

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER No 49 / £1.50 / \$5.00 / 500 PTS / 5000 L / 25 FFR / 12 FL / 8 DM

# PERFORMANCE

THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE



**DOCUMENTA:** Aktion, ritual and the power of the past  
**BERLIN:** myths & monsters

**POLITICS:** are European artists angels or demons?

**PORTUGAL & PARIS:** crossing the desert

**HAMLETMACHINE:** the unique & improbable co-operation of  
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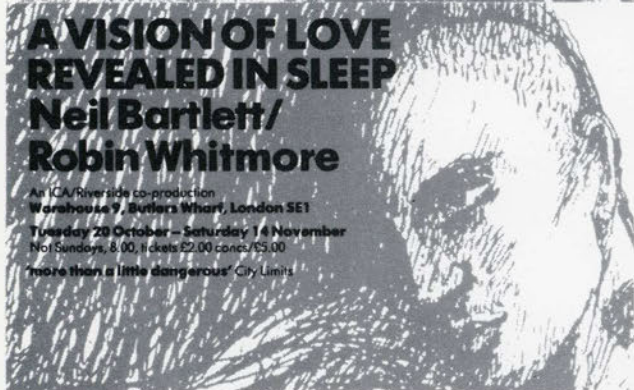


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# PERFORMANCE



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# PERFORMANCE

MAGAZINE

PERFORMANCE + ART / THEATRE / MUSIC / VIDEO / DANCE / EVENTS / SPECTACLE

Performance Magazine is a bi-monthly magazine that keeps you informed and up-to-date on performance, experimental theatre, innovative music, artists video, multi-media, visual arts and related events from Britain and around the world.

IN EACH ISSUE THERE IS:

**NEWS** ● details and discussion of forthcoming events

**CRITICAL ANALYSIS** ● in depth features on artists, issues and major events

**INTERVIEW** ● a full-length, in depth discussion with a major international artist

**REVIEWS** ● critical reviews of recent performances, exhibitions, festivals, meetings and special events

"If, like me, you're the kind of person that's as happy in an opera house as a rock club, a museum or a warehouse performance space, then Performance Magazine is for you. It's also one of the best looking arts magazines around."

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## INTERVIEWS

Gilbert & George / Laurie Anderson / Bruce McLean / Ethyl Eichelberger / Lindsay Kemp / Joseph Beuys / Jan Fabre / Rose English / Anthony D'Offay / Robert Wilson / Alistair MacLennan / Krzysztof Wodiczko / Steve Reich / Lily Savage / Stuart Brisley / Molissa Fenley / Derek Jarman / Nan Hoover / John Jesurun / David Freeman / Mark Pauline.

## FEATURES

Art on TV / Bow Gamelan / The Wooster Group / Artists in the Theatre / Carnivals / Pornography / Bellringing / Brecht & Pop / Laurel & Hardy / Lumiere & Son / Spalding Gray / Elvis Presley / Public Sculpture / George Bataille / Tom Phillips / Andrei Tarkovsky / Freud & Performance / Stephen Willats / Photography as Performance / Puppetry / Philip Glass / UFOs / Conrad Atkinson / Kenneth Anger.

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● Contents Page: Adam Noildt Intermission — the opening event at Documenta 87 (Photo: Rob la Frenais)

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The photomontage reproduced in issue 47 to accompany our review of the performance by Fred Goodwin was by Paul Allitt and Brian Musgrove. We apologise for not crediting them at the time.

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## ROB LA FRENAIS + GUEST EDITOR

Having founded *Performance Magazine* and edited it for seven years, Rob la Frenais will already be well known to many readers. In March of this year he gave up the editorship and has since curated the *Confrontations* exhibition as part of *New Work, Newcastle '87*, and the *AT THE EDGE* series of performances and installations at the AIR Gallery, London.

Rob has now returned to *Performance Magazine* as a guest editor to produce this issue on *The European Perspective*. With the support of an Arts Council bursary Rob has spent the last three months travelling across Europe attending many of the established European festivals as well as some less visible events. The issue attempts to take a necessarily selective look at current practices and attitudes in performance and related events across Europe and compares these with the situation in Britain. Although we have avoided complaints about the low status afforded the arts in general and the experimental arts in particular by Britain when compared with our European partners, it is worth just repeating a few statistics. Britain's public expenditure on the arts in 1985/86 amounted to just 0.34% of total public expenditure. In the Netherlands

it was 0.5%, Germany (1983) 0.8%, France 0.86% and Eire 1.00%. In 1980/81 the per capita public expenditure on the arts in Italy was £7.54; Germany, £15.77; Sweden, £24.82. Britain's expenditure per capita in 1986/87 was only £7.40.

At the time of writing, the L.I.F.T. festival has just finished and Edinburgh is in full swing. These two international festivals are misleading. British promoters are constantly embarrassed by the lack of support our government gives to visiting foreign artists and we have earned a reputation as the poor relation of Europe. I, and many others, wonder just how long the qudos of performing in London or Edinburgh will make up for the lack of cash.

Our decision to commission a European based issue reflects not only the sheer volume and quality of

performance activities in Europe this summer but also our desire to expand both our coverage and our readership. We are currently engaged in a new promotional campaign which has seen our availability rise by 25% and we hope that the European contents of this issue will afford a valuable opportunity to introduce the magazine to a new European readership.

Finally, part of Rob la Frenais' purpose in spending such an extended period looking at new work in Europe is to research his next project. *EDGE 88*, scheduled for London in the summer of 1988, is planned to be Britain's first truly international festival of performance of the kind that are now so familiar in Europe. ●

Steve Rogers  
Managing Editor

### ICA IS 40

+ The ICA, London's most prominent venue for all areas of contemporary art, is celebrating its **40th Birthday**. Part of the celebrations will be two special nights (September 23/24) of **live performances** by a variety of artists who have performed there over the years. Details of who will be appearing is being kept a closely guarded secret but we are told to watch out for some real surprises. Details: 01 930 0493. ●

### APPEAL PRODUCTS STARVED TO DEATH

+ Leeds based theatre co-operative **Appeal Products** are being **forced to close** after three years of really promising work, producing eleven different shows on tiny budgets. The reason, predictably, is lack of funding. Their application for a project grant from the **Arts Council** was rejected despite their having already lined up tour dates and having other funding from **Yorkshire Arts** dependent upon them receiving the project grant. If Appeal Products decide they can no longer continue to finance their own work it will be a very sad day. They are a young, innovative group and it is becoming increasingly hard to find such rare things these days. The background to this tragic decision makes horrifying reading. The Arts Council's total drama budget is now **£24 million** of which nearly **half** goes to the RSC and the

**National Theatre**. The bulk of the rest goes to the revenue funded groups, reps etc and a miserly £824,000 goes on developing new work. The project committee is responsible for the whole gamut of developing new work whether it be children's theatre, black theatre, small scale touring theatre as well as experimental work. The real villains behind the demise of Appeal Products are the people who decide the way the arts budgets are carved up. ●

### LARGE SCALE EVENTS

+ Once again the Arts Council could take a leaf out of the book of the **Gulbenkian Foundation** which after a couple of years of vague policies have come up with a truly important, far-sighted, new scheme to **commission one-off large scale events**. The scheme is designed 'to assist artists, companies, and promoters to research, plan and develop large-scale works for specific sites and environments.' They will select ten projects for development funding which will enable the creators to research and plan the project and out of these three will be selected to be put into action. It is open to any kind of artist in any media. The deadline for application is December 1, 1987. It is so refreshing to find a scheme that acknowledges the need for financial support in the planning and developing new work. Details: 01 636 5313. ●

### AIR MAIL

+ The **Air Gallery**, London is planning an

exhibition of artists' postcards for January 88. **A6 postcards** and **60 second U-Matic** videos should be sent to Air by November 30th. Details: 01 278 7751. ●

### AFTER IMAGE III

+ **After Image** are planning their next series of programmes for 1988. At this point they would be interested to hear from any artist in any media with ideas for a **five minute work for TV**. Stories, visual materials, music, almost anything can be considered. Details: write to After Image, 52 Acre Lane, London SW2 5SP. ●



