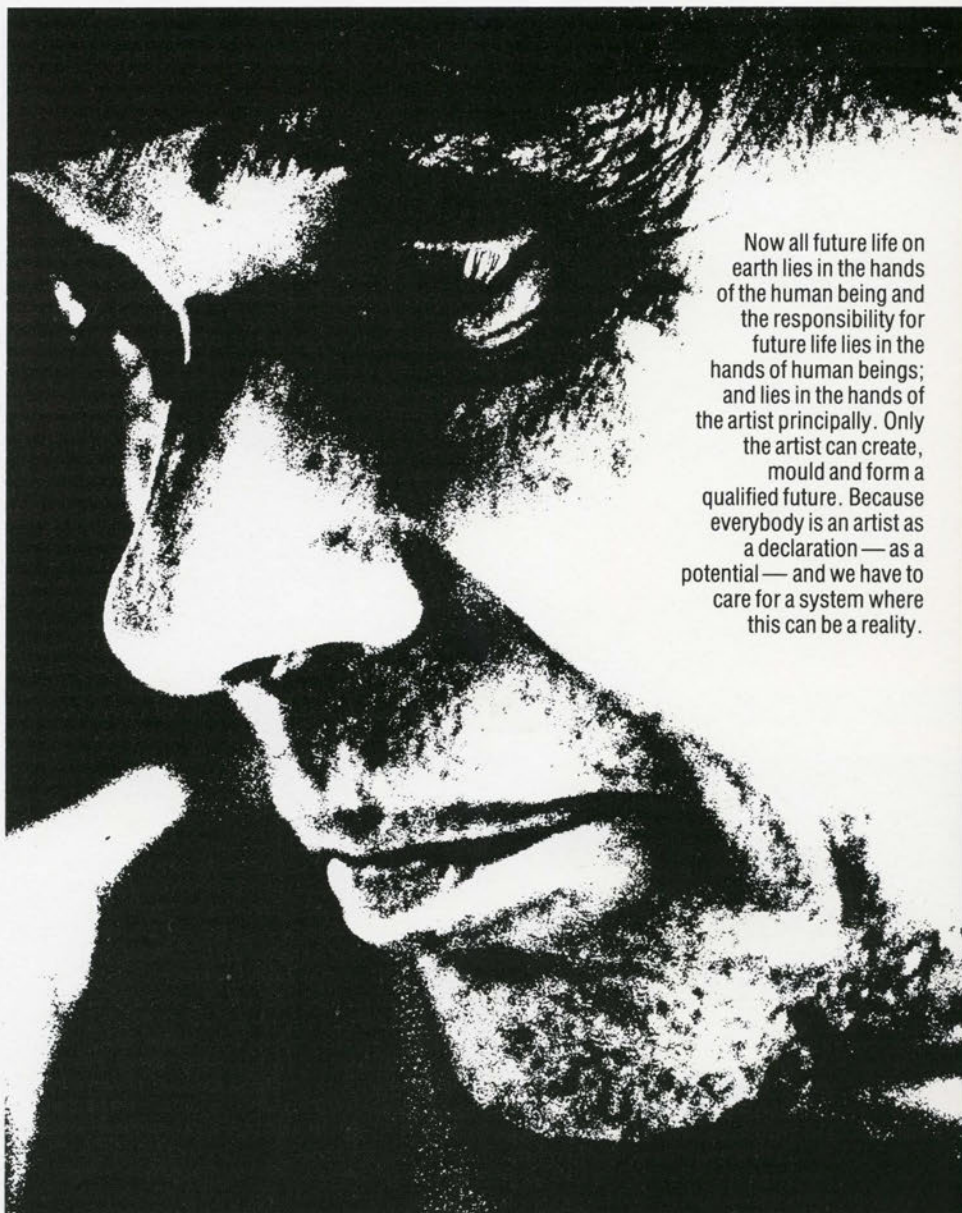
Thank you for your illuminating and informative review of Hidden Grin's contribution to the Midland Group/Zap club Performance Platform. Rob La Frenais' comments were generally well received by the company, but we feel we must correct certain inaccuracies concerning the genealogy of the company and specifically the past work of Rational Theatre. To set the record straight — Hidden Grin was formed by four of the members of the seven strong Rational Theatre Co-operative. A number of shows were produced by this co-operative, including Orders of Obedience and Rococco which he mentions in his article as being the work of Peter Godfrey. It is quite alarming that after four years of co-operative work (and you of all publications should understand the workings of a co-operative theatre group) the work we produced collectively can still be misleadingly attributed to one name. The experience of actually creating the work was very different, and I think I speak for all the other members of the company when I say that the period between 1980 and 1984 when we produced seven Rational Theatre productions was genuinely and excitingly collaborative. The fact that Peter founded the company does not

mean he made the decisions after he had decided to formulate a co-op. The artistic and financial control of the company lay in the hands of seven individuals. So the decision to 'enlist the skills of fine artists' as he puts it, was a major policy decision collectively taken, and in fact a tradition of cross-fertilisation between the arts was established which both Peter with his current group and Hidden Grin are committed to continuing.

It is important to correct misinterpretation in a field where documentation is so thin on the ground. The media seems to need names, stars and leaders. People ideologically committed to group work methods have a very hard time making a go of it when at the end of the day they do not feel they are rewarded by an equal share in the credit. This is particularly hard for performers in a 'director'-oriented theatre. The article attributes the video content of the Nottingham show to Steve Littman, although the publicity stated that the tapes were the product of Hidden Grin. All the members of the company made a large contribution to the content of the tapes and assisted in their execution naturally under Steve's expert guidance. This is the point — the video work was remarkable, a major piece of video art, we think the largest yet exhibited in the UK in a major gallery. It was a group effort that I think would have been very hard for Steve, me or anyone else for that matter to achieve alone.

The facts of work situations, company history and attribution are very easy to check. Artists are vulnerable souls who are serious about their work and a review is usually the only reward for a piece of work outside personal fulfillment. Performance if it is to remain the most important document of our area of work must be extremely careful to get these facts right.

Andy Wilson
Hidden Grin
Santley Street, London SW14



Now all future life on earth lies in the hands of the human being and the responsibility for future life lies in the hands of human beings; and lies in the hands of the artist principally. Only the artist can create, mould and form a qualified future. Because everybody is an artist as a declaration — as a potential — and we have to care for a system where this can be a reality.

JOSEPH BEUYS

1921-1986

Text from V + A lecture last year.
Photo: courtesy Anthony D'Ossay
Gallery and Illuminations.





LESLIE DICK on Miranda Payne's Saint Gargoyle:

Thinking about saints, women martyrs in particular, certain elements became clear. First, it's about a deeply private experience put on display, a spiritual spectacle. The spectacle concerns the death of the saint; this death is usually preceded by persecution and torture, endlessly fascinating. Saints achieve the status of an image in the moment of their greatest suffering, they become emblematic. In some sense, saints *pursue* their own martyrdom, it guarantees their immortality. At the same time, most martyrs observe the principle of passivity — especially women saints, who generally speaking bite the dust because they refuse sex with some powerful man. Such refusal ensures them appalling tortures, spectacular suffering, and immortality.

All saints have their own objects, or attributes, which encapsulate their history; in pictures, saints are generally shown carrying these things. They are often the instruments of torture used on the saint. People take up particular saints to be their patron; the image of the saint, with her emblematic attributes, is used to mediate between life here below, and eternity. A gory example of this almost arbitrary image-appropriation is the case of St Agatha, who is often represented in medieval pictures holding her two cut off breasts on a plate; she therefore became patron saint of bell-founders, because her breasts bear some resemblance to bells. Clearly, it is St Agatha in the form of a flat image (rather than as narrative, or human being in history) that makes this crazy slippage possible. St Agatha herself is silent: we see her, use her image for our own purposes. *She* just stands there, represents. In some sense, saints are always up against the wall. That's where they mean something to us.

You could say that saints achieve the status of an art object. Whether as image or as narrative, saints are thrown out of time into a kind of eternal fame, a kind of immortality, anti-mortality. Yet, like Jesus, it's crucial that they were once real people too. The fundamental saintly paradox is the *luxury* of self-denial. Choosing the spiritual realm, rejecting the world, saints delight in difficulty, deprivation, unpleasure.

Elements of saintliness then, a series of dynamic oppositions: private/spectacular; painful pleasure; passive action; silent object/human subject. Miranda Payne is interested in these kinds of borders, the lines where one thing turns into something else. The most poignant of these borderlines is between human being and object: when, how does a person become an object? Or *like* an object? In what sense *is* a human being an object? An art object, possibly.

In *Saint Gargoyle*, at Riverside and Acme Studios, Bethnal Green, Miranda Payne's project was to 'be two-dimensional', to make her body, her presence, as flat as a picture. She stood on two feet-shaped brackets, eight feet up a huge white wall, like a saint on the wall of a church. On hooks all around her, just within reach, various ordinary objects hung, including a chair, a saw, a screwdriver, hammer, piece of wood, pad of paper, tray, jug, etc. A teacup and saucer were stuck to the tray, theatrical. A bar of chocolate lay quietly on the wall. She was silent throughout, as images tend to be. She was as self-contained as she always is in performance, producing a sense of watching something not addressed to the



AGAIN



Photos: Julian Maynard Smith.

audience, a kind of private spectacle.

Flat as a pancake, Miranda Payne began by extracting the chocolate sideways from its wrapper, to slide it up the wall, and get it into her mouth. It didn't look easy to swallow; the saintly body always suffers somehow. Then with great difficulty, Miranda proceeded to make art up there, literally. She pulled a pencil out of a hole drilled in the wall, took the pad of paper, and made line drawings of the jug, hanging on its hook. Dissatisfied with each attempt, she stuck the crumpled paper to the wall beside her, next to the empty chocolate wrapper. These are the terms of her beatification: to eschew the world for the wall, to refuse herself the luxury of a floor beneath her feet, denying even the pleasure of simply discarding the waste, the residue — her crumpled drawings.

The jug hung above her head, the paper flat against the wall, her drawing consisted of two circles: we could see it didn't make sense. Giving up, Miranda couldn't make the jug do anything: it won't pour into the teacup, three-dimensional gesture is beyond her. Frustrated, she plucked the cup and saucer off the tray, undoing that illusion, and finds herself stuck, holding them in her hand. Whereupon

Miranda slowly gathered up all the objects that surrounded her, holding them clumsily in her two hands, something on each finger, and last of all, slid the tray behind her head — a black, tin halo. Her head turned gently to one side, this was the emblem: the saint holding all the instruments of her martyrdom. Merely holding them all is fraught with difficulty, danger, and ironic suffering, and of course it must not be forgotten that these *things* are the instruments of art-making, they're there to make still life. She paused, stilled, visionary, and then Miranda put everything back, and with *immense* difficulty, quiet and determined, she built a shelf to sit the jug on. Suppressed shrieks of agonized laughter from the audience at the sight of Miranda, clutching the chair on one arm, supporting the plank of wood, as she slowly, squeakily sawed through it. This is saintly suffering at its most refined: her struggles are clearly excessive, wasteful, unnecessary. Perversely, she has *chosen* to do (simple) things in this (impossible) position. She's *stuck* (passive), but we didn't put her there (did we?).

This saint's saintliness consists in formal terms: her achievement, her spiritual triumph is in merely being on the wall, holding her 'attributes', becoming an emblem. Sticking to the wall, out of some perverse choice, transforms possibility, introduces unexpected struggles, absurd difficulties.

The shelf achieved, Miranda places the jug on it, very matter of fact. We roar with laughter, amazed. Miranda's drawings of the jug on the shelf are all about perspective, over-emphatic distortions to challenge the two-dimensional paper, an attempt at transcendence doomed from the start. Again she crumpled up the drawings, careful not to let anything drop, to remain suspended. For some performances, she placed a real stuffed crocodile on the floor below her, to dramatize her danger, to make a joke. Saints are notoriously humourless, that's how come they get to be saints. Here the jokes are recursive, contemplative, aesthetic: suspended, she's in danger, in difficulties, and yet she's not. Miranda Payne's gentle wit, quirky obsession, delightful excess make us smile as sweetly as the crocodile, sitting at her feet. ●



P
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TIM ETCHELLS on Impact's new performance:

THE PRICE OF MEAT

The Price of Meat in the Last Days of the Mechanical Age begins with 3 performers standing silently in what looks like a bandstand listening to the soundtrack of an archive, very British documentary about life in China. 'Mai Ling leads the lazy water buffalo to the water's edge . . .'. When the soundtrack finishes the film itself is projected on a white sheet which hangs centre stage. The performers watch until it finishes and then assume positions at microphones at the back of the playing space.

'I am a very famous German film director' says Richard Hawley, 'and, er, er, UNT, UNT I am a vegetarian, I mean, er, VEGETARIAN.' As the show unfolds the three characters/performers attempt to construct theories around the film and consequently around themselves. Richard

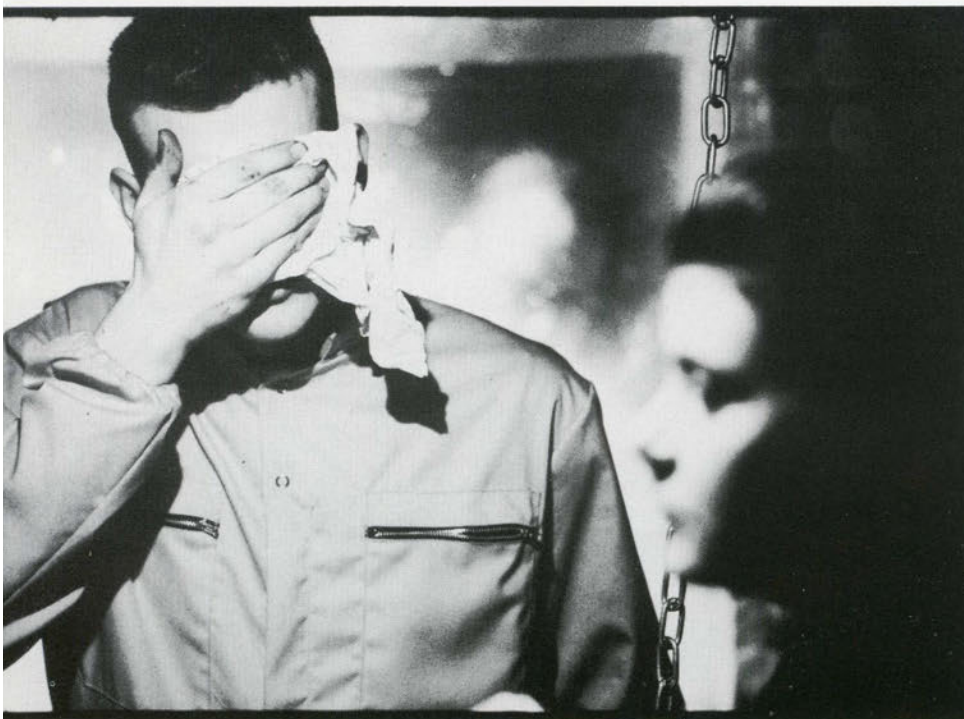
Hawley takes his film director from claiming a special insight into the film, to claiming 'the man who made this film is a personal friend of mine', to 'I made this film and, UNT, all the people in it are my children', to 'this screen is not a screen, it's the Turin shroud and I am Jesus Christ. This is my cross and I'm going to fucking well suffer for somebody.' The show shows us people trying to make order out of chaos, art out of life, fact out of fiction. Nothing satisfies.

'*The Price of Meat*' is a frustrated thrash dragged out of a co-operative who are caught between presenting real performance events and dramatic fictions. In the past Impact shows have set up basic and fairly archetypal fictional worlds/structures within which real events and actions are carried out. Additional conceits are minimised by an exaggerated and fundamentally distanced performance

style which avoids aiming to present a believable fiction full of naturalistic character detail but instead places emphasis on shape and structure, an emphasis which is supported by use of verbal, physical and musical repetition. Through abstraction their basic fictional premises are left behind and a real art event is created.

The Price of Meat makes no attempt to be a believable fiction — instead is applied for real status by continually deconstructing and disarming itself. The set is part park bandstand, part tv studio and part abstraction. The music is simply music — bare electronics with a minimum of cultural or atmospheric signification. The sound technician is in the 3rd row from the front, visible and lit. From the moment the performers open their mouths you know that they want you to know they're not the

'This isn't real rain'.



Photos: Flugo Glendinning

KEITH BISHOP on Billy Whitelaw:

characters they begin to represent: there is an aggressive distance from the pretence of character representation inherent in Richard Hawley's 'and, er, UNT'.

Unlike previous Impact pieces this show is not interested in transcending fiction. Instead it turns round and attacks it, spitting, throwing dissatisfaction everywhere. The audience is placed in a difficult position, the world is bare suddenly. We aren't allowed to believe anything, only that the three performers are pushing desperately through a show that reflects their own selves and concerns more than those of any characters they may want, for a moment, to create.

I found *The Price of Meat* confusing watching; it's raw, funny and depressing at the same time; you know these people aren't happy by the way they kick everything the moment they set it up. It is full of instances which *would* be called magical and exhilarating theatre — but Impact '86 won't quite allow or get these moments to work. Huge sheets of paper are torn from the metal grills which back the set in a gesture which two years ago would have revealed to our delight another fictionally organic, albeit more abstract, space. In Leeds the paper comes off clumsily and reveals only the wings of the theatre, a couple of slide projectors on the ground. Elsewhere in the show water is sprayed from the barely concealed hoses in the bandstand. 'This isn't real rain' says one of the performers: we don't need to be told.