PHOTO / HUW CHADBOURN

## DANCING PHOTOS

+ **Camerawork** and **Chisenhale Dance Space**, London have come up with the intriguing idea of commissioning a series of collaborations between **dancers and photographers**. The project, starting in November, is in two parts. An exhibition of photographs exploring new approaches to expressing movement based work and performances which include photography. Details: 01 980 8115 or 01 980 6256. ●

## NORTHERN LIGHTS

+ Yet another venue in the **north of England** has come up with a project to make performance more accessible. **The Leadmill in Sheffield**, is not so much a new presenter as a re-energised presenter of performance activities. Attempting to capitalise on the **huge crowds** that go to rock concerts and dances at the venue they have developed a season called simply **4D** and every week from October to December the space will be changed to encompass an extensive programme of **performances, exhibitions and video screening** by established touring artists as well as by lesser local groups. Including the premiere of **Dogs in Honey's** new work, **Gary Stevens**, **Annie Griffin**, and soundworks by local rock luminaries **Chakk** and **Hula**. As well as attracting an already committed performance audience the hope is that the largely young audience that turns up for concerts will also get to see other work. This kind of strategy is always a risky business but if the great night I had up there when the Media Show was on is anything to go by it should work. Details: See advert, or call 0742 754500. ●

+ **Leeds City Art Gallery** is the latest regional centre to start presenting performance and related work. Their **Trans-Positions** series runs into September with a talk by **Paul Bradley** of **Babel** and **Mona Hatoum's 'Hidden From Prying Eyes'** installation originally commissioned for the Air Gallery, London as part of the **At The Edge** series. Following that is the realisation of **Steve Willats' Between Objects and People, Perspectives on contemporary living** project (pre-viewed in issue 47). The exhibition consists of photographic text and sound material produced by working with residents of two tower blocks in Leeds and visitors to the City Art Gallery. The installations, which explore peoples' attitudes to contemporary culture will be sited in both the tower blocks and the gallery. Details: 0532 462495. ●

## ART IN ACTION

+ With a small grant and lots of energy and imagination **Rose Garrard** has organised a really exciting programme of performances and related static work and documentation.

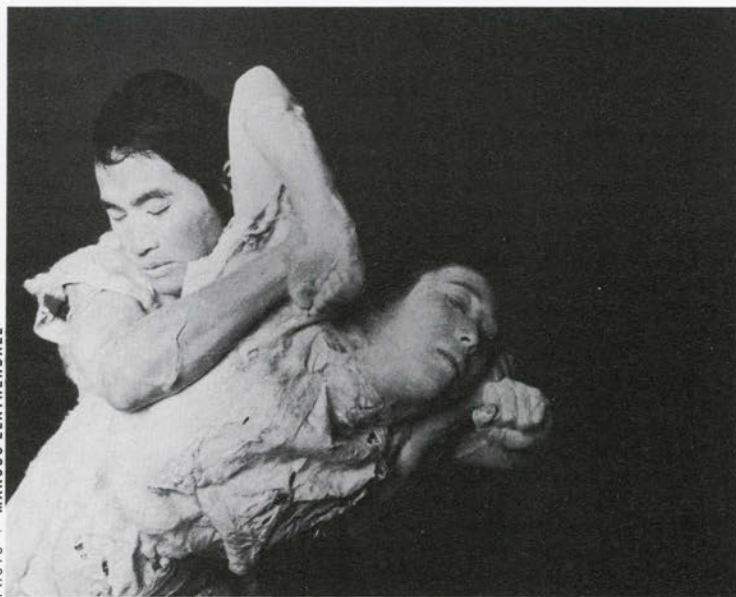


PHOTO / MARCUS LEATHERDALE

The south west does not stand out as an area which has had much to do with performance art and they couldn't get a better introduction than **Art in Action**. Durational works lasting not less than two days have been commissioned from **Anne Beane**, **Stuart Brisley**, **Charlie Hooker**, **Alistair MacLennan**, **Marty St James** and **Anne Wilson**, **Richard Wilson** and **Sylvia Ziraneck**. Videos of performance by **Projects UK**, **Arts Council films**, **TSW artists films** and the **Confrontations** exhibition from **New Work**, Newcastle '87 form the back up material to the performances. The series is split between **Dartington College**, **Plymouth Arts Centre** and **Spacex**, Exeter. Details: 0392 31786 or 0752 60060. ●

## DANCE UMBRELLA '87

+ Another busy **Dance Umbrella** festival runs from the middle of October. With one or two events yet to be confirmed the highlights of this year's programme look likely to be the return of **Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker's Rosas company**; **Eiko & Koma** from the USA: the wonderful sounding and looking **Urban Bush Women** also from the USA and this year's big star attraction is **Trisha Brown**. Having mentioned four foreign companies it is heartening to see how well the British contribution stands up in appeal against these. **Laurie Booth**, certainly Britain's most unpredictable and probably most important experimenter; **DV8 Physical Theatre**; **Yolande Snaith**; **Extemporary**; **Ashley Page**; all deserve their place in an important international dance festival. Details: 01 741 4040. ●

## GALLERY NEWS

+ **The City Museum & Art Gallery**,

**Stoke on Trent** has for some time now been producing good new small exhibitions. Between now and the new year they have two shows of interest. **Palaces of Culture** is about museums and how they relate to our perception of art. The exhibition includes works which question the nature of presentation and observation of art by, amongst others, **Nikki Bell** and **Ben Langlands**, and **Mark Wallinger**. Following on from this is an installation by **Tina Keane**. Called **The Diver** the work involves a large number of **video screens** and is concerned with eroticism and nostalgia. Details: 0782 202173. ●

+ **A WORLD'S WASTE** is the title of a provocative touring exhibition which started out at the **Brewery Arts Centre**, Kendal and is now at the **Rochdale Museum** and goes on to **Bristol**, **York**, **Hull** and **Carlisle**. It includes commissioned pieces from artists working in sculpture, video, performance, photography and painting around the central idea of the **Sellafield** nuclear reprocessing plant. In addition to this ambitious exhibition there is an excellent catalogue which is obtainable from **Kendal Brewery Arts Centre**, Highgate, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4HE. ●

+ A rare opportunity to see work by one of the original futurists. **Balla's** drawings and designs are at **Riverside Studios**, London until the end of September. ●

## PERFORMANCE NEWS

+ **Neil Bartlett & Robin Whitmore's 'A Vision of Love'** is being remounted in a new version in a warehouse in the **London Docklands** by the **ICA** and **Riverside Studios, London**. The enormous success of the original showing at **Battersea Arts Centre** has made the combined support of these two prestige organisations and a subsequent tour possible. ●

PERFORMANCE

NEWS

Eiko & Koma  
in *Trilogy*

+ **Trent Polytechnic's** Powerhouse seems set to replace the Midland Group's innovative live art programme. The autumn season at the Poly includes **Hexis Mundi** the new company formed by Richard Hawley and Nicky Johnson, formerly of Impact Theatre. **People Show; Forced Entertainment; Annie Griffin; Dogs in Honey; Intimate Strangers; Station House Opera** and a new version of **Neil Bartlett's** *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*. Powerhouse is at the Clifton site, Trent Polytechnic. ●

+ **Manchester Festival** doesn't have quite such a progressive programming policy as former years but it does include appearances by **Annie Griffin** (the most listed woman in Performance) and **Bow Gamelan**. Hopefully when attendances have been well established they can make the programming more adventurous again. ●

+ **Stephen Taylor Woodrow** takes up a two year project as performance artist in residence at **South Hill Park, Bracknell**. He has already worked on community based projects in the North East and will probably produce some new large-scale work at Bracknell. ●

## VIDEO NEWS

Compiled by Nik Houghton

+ Now revealed is the selection of artists chosen for the **Illuminations Awards** scheme masterminded by *Ghosts In The Machine* producer **John Wyver**. The scheme, jointly funded by **Channel Four** and the **Arts Council**, means that **10** artists will receive **£4,500** each in order to produce a short work which will act as a pilot to more expensive, high profile production pieces to be broadcast on Channel Four's new 'Ghosts' programme. (The deal is that four of these initial 10 will get the 'Ghosts' treatment while all of the 10 works produced will be toured by the ACGB as a package).