Theatrically then, the show sometimes fulfills its potential, but when it doesn't, it is hard to be sure whether this is out of under-rehearsal, mis-direction or obstinate genius — a tighter show would perhaps have left me more sure. Catching an Impact show early in its run places a reviewer in a difficult position — they're characteristically a group whose work expands and matures as a run goes on — and there is more than potential in this show, particularly as revealed in the final section which is a very effective piece of subversion. As the identify conflicts on-stage move out of the verbal and into the physical we're not given the angst-ridden muscular climax we are used to from Impact: instead as the 'rain' pours, the chaos is a slippery and miserable affair, the anger is perfunctory and disarmed — but incredibly effective — Niki Johnson wanders round the set smoking, looking vacant as Richard Hawley and Claire McDonald throw chairs around in a battle of some kind. Nobody wins.

'*The Price of Meat*' is either useless or so fucking essential it makes a cold night in Leeds seem warm. With such work I would not be sure which. ●

● The studio is brimming with middle class art lovers and assorted worshippers. Beckett is, after all, now *very* famous, and to some, a god. Most people have heard of him and never read him; aware of his reputation and not his work. I am not quite sure of the ratio. Whatever it is, the audience is baying for art, I mean REAL ART.

Enter Billie Whitelaw. She is also very famous. Largely for her playing of and working relationship with our present Messiah. She approaches and tongues are long as the spectators imagine: This is Beckett's preferred actress, he actually talks to her, she has met and keeps precious contact with the world's greatest living writer. He's so difficult to trace, so elusive. Such a pure artist.

Billie Whitelaw now says words to the effect of: 'Good evening . . . (various dedications) . . . I'm now going to read *Enough*. Normally Samuel Beckett does not like his prose read aloud but . . .' Here followed a theatrical rendition of the 1966 fragment *Enough*. It seemed more like an audition piece, wringing out all avenues of possible expression and nuance; thereby leaving the rhythm (and the interest) of the text behind, which, by the way, concerns a man and his 'doppelganger' (physical or otherwise) telling his (their?) story until his death. Happy? Billie Whitelaw read it like an afternoon story. The irony was in her opening statement. Not for the congregation. A degree of profound appreciation was recorded. Throughout, two unfortunates coughed periodically and consistently. As the clapping died away a 'higher priest' sitting in front of them turned round and railed bitterly, throwing cough sweets and other remedies in their direction. I record this incident for being amusing and indicative. The text, read, was not.

Footfalls. This, if not already known to you

through literally all media channels, was written especially for Whitelaw in 1975/6. Perhaps now we will see some business. It is a faithful performance. The beautiful, musical words; the essence; the distillation; the rhythmic patterns; the eternal figure 'revolving it all' until death. Familiar themes with brief flashes of humour before we are left with the coffin-shaped pool of light. The pace, the darkness surrounding and the silence give you the impression that a poetic image of the deepest truth, dressed in a few words and movements, had been dragged from the dungeons of the mind. — This play, so 'they' say, is like a musical sonata. More like a singing lesson in fact. Whitelaw goes over the top slightly; whining and droning exaggeratedly into the hushed bosom of Beckettmania (the audience).

Rockaby. New one this, (only 5 years old). Whitelaw on a rocking chair, rhythmically recanting, in broken phrases, a part of her life, constructed like music, until her death. The words are haunting and I like it. It works. But, there is a strange atmosphere about the whole show. Perhaps it is the audience who seem 'drugged' on media hype and legend about what it is supposed to be like; reactions seem thus contrived accordingly. Beckett is so fashionable that you could probably fill Wembley Stadium with the curious and sensitive. — I remember seeing *Happy Days* with Whitelaw about seven years ago at the Royal Court and that was brilliant, perfect. Or *Endgame* by the Rick Cluchy San Quentin Drama Workshop at the now defunct Open Space. Equally fine. But then there was only admiration and respect for Beckett. Now there is adulation and hushed, ridiculous reverence for his every movement. This media overkill makes it difficult to be objective about watching the plays, for the audience here, and audiences in general, seem to be made of blind academic intensity. It is a pity, for these pieces are certainly worth seeing, but at each new show I get more and more disillusioned with the way reputation has changed things. ●

ENOUGH BECKETT



BOL MARJORAM on the latest Arts Worldwide presentation:

SOUNDS OF SUDAN

● In the West with our expectation of the highly developed artist/performer we come to a performance as spectators. To such an extent we even feel that these polished and virtuosic presentations will be such that we can come to them at any point in their expression and expect to pick up an impression of the performance in full flight, as if we are watching television which can be switched on and switched off. Our being there or not being there from the beginning makes no difference.

Not so in the Sudan; the very expression is dependant on the people who come to the event. People come not to spectate, but to participate and to celebrate. Celebrations are held to mark some turning point in the life of the individual or community. A wedding, for example, will be an occasion for lavish expenditure on the part of the bridegroom. All guests must be offered the hospitality of food and accommodation and entertainment. It will also be a social occasion for the whole community when people dress up, and a time when the rules will be relaxed. In a country where alcohol is illegal, this is an occasion when the majority of the men will get extremely drunk.

Men will greet the groom by shaking their arms and clicking their fingers over his head. The same greeting is used to show approval of the musicians. Women will greet the arrival of the bride with joyous ululation. Dancing may be very sensual, although it will not involve touching between men and women. This raising of the social temperature takes its own time.

At the end of January three Sudanese singers visited London. Bringing them over here was the initiative of an organisation called 'Arts Worldwide', which tries to promote a better understanding of non-western culture through the performed arts.

Abdel Aziz el Mubarak, Abdel Gadir Salim and Mohammed Gubara are all popular performers in Sudan. Musically their style is representative of the Islamised northern regions of Sudan. This is a society governed by rigid protocol and social obligations. Male and female are separated from one another

socially. Women will not go to the market or the cinema for fear of the stares of men. A society where ideas like right and wrong have the force of religion and the force of the law, which is also based on religious principles.

The concert is at the Camden Centre. The set up is formal like a western concert, with musicians up on the stage. But the atmosphere is not; many of the audience are Sudanese, and soon one or two men have got up, clicking their fingers and shaking arms over friends and acquaintances in the audience. They get up onto the stage and rhythmically click fingers over the musicians in a gesture of goodwill and encouragement. Gradually one or two people start to dance.

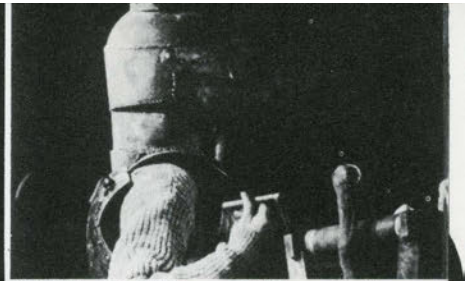
Of the three musicians Gubara is playing on the tambour, a type of lyre, which goes back to the Pharaonic times. While Abdel Aziz Mubarak plays the oud, a stringed instrument like a lute.

The use of these ancient instruments emphasises the continuity in Sudanese music, where the modern popular music of the towns (often played on western instruments like violin, sax and accordion), is nevertheless close in its rhythms and structure to the tribal music of Northern Sudan. Indeed Gubara, who sings in an extraordinary falsetto, bases his style on that of the river Arabs of Nubia. Whilst Black artists from the western world such as Michael Jackson and Bob Marley are popular with young people in the town they remain exotic imports.

Sudanese music continues to be the music you hear in cafés, buses and shops throughout the greater part of the country, and it is the music which expresses the character of the people.

A girl at our table is invited to dance by a besuited Sudanese doctor. Soon everyone is on their feet and dancing, but abruptly the concert is over for this is not Sudan, and it is time for the hall to close.

Let us hope there will be more opportunities to hear music from this part of Africa. For, although Sudan has been a major news story over the last year, the culture of the country remains largely unknown here. ●



STEVE ROGERS on IOU and Forced

● An IOU show is like the simple, hedonistic pleasure of a Sunday afternoon spent on the sofa with tea, crumpets and something gentle, witty and engrossing to read, like Trollope. This new piece, at the Almeida, fulfills all these expectations. It is inventive, charming, whimsically funny and mildly provocative. At all times it looks and sounds lovely. But for all this I was sadly, unconvincing.

IOU have created an aesthetic based on the back kitchen of a Victorian artisan's terraced cottage in some forgotten corner of the industrial north. Not so much low-tech as old-fashioned mass-produced adapted with a Heath Robinson DIY ingenuity which has more to do with eccentricity than practicality. It's charming but untruthful. In Thatcherland the idea of the show's central figure, an independent minded, kindly, pragmatic, working-class philosopher, with a salt of the earth wisdom and self-deprecating good humour is at best nostalgic — at worst a plain deception. The reality is surely much harder and colder than this. In the 'oldworldie' north they have TV sets and they watch *Dynasty* and *The Price is Right*, so that even if their kitchens do look like an IOU set I can't believe that anyone is really content with that any more.

I am sad that one of the most reliable pleasures of the theatre should so lose its point. Just another thing I hold the Tory government responsible for.

Forced Entertainment (Zap) will, I hope, learn from the lesson of IOU and not fall into the same trap of being mesmerised by theatrical style and lose sight of their purpose.

I first saw Forced Entertainment as part of the Midland Group/Zap Club 'Eight Days' festival and was very impressed. This is a new, young collective who boast of the influence Impact Theatre has had on them. As far as I am concerned there could be no one better to be influenced by, and the show I saw there, *The Set Up*, was a worthy testament to that influence. It looked a lot like Impact. Even though it lacked Impact's theatrical sophistication and intensity it had an energy and a bravura inventiveness which made it work well. I felt at the time that a more rigorous discipline was needed and I was worried by their attempts to include comic elements in their theatrical language; something which Impact have managed with any real success, only in their most recent work. But I came away feeling genuinely excited that here was a new, young group that could represent a new generation of British experimental theatre.

Their new show commissioned by the Zap Club conforms both the premise of *The Set Up* and some of my doubts. *The Day That Serenity Returned to the Ground* is a

THEATRICAL


Entertainment: . . .

Ballard-esque mingling and mangling together of two narratives. One concerns the death of a child during a family holiday in the Urals. The other is the 'burial at sea' of an astronaut aboard a spaceship. These two deaths from different times and cultures collide and the performers and their environment take on multiple, shifting layers of meaning. What is first a morgue, is then the spaceship. What is first the dead body of the child is then the dead body of the astronaut and is finally revealed to be no more (nor less) than a pile of earth and rock. This is symbolic earth. Symbolic of the fertile soil out of which all life springs and to which it returns. In covering their faces in these mortal remains the astronauts/child's family/performers/perform an act of atonement for their sins and failings. The morgue/spaceship/theatre is presided over by a mortician/flight controller/author who manipulates the controls which affect this environment. Time past — the child's death and time future — the spaceship, are both perhaps part of time present — the theatre. Theatre, like scientific endeavour, like life itself, is a voyage of the imagination beyond the self-imposed limits of time and death. This is by no means an original idea but it is a theme which is too 'remote' to be acceptable to the sociological attitudes and concerns of most theatre today and is therefore all the more welcome.

What bothered me though, was that the things that struck me in *The Set Up* as a laudable tribute to Impact Theatre; the use of sound as the structural basis of the work the pure theatrical functionalism of the design (everything has a purpose); the use of repetition to build momentum and emotional power; the raw, dangerous, angry, here and now theatrical reality — seem here not so much the results of a rigorously pure approach to generating theatre (as it is for Impact) but more like a mere theatrical style. They seemed like the means rather than the results of the creative act and in consequence lacked immediacy and power.

The show did contain some spectacular images and there is plenty of energy and inventiveness but it was all too formal and detached to achieve anything more than a televisual impact. In fact I found myself comparing the live action with the video monitor relaying the action to the back of the audience and preferring the screen image to the real thing. This was, however, only the second night and I hope they will find more persuasive performances in what is essentially a well conceived work.

The Set Up has been revised and can be seen at the ICA on March 9th. Nighthawks the show that came between *The Set Up* and the new piece is at the Oval House, April 16th-20th. ●

MESMERISM

. . . and on Station House Opera:

THE DOMINO

THEORY OF ART HISTORY

● A room is filled with a forest of breeze blocks. In amongst them, in the dirt, life is stirring. God, the Creator, the Artist, for reasons of his own vanity raises the living things up off their bellies and creates first man then woman. The narrative of Genesis gives way to a picture of social, modern man drawing further and further away from the creator. The narrative is presented through the constant building and rebuilding from the breeze blocks and the compliant bodies of the performers, a series of tableaux images which are quotations from art history. Mary cradling the crucified Christ is the most memorable image, whilst an angel conferring a blessing from above is the most acrobatic with Julian Maynard-Smith poised on a precariously stacked column of blocks. The breeze blocks are the material of life and art, but they can also be burdens (the man who in his sleep covers his body with blocks), or barriers, or prisons (the woman totally entombed in a tower of bricks). As the images are constantly dismantled and rebuilt so the rôle of the performers is constantly redefined by new situations, new references, giving a peculiar relevance to the cliché, a tapestry of history.

A Split Second of Paradise (Acme Studios) is, however, a good deal more subtle and interesting than this description makes it sound. It is more than just a 'good idea'. The spectacle of the performers struggling through a hard and laborious process is in itself fascinating but can itself be seen as another art historical reference, since process and work have been important themes in modern performance. There is also a good deal of slap stick humour. But what gives the performance its depth and power is the great sense of irony with which it is all carried off. These very grand themes presented through such very ordinary, banal materials; God's bemused, platonic philosophising which erupts into school masterly peevishness when he is contradicted by his own creations; the attitude of childlike innocent curiosity

with which the performers allow themselves to be manipulated and composed into images of agony and ecstasy; all of these are deeply ironic. The seemingly solid ground of well known biblical myth, art history, the development of man and his societies and civilisations, is gently, mildly subverted by this irony. All attempts to rationalise or impose some sort of order on human experience are precarious because we are not only the Creators, the Artists, who fashion all things but we are also the dumb, rude clay from which all things are made. This is the great irony of it all and it constantly threatens the edifice of history and culture which could so easily collapse like the row of breeze blocks which fall like dominoes in the final image of the piece.

What or where then is the 'Split Second of Paradise'? Is it found in the Eden between creation and self-realisation? Is it the still point somewhere at the centre of this vortex of continual change? Is it the brief moment of stasis in which all the performers and material are frozen into an harmonious, artistic composition? Or is the title too perhaps an ironic description for an infinity in hell? With *A Split Second of Paradise* Station House Opera have asserted a distinct voice of their own, free from the earlier clear influence of the TING: Theatre of Mistakes. This ironic, humorous, mere relaxed approach suits them well. Julian Maynard-Smith, the creator of Station House Opera, is also happier with this less formally rigorous style and is developing a more confident and entertaining performance of his own. His collaboration with Gary Stevens in *Invisible Work* last year has clearly had a considerable and positive influence. It is a partnership of literary and visual styles which promises a great deal, and I see *A Split Second of Paradise* and *Invisible Work* as only the first fruits. (Rumour has it that this show will be included in the Expo of the best of new British talent at Riverside Studios in May. It should be.) ●



Nick Houghton checks out Channel Four's latest video series:

Every Tuesday since early January I've grabbed a place in front of my battered Taiwanese idiot box and tuned in to Channel Four's regular late night American video slot, *Ghosts In The Machine*. This activity, sustained over the six weeks duration of the programme, has left me with bloodshot eyes and, more pertinently, a few doubts about the mechanics of broadcasting video art.

Before we get into THAT one, however, I should first like to question the naff hi-tech graphics which prefaced the American tapes — British design team English Markell Pockett were the engineers of these undoubtedly expensive intro sequences, though why the editor, John Wyver, decided to use these plinkydinky exercises in disinformation will remain a mystery. (Forgive me if I'm wrong but aren't intro sequences s'posed to be *informational*? . . . All too often I found myself stranded in mid-programme

The second reason, says Levine, is that though many artists work is far more interesting than broadcast TV it suffers from comparison with the mainstream because it simply doesn't have the same sort of budget or resources. A third reason, I would suggest, is that tape makers — particularly in the UK where interaction with broadcast systems is so tenuous — often rely on the fact that their work will be most normally screened in the context of a given space and time. The tape will be the central focus of the 'event' of screening to a usually small group of interested viewers. These viewers will be there because of the video and the particular intimacy of this 'closed' screening with the artist relying, perhaps, on this concentrated mode of audio-visual consumption as a site for dialogue between video and viewer. Quite simply we don't watch television in our sitting rooms in the same way and to expect video art to make the transition successfully is

Muddle made the transition from an 'art context' to gogglebox less successfully. Hill's tape, which in a different viewing context I suspect I would've found engrossing, was an elegant quirky puzzler of a piece which questioned given notions of order and reality yet in transmission it seemed overlong and too determinedly clever. Sat beside *Muddle* Tom Rubintz's mobhanded swipe at trash television, *Made For TV*, looked like kneejerk humour — I'm not sure why but somehow it just wasn't funny.

Neither was *Eternal Frame*, product of media pranksters Ant Farm/Truth Co. back in '76 — unless you liked your humour black yet there was a nervous smile fluttering around this video documentation of a re-staged assassination (John F. Kennedy in Dallas 1963). 'I guess what it is is figuring out what it is', responded an actor playing Kennedy in this strangely cathartic event when asked to explain the thing; 'Is it art?' persisted the questioner — 'Well, it's not not-art' said Kennedy cryptically. It was all leading up to Dealey Plaza, of course, where the amount of 'image death' was replayed again and again before a growing crowd of spectators. 'It's a beautiful re-enactment', commented one woman, while nearby a pseudo-security agent heard the killer gunshot and snapped, 'We fucked up this one'. Roughedged and slightly rambling this tape was really just an extension of an event — albeit an intriguing and ghoulish event — and this, surprisingly, was an aspect of Stateside video which flavoured even the most contemporary of tapes.

The form had got slicker, more stylish, by the 80's, mind you, but you could still taste it in Colin Campbell's Canadian tape, *The Woman Who Went Too Far* for all its glam modishness.

I could go on but — apart from gold star ratings to Peter Campus doubletracking subliminal 'blipvert' of a tape, *Transition One*, and a nod toward Laurie Anderson's spare, gestural *O Superman-Ghosts* was finally only halfway there if the intention was to interest Joe Public.

For video junkies like yours truly, our brains rotted by mainline VTR, the programme offered a new perspective on American medianiks but for many viewers the message in the medium may well have seemed wilfully obscure. This is no more the fault of the video artist, who most probably never intended his work to be broadcast, than it is of the viewer but what it does suggest is that broadcast institutions allow something more than airtime to independent tape makers; production budgets and facility access might be a good place to start. With this done we may yet be witness to a mass medium art form which both engages and entertains whilst retaining its oppositional stance.

In the meantime it's heartening to hear that Anna Ridley, for many years involved in engineering interaction between artists and TV corporations, is organising an event intended to bring together the 'indie sector' with those 'telly people'. Scheduled for early March at London's Riverside studio this may, at last, prompt positive relationships between the mainstream and the avant-garde instead of the more usual antagonism. ●

IGHOSTS

with a video tape that, seemingly, had no credits or title).

Alongside the irritation the graphics prompted there are those doubts I mentioned. They'd started, these nagging uncertainties, during the Eleventh Hour programmes on UK video art and, by the time I'd undergone six successive doses of the American brand, I'd begun to see what the problem was. Primarily it's something to do with the nature of mainstream television and our expectations of it which may be jarred by the apparent inadequacy of video art, a supposedly innovative and exciting art form, to deliver the goods.

Les Levine, in an essay entitled 'One Gun Video Art' (New Artists Video: A Critical Anthology: Dutton Paperbacks 1978) was on the right track here when he wrote, 'The art viewer is always asking why can't video artists make their video tape like real TV? The first answer is they simply don't want to'.

expecting a lot of both the casual fireside watcher and the video artist him/herself.

This said it was somehow surprising that such a high percentage of American video DID make some sort of impact. William Wegman's simple comic sketches, featuring quizzical dogs, singing bellies and anthropomorphic angle poise lamps, was one example. Similarly Max Almy's *Perfect Leader*, a stylish chunk of agit-pop centred on media and politics, was a worthy attention grabber while Spalding Gray's *A Personal History Of The American Theatre* — essentially a talking heads monologue — utilised this 'address to camera' framework to deliver something both original and witty. ('Oh yes', said Gray as he saw his cue card marked "Krapps Last Tape", Becketts great work . . . Yes. I have a great affinity with this: I work alone, often with a tape recorder and mostly I feel like crap). By contrast a work like Gary Hills *Why Do Things Get In A*

WHY, why, why, pleads JOHN ASHFORD, are national newspaper critics so incapable of appreciating new work? They've known about it for decades, but a brief history lesson shows them none the wiser:

● "Who's on at Come Together?" I asked Mark Long of The People Show some time ago. 'The usual boring lot', he replied, 'The People Show, Freehold, Pip Simmons ...' You can see what he meant. Come Together did have the air of a retrospective. Apart from some of the mixed-media work, we'd seen it all before. Two surprises, then, made the first night an occasion: (1) The look of the theatre — all gutted and pop-painted — really gave the impression that something new was happening. (2) The reaction of the press. I had the misfortune to sit behind three fat, black-suited old men. Throughout The People Show's performance, they swapped inane, snide, ill-informed wise-cracks, in spite of people around them repeatedly telling them to shut up. They behaved like a bunch of silly schoolboys at a speech day. Their ringleader was Milton Shulman, the Standard critic of the year, having a jolly night out with a couple of critical cronies.

The following day he put down The People Show as "the halitosis of experimental theatre". That's a nice quote, and a compliment to The People Show. But he did not intend a compliment. His headline was about the smoke bombs that were let off at the end of the show — not surprisingly, since one of them, I'm pleased to report, was detonated right behind his seat.

Shulman was not alone in his views. The People Show were universally reviled for being neither funny nor appealing to the man in the street. Who said they should do either? Not a single critic, posh or show-biz, did more than describe the rudiments of the show. Not one attempted an analysis; not one mentioned any of the events they staged outside the theatre and in the bar over the three weeks.

Only Nicholas de Jongh in the Guardian was distinguished by knowing anything of what he was writing about — and ground the point home by congratulating himself as being "one of the few critics who have followed and praised The Freehold from its inception". Jolly well done, Nick. The Guardian also had the good sense to send an art critic to see Stuart Brisley's performance: Caroline Tisdall wrote the best review of any Come Together event.

What was so good about Caroline Tisdall's review? Simply that she entered into the spirit of the event and judged it successfully on its own terms. Most critics seem to think that they had to bring to bear the "true standards of real theatre"; which is like judging a race horse by how well it plays football, just because it's all sport. Critical awards go to Irving Wardle, D. A. N. Jones, B. A. Young, and Arthur Thirkell —

show-biz correspondent of the Mirror — who wrote: "Those trendy people can outdo anybody else in the presentation of pretentious, vulgar, mind-boggling codswallop". And that's probably what most of the critics of Come Together really thought. Now it's all over and everyone can get back to the real business of making theatre.'

Hang on a minute. Where was this Come Together thing? Bill Gaskill put it on at the Royal Court. *The Royal Court? No, you've got it wrong. He's just done the Howard Barker play there.* Bill Gaskill put on the Come Together Festival at the Royal Court Theatre in 1970. *1970? Plus ça change . . .*

I was reminded of The People Show smoke bomb outrage when attending La Fura dels Baus in Docklands recently. This time the critics were ducking fireworks and the perpetrators were from Spain; but their reactions were largely unchanged sixteen years later. What I had written above in *Time Out* magazine in October 1970 could have appeared, with the references and the names changed, in April 1986 within *Performance* magazine.

And this was a festival which would have been at the centre of *Performance* magazine's interest. It combined the best of experimental theatre with performance work (Stuart Brisley), installation (Peter Dockley), and video (Playback 625). I recall with particular affection Brisley's piece. White bandaged acolytes erected a tower for him whilst he grabbed and consumed a great deal of their bread and milk. When they'd finished it, he mounted to a chair/throne at the top, stuck his fingers down his throat, and vomited copiously and extensively all over the stage of the Royal Court. It stank. The National Anthem played. Naive and physically direct, it said by art what Roland Muldoon's CAST attempted by argument. Come Together was an historic uniting of heretics which, in the book celebrating 25 years work at the Royal Court, earns the mention 'cast list unavailable'. It was also the first occasion upon which national newspaper critics were forced to assess experimental work.

Come Together seems even more remarkable when reminded of its cultural context. That 1970 *Time Out* report was followed by a

A CRITICAL SENSE OF HISTORY

A CRITICAL SENSE OF HISTORY

► disappointed review of Incubus' *second* show, and a lengthy academic review of Godard's *Two or three things I know about her* which claimed it as a masterpiece. It was preceded by a review of the Steve Miller Band's *Number Five* which began: 'I heard the Steve Miller Band's Children of the Future album around the time that I began smoking dope. But the fact that I was stoned when I first heard it has nothing to do with my conviction that it was, and is, one of the most beautifully inventive rock albums ever make . . .' No, I didn't write that.

Years later, Milton Shulman changed his tune about The People Show when he saw their Cabaret. 'The People Show has an avant garde reputation and they have been written about as exponents of surrealist imagery and nightmarish visual coherence. Don't let that critical jargon put you off this fun show which is as intellectual as a bucket of paint poured into a clown's crotch.' Ah well, that's a relief. No need to engage the brain anymore. No need to puzzle over what on earth 'nightmarish visual coherence' might mean.

But neither Shulman nor anyone else from the Standard bothered to go down to the docks to see La Fura dels Baus, even though the paper ran a couple of news stories on the unusual nature of the event, one of them a good ten column inches long.

It was left to the likes of Michael Coveney in the Financial Times to let us know what went on. Tired,

dyspeptic, seen-it-all-before, born-again-conservative Coveney used the occasion to mount yet another of his tedious attacks on 'the avant garde'. During the 70's, as second string on the Financial Times, Coveney made a career for himself by writing intelligent, informed reviews of new theatre work. Now, stepping into the shoes of spritely and acute pensioner B. A. Young, he bites the hand that fed him with teeth decayed by ignorance. For all his information is a good five years out of date; and as a result his assaults are becoming increasingly ludicrous. The trouble is that, because he used to know, his colleagues in the Critics' Circle feel it's OK to follow suit.

Coveney found La Fura dels Baus 'pretentious, old-fashioned and decadent'. He likened it to Cafe La Mama (wrong) and a 60's Happening (well, all right). The thing that distresses me is that when a work clearly and ironically locate itself within a tradition of twentieth century performance, a fully documented tradition which stretches back over seventy years through Happenings, the Absurd and the Futurists to Dada, a theatre critic should dismiss it as 'old-fashioned'. It's about the same level of critical competence as a writer on architecture finding a postmodern building 'old-fashioned' because it sports a couple of Doric columns. The truth is that Coveney was defensive and flummoxed, sent running to his depleted library of personal references because he recognised that he just doesn't know enough about it any more,

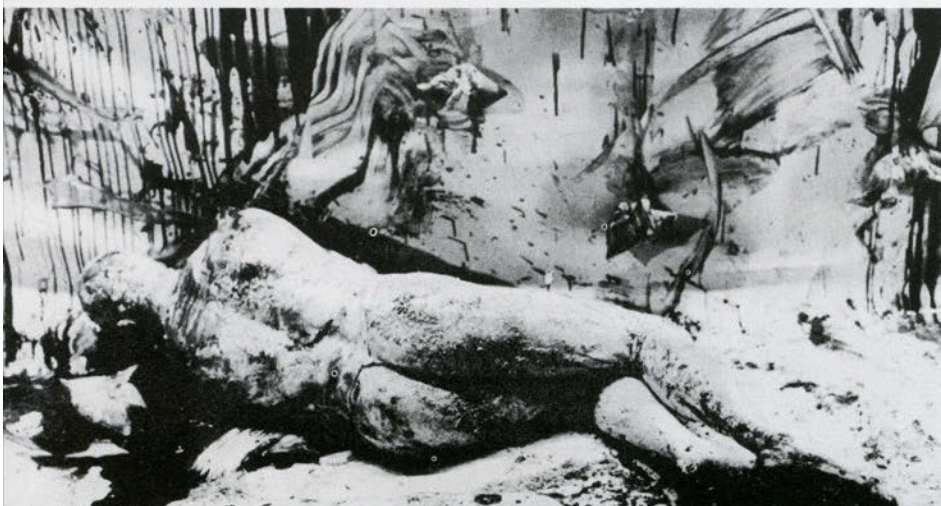
about — say — the Japanese dance form Buto to whose images our Spanish chums are most indebted.

The truth is also that a fresh and imaginative critic needs no recourse to any such references. In the good old Ham and High, (the Camden local Hampstead and Highgate Express) under the headline 'When Catalans are let out of the bag', Keith Watson got the tone just right. 'A demonic mixture of circus, pantomime, breaker's yard, rock gig and abattoir, La Fura think big . . . With a firecracker BANG loud enough to send a shock wave all the way back to Barcelona, the devilish Furas set out to terrorise their captive audience with a succession of anarchic set-pieces (spot the contradiction) which had the crowd on the run from one spectacle to the next . . . With savage glee a Herman Munster type joined up with a pal to form a Ford Capri wrecking crew. As capitalism was dismembered its fractured debris was scattered wildly amongst the audience. And here the fun really began. With wild lunges, our wacky hosts covered themselves in sticky blue paint before attempting to coat the crowd. The collective panic was . . . as someone said, like a sheepdog trial where the dogs are rabid.'

Now *that's* what it was like — sly, self-knowing and celebratory. Keith Watson entered into the spirit of the event and judged it successfully on its own terms — and yes, that is exactly what I wrote about the lesson taught by Caroline Tisdall 16 years ago.

Has any other critic learned that old lesson? Looking through the reviews makes for mainly depressing reading. Take the music, for instance, which began as a kind of parody of our very own and much loved Ted Milton's *Blurt!*, and rapidly deteriorated into an undistinguished electronic thrash for two synth keyboards and drum machine. Kenneth Rea in *The Guardian* (where the hell were Billington or de Jongh?) found it made 'punk rock look like the teddy bear's picnic'; whereas John Peter in the *Sunday Times* though it 'made the Sex Pistols sound like the London Mozart Players'. Mary Harron in *The Observer* tried harder by placing it 'in the tradition of *Einstürzende Neubaten* or *Test Department*'. Well, they did use a

'with wild lunges, our wacky hosts covered themselves in sticky blue paint . . .'





drill at one point. Coveney just reached lazily for his favourite adjective 'old-fashioned'. Brian Morton, art critic for the Times Higher Ed, got closest inciting 'Britain's only likely parallel, the modish Bow Gamelan Ensemble'. Now I wonder how many theatre critics have even heard of our modish friends, let alone seen them?

All this probably seems like impotent and vengeful invective: national paper theatre critics are no better equipped to assess contemporary work now than they were 16 years ago. Judgements are still one-off, uncontextualised, ignorant of the tradition of work from which springs the new. In fairness, La Fura dels Baus were treated more enthusiastically than they would have been 16 years ago; but there is a truth here, and it's important since these people are powerful and can inflict severe damage.

A couple of months ago, John Peter in his Sunday Times column let us behind the critical scenes and owned up to what happens in 'a light week' — when there's little opening at the Nationals or in the West End. Critics earn their crust by first turning to the regions or, as a last resort, dipping their toes tentatively in 'the Fringe'. It's a bit like film critics only going to the independents when there's nothing to see from Hollywood.

This is the crux of the problem. Arts editors and critics should *always* know what looks promising amongst contemporary work, and should *always* make an effort to see it irrespective of the weight of commitments elsewhere. It's not a difficult area to research; London's listing magazines still give an adequate guide. And if they don't know, they could always ask. Then critics would at least get to see the key events — whether or not they're able to write about them — and develop an appropriate body of knowledge and vocabulary. After all, most of them only seem to work around four nights a week, so they do have the time. Come on, chaps. It has been 16 years now, and the stuff isn't just going to go away however hard you try and dismiss it. Isn't it about time it was taken seriously?

Meanwhile, I long to know what Milton Shulman will make of People Show No. 91 at the Almeida. Bombs or bouquets? ●

Dear Michael,
The day after I sent this in, I read your piece in the Financial Times on Jan Fabre (prior to his company's appearance the Albert Hall). It was, of course, exemplary: lucid, learned, quite back to your old form. It even started me thinking about *The Power of Theatrical Madness* all over again. I thought I ought to withdraw what I had written.

But reconsidering *The Power of Theatrical Madness* lead me to fresh conclusions. You will recall that at the end of the show, when the parrots are brought on, a woman shrieks out: 'This is theatre like it was to be expected and foreseen. Jan Fabre. Antwerp 1982.' In this way, Fabre ironically adds his own work to the catalogue of significant milestones of performance recited during the running race earlier in the show — ironically because, in echoing the voice of the parrot, Fabre simultaneously recognises his indebtedness to that tradition.

And this is no mere egotism. Clumsily but prophetically titled, *This is theatre like it was to be expected and foreseen* was a genuine milestone, perhaps even a work of genius. It was about people and life, the real thing; whereas *The Power of Theatrical Madness*, is only about art, an afterpiece which knowingly offers an exquisite and elaborately gilded frame to the earlier work, placing it within its cultural context.



I put on *This is theatre . . .* at the ICA in May 1983. Where were you? Not there — and not alone in not being there. Despite features in Time Out and City Limits, no critic of any national newspaper bothered to turn out to see this seminal work. So even though Fabre insists *within the work* that its tradition reaches right back to Wagner, the critical response is still one-off. If you and your colleagues had written about *This is theatre . . .* in the terms in which you are now writing about *The Power of Theatrical Madness*, the lives of a number of people would probably now be rather different. What I find really disconcerting, I suppose, is that a critic of your demonstrable stature seems unable to peer through either hype or the lack of it. And so my comments stand.

And I'll even go on to pick another fight. In your piece on Fabre, you say his work 'has already spawned some rather desultory imitators on the British fringe'. This is both unfair and untrue. It's more a question of zeitgeist: it would be surprising if artists of the same generation did *not* respond in similar ways to the world in which they find themselves. It's not a question of imitation, rather a case of parallel but separate development.

One company which you would probably accuse of Fabre imitation if you were to see them (although, I suspect, you won't even have heard of them) is Forced Entertainment, a two-year-old group from Leeds. But they've never seen Jan Fabre; and it's only through the pages of *Performance* magazine that they found out about Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. They've never even heard of Epigonen. But they all live in the same world. Do you?

In May 1983 I wrote: 'Jan Fabre should be as important to the 1980s as Robert Wilson was to the 1970s.' Nearly three years later it seems that you now agree with me. During 1984 I tried to meet you for lunch to tell you, amongst other things, how important Fabre was. You cancelled, and cancelled, and cancelled — the last time because you had to go and watch cricket at Lords. I gave up.