The full line up for the new 'Ghosts' will include four other film/video productions which have already been commissioned and eight foreign co-productions. In the meantime though the artists selected from an initial rush of **2,300 enquiries** are: **Patricia Diaz; Sara Furneaux** (bursary holder at the LVA in 1986); **Jean Matthee** (winner of one of the Arts Councils Student Prizes last year with 'Plutonium Blondes'); **Steve Hawley/Tony Steyger** (Hawley renowned videonik of this parish now Head of Sheffield's, Media Dept; Steyger a freelance cameraman); **Patrick Keiller** (film maker); **Anna Thew** (once, I'm told, a go-go dancer but now a primo avant-garde film maker); **Sandra Lahire** (producer of the much acclaimed 'Terminals'); **George Snow** (art funkier with his name to Art Of Noise pop video); **Paul Graham** (photographer) and, finally, **Tony Hill** (film experimentalist noted for the spectacular style of his work). Choices were made by **Mike O'Prey, Kate Elwes, Martine**

**Attile** and 'Ghosts' producer **John Wyver**. Work is expected to be produced for re-selection by the panel in September but problems are already arising with the delayed release of money. At the time of writing rumour has it that Sandra Lahire camped out overnight on John Wyvers doorstep in order to get £1,000 to initiate her project. ●

+ 'Our next project is an over-the-top version of "Wuthering Heights" set in the 1950's,' intimated **Mark Wilcox** in a recent phone conversation. And what about your last epic, *Boxing For Boys*? 'I think it' OK — some parts worked better than others.' Having viewed the tape your critic says; ambitious story concerning two rival boxers falls slightly flat as 1950's style narrative slips sideways into oddly clumsy TV drama. Wilcox is now collaborating with **Kate Cragg** on the script for the next project while the voice of reason asks **What makes today's medianiks love the 50's?** ●

+ Watch out for a *Technology* issue of **SCREEN** magazine which, it seems, will be heavily biased toward video. ●

+ After a disappointing crop of work from the **Slades** post-Grad Dept enlivened only by **Alanna O'Kelly's** sound piece based on the lost art of wailing and a strangely sensual videotape, *Insights*, from **Lily Markiewicz** it was down to the Metro for the **London College Of Printing Film Dept** show. Not exactly art this but a strong tape was on show about anti-apartheid from **Maria Nobreg** which was complemented by a hardhitting, if overlong, documentary about repressed home workers in **Peru (Eskenazi/Bernays)**. Bottom of the list came *Gum Boots Game*, a horribly unfunny spoof about a coke snorting groover. Did I laugh? No. ●

+ Did **Saun Cubitt** laugh? Well, almost, but this was more to do with the fact that he'd just had confirmation of a contract with **Methuen** to write a book about video enti-

led *Timeshift*. As if this wasn't enough Cubitt is also deeply involved in pushing ahead plans for a media centre at the **South Banks Coin Street** development site. ●

+ Still with student shows good reaction registered at the **St. Martins** screening to **Candy Guards** urbane sitting room sketches *Hair and Mary and Randal*. Elsewhere a demand was lurking from three final year students criticising the courses lack of a **multi-cultural perspective**. ●

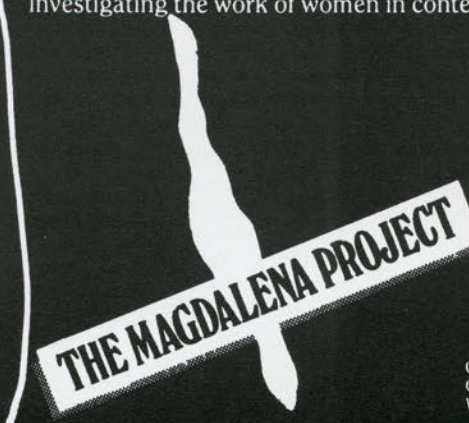
+ Send a large SAE to **London Strategic Policy Unit**, Middlesex House, Room 504, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, SW1 or to LFPVA, 79 Wardour Street, W1 for three booklets compiled jointly by the LSPU and **Independent Film Video and Photography Association**. The set of three comprise *Twenty Years On*, an overview of the indie sector; *Off The Shelf*, looking at promotion and marketing of tapes and *Marketing Workbook* which outlines marketing strategies. Highly recommended for all viderati. ●

+ Watch out for September's **International Video Festival** at the **French Institute** in London curated by Jean-Marie Duhard. Programme will include major videos of the last 20 years alongside prize-winning tapes and work from European TV stations. The festival is designed to launch the Institute as a video space: French Institute, 17 Queensbury Place, London SW7, Tel: (01) 589-6211. ●

## 50th ISSUE SPECIAL

+ The next issue is our **50th issue** and we will be celebrating our **half-century** with a special large issue edited by **Claire MacDonal**. The issue will be based around the theme of **The Artist And The City** and will cover a range of topics relating to this. As it's our birthday we will be planning other kinds of celebrations including less static ones than the magazine itself. ●

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# NATIONAL REVIEW OF LIVE ART 1987

# A MESSAGE TO THE KUNST FUHRERS

AT THE END of my review of the Platform section of the 1986 National Review (new and untried young artists selected from auditions around the country) I wrote 'The Platform is great but it's not enough.' (Performance 44). I wrote this at a time when the fate of the Midland Group, where the platform started and grew up, was in the balance. Since then of course the Midland Group has collapsed and the National Review, complete with Platform, has found a temporary new home at Riverside Studios, London. Clearly its survival beyond the Midland Group and the willingness of the Arts Council to support its continuation away from the Midland Group is some kind of testament to the annual events significance. It is still the only major attempt made in this country to seek out new performance artists and intervene in the usual process of artists going ignored for years until either they stop making performances in favour of some more 'acceptable' way of working or, rarely, hang on with ferocious tenacity and join Britain's meagre ranks of 'established' performance artists. The translation of the Platform to the larger, prestige London venue will mean there's even less excuse for the event to be ignored by the media, the funders and the promoters. It is obviously more than the Midland Group Platform and the test of whether this will

be enough will come slowly in the years that follow when we see whether this showing really benefits the artists involved.

As to the National Review itself, Nikki Milligan, the events doggedly determined organiser, has complained that the event has no foreign participants this year (last year it included Academia Ruchu and Peter Baren), through lack of funding. I'm not sure this is such a failing. The programme for this year's Review includes a great number of British artists who, whilst earning some of the respect they deserve outside of London, and indeed abroad, remain for the most part unknown within the capital. It is one of the most inexcusable phenomena of British artistic life that there is no regular London promoter of performance art. Alistair MacLennan, for example, who is without doubt one of the most important performance artists in Europe, who has worked extensively abroad, has never had a major London showing. Nick Stewart, one of the most promising young

artists working in the area in Britain has made only cursory incursions into the capital. Annie Griffin, who must be one of the most sort-after young performers, spends most of her time on the road doing one-nighters away from London, and so the list goes on.

The absence of any international 'stars' from the programme may well be a blessing in disguise since it will force the audiences to focus on British work without the glamorous distraction of foreign visitors to fete. The quality of the work on offer in the National Review will speak for itself. The irony of the lack of attention paid by the metropolitan Kunst Fuhrers to this work which has been proliferating outside of London, especially in the north of England, is that much of it fits quite neatly into the neo-expressionist international style which the arbiters of taste have hyped so successfully in recent years.

So this is my message to London's globe trotting curators and programmers. *Britain is producing some of the best new performance artists in the world.* Now is the chance to catch up on what you have turned your backs on. It's time to make amends for your inactivity. ●

Full details of the National Review of Live Art from Riverside Studios.  
STEVE ROGERS.

PERFORMANCE

PREVIEW



Diane Esguevre  
& Keith Khan

PHOTO / CHRIS BISHOP

## BRACKNELL 87

Previewed by JEZ WELSH.

THIS YEAR, from Friday 30th October to Sunday 1st November, the Media Centre at South Hill Park, Bracknell are presenting their 8th annual festival of Independent Video. In 1986 a pattern was set for the curatorial structure of the festival whereby each programme was 'sponsored' by a magazine. This year PERFORMANCE has been asked to contribute to the festival, and will be presenting a programme of tapes that aims to highlight the work of a younger generation of video artists who are bringing new blood and fresh ideas to a tradition — if video art can be seen as such — that is now in its twenty first year.

It is an apt time to reflect upon Video's brief but varied history; all over the (western) world, in museums and big festivals, video's cognescenti are taking stock, the definitive versions of the history are even now being written. The very notion of a definitive history is absurd in the British context; there is simply not enough documentary material in the UK from which to develop an ordered history. Paradoxically, for

an electronic medium, British Video Art has an oral history. But outside the UK things are very different. The international festival circuit, to which the British have latterly made a belated entry, is by now a well established medium for the building of careers, whether of artists, curators or critics, and the careers that have flourished most spectacularly under this system will produce the definitive histories.

How precisely this relates to the Bracknell Video Festival is determined in terms of the status, credibility or kudos of the event, relative to its European or North American counterparts. Bluntly, Bracknell, though an immensely useful get together for the British Independents, has no status in the vocabulary of the international circuit simply because it is not an international event. This may seem a simplistic observation, but its significance runs to the very heart of what is British Video and why it is so relatively unsuccessful compared to American or German Video in particular or European Video in general. As I have argued relentlessly over the past five years, it is nothing to do with the quality of the work either in terms of its content or its execution; British video artists, documentarists and independent producers can and do make work that is every bit as coherent, sophisticated and mature as that of our European and North American counterparts. What holds us back is a chronic lack of promotional support that reflects a debased status in the cultural hierarchy, whose effects are evident at every level of pro-

duction, distribution, promotion and critical debate.

So how can 'we', how can 'Bracknell' address these problems? I do not wish to suggest that there is an easy answer, though a big injection of cash and the confidence of funding agencies would go a long way to help. But as long as Britain lacks a credible international event, it can not and will not have an influential voice in the development of an international video culture. At present the best thing we have going for us is Channel 4 which is the envy of most other video active nations, but the tiny proportion of tapemakers who are supported by the channel directly can in no way reflect the enormous diversity and genuine vigour of the wider constituency. British tapes are beginning to have an impact, our voices are starting to be heard, but one still senses that we are always the last name on the guest list, we are never expected to speak with the voice of authority. A good start would be for Bracknell to Go International, not in the token fashion that its current budget dictates, but in a real way that will involve a quantum leap not just for this event, but for the whole 'sector' it (tries to) represent.

To return to earth, however: Performance's programme at the festival has to say something about the year's output and the state of the art. It has been a year in which some of our more established artists have continued to make confident and well rounded works, if a little lacking in risk. Marty St James and Anne Wilson were

Continued Page 42

# HAMLET MACHINE: THE UNIQUE AND IMPROBABLE CO-OPERATION OF ROBERT WILSON AND HEINER MÜLLER

considered by JANNY DONKER

ROBERT WILSON'S choreography to Heiner Müller's *Hamlet Machine* is based on the idea of a clock. A single sequence of movements is executed by seven male and seven female actors almost indistinguishably five times in succession. Each time the set is turned ninety degrees. It consists of a table placed diagonally at which three women sit on slightly tilted chairs, a leafless tree in a corner, and a low wall along one side. At some distance from the table, a woman is seated in a revolving chair mounted on little wheels which permit her to move slowly to and fro. More or less opposite her, another chair is provided for one of the male actors. With each turn of the clock, the direction of the actions changes: upstage becomes downstage, left profile becomes right profile, actors facing the audience in due time turn their back upon them. Moreover, their distance from the viewer varies as the set revolves, which also influences the impact of the actions.

The movements vary from walking and hopping slowly across the stage to diminutive and sometimes trivial or mocking gestures like scratching the head and grinning. The woman in the revolving chair resembles the classical image of madness: hair standing on end, eyes dilated, mouth open to reveal the suicide's blue tongue. Her head and hands move alternately as in a trance and with sudden jerks. The others likewise have their characteristic patterns of motion. Towards the end a completely black man walks up behind a lady in an evening gown and suddenly puts his hands in front of her eyes. An athletic figure resembling a golden statue hops up onto the table like a bird and remains there, arms outspread, balancing on one foot.

This choreography has little apparent connection to the text of *Hamlet Machine*. In fact, the first 'movement' omits the text altogether; it is executed to a soundtrack that contains mainly

quiet piano music, punctuated by the dry raps — the sound of the clockwork running, so to speak — that marks the changes from one sequence of motions to the next. Heiner Müller's text is distributed among the remaining four 'movements'; the fifth, consequently, when the set has returned full circle to its initial position, repeats the first with a ferocious monologue by Ophelia superimposed on it. The text is spoken by various performers singly or simultaneously, taken apart and repeated fragment-wise, which often results in contrapuntal, even fugue-like structures.

*Hamlet Machine* begins as the monologue of an actor who refuses to continue playing Hamlet. He comments bitterly on the events that constitute the content of Shakespeare's tragedy. The playhouse seems to him filled with corpses and he turns to reality. But at home the television is dealing out the day's ration of lies and loathsomeness, and in the streets a revolution is going on in which he, irresolute like the character he used to play, imagines himself simultaneously the oppressor and the oppressed. Even the body, the privacy of his own bowels, blood and brain, seems to offer no safe retreat, and he wants to be a machine. The actor's text alternates with the monologue of Ophelia, the suicide, who curses all men who have possessed her and promises to swallow up again into her womb the world to which she has given birth and to crush it between her thighs. At certain moments the text is interrupted by elaborate stage directions which invite the grotesque and the violent: Marx, Lenin and Mao appear as nude women to mock Hamlet, who splits their heads with an axe; during her final speech, Ophelia is reduced to immobility by attendants who wrap her up completely in white bandages. None of these actions are so much as alluded to in Wilson's choreography: he has made the actors recite the stage directions as

if they were part of the monologues.

There are two versions of Wilson/Müller's *Hamlet Machine*. The first, which will be performed in England, was produced in New York and performed by drama students from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. The second, using the original German text, was created subsequently at Hamburg with students of the local Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (Academy of Music and the Performing Arts). The two versions differ in two important respects: the lighting and the treatment of the text. Wilson considered the lighting used in New York too harsh for European eyes and added a lot of blue to create a milder chiaroscuro for Hamburg. The different handling of the text in the two versions has to do with the differences in background between the American and German performers. The American students had received a thorough training in bodily movement but were totally unfamiliar with Heiner Müller and his German background. Wilson had them speak the text unemotionally, almost mechanically, in accordance with the clockwork-like pace of the whole. The Germans, on the other hand, knew their Müller and their Marx and a lot of other things necessary to understand *Hamlet Machine*, but their text-oriented training had hardly prepared them to meet the demands of Wilson's rather exacting choreography. This led Wilson to work out with them a far less mechanical kind of diction. He encouraged them to explore the range of their voices from whisper to scream, to dwell on certain sounds as if gloating over a savoury morsel, and to distort the words to make them sound ludicrous or even obscene.

Heiner Müller, born 1929, has witnessed the rise and fall of Nazi-Germany, the Russian occupation, and the first decades of the German Democratic Republic. His brand of theatre is modelled on Brecht and



PHOTO / BEATRIZ SCHILLER

Hamlet Machine

Artaud, but he draws upon the entire European literary tradition from classical Greece through Shakespeare and Racine to Hölderlin. His early pieces, dealing with the struggle for survival through the birth pangs of a post-revolutionary society, were sufficiently critical of revolutionary practice in Communist Germany to attract official displeasure. Since then, however, he has reached a level of international reputation where he is permitted to move with relative freedom between East and West,

including even the United States. Though he remains relatively unknown in England, his pieces for the theatre have been performed extensively throughout the Federal Republic, in Holland, France, and elsewhere on the Continent over the last fifteen years. In the United States his reputation is of more recent date. At the moment, Heiner Müller is being recognized as one of the most important playwrights of the past three decades. Significantly, he is particularly popular with the youngest generation of theatre makers,

some of whom are experimenting with his texts in the context of dance and mime, for instance.

Heiner Müller's main vehicle is the dialogue, but his plays offer many opportunities for bodily activity on the part of the actors. Traumatic bodily experiences pervade his texts: man is forced into submission by violence done or threatened to his flesh and blood, by hunger, pain, and fatigue. On the other hand, Heiner Müller's extensive reading flows back into almost everything he writes; his texts



# HAMLET MACHINE:

abound in quotations. Consequently, directors and performers usually feel obliged to outdo one another in gory acrobatics and to delve for hidden meanings and go out of their way to drag them to the surface.