I think you owe me lunch.
Yours expectantly,
John Ashford

The acquisition of special skills has always been considered an activity within the domain of the less experimental, usually two and three-dimensional artist, and is almost positively identified, with few exceptions, with the actor and musician. For a long time it has been considered that technique was something which must be discarded in order for it not to form a barrier between the maker and perceiver. Learning *not* to fabricate, to act purely from instinct, has been the first step on the path to true creation and innovation. But slowly, from that standpoint of pure instinct, it can be possible to train the body and mind to *frame* the creative impulse in such a way that it can be said to be amplified by technique. Moreover, by applying artistic insight to the very nature of the acquisition of skills, those skills themselves can be transformed into a 'found' artwork in their own right. 'Learning to fly', as well as the name of this section on artists who have acquired unusual skills, or who have transformed an attitude to skill, is therefore a metaphor for the possibilities lying in wait for the experimental artist. Those possibilities have no limits.

As well as inviting statements from selected artists in this category, ROB LA FREN AIS interviewed artists who have become ballroom dancers, Industrial Revolution inventors, and a deep sea diver.

LEARNING TO FLY



MARTY ST JAMES and ANNE WILSON hope to make the heats of 'Come Dancing'. Here, they describe the trials and tribulations of life under the mirrored globe:

SLOW SLOW

QUICK QUICK

Rob La Frenais: What got you interested in Ballroom Dancing?

MSJ: I think one of the things that got us interested was that the performances we'd been doing in the past together were often perceived by the audiences as actually having an element of dance in them, or choreography, which, when we first started working together we didn't realise was so. I think that's where the prompting came to actually start to think about dancing, in that sense.

AW: Dance is a minor thing. I think that we both had a personal interest in ballroom dancing as an activity. We both had very strong memories of watching 'Come Dancing' as children, and the absurd, ritualistic way that those dances occur, the movements and the positions. We have actually used them in the past, individually, in the films we've made, so we've had a link with ballroom dancing even before we worked together. The other link, I think, was the romance link. All our stuff being about the bizarre portrayal of archetypal relationships; and that dancing is a social get-together with all its aspects of 'wallflowers', dashing ballroom knights in white dinner jackets with dickie-bows on cruise liners being an integral part of every Mills and Boon book.

RL: Once you enter the 'world' of ballroom dancing, do you start perceiving it in a different way as art to how you did before you went in? In other words, do you find yourself actually becoming involved in that world, and moving away from your original standpoint as artists? You mention it, for example, as seeming quite bizarre from a distance.

AW: I think learning anything shifts your standpoint, because it becomes about practical issues of whether you can move your leg far enough back to the right. I think something that we both said very clearly is the way it feels to do it and the way it looks visually are actually very different. The place that

we go to is actually surrounded with mirrors, and it's quite a shock sometimes to see how the things you'd been taught to do actually look. You get so involved in the mechanics. We also realised that you do get sucked into the world of it. Ballroom dancing is a total subculture.

MSJ: You get to the point that you find yourself actually picking up dance news, and finding out about these cruises that occur. Two week cruises for £400 and dance for two weeks. Yes, one can't help but actually get involved with all that. I mean, we keep asking for our number to be pinned to our backs. We've got competitive about it, I'm afraid it's true. Initially, we went along to the ballroom in disguise a little bit. We didn't tell them what we did, or anything.

RL: What do you mean, in disguise?

AW: We didn't say that we were artists, performance artists we didn't talk about what we did to the tutor or the other people being taught. We wanted to remain anonymous, so we went along in an anonymous way. Unfortunately one of the people saw us on television and the whole thing broke down.

AW: On *Paintbox*, we did a pulp romance for London Weekend Television. We were there, waltzing away, and this woman ran in screaming 'I saw you on the telly last week!' and we kind of went unhhnn!

RL: Blown your cover. So what happened then?

AW: Well everyone sort of took a step back. Particularly the woman that ran it, she had become very suspicious of us by then. She said that, although we'd never done it before, we were too good at it. She obviously had figured out that we were used to moving together, and we could deal with it spatially. When she said 'move your body at a diagonal right, then do a reverse pivot, change the line of your arms', we understood what she meant, while everyone else was asking 'could you explain that please?'

RL: How did they feel? Did they think

it was a wind-up? How did their attitude change when they realised?

MSJ: It changed a little bit in the sense that we took up very specific private lessons which were to do with the Tango. Once they all realised that we were actually involved in performance of some type or nature, one was then put on the spot a little bit more and made to actually demonstrate or perform to the others who were not quite as advanced as us. That was quite difficult, to be quite honest about it, it was very difficult.

RL: So essentially you lost your amateur status.

AW: Yes. We had to explain to her that we'd gone to specifically learn three dances, which were the Cha Cha Cha, the Waltz and the Tango, and that they were related to three pulp romances that we were and would be working on over a fairly long period of time, and that we wanted to put them in our repertoire. But, we also wanted to learn the others, because there is a general vocabulary of ten to twelve

SLOW



dances which are standard fitting. I think she was quite pleased when we explained to her because it gave her something to pitch it as well.

RL: You mean she'd been smelling a rat, but she was unsure about exactly what it was, so it actually helped in a sense when they realised.

AW: Yes, I think so. Also, because we had to approach her about the Arts Council Training scheme. That obviously would send it straight out of the window. She actually said 'Right, OK' and was fine about it. She was delighted when we got it, quite aside from financially. I think that gave us a little bit of institutional credibility.

RL: Did you have to explain what visual artists were doing learning ballroom dancing? How did you put it? In a sense you were being put on the spot, as artists having to explain really, what *art* is.

MSJ: It wasn't too difficult in one sense, because one of the things we'd locked into very strongly was the fact that the teacher herself taught the theory of dance as well as the practicalities. She teaches it in a very sculptural way. She really does. That's where we found ourselves being able to lock in with her, more than her with us as such, because we could actually talk about it. Obviously, there's a big hole, a big void here in which she doesn't know what we're talking about, but we actually manage to communicate and come to an understanding, on the basis of a sculptural . . .

AW: You see, there are two schools of ballroom dancing. One is the German one which is Danz-sport. Literally you keep fit, and you move down the floor doing these very rigorous movements. The other way is to treat it as an artform, which is what fortunately the woman who teaches us does — the creative as opposed to the sport side. And then in the middle you've got the social shuffler who comes because he wants to get round the floor at dinner-dances. The other thing about her is that she has a very good sense of humour that helps tremendously, a very odd sense of humour. The place we go to is off a main street in Hackney, and it is the classic image of a ballroom. It has a globe that rotates on a motor, it's surrounded by mirrors, a little stage at the end where the records play, it has a Spanish bar at the other end . . .

MSJ: But it was quite nice, to go back to that point, initially to have gone in there anonymously. There was one guy there who'd also gone along to learn to dance, and it took six or seven weeks to find out what he did, actually, because we knew that he 'worked underground'

some days and 'overground' other days, and also that he was responsible because he had a key, but we couldn't work it out. Finally we found out that he was a toilet attendant.

AW: It was like that, you had a ten minute break in the bar, halfway through, and everyone would be putting these very discreet questions to find out what each other was doing. The woman that saw us on the TV said quite astonishedly, 'I thought you were cooks.' We said 'How did you think that we were cooks?' 'Because you were talking about food last week.' Which was a very long shot. To go back to the previous point, about whether you actually got involved in the world of it — obviously we are doing it for our performance work, and we'll continue doing private lessons which will take us into more specialist areas. We've reached a point with her now where we have to actually tell her what we want, because some of the repertoire is no good to us. We have to be able to perform in a relatively small area, lots of different things. That's quite specific. But the other side is that general class that we go to for practice are quite different, because those are leading to the medal syndrome, which we didn't even think about. I mean we both have vague memories of Aunties who 'had medals' for ballroom dancing.

RL: That then is the pathway to 'Come Dancing'.

AW: Yes, so what we've decided to do is, this year, we're also going to engage in that. We didn't start by going through the Bronze, Silver, so we have to backtrack.

RL: How to they actually get people for 'Come Dancing'? Do they have talent scouts?

MSJ: It's all broken down into regions, like Midland and Northwest, and Wales. That's all based around the dance schools themselves. There is an affiliation to which the teachers belong to, such as ours, the most famous one being Peggy Spencer.

AW: In Penge. In fact our first link with ballroom dancing is Frank and Peggy's book *Come Dancing*, which we bought many years ago. The thing is though, that the clubs are very competitive. We all think that the art world can be quite bitchy but the ballroom dancing world knocks spots off it.

MSJ: Yes there are many similarities. One of the things said . . . our teacher won't involve herself in the judging now, because she believes that it's the politics of dancing that gets you the prizes. She said they don't watch the feet any more, they watch the grin on

the face, or whatever.

AW: She said she was told discreetly to stop judging people on their feet. She said 'In my terms, if their feet are wrong, the whole line of their body's wrong', because she's a purist. She says she didn't care what they were wearing, they could have come in their pyjamas: if their feet were right then they deserved to win the competition. After having had a few words with her — she was on the international circuit of judges — she actually pulled out and made an official protest. According to her, everyone just waves their arms in the air now — and then it's not dance.

RL: How do you dress?

MSJ: The thing is, that up the judgement of medal standard you're not allowed to dress *up*, as it were, because they feel that it would affect the judgement. As far as actually the medals are concerned you can't dress up. Generally though, when we go along to the classes we go reasonably informally. Except recently, we had an Xmas dance at which we were expected to attend in evening dress. But obviously the dress is very important — for the man in terms of the line of the body — for the woman in terms of being shown off. It is, whatever one says — and this is one of the difficulties we have — the man has to drive, so to speak. The man has to go forward, the man has to make the decisions, the man has to be stalwart, if you like, to show the woman off. So it is actually quite masculine-based, in terms of control.

RL: It's a metaphor for an image of society in that sense.

AW: Yes, this is why we picked it out.

It's also a very bizarre metaphor, because in that sense, it does take two to tango. Neither of you can do it on your own. I found it difficult to go backwards looking over my left shoulder for quite a while (laughter) because that's what you actually do! And the holds are actually quite extreme. When you first go there you're just more concerned with your feet. We've now reached the stage where the holds . . . I am supposed to be able to see my left foot coming back behind me.

RL: Having discovered this aspect, how to you feel about it as artists? Do you not feel that in playing with that metaphor you're not helping to reinforce it, rather than expose it, or change it?

MSJ: I think that one of the reasons we've become quite fascinated with it is of course the fact that it's about relationships, about male and female and the way in which they are actually perceived in this sense, movement-wise

and visually. At the moment we're not sure what the effect's going to be, because we're not far enough along the road as such. In a practical sense, one of the things we have found out, is that one person has to lead, it's very important, otherwise you fall over!

AW: The strange thing is, though, is that it's not a sexist thing. You do come to understand that the better you get at it. The couples that are very good — I know some people that have been doing it for a very long time — are incredibly strong physically, and there are some dances, for example the foxtrot, which are based on the man doing very light, very dainty steps that are called 'feather steps' which move forward to the side and then back again. What the woman does is that her legs become shock-absorbers, and she has to pile-drive backwards down the floor, absorbing these dainty little steps as the man leans forward. So in actual fact, in terms of physique and control that dance is exactly the opposite (of sexist). We were actually asking those questions about . . . well this is a bit odd because we were used to sharing everything, doing everything together . . . it can't be so that the man has to do everything and it's not, it really is not. It's just that traditionally, the man goes forwards, and the woman does go backwards and therefore he can see where he's going and she can't. But, when you do a reverse turn, that changes round, and the woman goes forwards and the man goes backwards. I think as far as reinforcing the roles, we don't. Our aim has never been to answer questions, but to pose questions. The ballroom dancing is, for us, people trying to get to a Perfect Moment. (*Perfect Moments* is a title of an earlier piece). Aside from the *Mills and Boon* if our philosophy was about anything it would be about all these structures that are in society to try to get to that point where everything is perfect. And you can't do it. Ballroom dancing is a very weird hybrid that has come up through Court dancing, social dances pre-war right up to what it is now, and it will soon become an Olympic sport. Which is what is hoped will happen to it.

AW: We use a phrase to link the dancing to what we do which is 'Romance, don't dance alone'. It is still the point of contact for people. We were not brought up in a situation where people go and ask someone else to dance. It's quite a fascinating thing, because to be able to go and ask someone else to dance and for someone to accept means that you both take it for granted that you have this language that you share. ▶





Right: Latin-American hand position — 'pencil between the fingers'

All photos by Marty St James and Anne Wilson

RL: Is it true that you get people who dance together all their lives, who have each their own husband and wife, like a kind of stage marriage? A double life.

AW: Yes, that's very common. That's where you see where the whole archetypal thing breaks down, because it's actually a professional partnership. Partners are found, they don't just happen. The woman that teaches us, her niece, she travelled right to the end of the country to find a partner for her niece.

MSJ: And she found her a partner.

RL: So it really is a kind of arranged marriage situation.

MSJ: Yes, it is. Unfortunately, in this case it broke down because the niece lost interest and the guy went on to star on 'Come Dancing'. Still to this day our teacher says, 'My God, she missed her chance there'.

AW: In that sense, you're no good without your partner.

RL: So, are they going to turn round one day and say actually do you really think you should dance together, we'll find you other partners?

MSJ: Well we've been told that we do work very well together, so that's all right, we're OK on the arranged marriage.

AW: They do do that with other people, they move the other people in the class around. Because the obvious thing is if one is a beginner, it's very good to dance with someone who's good, it's the quickest way to learn. They argued the toss with us when we first went there, because we insisted that we just danced together. We didn't want to go there for the social shuffling. But then after it had all come out, everyone understood why we had to find it all out between us.

RL: Are there others of your age learning?

AW: Younger too. The cultural aspect of it is that there are ballroom families. From the minute they have offspring, procreate, those children are put into little suits and dresses. So you get eleven year olds that are just out of this world. They really are stupendous. The people you get in the school depend on which night you go. Monday nights range from absolute beginners who've never put a step in front of them to those like us who are about to launch into a medal situation. Wednesday nights you have people who are very good, they go away and they compete at Butlins Holiday Camps. For us that's excellent, because it makes you, as they call it, have to 'step out'. Which means you have to stop being tentative. And my God, if you don't step out you'll get knocked off the floor. They are *striding*

out onto the floor. I mean it really is powerful stuff. It's very fast, it's very strong.

RL: Is it exhilarating?

AW: It's amazing. It really is. The music is all Mike Sammes singers and . . .

MSJ: The music is awful, but it's quite good for watching dance to. To listen to on its own — we play the tapes to ourselves and sometimes we have guests round to listen to these tapes which we find beautiful, and which in actual fact they find thoroughly disgraceful.

AW + MSJ: *Dah Dah Dah Dah Dah, Dah Dah Dah Dah!*

AW: In terms of the context that you're asking us all this in, though, the most interesting thing that we've found out of all is for someone to shout at you. To be placed in a position of after having gone through art college, become artists . . .

RL: The seventies art school ethic — being able to do what you want.

AW: . . . to be placed in a position of something that's absolutely skill-based — you can't go and tell them you've got a BA because it won't make any difference — if your footwork's wrong she doesn't give a damn. She gives you hell. That is quite something to take.

RL: So she actually does tell you off.

AW: Oh, yes.

MSJ: Very strongly, in very strong terms.

AW: She picks on the men rather than the women.

MSJ: I'll be honest, I was a bit wimpish when we first went in to the Tango.

And I had to stop being a wimp, as she said — pick my back up, stand up straight and stride out. I meant that's quite difficult to actually do. The most interesting things, one of the most exciting things about dancing, is that you can't fudge it. You *cannot* fudge it. Particularly with this tutor.

RL: There's no right to fail.

MSJ: There's no right to fail. It's all made up of little elements. Like in the Tango you have to use your body in three parts — your feet going sideways,



SLOW SLOW**QUICK QUICK****SLOW**

your shoulders going sideways, your head following your feet, and your body sort of swivelling. So you've got the self-control of the actual bodyline itself, you've got the music, you've got the actual rhythm that you have to keep — you have to have rhythm, you have to understand rhythm and timing, and also you have to 'pick your back up'. So there's all these different elements which actually fit together, which I think we strongly relate to as performance artists because that is the way we think, that is the way we work. But, as Anne says, unlike English art schools in the seventies you have to *do* it and you have to do it properly.

AW: She is a purist, the woman who teaches us. She is the sort of woman, that if you do something terribly wrong, you cringe. We think that's a really good thing to experience — at this point in one's life.

MSJ: A grown man and a grown woman cringeing!

AW: It is, it's incredible! There's a very good example of that, three or four weeks ago. We had just completed the first course of tango lessons, and had learnt an number of devices what were reasonably complex — what she did was — at the end of what for us had been an exceptionally long day in which we'd both been teaching all day, come straight home, gone out to the dance class, be whipped around the floor to mostly quicksteps, which are very exhausting and right at the very end just as everyone else was putting their coats on she said 'OK. Tango on. Off you go.' We were absolutely exhausted. It was only the fact that she stood at the end of the ballroom *glaring*, with eyeballs out, *daring* you to put a foot wrong . . . I don't know where we go the energy from to do it, but we did it. And the whole class stood up and clapped. But it was sheer terror, because if ever we'd put a foot wrong . . . What happens is that you become her flagship, which is very extraordinary. ■

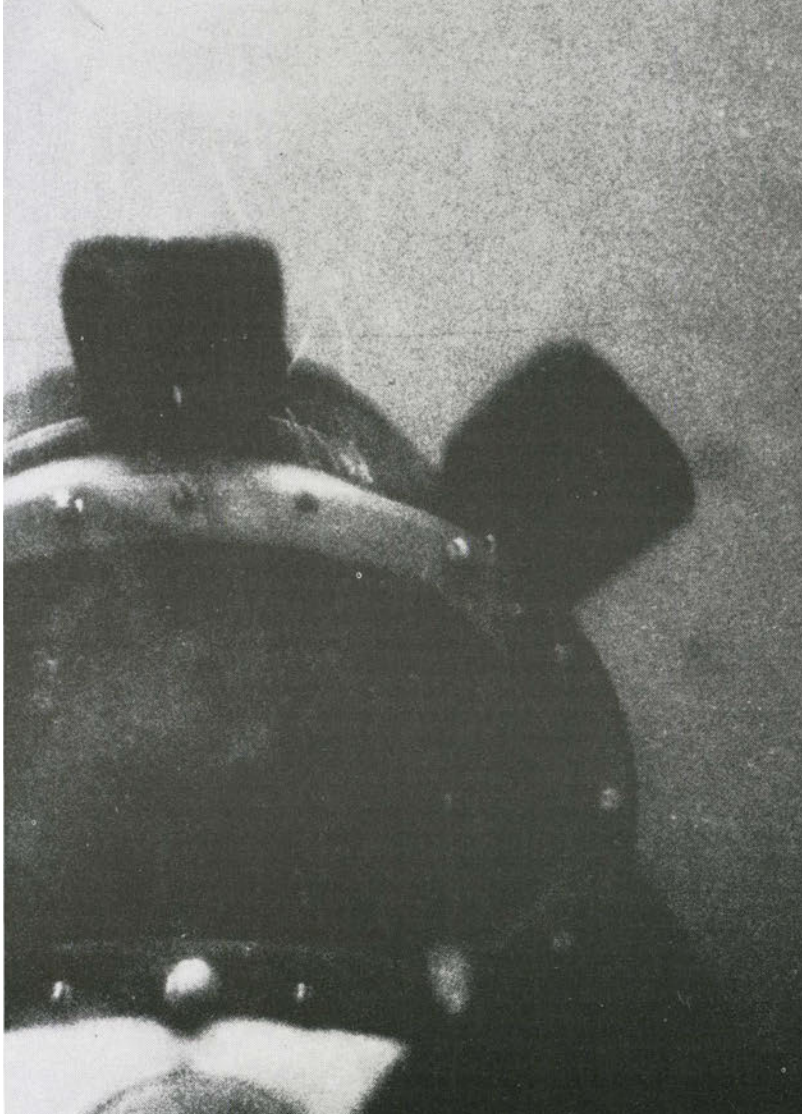


LEARNING TO FLY

LIVE ART NOW

IAN MUNRO is undergoing a unique ten-year training and career as a deep-sea diver. But underneath the rubber suit he will always be an artist:

IN DEEP



Rob La Frenais How, as an artist, were you drawn to becoming a deep-sea diver?

IAN MUNRO: From 1965-69 I was engaged in a series of paintings, sound pieces and written pieces, which generally explored the idea of extreme experiences for the human being. Threshold experiences, the limits of what it was possible for a human being to experience and explored and in terms of environment, for a human being to occupy and survive — with particular attention and interest in those environments in which a human being was not supposed to be able to live, except where living was made possible by the mediation, and intermediacy of a particular kind of body-shell. The body shell I became interested in was the one used by divers.

RL: Had you considered other active pursuits, before you considered diving?

IM: The first was sky-diving. The skydiving led from a sequence of landscape pictures, where I was making pictures of landscape which were compound images, of several landscapes

overlayered, and I started being interested in the idea of falling into a landscape, the landscape being something which was *entered*. The image was made by something literally falling into the landscape, and the image had that quality. I did some pictures using NASA space photographs, and then went skydiving in order to experience landscape from that perspective. As a result of that, I did a picture called *Exit*, which was about the skydiving *experience*, which proved more interesting than the landscape one was falling into. That then led into another body-shell, the skydiving outfit, that makes it possible to survive in an environment where one isn't supposed to survive — it was the idea of the human being as a soft animal, as a piece of jelly that is very vulnerable, putting itself into some kind of carapace, which is cunningly contrived in such a way which makes possible survival in an environment which is supposed to be fatal. That particular idea, and that particular relationship between bodyshell and motive was the fascination.

RL: So you did a diving course, and decided to embark upon a career as a professional diver?

IM: No, I wanted to go and see what it was like, I wanted to get pictures of that, I wanted to get hold of the imagery at that frontier, I wanted to get hold of the soundtracks of that frontier, and I wanted to experience it in verbal terms.

RL: As an artist purely?

IM: Purely. And the only way to that — there is no way to do it as a tourist — was to get the licence. Once I'd conceived the idea, I knew there wasn't anyone else who was doing that. I knew there was no one else who'd made an entry into that kind of area — it was an untouched area, which was why it was so interesting — it was an unknown. As soon as I discovered that, I went about finding out what one had to do to get into it, did so, borrowed the money to do the course. I couldn't swim and I suffered from claustrophobia . . .

RL: You couldn't swim?

IM: When I thought of the idea of wanting to go and experience that, to explore that threshold — the things against it were a) I couldn't swim, b) I suffered from claustrophobia, c) I had no experience whatsoever of working or living in the sea. The motive was to want to experience — in a phrase I use — to want to get to the edge of the night, to look over the edge.

RL: You went in with a sensibility, or ambition, that did not equal at the time your acquired skills?

IM: I had absolutely none of the skills necessary to bring this about. All I had was the motive, the compulsion to look over that edge. And to bring back some kind of record of what the experience was.

RL: How did the trainers react when they discovered you couldn't swim?

IM: They didn't. I concealed it. Of course. Very effectively. By the end of the course I could swim! Just about enough to cover it.

RL: Did any reason emerge for your not being able to swim during your training?

IM: No, I was twenty eight when I did the course, I've been an artist all my life that's been my vocation and involvement ever since I was a small child, and I had absolutely no interest or reason to be involved with the water. It had no interest for me at all, until the Aquanaut project.

RL: Explain the use of the word Aquanaut.

IM: Diving, rather like flying, is a matter of degree. The lowest level of flying, I suppose, is hang-gliding, jumping off hills with a sail; the highest ►

LEARNING TO FLY

LIVE ART NOW

level is flying Concorde, or being in a lunar orbiter around the moon, or landing on the surface of a foreign planet. The equivalent in diving is that the shallowest is snorkelling, which is the same as hang-gliding, when you're holding your breath and wearing a mask, going down, touching the bottom; and the apex of it is oilfield saturation diving, using 'Heliox'.

RL: Could you explain saturation diving?

IM: There are three sorts of diving. There is self-contained diving, which is like scuba gear, the conventional frogman idea; there is surface-supplied air diving, where you are on a hose where there is a continuous supply of gas, which is air, which is legal now only down to 50 metres; and saturation diving, where instead of breathing air, you are breathing a mix of Helium-Oxygen. The reason for this is that helium is an inert gas, the second finest gas in the universe next to hydrogen, and penetrates the tissues so efficiently that it causes no damage under different pressures. So saturation diving is when you are compressed down to the depth at which you are going to work, and the compression is then maintained for the duration of the job. So your body is saturated with gas at the pressure at which you are working. That's hence saturation diving. And you decompress for the whole job at the end in one go.

RL: And it takes a period of isolation?

IM: It takes a period of time to decompress which is proportionate to the depth at which you're working, not the time. You could work there for one day or a hundred days, but if you are working at bottom pressure, your decompression period is the same amount of time.

RL: In your case what has been the longest?

IM: In my own case, my own longest personal decompression period was seven days, and my own longest saturation dive was fifty two days, in a chamber. That's extremely unusual.

RL: This obviously got beyond the stage where it was an experiment as an artist. It became a full time occupation.

IM: No, that's not quite true. It has remained something which is entirely part of my artwork, but as with spaceflight, you'll appreciate that going from being a claustrophobic non-swimmer to being able to do deep saturation diving involves a lot of time and effort — what's called in the business 'wet time'. It can take up to three to four years to get from the point I started at to the point I reached eventually, in terms of professional competence. I actually took 18 months,

but when I reached that level of qualification, of licensing, I was only just barely capable of it and the objectives that I had in entering the whole area — which was to look over the edge, to get some experience of what this was like, to bring back the story, to actually get a print of what the feeling was like — I had only really been able to embark upon. When I got to this point, I realised what I was aiming at. It took actually eighteen months to two years to reach the point where I could actually look over the edge. At that point I was beginning, in a sense, to actually be able to properly look at what I'd gone there to see. At the same time, also, beginning to consider, what kind of media problems were involved in recording the experience.

RL: You're saying that in order to get the full experience you had to become professional?

IM: There is no other way. You cannot go there legally as a tourist. It's not possible. It doesn't matter if you're the brother of the chairman, you cannot go down in the diving bell unless you have the licence.

RL: How long have you been a saturation diver?

IM: I've been a qualified diver for eleven years — as a saturation diver — I had my bell licence in 1979.

RL: So it's taken a long time.

IM: It takes a long time.

RL: But you have not felt at any time losing sight of your original artistic objectives?

IM: No. It's been extremely . . . emotionally lonely. To maintain a motive, to find oneself as a person who is motivated thus in an environment where nobody else is, where the people in that environment not only don't share your motive, but cannot grasp what it might be . . .

RL: So you have difficulty in explaining that you're an artist?

IM: No difficulty in explaining it, but great difficulty in justifying it. This is a super-right-wing environment, in which the people basically feel that culture is a piece of froth.

RL: Have you not ever found yourself in sympathy with that feeling? Or at least being able to emphasise with it?

IM: I value myself often, as sole defender of culture in an environment where I'm surrounded by intensely pragmatic men, who risk their lives daily, and see absolutely no justification whatsoever in 80-90% of what passes for art. I have found myself in a position of having to defend that quite often, yes.

RL: And you're prepared to carry on



doing so.

IM: I feel it's part of my job to do so. They have their business. I have mine. In one sense they're as much an intruder in mine as I am in theirs. The poverty, spiritually, in that world (the diving world) is that people possess no motive beyond the economic. This gives them a kind of spiritual hollowiness that is tragic. And it makes them isolated and lonely people. I mean, even an astronaut has some kind of spiritual, dramatic component to his motivation. But a saturation diver — there's something it's important you understand here — with spaceflight, the risks involved, the technology involved are directly equivalent. The money involved is directly equivalent. The amount of money it costs to put a team of men a thousand feet down in the ocean is directly equivalent to what it takes to put the same team of men on the moon. Because you've got your X million dollar ship — you've got the supply ships to back it up, you've got all the support personnel on the shore, you've got something like 2-3 thousand people involved supporting, ultimately, an operation which comes down to one man's pair of hands, on the sea floor, with spanner or explosives or a TV camera. So it's a direct equivalent. But the difference is, that in space flight, NASA and the space programme is basically financed on a loss basis, on the basis of research, technology and development, and it's done by publicity. Whereas in the diving business, the whole thing's on a profit basis. They don't want publicity. They don't want people to know how much these guys risk. They don't want people to know how bad their conditions are, or how bad their pay scales are, because it would be even more expensive. The saturation diver is the single most expensive employee in the whole oilfield operation. So there's no way they want his plight publicised.

RL: What kind of risks have you faced? Apart from theoretical risks, have you had close shaves?

IM: Oh yes. I was once trapped upside down in standard gear — that's the old brass helmet and canvas suit — on the end of a rope line, tied to a concrete block, on the sea floor, with the air in my boots keeping my feet upside down with my head downwards, so that if my suit leaked, or burst, the water would have filled from the head end up, and the only knife I had was blunt. It wasn't actually possible to cut my way through, so they actually had to launch a Z boat, to get someone down to me with scuba gear to cut the rope so I would be free. Since then I've always had my own



knife which will cut through anything. I never go down without it.

RL: Do you find that being an artist makes you a better diver?

IM: Oh yes. I have a fascination with the linkage between form and function, and I see there being a direct equivalence between an adequately conceived operation and the adequate preparation of it with the appropriate tools. They're all part of an organic hole, and a person who fully knows what he needs to carry it out . . . that's all part of the whole approach that goes through everything I've ever done.

RL: How does that relate to your working daily with danger? Do you see the being on the front line of danger as being a necessary part of you being an artist, or do you see the danger as something to be dispensed with. Otherwise you'd be dead.

IM: The working daily with danger thing — to use a cliché — it concentrates the mind wonderfully. I mean, there was a value that I didn't foresee — creatively. I went out there expecting to get first hand experience of body shells of a certain type, as I've said, and I was fascinated by the imagery. I was only interested in the other dimensions of it — depending on what they turned out to be. Because I had no idea of what it was going to be like, but in effect, what turned out to happen was that I was confronted with a zen experience. It confronted me with myself. It brought home to me the fact that had been part of what I'd been seeking, and that had been part of what the whole art motive is anyway. I feel that the canvas, the typewriter,

the sketchbook, the tape recorder, the synthesizer — whatever it is that's between you and the subject — is a kind of chessboard on which you are working out a relationship between yourself and the cosmos, which reveals who you are as much as what the cosmos is. That's how I experience the operation. It is a process of self-discovery and contextual discovery, which is mutual, simultaneous and interlinked. In the process of, willy-nilly, being involved in that way of operating, in that environment, I was confronted with the unexpected, way beyond my expectations. It changed my life way beyond my expectation. Totally, I went into it expecting to be a passive observer to something very interesting. What I was actually confronted with was the necessity to stop being a baby. The big thing about being a diver is that you can't actually be a diver unless you stop being a baby. An awful lot of artists are only artists because they have always been babies. They are very, very, self-indulgent. The head-on confrontation between that habit of self-indulgence and allowing one's imagination to run riot, which is part of the very process of art, and the professional requirement of not being able to do so, because otherwise you get the willies and wouldn't be able to manage it — is extremely educational, and extremely interesting. It changed both my character and attitudes to both art and diving.

RL: You remain proud of being an artist, in fact.

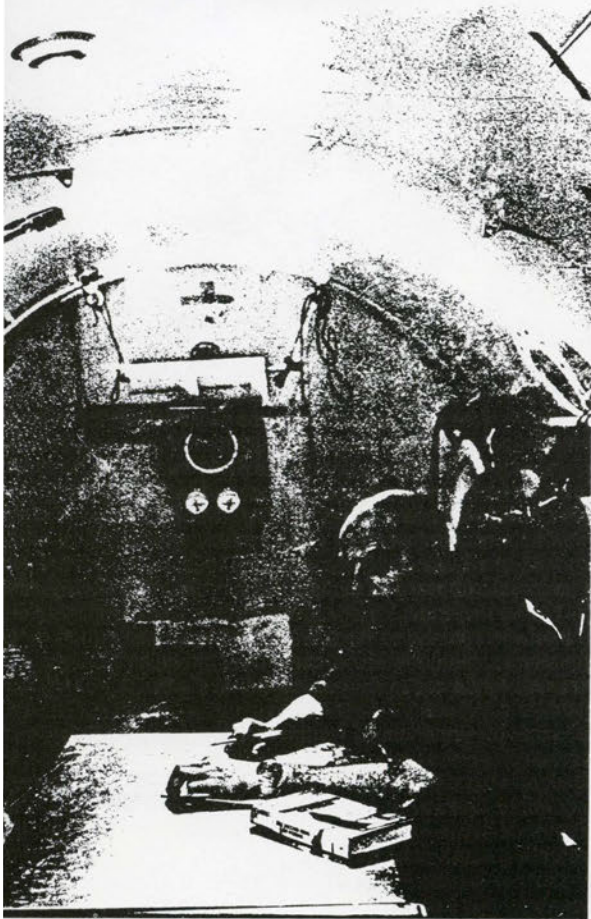
IM: Oh certainly. It's a far more dangerous trade than being a diver. ▶

Ian Munro in diving bell 200ft. below N. Sea

IN DEEP

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Decompression. Munro has to spend up to a week in a chamber, isolated aboard ship, after a deep dive.

RL: How do the other divers, who are in it for the money, as you say, relate to such concepts? They are totally up against danger themselves.

IM: They are initially extremely hostile.

RL: You mean the macho ethic?

IM: Yes. Artists to them are anti-macho.

RL: I mean, actually, in the way divers react to the dangers of the trade. For example, when you were upside down with the air in your boots, what did they do, tease you? Did they take a cool attitude to your potential danger?

IM: As I say, the capacity to carry out that role adequately is characterised worldwide, as far as I've seen, by certain common denominators. Those are a particular kind of ritual attitude to performance. They *are* performance artists. They don't know it, but they are

performance artists. They have a ritual attitude in which meticulousness of preparation is crucial. Everybody checks everything, personally, themselves with acute care, to the degree that if they don't do it they're unprofessional. And to the degree that if they're unprofessional they're eventually dead.

RL: So when you came up with a blunt knife . . .

IM: The sense of humour that runs throughout the diving business has certain objectives. It is a very specific kind of humour that I haven't personally come across anywhere else — and it has two qualities which stand out a mile. One is that it is merciless — Spitting Image isn't in it, it's cruel and vicious, and the other characteristic is that it's designed to identify weakness as rapidly as possible. So everybody's humour, all the time, is looking for cracks. I had a very hard time, for many years. If you are easily lampooned you will prove the target of the whole vessel. Say, for example, you turn up to work wearing a pink shirt. That's enough. This will immediately earn you comments every fifteen minutes for the next four days.

RL: This is really to do with people living in close communities.

IM: Yes, it is. But the particular diving thing is that the diver is what's supposed to be called an RTD. Which is a ruffy-tuffy diver. You are not supposed to be interested in ballet or opera. You are supposed to be a cliched macho person. If you're not, you worry them. Because you worry them, they will poke at you and humourously snap around your heels until they find the weakness that they suspect is there. If they can't find that weakness, they will grudgingly offer you whatever respect they have. But it takes some time. And you have to prove yourself. Every time you're in the water everyone's eyes are on you on television. Literally. Because nearly everything's televised.

RL: Have you ever felt you'd like to make an artwork under water?