To Heiner Müller fans accustomed to this type of performance, Robert Wilson's *Hamlet Machine* must appear sacrilege. But what else, they will say, could be expected from someone from another generation (1941), Texas-born, New York-based, without any roots in European literature or even in the tradition of the theatre at all? For the New York which provided the background to Wilson's early experiments in the theatre was the New York of visual artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol and of dancers like Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer, rather than the world of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee. It was the New York of Happenings in lofts, churches or wherever an opportunity offered, where everything seemed possible and permitted, without regard for professional concepts of drama, acting, and design.

Robert Wilson's theatre, in fact, has never been a theatre of plots and psychological relationships modelled on real life. It is dominated by successions of visual images made up of sets and performers positioned within the frame of the proscenium arch with an architect's keen sense of space and a painter's eye for outline, colour, and lighting. The 'picture' changes very slowly, performers displacing themselves chiefly along lines parallel to the 'picture plane'. Sound, text and music form a kind of acoustic film superimposed upon the visually perceptible action, which develops in counterpoint to, rarely in unison with, the movements of the actors. The 'typical Wilson text' is a kind of sleepwalker's monologue, composed of seemingly incoherent fragments like the snatches of conversations overheard as one passes people in the street. This is the kind of theatre to which Wilson adepts have become accustomed through *Deafman Glance* (1972), *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), and the huge, unfinished 'international opera' *the CIVIL warS* (1983/84), to mention only those of his many productions which have chiefly contributed towards Robert Wilson's fame as one of the great innovators of contemporary theatre.

Considering their extreme differences in background as well as in the type of theatre evolved by Heiner

Müller and Robert Wilson, neither could have found a less likely companion to embark upon a joint venture. Yet they have been cooperating repeatedly ever since Heiner Müller furnished part of the text for the fourth act of *the CIVIL warS*, which was produced at Cologne and featured Frederick the Great of Prussia as one of its protagonists. Wilson incorporated texts by Müller in his re-workings of Euripides' *Medea* and *Alkestis*, and recently, apart from *Hamlet Machine*, he has staged another complete work by the East-German playwright, *Quartett*, which was premiered during the Stuttgart Theatre Festival in June. Evidently, there exists a kind of affinity and understanding between them that overrules formal and cultural differences.

For his part, Heiner Müller fully approves of Wilson's radical departure from the usual type of performance of his work. He likes the mechanical character of this new *Hamlet Machine* and, as he declares in an interview with Rick Takvorian in *Ballett International* (12, '86), he also likes the sensual treatment of the text in the German version as opposed to what he sees as a contemporary tendency to reduce language to the mere transmission of information, to 'computer language'. In fact, for all the stress laid by Wilson on the formal and acoustic qualities of

speech, one does not find oneself listening less intently to catch the meanings suggested by the very distortions and repetitions of the text of *Hamlet Machine*. Wilson's and Müller's contributions to the production have become inextricably blended.

To Robert Wilson, such close interaction with someone else's imagination is not a new experience. His early work owes very much to the visual fantasies of the deafmute negro boy Raymond Andrews, whom Wilson knew through his work as a therapist. His interest in language as sound stems from his close association with another handicapped person: young Christopher Knowles, with whom he did a number of productions in the later 'seventies. This time, however, both partners are at the height of their career. And both of them bring to the joint venture an experience of life — formulated primarily in terms of visual symbols, motion, and sound in the American's case, in historical and political terms and visually evocative language in the East-German's — which can provide the substance to what otherwise might have remained an improbable formal experiment. This is a unique instance of mature artists, coming from almost complementary quarters, joining forces, and both may profit from it. ●



PHOTO / BEATRIZ SCHILLER

In a summer festival season dominated by the enormous 100 day Documenta in Kassel, ROB LA FRENAIS finds some of the best new work in Europe in some less-exposed corners.

# WHEN THE TUNNEL IS BUILT

Machini Sensibili at Polverigi

PHOTO / ROB LA FRENAIS

IN SIX YEARS time, then, as President Mitterand ironically put it, the Continent will cease to be isolated from Britain. When the tunnel is built it will be the Tories' one positive legacy to a physically and spiritually bankrupted Britain, and it will be particularly welcome to experimental artists, if such still exist by then.

For at the moment, Britain is still clearly outside the network of links between artists and the various amateurs that cross borders with some ease on the mainland. However, to fully describe the 'sense of Europe' to which we are denied, it should also be asked if, like the Eastern Europeans, we do not benefit from our isolation. Secondly, it is also necessary to avoid the 'grass is greener' trap when describing the work and conditions of work outside Britain. As a hangover from a bourgeois romantic view of Europe as being in a constant state of bursting at the seams with culture, the south a non-stop sunny carnival and the north a workers paradise where artists are given salaries and treated like bankers, a lack of realism goes hand in hand with insularity. However, as members of a system which funds artists least in Europe, (and more to the point for many, pays the least social security per cost of living) it is worth trying to get a picture of experimental work where, (and if) it is thriving outside Britain in the various countries of the EEC.

Travelling across a period of two months I attempted to pick up the various strands of the experimental network which exists in Europe for performance, video and related activities. I say 'strands', because, one soon learns in planning such a trip, there are no formal ways of gaining

information from the British end, apart from word of mouth. Even on arriving in a country, it is often simply a matter of marching into a gallery or some other cultural centre and asking to go through their invite trays! However, there was one advantage this year. The mammoth, quadrennial Documenta lumbered into life for a hundred days this year, with a significant proportion of performances featured (see interview with Elizabeth Jappe) and would prove to be, whatever its ideological problems (see feature) an ideal jumping off point for linking with experiment in Europe.

It could also be useful to point out that I was travelling around looking for work that might usefully be brought to Britain. This concentrates the mind wonderfully and is a suitable antidote to any romantic illusions about European work. In the last issue Peter Culshaw refers to the LIFT festival of theatre as presenting 'out of nowhere, 20 or so interesting pieces of contemporary theatre, miraculously transposed to the middle of London'. It is true. They are magicians. Where do they find it? There is a lot weak, derivative, downright bad work circulating in Europe. Compared to British work it lacks, without wishing to introduce too many macho metaphors, guts and muscle. Its intellectual qualities in the main make Britain appear a seething laboratory of ideas. BUT if you look for it, the good stuff is there. If you look for it. A thousand kilometres and several borders can make this process tiring and expensive.

The performance cult seems to be on the upswing in Europe. British readers have already heard of the Slovenian neo-constructivist shock-workers Neu

Slovenische Kunst (incorporating the Sisters of Scipion Nascia, Irwin Laibach and the newly formed Red Pilot) with forty members. There are also Minus Delta T, written about at length by Ken Gill in his Berlin report.

For the grand opening of Documenta a coachload of shaven-headed blue garbed performance rabotniks the Adam Noiltdt intermission filled the street of Kassel with a tonal mixture of Balinese Gamelan chanting and Bavarian Beer hall carousing.

After their performance on the first of the Hundred days, the international art world sheltering from the rain under the facade of the Fredricianum a couple of real tanks roll down the main drag, reminding us of the proximity of the start of the several thousand of kilometre of Warsaw pact countries to the East. As the performers sat on their coach munching their sandwiches, I consider the fake militarism of this group, the ludicrous use of heavy industrial props (a mechanical digger) the smoke bombs, the masses of photographers and TV cameras, and wonder, given all that, how the authorities managed to find a threat the unofficial performance the previous night by Kassel artist Natascha Fiala, in which she draped across a highway cutting a huge photographic image of herself with the words 'I am not afraid of the Russians'. The police were called, and yet another crack in the tolerance of this small town in the centre of Germany.

The problems of having an event like Documenta in this situation are in fact well understood by the organisers, as Elizabeth Jappe points out in her interview, but on the whole the tendency towards liberal tolerance of self criticism WITHIN the show, such

# WHEN THE TUNNEL IS BUILT



as when sculptor Jurgen Klauke demolishes a neo-geo metal sculpture with a Beuys hat balanced on top of it, seems to serve only as a cushion that can be easily punctured. An example of this was the organiser's embarrassment over the placing of performance artist Charlemagne Palestine's massive *God Bear* sculpture (the biggest example of what Palestine calls 'the greatest and most popular totemic object invented this century: The Teddy Bear'). There was controversy over where this bear should be placed, and as it was the most obviously identifiable sculpture, its totemic potency increasing in scale to its size, it was unfortunate that it did not fit into the 'Documenta-concept' of Manfred Schneckenberger. As it was, it served to point a mocking figure at the whole pomposity of the 'concept'.