IM: Oh yes. Since about the second year in the business I had a dream — I don't know how I'm going to bring it about, but I will somehow — of doing a performance, a ritual, on the sea floor. There's all sorts of reasons why that's very difficult — there's the technology required — we're talking millions of dollars — it would have to be done in connection with research for a major company.

RL: Get Christo on the job?

IM: He's another artist. He would want to do a whole different thing. Anyway, a ritual on the sea bed, carried out by single individual — very simple — the

tracing of a mandala on the sea floor, the use of light sticks of various kinds, beacons, just to create a configuration on the seabed, whose function was ritualistic and not economic, or pragmatic. That's quite important. It's a sort of homage to the role. This is crucial to all this. Duchamp said that the most important act in his life as an artist was the conception of the found object. I claim — the only thing that I feel really passionate about — that is the conception of the *role* as found object. In this case the role of the saturation diver as the ritual enactor of this aquanautic strange trade. It's that role that I am interested to present as an object, independent of the individuals who fill it. As a role it is an archetypal one as the astronaut's role is. It's a heroic, archetypal role. It is a frontier, it is the hydrosphere, it's the inner world. It is the inverse of everything that the astronaut experiences. The astronaut's experience is easily communicable to the public, easily sharable, because it's about clarity, long range vision, super sharp images, bright light, freedom from gravity, getting outside. Diving is about darkness. The interior, pressure, crushing, death, mud gunge, getting into the great Mare, the great sea, the great ocean, the female element . . .

RL: Would you like to see other artists put themselves on the line in this way?

IM: The job's been the same more or less since the Neanderthal times. We're shamans. And the shaman's job is both that of having the visions, taking the drugs, actually doing it — jumping off the cliff — and at the same time being able to explain it, interpret it, and convey why there is a necessity for as many people as possible to share in this confrontative experience.

RL: What was your main success in explaining all this to your fellow divers?

IM: Being confronted, in a 13-man saturation chamber, with eleven guys from Louisiana — what are known as 'coon asses', total goddamn rightwing fellows who reckon everybody who's Black never mind a goddamn artist is an asshole — about the bricks at the Tate. They said: 'OK you're a goddamn motherfucking artist, what about those bricks in the Tate, those guys were conning the ass off us. Tell us what that was all about. So I said 'I'll tell you what it was all about. Have you paid any attention to art in your life?' 'Goddammit no! It's a waste of time, load of horseshit!' 'OK, well here you are, 280 feet down in the North Sea, you are having a debate about fine art. That's what it was all about.' We spent the next five hours talking about art. ■

THE BOW GAMELAN ENSEMBLE are jacks of all trades. Have they become masters of any?

NOTES FROM THE ENGINE ROOM

Rob La Frenais: Would you say that the things you do have all been done before by early technologists, that you are going back to square one technically, discovering creative elements that could have emerged anywhere along the course of the Industrial Revolution? but were abandoned to the idea of progress?

Paul Burwell: When we originally thought of the Gamelan, much to our surprise, we found ourselves thinking in an Industrial Revolution technological level, ie mechanical, steam, reciprocating engines, the sound of machinery, wheels turning, cranks moving, pistons, all those clackety-bong-bong things.

Richard Wilson: The general atmosphere of an engine room, lots of equipment moving around you, people

running up and down.

PB: Since electricity replaced steam you don't get motors that make an interesting voice for themselves. You get an electric motor that just goes whirr . . . if that. We had to start using them to power things because we didn't have access to previous technology. But it was where we were mentally, at an industrial revolution level.

Anne Bean: The strange thing is, a lot of the audience do respond by saying how sophisticated it is, and how did you learn to do that? Did you do physics, did you do chemistry? I'm always amazed that people don't realise that all of it is pretty basic.

RW: You distract away from its original intention. If you take a bar fire, it's purely there to give out heat in a domestic situation. We use it to create sound by the heat breaking glass, or we use it as a light source. We transform it into a different area, away from keeping yourself cosy.

PB: Technologically we're like the bloke in the corner shop who repairs anything for people, your radio, your vacuum cleaner . . .

RL: Did you use the Science Museum?

AB: Yes, we went to the Science Museum a couple of times, really to look at their pyrophones. We went to see the guy in charge of acoustic research. They were in the process of rebuilding, but we had a long chat with him and he was quite enthusiastic about it all.

PB: There were areas there in terms of mechanical sound reproduction that we will be exploring. We started to with the giant record player at our recent ▶



Burwell, Wilson and Bean inspect Industrial Revolution — level equipment

performance at the Place.

RW: In fact, we always seem to home in on that Victorian era, when all that sense of invention was very romantic. If you made a machine, you put lions on it, you put wings at the top of it, it wasn't just a machine, it was disguised into all sorts of other forms. But ultimately quite crude.

AB: Or even like those old sewing machines — they were always very ornate.

PB: But we do think in terms of machinery.

RW: Whether it's manual or motorised.

RL: What particular skills have you learnt in the last two years?

RW: Weightlifting! (laughter).

AB: Labouring.

PB: First Aid.

AB: Packing.

PB: Welding.

RL: You have learnt to weld. Of course that's something a lot of people learn at art college. What particular kind of welding did you learn?

RW: My discipline, with the Gamelan, comes from being a sculptor, and therefore I've exposed myself to the use of all sorts of material. I tend to enjoy the fact that I can use skills well. I was the one at college who wasn't afraid of using the circular saw, or something like that. So if you need to cut a piece of steel, you need to have oxy-acetylene, you need to have access to some kind of machine which is going to do it for you. Otherwise you won't get the job done. Therefore you're restricting your potential. You get over those things. There not dangerous.

RL: Doesn't that create a tension between your doing it to an end, as a sculptor, and doing it in public as a time-based piece?

PB: No, you see construction work with people watching . . .

RW: I think what happens, in the techniques and skills one has, there is an element of theatre. My own work, in terms of making giant castings, is classic form of theatre really. We don't use it in the Gamelan, but what we do is say Ah look at that, look at the way that's happening or — when you go down the river, you see people cutting out old bits of the dockside cranes and stuff, and sparks are falling in the water, and you hear all the hissing, and phutting, and whatever else. You start to think — how can one put that to use on a stage. Welders are used for putting together pieces of metal, but we use welders because we've seen lighting effects on the side of the river at night. So then you start making analogies. You start think about dogfights over London, or flak going off, the war situation where

lighting became very dramatic. Some of those photos you see in books, with great big shadows. So you start to enhance shadows with the use of a welder. We were just talking about that today.

RL: Is it the arc-welder you use to create the great showers of sparks?

PB: Yes. I've got an arc welder of my own now, and getting more proficient with that myself. It's not necessarily a skill, though, it's deciding you want that particular tool, and becoming proficient with it. Not exactly a 'skilled welder' but I can tack things together so that they hold.

AB: Voila!

RL: What you are doing is picking up on some of the aesthetic effects of these work processes.

PB: Aesthetic by-products. The stuff that we're producing, as instruments, are from a very different, almost non-aesthetic standpoint, compared to, say, sculpture. Welded metal found sculpture is pretty old-fashioned really, and I suppose we get away with it, in our heads, because we're just doing it to make things to *work*.

RW: We treat it on a pretty functional level, and the aesthetics tend to look after itself.

RL: But during the actual time of the performance . . .

PB: All the instruments are visual . . . one could look at them as sculptural objects, but that's not their primary function. That is to make a sound. In a sense, the visual manifestation is a happy by-product, and it's like the tip of the iceberg. The violin, or the welded bit of metal. If it looks interesting, that's fine, but its main function is to make a noise.

AB: We never actually set out to say we're going to look for this particular thing. It's mostly that our eye catches something and then we see what we could do with it. We don't think — we're going to go out and look for so and so. Or very seldom we do that, it's mostly coming across bits.

RL: There's a kind of sadness, to me, about the fact that it's down to artists to take up these lost uses of technology, and materials. I think you're fulfilling a function, but I get a sense of sadness about it.

PB: In my own work, I used to make a lot of use of found objects in the early seventies. I went very much off it for the sort of reason that you're pointing out. Why should the artist be the person who's on the rag-picker scrapheap periphery of society? Why shouldn't one have access to the same level of technology as anyone else? But I've come back to it from a slightly

different ideological standpoint. When something is discarded it ceases to be tied to its original function. It becomes like a discarded motor car — just dumped in the river. It ceases to be a motor car that's outlived its function. It starts becoming a pile of metallic possibilities. An empty, rusted crankcase can start being a piece of sculpture, if you chopped that bit off you could use it for *that*. It starts being something that your imagination could work on. It's been released from its function. The way the old-fashioned artist used to wander round and see a pleasing conglomeration of trees, arcadian shepherdesses, whip out their palette and knock out a quick pastoral landscape. It's the same sort of response to one's environment.

RL: But it is also by necessity. I mean, no-one's going to let you go and play with a nuclear power station.

PB: I don't know. They're letting all sorts of other idiots play with them, aren't they? ■

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ANNE SEAGRAVE explains why she has indentured herself to art:

The whole idea of being a Dance Apprentice in the first place was the fact that I wasn't very keen on being categorised in one area or another. People would say — 'Oh Anne, she's a dancer, oh Anne, she's a performance artist, oh Anne, she works in theatre, oh Anne, she works in cabaret. So I adopted the phrase Dance Apprentice, because nobody else was using it, and if anyone asked me 'what are you' on the phone, I could say 'I'm a Dance Apprentice' and that shut them up, really.

The basis of it was the desire to study a number of different techniques without performing just one and without bastardising all of them. So I have been researching for a number of years, different people's works, dancers, physical theatre people, a lot of solo artists, especially from the twenties and thirties — mid European solo artists such as Greta Palucca, Valeska Gert, Hanya Holm, Mary Wigman. At the moment if you use the word 'dance' it's something of a dirty word because people don't think it's got any political relevance to anybody else, but at that time, 1917-20, what people were doing was so much more expressionist, so much more poignant. The first western European to be invited over to Russia after the revolution in 1917 was a dancer, Valeska Gert, because what she was doing was so relevant. But now, who's going to invite a dancer over to talk about politics or talk about something that's poignant and significant?

I want to apprentice myself to a number of people working now. I would have really liked to — would like to — study under Alberto Vidal, who was here last summer for the LIFT festival, performing in Regents Park Zoo, because he works with the individual. I've done odd workshops with Sally Potter, which have been marvellous — she works very much with the individual too. Also people like Philippe Gaulier.

And also visual artists — maybe I would spend time researching or travelling — not necessarily collaborating in a physical way — I'd really like to go and meet Jean Tinguely in Switzerland because I think he has a great sense of humour and people — his work is very comic and approachable. To research people's writing and work in progress. One of the most interesting things was in Poland recently, to see his work in progress for his new performance. But at this moment, I'm not sure whether I'd want to be apprenticed to him, because Kantor works with people that have got a lot to give, and because of my age and

DANCE



APPRENTICE

naivety, I don't know if I would be able to do that at the moment. He works with people's individuality — their characteristics. Maybe in another twenty years, it would be nice, maybe then I'd have more to give. I see myself as a lifelong apprentice. At the moment I don't really feel like tying myself down to one particular area. There is a reason for this. There would be an area in which you could apprentice yourself to a number of different kinds of people, learn different techniques, and then perform something that was individual and from yourself at the other end, that wasn't bastardising all these other people's work. At the moment, if people study a technique, especially in dance, they end up performing that technique. If you study Cunningham, you perform Cunningham. If you study Graham you perform Graham. But it doesn't have to be like that.

The Arts Council refused me a training bursary to pursue this apprenticeship on the grounds that — what were the exact words — 'We are sorry to disappoint you and suggest that you re-apply for a bursary at a later stage in your career' I memorised it because I thought it was wonderful. Highly inappropriate. The whole point of applying for a bursary after you've

started a career seems to me topsyturvy. But maybe that's the way they work and good luck to them, really. It's very interesting to see people that work that way round. You start a career then you do your training. I mean you wouldn't do it in any other apprenticeship. You wouldn't do it as a carpenter. You wouldn't do it as a plumber. So why do it as an artist. But they must be right — they're the Arts Council!

So my approach is very much akin to a traditional form of apprenticeship, except not just studying under one master, and I won't know when I've stopped my apprenticeship.

There are definitely certain people who I would consider very valuable to me as an apprentice, who couldn't get rid of me even if they wanted to. Because I do value their opinion very much. There are certain people who I'll always try and take the advice of, even when it is very critical, or I'll disagree with it. I'll try and see some worth in it, because either I like their work very much, or I think they have a very good eye for things. I mean my Mum has a very good eye for things — not just because I'm related to her — she genuinely likes the work. ■

'Not just studying under one master, and I won't know when I've stopped...'

Photo: Edwina Fitzpatrick

HYBRID

PR



LEARNING TO **FLY**

PRODUCTS

JOHN FOX outlines a unique exchange

of skills with a Tanzanian village:

Learning from the birthplace of humanity in E. Africa

For many years Welfare State International has had a consistent training policy; extending, wherever possible, the range of skills of its own company of artists and also passing on, when useful, its own experience of celebratory performances. There have been 4 main strands to this policy; foreign touring and exchanges, annual summer schools, our handbook — 'Engineers of the Imagination', and hiring and exchanging videos and films. In the foreign work, over the years, we have been able to persuade the British Council that hybrid products generated by our artists working in partnership with foreign artists is often more fruitful all round than transporting Anglo-Saxon products to one-night stands in Borneo.

After successful residences in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, New York and Toronto we have demonstrated not only that artists and audiences learn more by the fusion of different styles in strongly original (and relevant) work, but also that we can revitalise ourselves and English vernacular traditions, by the addition of, for instance; bush dancers from Australia, lanterns from Japan, shadow puppetry from the Far East and rhythm and dances from Africa.

In acclaimed and allegedly sophisticated areas — like Expo 86 (Vancouver) — the terminal concrete pile of eighties capitalism — we seek (in conjunction with 12 Canadian artists) to rediscover the buried soul of *False Creek* and the lost trails of the New World.

Equally we are learning from the birth place of humanity in East Africa. (See picture). Here we are in partnership with Bagamoyo



College in Tanzania. In a government centre training traditional dancers and musicians, who are also seeking a contemporary theatre style, we have been exchanging skills, rediscovering, for ourselves, new powers, new attitudes and new music. The first years fruits of this five year exploration was seen in London at the Commonwealth Institute in December 1985 in *Nutcracker*.

Presented in the form of a village party and street dance, with elaborate decorations, moral dance tales, processions, social dances, mobile sculptures and strong archetypes culled from both cultures this work demonstrated a joyous carnival fusion of African and European imagery and music. It was the result of a month's residency in Tanzania

when Pete Moser (Musical Director) and John Fox (Artistic Director) researched styles and exchanged techniques and information. Apart from continuing this relationship with Tanzania and Canada (through further visits, exchanges and public performances) other current plans include interchange with Japanese craftsmen and the extraordinary Friends World College in New York.

Making these extended voyages from our anchorage in south west Cumbria not only enables us to recharge our own batteries and bring back ideas but increasingly gives us the opportunity to trace and generate gently a global network of artists who care about each other and each others cultures. Such learning knows no boundary. ■

JILL SMITH used an Arts Council training grant to trace the dream-journeys of Aboriginal tribes, then came back to trace a year-long circle round Britain:

THE GYPSY

SWITCH

I've been out of touch with the art world as such for quite a while now. I don't know why it feels necessary to begin thus — maybe because I have recently put myself back in a 'art' context and have no idea what are the current definitions of, in particular, performance art. I abhor definitions, mainly I suppose because I relate to a reality where there are no boundaries, categories, labels, separations: where everything is not just part of the whole but *is* the whole.

However I still call myself 'performance artist'. It helps some people to begin to comprehend something of what I am doing. If they categorise me it helps them not to label me a raving nut, hippy, vagrant or whatever. Maybe I use the category to achieve a kind of respectability — but I want to communicate. I do a lot in isolation and am learning all the time. When I come into contact with people I want to be able to explain something of what I believe, and a label may lessen the barriers of prejudice.

I make journeys — themselves a kind of performance. A physical movement through the land — for the land: at the same time a cosmic journey for the universe, for the earth: at the same time an internal journey; a shamanic journey.

There are small 'enactments' in special places — for the places, for the earth, for the universe and sometimes for a specific purpose. There are public enactments — representation of journeys made on many levels of reality. These are performances. They are also real. They communicate a feeling, a mood, and energy — sometimes a transmission — not necessarily an intellectual understanding.

I write of experience and make booklets and put the writings on walls,

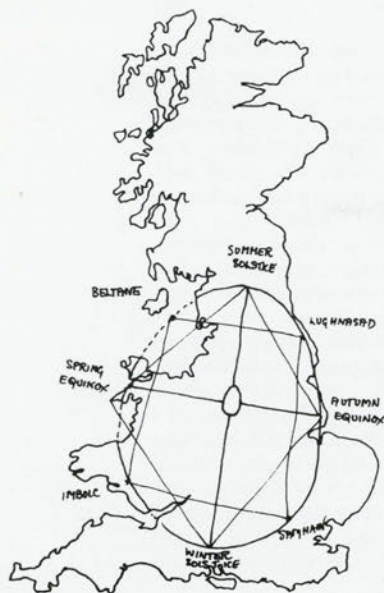
and do drawings of images that present themselves to me at places, so people can understand my experience and relate it to their own — not to be judged for artistic or literary merit.

All this is a preamble to saying that what I do is REAL. My motivation for doing practically everything is real. For a purpose. The purpose being ultimately, healing. To heal the earth, universe, general state of things, specific things and my own personal state. A tall order.

It's to achieve harmony: balance. These are becoming corny, overused, devalued words but I can find no better. I believe there was a time when nomadic peoples moved through their lands, linking sacred site to sacred site, moving with seasons, celestial movements, or whatever appropriate to their environment. They travelled these movements year after year, generation after generation, and the journeys were etchings, healings, songs, stories, knowledge of their land as a living being; of their history and their land's creation. Time *is* timeless. Past, present, future all happening together — being the same thing. All levels of reality are one when that particular consciousness and awareness is lived.

The journeys were physical upon the earth, but they were of creation and the ultimate universe and realms from whence beginnings come and endings go. They 'enacted' the journeys in ritual, song and dance. The enactments were real, the microcosm of the greater journey. The human is a necessary link in a chain of realities. Their paintings, drawings, body decorations for ritual were all ways of depicting the knowledge, the journey, the map.

The humans were part of the whole, healing or keeping well the land. They were their land. To heal a person they would need to relate to the land. To



heal the land needs the people. They had a way of seeing and being which was not apart from everything else.

I feel the loss of this awareness and way of being is fundamentally what has gone wrong with life on earth. From this loss, all else negative and destructive has sprung.

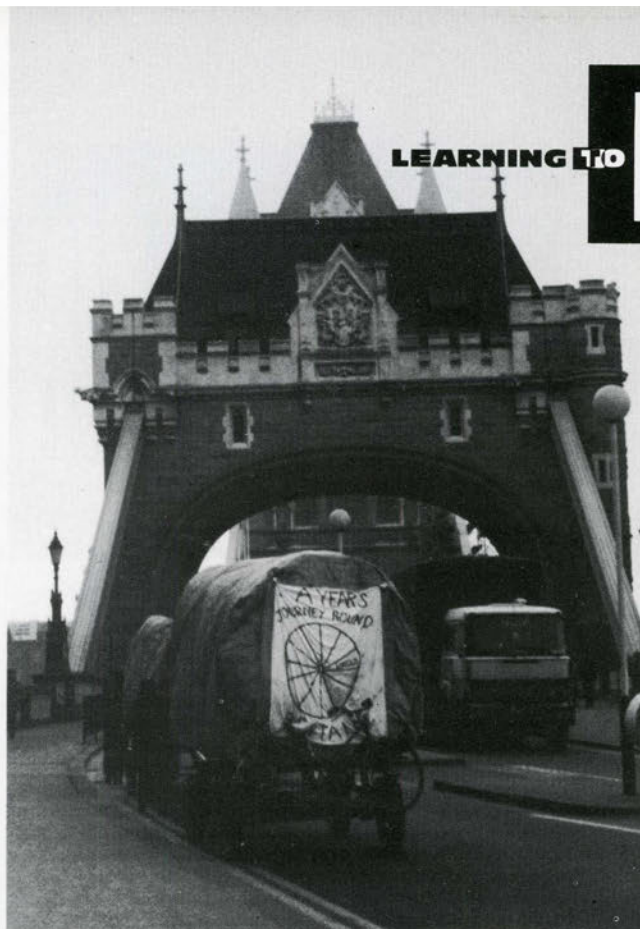
It feels necessary for me to undertake journeys — physical journeys through the landscape, particularly linking ancient sites, power places which can be activated by the human energy. Then these become journeys to be enacted on a smaller scale, but no less real; to be worked on as inner, visualised meditative healing practises; all these representing the absolute macrocosm of universe and realms of creation.

At the beginning of the Gypsy Switch journey, it felt necessary to me, to my understanding, to go to Australia (with the assistance of the Arts Council performers training bursary) to learn from the Aborigines, for they are one of the few peoples still *doing* it. I spent 2 months there: 5 weeks in the desert — a month of it at Ayres Rock. A tiny amount of time, but it had a fundamental effect on me. I learnt enormously by direct transmission — from the people, from the land, the sacred places, it just comes into you and you know it as if it has always been there — I can't find words for any of that. To be for a while in the presence of those who still travel their dreaming paths, laid down at the time of creation by their dreamtime ancestors — enacting in ritual, living the land, being the land, helped me understand so much and the understanding is a state within me. Now I try to live it.

What is art and what isn't? The aboriginal cave paintings, sand drawings, body decoration, decoration of sacred objects can be viewed as art; but it's real, functional, purposeful, and so was all art once, surely. Their enactments can be viewed as performance — was not this the beginning of performance?

It was so here once, and everywhere. The same ancient symbols turn up everywhere. Here in Britain there are ancient rock carvings so similar to the Australian painted symbols. There were ancient dreamtime journeys here — to be refound: in the context of now, to be recreated.

So what of the Gypsy Switch? It was sent to me years ago as a circular diagram. It was a traditional travelling route though I know practically nothing of its history or authenticity. It felt 'right' and things cropped up en route that for me confirmed it as real and ancient.



The circle takes her across Tower Bridge

Photo: Jill Smith

It was a year-long journey — a circle round England and Wales. Twelve named places — each corresponding to a time of the zodiac, so one would move physically round the land as the sun moved through the zodiac. I knew I would have to travel it one day. On the Walk for Life in 1983 (a peace walk from Faslane near Glasgow to Greenham Common) I met others who wanted to travel and do peace theatre, so we blended the two together. An ever-decreasing group, with much difficulty, got together horses and roughly covered wagons and we set off and travelled through the winter with them as our only homes. A circle has no beginning or end: we entered the Gypsy Switch journey at the appropriate time when we were ready. This was VIRGO — Lincolnshire. The journey was — LIBRA — Cambridgeshire; SCORPIO — Essex; SAGITTARIUS — Kingston on Thames; CAPRICORN — Wiltshire; AQUARIUS — Glattonbury; PISCES — Lampeter, Wales; ARIES — Angelsey; TAURUS — Ireland; GEMINI — Appelby (The great Gypsy Horse Fair site and; time); CANCER — Durham; LEO — York . . . The centre is Arborlow stone circle in Derbyshire.

While we were a group we did performances and storytellings at each appropriate place and we also celebrated, performed, placed on/in our circle. The ancient festivals of the year — solstices, equinoxes, the five festivals of Imbole, Beltane, Lughnasad, and Samhain and lived in rhythm with the waxing and waning moon and the elements of each zodiac sign.

If you like, we cast a circle on the land.

When I went to Australia it was Autumn Equinox with the others of the group in England; it was Spring equinox with us in Australia. We made a circle round the earth. Spring and Autumn in one moment at the state of balance. Each of us is a universe. We balance and heal.

The other travellers, for various reasons, left the journey in Wales. I continued on foot, alone with my baby son Taliesin. The journey was his first year of life. A first circle. So, for a year I 'drew' a circle on the land, moved through a zodiac in time with the sun, physically left zodiac signs in a circle round the land, marked the solstices and equinoxes and experienced with the year a kind of shamanic journey — into the darkness that turns at Winter solstice, into the heart of crystal vision at the Summer solstice, balancing east to west, north to south at equinoxes, entering the realms of the directions and elements and lights of creation; waxed and waned with the moon, linked place to place, brought tiny objects from the circle; traced the circle . . .

Now the journey is a circle within.

I drew the images that came to me at different times of the year: I wrote the immediate impressions. I exhibited them at the Showroom Gallery along with Lynne Wood — another journeywoman artist, performer, Australian, world-encircler.

The first enactments were made.

Britain and the Cosmos drawn into a room.

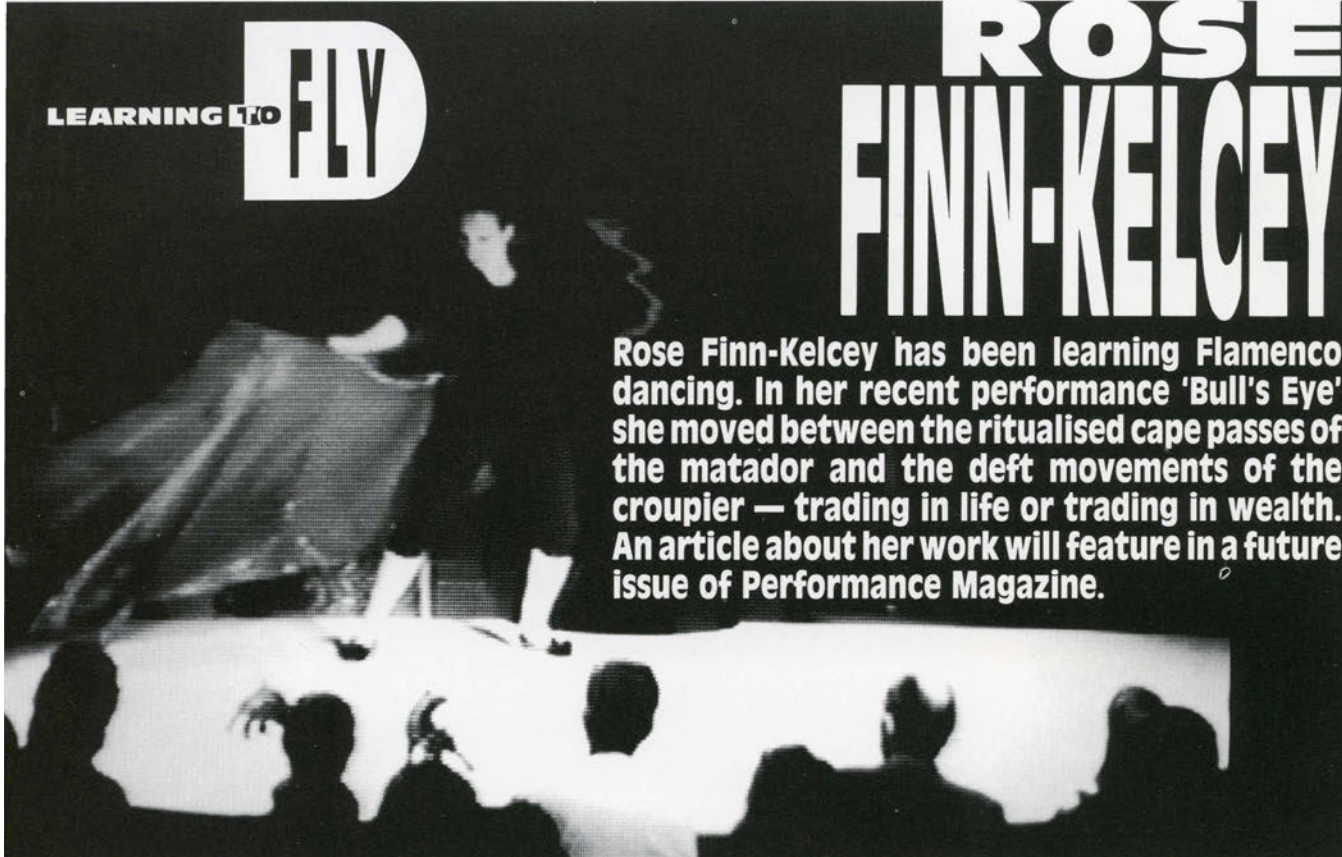
It's my art and my reality. ■

LEARNING TO

FLY

ROSE FINN-KELCEY

Rose Finn-Kelcey has been learning Flamenco dancing. In her recent performance 'Bull's Eye' she moved between the ritualised cape passes of the matador and the deft movements of the croupier — trading in life or trading in wealth. An article about her work will feature in a future issue of Performance Magazine.



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OUR WONDERFUL CULTURE

*'Perhaps a glimpse of hope is still detectable, like the first blade of grass you see after the bomb has hit you.'*¹

In many ways the making of *Our Wonderful Culture* can be seen as a continuous performance with the exhibition itself an installation which involved both the artist and the audience, the artwork and its context, in the never ending battle between optimism and pessimism, meaning and meaninglessness that is the fate of content in contemporary art in our wonderful culture.

The show's title (originally the name of a magazine published in New York) allowed for anything to be included under its ironic banner, forcing us to ask the question of just what is the nature of our wonderful culture.

*Straw will cover the floor of the crypt creating a theatrical installation which reminds us that during the second world war the British Museum placed many of its treasured objects in Underground stations and will perhaps warn us that today in a culture which seems to care less about its people than its objects, it is time for art to go underground again.'*²

And so there was no selection procedure beyond the invitation to participate, which originated with the organisers but was soon extended, to invitees issuing their own invitations and by word of mouth, eventually resulting in more than sixty participants. Such was the atmosphere created by this lack-of-selection process that work even appeared, sometimes anonymously, throughout the course of the show. Originally there were eight people involved in the initial discussions about the show but it was our refusal to operate a 'quality control' over the selection procedure (as well as the idea that these 'contradictory fragments' would be 'overhung') that reduced the number of organisers to four. With the straw covered floor, the sheets of corrugated iron scattered around, the 'over-hanging' of the work drew attention beyond the neutral (natural) white space of the modern world, towards a different, 'corrupted' context — a context which challenged the content of the work, the 'integrity' of the artist and the 'authority' of the artwork, and in which the audience finds itself at the centre of the debate about decisions concerning quality, relevance and meaning in our museum culture.

*'As we wander from fragment to contradictory fragment through the ruins of common knowledge, we express both melancholy and optimism as we wilfully misread what we see; and we realise that we are all terrorists in the museum of ruined intentions that is our fragmented present.'*³

The crypt of St. George's, a Hawksmoor church appropriately just in front of the British Museum in Bloomsbury, was the perfect setting to explore the idea of 'complexity and contradiction' (according to American architect Robert Venturi, recently selected to design the National Gallery extension, in his book *'Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture'*, a quality of the architecture of St. George's itself).

'In a critique of the museum, of the idea of art as an exclusive and non-participatory activity it was deliberately overhung, or not hung. There were paintings and drawings propped up on straw bales, suspended from the ceiling and

*angled out from the walls, like some of the famous exhibitions organised by architects in the 1950's.'*⁴

If 'difficult history' was asserted as a critique of the historicizing of normalizing role of the museum, as much as to centre the debate about culture on the participation of the audience — 'everyone can be an artist and everyone is a critic' — the inclusivist chaos was also meant as a display of anarchic optimism towards do-it-yourself culture: a culture without curators.

*'Its rhetoric of ruins, fragmentation and chaos contained along with a note of denunciation and warning, pointers to the possibilities of creating, out of the chaos occasioned by the collapse of past meaning-systems, new meanings which could lead towards a freer, more fulfilled future: the implication being clear that whether the warnings are heeded and the possibilities pursued is up to us.'*⁵

One of the main hopes of the organisers of this exhibition then was that artists would spring to life, like the return of the living dead, and the disease of optimism, criticism and self-help opportunism would spread to produce more, and more wonderful, art from the ruins.

*'Like archeologists examining and cataloguing the precious shards of civilization, we project ourselves into the past. We practice a social science that permits we have no future but the one yet foreseen in retrospect.'*⁶

The extremes of pessimism and optimism were represented for us in some ways by the non-art construction of Ed Baxter and Simon Dickason, and the failed-art installation by Stefan Szczelkun.

*'A number of Fleet Street and television journalists accompanied the British Navy Task Force to the South Atlantic. On nearing the exclusion zone, everyone was obliged to shave off their facial hair (purportedly to accommodate gas masks). The entire proceedings were filmed for the benefit of those unable to be there. Much glee, the nervous laughter of unease and half-formed thoughts, attended this ritual. The transfiguration was not so subtle. In celebration, and to underline the ritual, a battleship of 'barbarians' was sunk. The violence was excusable in the unconscious eyes of the now smooth-chopped media...'*⁷

Made from found wood and other materials and painted all over a foul pink:

*'Ed Baxter and Simon Dickason's Exclusion Zone, a withered tree with parts of a piano (posing as a dummy switchboard) and a cut-out United Kingdom the size of a TV weather map lodged in it, appears to be both protest and warning. Barbed wire guards the small sea of wool and hair around the base. Notes on the back about 'parapolitical cargo cult fetish' raise more questions than answers... 'our wonderful culture', victimised, pilloried, is written off as a wasted asset.'*⁸

Stefan Szczelkun's installation of thirteen red and black framed drawings sandwiched between wooden blocks like flats in a tower block with strategically placed red brooms to sweep them away once they became 'property' was entitled 'Art is important but Artists are more important'.

*'Symbolically we can remove the 13th storey and have 12 nice storeys with its dozen familiarity of hours, months and apostles.'*⁹



Exclusion Zone and Cityscape of the Dead in the Bloomsbury Crypt

Photo: Edward Woodman

CULTURE

For us the works of Ed Baxter/Simon Dickason and Stefan Szczelkun represented the idea of the non-artwork as a 'zone of anxiety' which enables us to wonder about our wonderful contemporary values.

*'Certainly we are no longer plunged into bathos by daffodils. Yet our experience remains riddled by discontinuities, and the sublime, or something like it, as well as the bathetic, or something like it, will always be found in the ill-defined zones of anxiety between discrete orders of meaning.'*¹⁰

An evening of performances on Friday the 13th centred around the space of the crypt and the artworks it contained. Ian Sherman took us back in time to the Dark Ages and converted the crypt into a dark chamber where evil spirits, prisoners or the mentally disordered ran amok, whilst Deborah Levy, with irony and black humour, brought us back to the present with her 'Prayers to the Beast', an epic story of consumers and consumptives. Hercules Fisherman alienated the audience and serenaded the artworks with his manic violin solo performance.

Szczelkun, making the connection between Friday the 13th, his thirteen storeys and the anniversary of the imposition of martial law in Poland, made reference to the artwork as commodity and artist as symbol of freedom. Walking around the crypt muttering Euro-nonsense from an estate-agents' guide to property for sale whilst examining various artworks on the walls, Szczelkun, having removed one of his thirteen storeys, finally framed himself in Mona Lisa pose — the artist becomes a commodity whilst the audience becomes a crowd. With this performance he reminded us of the 'solitary' activity of the artist as one of forced exclusion, and at the poetry reading some nights later Ed Baxter with Erik Fuller turned this alienation onto the audience, reading together from their text they made us painfully aware of how there is no place like home in the exclusion zone.