Of the performances, at the time of writing, there have been many disappointments and not many surprises. The legendary Rachel Rosenthal, whom I had long awaited seeing was indeed legendary, in physical demeanour and appearance — for the first five minutes — but the rest of the piece seemed to confirm what I have heard recently; that US performance artists have reached decision time — sell objects or make theatre. Now, I don't regard use of theatrical skills as a negative thing by any means, but Rosenthal had gone for option 2 in a big way. As part of a whiz-bang *Scientific American* style explication, of life, the Universe and Everything, she proceeded to make her point largely by miming an ape. Her

initial strong impact was not only diluted by a lugubrious narrative, but also a cutesy American bathos, which got in the way of what she was trying to tell us.

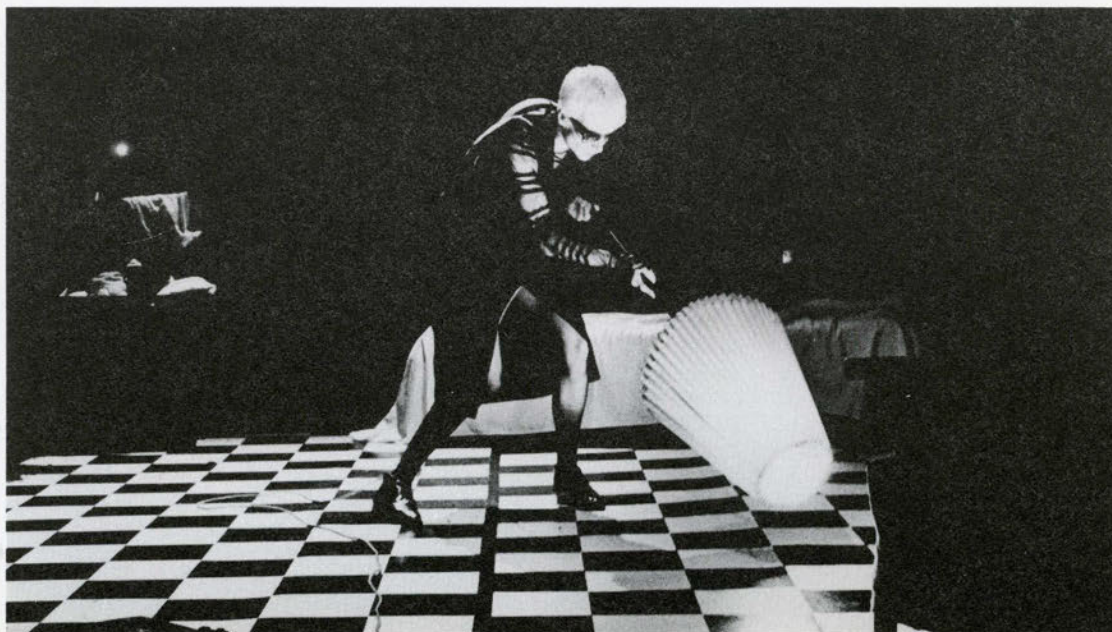
Another legendary artist on display at Kassel was the German video and performance artist Ulrike Rosenbach. Her night-time piece, executed in the classical bower of the Templehof, overlooking the main sculpture park was breathtaking in its simplicity and power. I had heard mutterings that Rosenbach had 'gone religious' and her art work had suffered as a result. In fact, the Dervish dance she did, whirling in a full red cloak, clasping a knife, seemed to me a perfectly appropriate use of ritual for the occasion. When after half an hour of hypnotic 'turning', in which she clearly was experienced, the trance was broken by the loud report of a male, German voice shouting 'shit!' on the soundtrack, she was poised for one tense moment full of real danger, without falling, when it seemed possible to the audience that she might mutilate herself with the knife.

Instead, (the blood of the artist does not always have to be spilt), she carefully cut away the gold hangings surrounding the dome. The performance, and the danger, was finished. But it is moments, potentialities like this that real experimental art is about. Her legend is secure.

A similar, though less potent moment had been achieved by Jurgen Klauke in the performance previously mentioned. Though the intention —

the obvious debunking of the Documenta edifice — was weak, a subtle moment of real danger was felt when, in the darkness, Klauke and his accomplice, carefully dusted down the large metal sculpture, an action which was peculiarly menacing, producing a thrill of anticipation. Then out came the circular saws, the performance cliché of the year. But Klauke's performance, with its cleanly executed directness was one of the better things of the opening weekend.

The people who are trying to keep that moments of real danger going for as long as possible are Minus Delta T. Having seen the *Death Opera* in Berlin presented with some discipline, and with nothing more audience-threatening than sealed fire exits and a powerful water-hose, it seemed back in Kassel they were up to their old tricks again. They have an odd, schizophrenic image that is really at the root, I think of what they are trying to do. By day they operate a public telecommunications resource centre, with open-access radio, publications, and God knows what other sophistications from a large white exhibition bus. By night, they fill the local disco dance floor with oil, knock people over, get uproariously drunk and generally behave like spoilt, overgrown schoolboys. By the time I arrived for their section of Documenta, the authorities were busily disowning them, and it was thus impossible to find out when they were going to perform. It is finally gratifying to see a form of subversion that cannot be subsumed by the liberal tolerance that



Cloud Chamber in  
Amsterdam

PHOTO / MAURICE BUYER

allows car companies with South African connections to be both attacked (Haake and Wodiczko) and product-identified (the large revolving Mercedes in the main show). But the luxury of confusion bears high costs. However subversive, Minus Delta T seem to have an extraordinary network which spreads across Europe.

At the risk of indulging in romanticism, one of the first things that become apparent is that Kipling's Great Game is still alive and well in maelstrom of links and alliances, conspiracies and cross-border confrontations and collaborations. Information, opinions, invitations and rejections, all seem to flow through channels a lot more smoothly than they would in Britain, where competitiveness and the resultant paranoia tend more to the American model.

been on Time-based Arts and their relationship with the artists. 'How do you feel about getting all the money' I asked Co-director Art Van Barneveld on the terrace of an overpriced Cafe in Kassel 'Fine, just fine' he quipped, many of his rivals for funding being in close proximity and went on to describe their performance promotions (they work a little like Projects UK) for the summer. Indeed, nobody I met from Holland seemed to show any animosity towards Time-based for their lucky position — it was almost as if the Dutch artists were determined to resist a policy of divide and rule.

Time-based arts were, when I visited them in Amsterdam, strongly involved in programming the ambitious summer festival, which featured a lot of experimental work. One of the most ambitious pieces was by Cloud Chamber, a group started by

with flames six inches from my nose. The Sisters of Scipion Nascia, the Theatre unit of Neue Slovenische Kunst were performing for the last time *Maria Nablotzka*. The version of Brecht's Baal, which was unceremoniously shut down at Edinburgh last year after being enjoyed for a single performance by a handful of newspaper critics. The sad story is, I am afraid to say, that English audiences have missed one of the most unique theatrical performances of the decade. While deeply suspicious of the 'appropriation' (a convenient excuse) of totalitarian imagery in the NSK's marketing strategy (rather than the art), I should say that this series of constructivist vignettes taking place at eye-level was surprisingly haunting and memorable, even though conducted in the groups native language. Using stylistic set pieces resembling social realist photomontage, the men and women of the 'Sisters' marched, sang, posed, cried, laughed, swaggered and stamped their way to a socialist paradise. While in hell, we could only watch, trapped from the shoulders down.

Like the Polish company, Akademia Ruchu, (whose early work *The English Lesson* outshone most other work at Documenta) NSK are yet again possible proof that cultural isolation is not necessarily a bad thing. Though it has to be said, both Poland and Yugoslavia's art worlds are keenly aware of developments further west. Where, in fact, now Glasnost has hit Russia is the last cultural frontier in Europe?