*'Behind this anti-purism could be sensed the desire for art to contribute to a fundamental revaluation of our ways of seeing and understanding the world; not, in the manner of certain early twentieth-century avant gardes, by beginning with a tabula rasa but rather, in good Post-Modernist fashion, by a sort of guerilla creativity amongst the ruins and fragments of our cultural heritage.'*¹¹ ■

Quotes

- 1 Ken Connor, participating artist
- 2 From the organisers letter of invitation to participate
- 3 The author — from artists' bookwork 'Work From Common Knowledge', published by Circle Press, 1985
- 4 Margaret Garlake — from review of the exhibition, *Art Monthly* No.93, February 1986
- 5 Gray Watson — from review of the exhibition, *Artscribe International*, No. 56, Feb/Mar 1986
- 6 Tom McGlynn — Editor of *Ferro Botanico* (New York) and participating artist
- 7 Ed Baxter — participating artist
- 8 William Feaver — from 'Anger in the Crypt', review in *The Observer*, Sunday 8th December 1985
- 9 Stefan Szczelkun — participating artist
- 10 From 'A Conversation with Jean-Francois Lyotard' by Bernard Blistene in *Flash Art International* No. 121, March 1985
- 11 Gray Watson — *ibid*

Our Wonderful Culture: Art in Ruins was at the Crypt of St. George's Church, Bloomsbury Way, December 3-21 1985. It was organised by Glyn Banks/Hannah Vowles and Hercules Fisherman/Armar.

The exhibition included the work of over 60 artists, architects and designers including Nicyian Banks, Ed Baxter, Ken Connor, Mikey Cuddihy, Simon Dickason, Tony Gill, Andrew Golding, Jim Hanlon, Carlyle Reedy, Registrare, Stefan Szczelkun, Graham Stewart, Julia Wood, John Webb and Edward Woodman.

ART

A polemic from
STEFAN SZCZELKUN:

THE INVISIBLE NEW WORKING CLASS INTELLIGENTSIA

The expansion of higher education into the post-war years in Britain was followed by the entry of many thousands of upwardly (and not so upwardly) mobile working class youth from the poorer state grammar schools in the new Polytechnics and Art Schools. For the first time ever a large but invisible working class intelligentsia has been created.

It is invisible and almost unconscious because in British terms a working class intelligentsia is impossible because by definition the working classes are 'not intelligent'. People processed by higher education are supposed, magically, to become 'middle class'. Of course the curriculum and expected mannerisms, style, language, accent and so on is all firmly derived from middle class academic tradition. But it is absurd to expect a few years of education with a distorted world view to change one's CLASS even with a bit of preparation from ambitious parents keen to 'get' on and 'better themselves'. Class identity goes a lot deeper than the learning of facts or manners. Taking your elbows off the table and learning to say thingy rather than finky don't, sorry doesn't, make you middle class any more than being on a monthly wage or owning your own house does later in life.

In the fabulous '60s the first wave of artists from the lower echelons of society started to make trouble and demand in a loud and naive way a social relevance to Art practice. This huge struggle resulted in a whole new category being created to contain and defuse them. Community Art was formed to protect Fine Art from the riff raff. Community artists, for all their achievements, have been relegated to the fourth division in the League of Meaning and Status.

For the first time in history a large section of the population is trying to realise their vocation in Art. Along with the college grant aid scheme and the following unemployment benefit the result is a huge number of artists who have no place in society but continue to work without pay and sometimes with no exposure.

In addition to this huge number of new working class artists, armed with their class consciousness (even if temporarily occluded), many other artists have a private income. These artists have the same economic interests as the working class even if they are a bit culturally hoorah. Basically they are exploited as producers of value even if their wine and cheesy grins cover their economic deprivation.

R + CLASS

THE ILLUSION OF SCARCITY OF RESOURCES FOR ART

The demands of the commercial art market supported by the owning-class art collectors is small, academic, exclusive and limited. Most people don't buy artist's work because they have internalised the oppressive image of themselves as being without 'taste'. Art is thought of as an inane business full of incomprehensible gesture and empty subtleties.

Contemporary art made for the market fulfills this 'superior' role with flair and panache.

So with a mass of artists and a limited market there is inevitably a scarcity of resources for art. There is *no real shortage* of global resources to support art activity — the apparent shortage is due to the same irrational system of exchange value that has food mountains in Europe whilst people starve in North Africa. This imposed scarcity means that however hard we strive there is only room for a small number of people up there as 'great' or even with a decent living wage. You can only be successful at the expense of some other artists being downrated or dead.

I have recently experienced meetings in which one group of artists tries to negotiate a bigger slice of the diminishing art cake by identifying a weaker group to be chopped. As a prelude the weaker group is derided and their work made to seem worthless. Classic. Dog eat dog. And we fall for it!

The day-to-day expression of the competition to survive and gain social recognition of the value of our work is that artists' critical faculties are invaded. The tools of the trade, critical judgement, are turned against each other. Rather than developing a critique by which to judge our art by our own standards we measure ourselves against each others 'Success'. What sort of art is it that serves the survival of the artist best? Of course it is the art which is most servile.

This ethos is encouraged and ritualised by the endless banal competitions which often have the cheek to charge the artist a large handling fee for the privilege of being ignored. Or they may be free but offer a pittance in prize value whilst spending hundreds of times this on advertising, promotion and management.

The reality beneath all this competitive madness is that our roles as artists are *not in conflict* with each other. There are plenty of resources for everyone to realise their artistic projects. Most people welcome art in their lives if it arrives organically rather than being foisted on them from above like medicine. If the mental fog of confusion which hides the *new*

working class intelligentsia were blown away there would be no surplus of artists and every artist would be very much in demand. It will just take quite a few of us to blow at once.

EXPLOITED RATHER THAN PRIVILEGED

Whatever radical artists do, however extreme they get in their desperation, it always appears on retrospect that they were serving the interests of corporate capitalism (e.g. Dada and Surrealism). In the world of Art nothing changes whilst everything must be 'original'. The reason for the stasis is as plain and difficult to see as the nose on our face.

The terms of reference, identity and social status, in other words the whole cultural context, is always conservative. The *individual* artist, whatever her personal background — however much she rants and raves — is set up to serve.

The invention of new images is very important to the continual innovation of appearances that is demanded by the market in terms of packaging, advertising and actual forms of commodities. If these ideas can be thrown up by an unpaid workforce of avante garde artists all the better! It is easy to ignore truly radical and dangerous work as so few people have seen it . . . anyway most radical art — outside the artist controlled context — loses its punch in the sanitising atmosphere of the 'salons' where the obfuscating gasses of art criticism will dull its cutting edges with dull explications.

Ideas are cheap. Art itself is not used but simply plundered for new forms. The content is left with the art. The surrealist images that line our streets selling everything from cigarettes to pantyhose have nothing of the original radical ideas to communicate. They in fact turn surrealism on its head by exploiting the subconscious rather than clarifying it as a source.

What I'm trying to point out is that whereas isolated artworks or movements can easily be exploited, artists collectively aware of their oppression cannot be put over the barrel with such equanimity.

It's difficult to get reliable figures and the independent research badly needs doing but it seems that at least 90% of the total income from art does not go to artists. Practically everyone else in the Art industry is at least paid and yet there must be 9 artists for every one other art worker. If that isn't enough, of the small fraction of the income generated by art that goes to artists I'd guesstimate that at least 80% of it goes to only 500 or so artists in this country. Now if this isn't adding up to an outrageous level of exploitation . . . Add to this that perhaps 99% of the fine art produced remains unused gathering dust.

How many people have passed out of

Art College since WWII? This would give us some idea of the number of serious artist vocations in the country. I'd guess at 100,000 (?). This figure would give us some idea of the problem.

IDENTITY AND POLITICS

The lesson to be learnt here is surely to dispose of this illusion of scarcity in our own collective practise. To show our works in all their abundance and wonderful diversity on our own terms and in our own spaces. *Or* to stop all art production for three years and spend the time in organising, meeting and sharing information with other artists. Whatever course of action we choose it must be collective, broad based and *above all imaginative*. We *can* achieve a recognition of our needs and a recognition that the fulfillment of them is a basic human right. Artists are workers. They produce value.

For this to happen we must challenge the false identity of many artists and reclaim an identity from our own personal history and our objective social situation. The process implies a shift of major historical scale. It is not something that will happen through rhetoric or wishful thinking. It can only occur through prolonged communication between artists.

A way of starting this communication process is by listening at length to each others life stories and background histories. Only in this way will we see how our present condition has arisen from real historical experiences and how these conditions effect our work and social relations. Only by listening will mutual respect gradually replace competition between artists.

The difficulty in doing this is often that the subject is emotionally loaded to the point of being taboo. The only possible approach is often very light hearted with much laughter and perhaps even a few tears. It is also very helpful if an agreement can be reached that what is said should be *confidential* and that people should be allowed to have their say *without interruption*.

Alongside this bold moves would be made to re-integrate our art practice with working-class culture. This is something which myself and quite a few artists have been experimenting with in isolation. A conscious move in this direction within a clear framework of Liberation Theory would help make this process much less tentative. ■

This article is extracted from a self-published booklet titled *rough notes on ARTIST LIBERATION*, £1.00, which may be obtained from the author, c/o Brixton Art Gallery, 21 Atlantic Road, Brixton SW9.



Photo: Edward Woodman

PREVIEW



Purdah (above) by Diane Esquerra and Khan 'reveals the dimensions of covering and smothering in Othello and The Koran', and is at the Zap Club, Brighton on April 5 (Info 0273 671545) while Franklin Aalders (below) will work for a week at Anne Bean's new venue in Limehouse, with a performance on April 20 (info 01 987 1046)



Photo (right): Ian Liggett

Calling themselves Large Scale International (above), a new touring theatre group are rehearsing at Oval House.

The press release claims a company that is twenty strong, with a transvestite, an ex-commando, a stripper and a prostitute amongst them.

I find them in a small rehearsal space hidden away in the annexe. I am the only spectator in a space about the size of a large living-room. In front of me are eight performers. Thank God that, on this day, their numbers are not up to strength.

They begin moving, very slowly at first, using jerky mechanical movements which owe something to Meyerhold, pioneer Russian Theatre director, and something to video scratch acting. Gradually the movements lose their angularity and soften into the sensual probings of masturbation. Mumbled phrases are audible 'Big bollocks', 'Smelly cunt', 'Dirty fucker'. The performers work themselves into a frenzy. They climax and, following climax; stillness.

Once again they slowly begin their jerky movements. This time they unite stroking and caressing each other in ones and twos. Once again the same phrases are heard; 'Big bollocks', 'Dirty fucker', mixed, this time, with new ones; 'Meet me at the bottom of the stairs', or 'I've got no time for you'.

The group describe what they're doing as mixing precise, controlled movement with emotional content. The final performance with satin drapes, satin costumes, red wigs and hob-nailed boots PLUS a sextet of acoustic musicians and a tape of treated sounds should live up to their name and provide a pleasant gloss to their raw theatrical gropings.

They perform at Oval House from Thursday 10th-Sunday 13th April, and at Battersea Arts Centre Friday 18th and Saturday 19th April.

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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A NEO-NATURIST

CHRISTINE BINNIE writes:

● Me: Hey Jen, don't forget it's drinks at Performance Mag tonight.

Jen: Of course not. How could I? We've been looking forward to it since last year — don't you remember?

Me: How could I forget! I wonder who'll be there?

Jen: Yes, I wonder if that man will be there who we had a fight with. What's his name?

Me: Ken Hollings, yes, I felt a bit sorry for him actually. After all, we were pretty fiascoish last year. I don't think he really deserve it.

Jen: He didn't seem to mind much.

Me: No. I s'pose not, but we haven't seen him since, so he can't be that keen on us.

Jen: Why did it happen, anyway? Wasn't it something to do with munchkin?

Me: Yes, you said his girlfriend was a munchkin, excepty you didn't realise she was going out with him at the time. Then we had a fiasco with him and I ended up by bending his finger back. Poor thing! Anyway, I'm going to Marilyn's house now so I'll see yer there, OK?

Jen: OK, Chris, see yer there.

Later the same day at Marilyn's house:

Me: Hey Maz, wanna come to a party at Performance Mag this evening?

Maz: What's Performance Mag?

Me: Oh, it's a magazine that writes all about Performance art and stuff.

Maz: Performance art?! Load of shit! Still, I might as well come. I'll make them put me on the cover. When is it?

Me: I'm not sure exactly, 5 or 6 I think. Ring up if you want to. Here's the number.

Maz: (Into answering machine) Hello, it's Marilyn the singer here. I'm coming to your party tonight and want to know what time it starts. So could you ring back and let me know. Bye.

In the end we go back to my house to call for Jen and Grayson before we set off.

Jen: I rang up Performance Magazine to see what time it started and spoke to that man, what's his name, Rob Le something, he said that he's worried because Marilyn rang up and said he was coming to the party. He thinks Marilyn thinks it's a really trendy party. I think he thinks we'll all be disappointed when he gets there.

Maz: What are you talking about?

Jen: Oh nothing, come on let's go.

Maz: Who's Rob Le something?

Me: He's the Performance Magazine man.

Maz: Show me who he is when we get there.

Jen: I'm going now because I want to take Prince in the park on the way. See yer there. Bye.

Marilyn and I arrive at the party first because we get a taxi. The Performance office is already overflowing on to the balcony of the Diorama when we arrive. But we squeeze our way to the drinks table where Rob La Frenais greets us with a bottle of red in one hand and a bottle of white in the other. Hello, red or white, he says. I have red, Maz has white.

Me: That's Rob La Frenáis.

Maz: Who?

Me: The man who gave us a drink. I'll introduce you. Rob this is Marilyn. Marilyn this is Rob.

Rob: Hello.

Maz: Pleased to meet you.

Rob: We heard you were coming.

Maz: Are you the one who didn't want me to come because it's not trendy enough?

Rob: Well I didn't . . .

Maz: Look, I like meeting all sorts of different people OK? I couldn't give a fuck whether it's trendy or not. What is trendy anyway.

Rob: . . . I thought you might be used to more glamorous . . .

Maz: Well It's glamorous now. I'M HERE! So what's the matter?

Rob: . . . It's just an office party . . .

Maz: I'm having a fabulous time, now shut up. Where is this magazine anyway? I want to see a copy.

Marilyn mingled and I glanced around to see who was there. I could see Ken Hollings out of the corner of my eye but I thought I'd leave him for later. I could see André Stitt by the drinks table as usual and he was talking to someone who looked vaguely familiar, but who was it? Now there's Hermine going over for a conflag. Then it dawned on me who it was. He was the man who we had lent our sellotape to at Anne Bean's studio opening. He had it wrapped around his head. Ian Hinchliffe, that's it! I'd been hearing about him ever since Bruce Lacey's Fairie Fayre in 1982, as a matter of fact, but we'd only met for the first time during the sellotape incident. I had a bit of a chat with Anne Bean.

Me: Marilyn, this is Anne Bean.

Anne: Hello.

Maz: Hello you're pretty. You're Christine's idol in life aren't you? She's always going on about you.

Anne laughed, I think, and I said something like 'It's true', and went bright red and came over all alike. It is true as well. When I was a security guard at the Hayward gallery in 1979, there was an exhibition of performance art. I'd never seen performance arts before and although I thought most of it was rubbish, I loved Anne Bean's piece, and thought I'd have a shot at performance art myself. So I did.

Anyway, after I'd recovered from that little incident I realised that Jen and Grayson had arrived with Prince. The had found some magic mushrooms on the way and were giving them out to people.

Jen: Who's that handsome man over there? I think I'll give him one.

Me: That's Ken Hollings. I haven't managed to speak to him yet.

Jen: Is that the one we were horrible to?

Me: Yes. Come on, let's go and give him his magic mushrooms.

Ken Hollings turned out to have completely forgiven us for our dreadful behaviour of the year before. And we both voted him sexiest man at Performance Magazine drinks. Marilyn seemed rather keen, as well and could hardly drag himself away when it was timeto go for his sound check ready for his gig at Heaven that evening. But he managed somehow and took Jennifer with him to boot. I continued my conversation with Ken who told me about his auntie who had Buddhists and psychopaths at her funeral and who only smoked at Christmas (like me) I remember a short encounter with Neil Butler from the Zap Club and getting tackled by Hermine about the question of seriousness in performance art. Then it was home time! So off we went to get ready for the next event of the evening — Maz's gig!!

The metallic green Beetle sidles up to the pavement outside the Strand Macdonalds. The gang gets out. No-one fancies a Mac and they head straight to where the action is. En route, Viv n' Chris manage to find time for a bit of slap and tickle. Jen and Grayson favouring the stiff upper lip approach, settle for a cosy peck on the cheek. Before you can say BOY GEORGE they've arrived. Oblivious to the screaming hordes Viv checks out his sporty crew cut in a handy shop mirror. No one fancies queuing with the plebs and, be fair, why should they. 'C'mon Viv', intones Jen. 'You look like a million-dollars, lets all head for the guests-only entrance round the back. To Jen's command the fearsome foursome head off with a swagger only to bump into Marilyn and his motely-coloured cohorts, arriving dead on time. He don't need; to keep em' waiting. I introduce him to Viv.

Maz: Pleased to meet you. Do I look all right? Let's go in.

We all go in. Marilyn disappears to look for his dressing room and we dither about looking for drinks. After about a quarter of an hour I track Marilyn down sitting in a dressing room behind the stage surrounded by broken glass. 'I hate fluorescent lights' he says. The next time we see him he's up on the stage warming to the rapturous applause of his teddy-bear-hugging public. He was fantastic! ●

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