After Albania, it has to be said, comes East Germany. Yet, leafing through the publicity tray in the DAAD Gallery in Berlin, I came across a roneed sheet advertising and event titled WOHNSINN, an art event taking place in a church in the outer suburbs of E. Berlin. It was stressed to me by one of the organisers of this event that this was an unofficial performance, but not an underground one. A subtle distinction I could only surmise meant that they were treading on a fine line of toleration — days after police had broken up groups of youths attempting to listen to pop music coming from an open air concert the other side of the wall — which fell somewhere short of the Volkspolizei marching in and making arrests, but not that far off. Even so, not many necks twisted towards the door when a bust of Lenin was revealed revolving inside a toilet seat and toy tanks pattered about aimlessly on the stage bearing the legend USSR. But then, wait a moment — Hoenacker is known as a critic of Gorbachev, isn't he? . . . I'm confused. This performance, on the first day I went, wryly announced as a

The Sisters of Scipion Nascia



PHOTO / REBECCA SINKER

In Holland, all this is beginning to change, perhaps, as a more Thatcherite view of arts funding has led to cuts, centralisation of funds, an increased profile of commercial galleries and a more conservative official taste. This year the changed mood seemed to be about to affect the influential Perfo festival, organised by the Mercurial Wink Van Kempen, with rumours that the Rotterdam Arts foundation had removed its funding — later proved to be groundless (but the festival will happen later than usual and in a different venue.)

More serious has been the removal of state funding from several media and performance centres around Holland and concentrating funds on the successful Amsterdam based Time-based Arts. However, as Mediamatic Magazine put it in a recent issue the advance notice meant that the affected organisations have taken the changes in their stride and the real pressure has

performance artists Boris Gerrets, and performing in an indoor riding school. *The Volcano is always Offscreen* was a technically clever attempt to simulate filmic techniques in real time. It contained some fine images, but suffered from an overabundance of visual 'ideas' rather like some English visual theatre companies. In fact, this is a problem one often finds with Dutch work in general, particularly that coming from Amsterdam. This city must surely be the least culturally isolated in the world, and people working in the arts here suffer from an over-exposure to cultural forms, making a lot of work seem derivative.

In Holland, I experienced that peculiarly British form of pleasure, the indulgence 'abroad' of what is forbidden at home, like reading *Spycatcher* or having a beer at ten past eleven. This was to be plucked out of a crowd, blindfolded, and having my head stuck through a hole in a stage

# WHEN THE TUNNEL IS BUILT



Akademia Ruchu's *The English Lesson* — still the best in Europe

social realist play, was in fact pure dada, of the most infantile. A lot of inanity, infantilism, food throwing and misuse of consumer products signified, I assumed, a rejection of the new prosperity of the East. (The organisers — 'things are much better now. All we need is a bit more artistic freedom and it would be perfect').

The following day there was work which seemed to be based on some kind of psychoanalytic experiment. Each of the members of the group were given freedom to act out their fantasies in public, which again usually meant rubbing their bodies with materials, red ash, peculiar to E. Berlin stoves, being one example. The eating of (party) newspapers, obsessive use of cosmetics, and so on. It was really difficult to compare this work critically with other situations. The audiences were of all ages, dressed in early sixties bohemian gear. All seemed to be taking immense pleasure in the proceedings. Perhaps they'd have all preferred watching *Einsturzen*

*Neubaten*, appearing later that night a few kilometres away in *Monster, Myth, Mutation*.

But on the whole, the bucolic innocence of the crowd as they surged out of the church discussing the festival seemed light-years from the doomed punks and broken glass of *Kreuzberg*. Perhaps this is what the wall was built to protect.

The queues of cars backing up for kilometres from the edge of the corridor, as West Berliners attempt to escape their particular form of isolation lead to thoughts of Britain breaking its natural stranglehold of the sea. When the tunnel is built . . .

When the tunnel is built, we shall, at the drop of a hat, swan off to the farthest corners of Europe. To Vienna, home of the actionists, tucked away in its own little corner of Europe, with its ornate , with a right-wing pariah of an ex-Nazi president but a socialist government with a ministry of culture which sponsored the largest and most ambitious exhibition of womens art in

Europe (organised by Silvia Eiblmeyer and Valie Export, who are now preparing a retrospective show of actionism.)

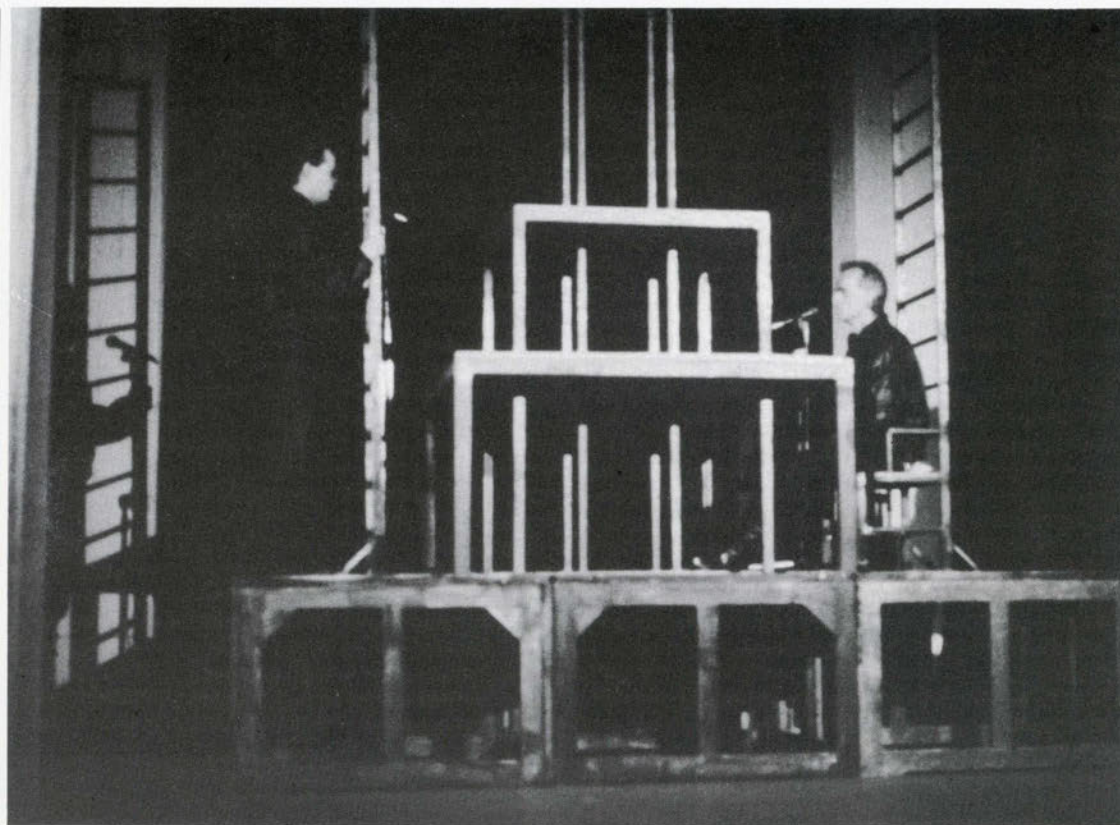
We could go a little further from what used to be the centre of Europe to Budapest, where Vera Bödy, dynamic organiser of the international Infermental organisation is organising an experimental festival.

We shall proceed south, annually to Polverigi, in Italy, where theatre still holds the fort for experiment, in the able hands of Roberto Cimento and Velia Papa, see groups like *Machini Sensibili* (the best of the Italians this year) and *Need Company* (the Belgians of the moment). Cimento and Papa are transposing *Inteatro* to Portugal later this year — combine this with Edgidio Alvaro's performance art event (see article) this October.

We will probably give the now-degraded Avignon Festival a miss — a tedious mixture of the worst aspects of French Cafe theatre and Cabaret in the manner of the worst of the Edinbrugh



PHOTO / P. I. A. JAPPE



Jurgen Klauke —  
destroying the edifice of  
Documenta

festival and proceed west to the much celebrated Barcelona. Here, finally will we find not only the much vaunted Catalan exuberance and excess of La Fura Dels Baus, Comedians and the brilliantly eclectic musician Carles Santos, but also the latest project of Albert Vidal, who, in the guise of an eccentric, seems capable of achieving some of the original Utopian ends of artists who are seriously engaging with the changing of society. Using humour, a lateral approach to life and

art, and above all a deceptive simplicity, he seems to have endless resources to approach any subject. His latest project documentation of which I saw as I was ending this piece, involved an exhibition of 'citizens' many of whom were from his own village in Catalonia, in Barcelona's experimental gallery, Metronom. Here, with quiet dignity, members of various professions approached by Vidal stand on plinths announcing their calling. (Banker, Farmer, Nurse, Teacher,

Lawyer, Playboy, Filmstar, Porter, Cook, etc . . . 40 of them) for the public to inspect them. In an otherwise insecure world, these people feel secure and trusting of an artist.

When the tunnel is built — pre-metaphorically of course (who has faith in the future any longer?), we can retreat further into ourselves or expand and absorb. The choice will be ours. ●

*Rob La Frenais was assisted by an in-service travel bursary from the Training Dept of the Arts Council of Great Britain.*

PHOTO / LEOPOLD SAMSO



Albert Vidal presenting  
Living People



**AN OVERPOWERING CONCENTRATION** on death, memorial, suffering, power and the past seems to have been the inevitable result of choosing the theme of 'art and society' for the 8th Documenta at Kassel. The sombre, reflective manifestations of the polemical art central to current art practice sit uneasily next to a large section on art and design, in which utopian architectural projects for museum spaces and art as furniture and vice versa restate. In their expensive slickness, the ambiguous role of 'social' art objects, in the main Documenta site, the power of their statements is subsumed by their sanitised collectability.

In the setting of immediate post-war Germany, Documenta was established to survey current developments in contemporary art and host an international cultural event as a symbol of German goodwill. The small town of Kassel in South Germany, a few miles from the East German border, was chosen as the site. Every four years, an international but German-dominated committee headed by an artistic director, this year the German academic and critic Manfred Schneckenburger from Cologne, make their exhaustive selection of what has been important and significant within the field of art over the past five years. Inclusion in Documenta is a matter of some international prestige; in many eyes it is the most important international forum for contemporary art. This year, Britain's presence was hardly felt.

The majority of work is contained within two buildings in the centre of town: The Friedrichsmuseum and the Orangerie. A significant body of work outdoors, 'in the streets' and in specific sites is accompanied this year by an extensive performance video and audio programme. The outdoor section, which includes an installation in the church by John Cage, a Richard Serra which blocks off an entire street at one end, the planting of the 7000<sup>th</sup> oak (or sycamore) by Beuys's widow, Les Levine posterworks, a Wodiczko projection and numerous static art works in the surrounding park and streets, almost overtakes the performance, video and audio programmes, and the three overlap with each other at various points.

Of the current 'state of the art' as reflected in Documenta, Schneckenburger proposes that the late eighties are 'a time of reordering and recombining existing strategies rather than a time of the dynamic avant garde'. Certain recent strategies such as 'new spirit' painting, which dominated the last Documenta, have been abandoned, and other, less fashionable

Von Bruch's Coventry

# THE QUINTESSENTIAL EUROPEAN EVENT

**CHRISSIE ILES**  
on Documenta,  
Kassel.



strands, video, performance, mixed media and installation based work, have been given a central position within the exhibition, almost leading one to believe in a genuine triumph of such work over reactionary, market-dominated, canvas-bound superficiality. Yet consumerism, market forces and the elitist status attached to the purchase of the most ephemeral and radical work dictate the true face of late eighties postmodernist culture, and the role of such work within it.

The title of the Performance section: 'Performance Aktion Ritual' (the catalogue essay substitutes 'behaviour' for 'aktion') epitomises the difference in attitude towards live work in Europe. The words 'aktion' and 'ritual'

have meanings which in German hold a greater significance and depth than their English equivalents. The need to include all three in a subtitle to describe the programme is clarified by the division of the programme itself into six parts over the 100 days: theatrical aktion; expanded performance; technology and media; body language; art performance and object-sound-instrument. This wide brief is used to include an enormous range of work, from Jamie Lee Byers and Kaprow to Nan Hoover, Rachel Rosenthal, Academia Ruchu, Meredith Monk, Magazini Criminali and Die Kunst des Geschelenlassens. Not a single British artist is included, although Rose Finn Kelcey and Reindeer Werk receive brief mentions

in the catalogue essay. The majority of performers are German, American and, to a lesser degree, Italian, covering almost every aspect of performance work explored over the last twenty years. Pondering the problem of how to place a performance programme within the Documenta exhibition of 100 days, performance co-ordinator Elizabeth Jappe concludes that the best solution is to place different sections across the months rather than in one block, using a Kassel nightclub, 'Bistro New York', as a focal point for a 'fete permanente', in which artists and public can meet, talk, see work and exchange views. Such a location is obviously limited to a particular type of work, but is outside the gallery context and a genuine attempt to place art into 'everyday life'.

Unlike Europeans, who can catch the train or motor across the border for the sections of their choice, British audiences will have to choose their area carefully. For us it would have been far easier to have had a concentrated block of work to assimilate in a single visit; but then, this is the quintessential European event.

The extensive performance programme reflects the new status enjoyed by live work. Yet it is impossible to capture the power, meaning and impact of earlier rejections of the very art establishment which the Documenta circus represents and celebrates, and the programme suffers from the same kind of institutionalised radicalism encountered in the placing of Haacke's installation, attacking the Nazi connections and South African investments of the Deutsche Bank in the centre of the main entrance hall. The statement sets the tone of a significant part of the show.

Social/political comment, collective guilt, the futility of war and remembrance of the past, with the unstated implications of 'never again', abound. The references to war concern themselves overwhelmingly with the second world war, establishing the European character of the show; wider contemporary conflicts still possess lesser immediate significance. In *Coventry*, an installation by Klaus von Bruch, two silver bomb-shaped torpedo forms rise up to the high

ceiling, topped by video monitors relaying British and German reportage of the famous bombing and destruction of the city of Coventry and its cathedral by the German Luftwaffe in 1940, to a background of Britten's War Requiem. The soaring scale of the metal towers and the positions of the talking heads evokes a cathedral-like presence. Religious awe is replaced by secular remembrance and 'documentary' substitutes 'sermon'.

Another, more poignant and disturbing sense of memorial is contained in Christian Boltanski's *Reserve*, a small room subdivided by metal latticed wall sections on which are hung row upon row of black and white photographs of Jewish children and teenagers. At once graveyard, safe house, memorial and archive, the strange collection of anonymous, silent apparitions, dimly lit, their past echoed more loudly by the knowledge of their untimely death, are barely perceived until entering the narrow, constrained corridors for closer inspection. The contrast between emotiveness (the sense of family album, or the pictures left pinned to the wall of Anne Frank's

Ian Hamilton Finlay —  
at Documenta



PHOTO / CHRISSIE ILES





house) and objectivity was marked by the documentary, archival library atmosphere in which each image provided a source of information and visual proof of something irrevocably lost. The final effect could be read as an attempt at a kind of superficial appeasement were it not for Boltanski's refusal to allow an aestheticisation of suffering.

Robert Morris uses photographic imagery of holocaust victims to a less direct and more ambiguous effect. His large scale picture objects project tinted photographic montage panels from metallic casts within which can be traced a frightening chaotic mass of dismembered hands, heads, feet, phalluses, sections of torn muscle and fragments of bone with pieces of machinery and discarded weapons. Inside the fossilized composure of these 'frames' a scene of Nazi and nuclear holocaust erupts as piles of emaciated bodies are engulfed by a central vortex of fire which threatens to draw in the fragments of corpses surrounding it. The mawkish palette and fiery red light recalls Turner, Delacroix and earlier Renaissance paintings of hell and Dante's inferno. Nineteenth century kitsch and the obsessive, morbid fascination for the reliquary are also evoked. There is a real danger of reducing the relief objects and the horrific photographic imagery of suffering to a venerated, voyeuristic aesthetic horror show in which the idea of the apocalypse is too ambiguously used to freeze the realities of death into a decorative illusion.

Destruction and annihilation are echoed in Kiefer's room of paintings and bookworks. The razing of the land, in this case the fatherland, within the oppressive history of German mythology and the teutonic tragic quest for sublimity and power from which the roots of fascism were born, points to an overwhelming sense of bleakness and desolation. Kiefer's archaic, ruined places continue to disturb and stir up difficult questions within and beyond his native Germany. His stepped *Pyramid*, referring both to a past regime of power and to the Nazi obsession with Egyptology and myth, makes deep and disturbing analogies to the position of his country. Worn out and stifled by its past, wavering between the presence and absence of power.

A more global sense of memorial characterises Jenny Holzer's installation. A darkened room in which engraved texts on the top of two highly polished granite tombstones are repeated on two corresponding vertical newsreel lighting strips, the still coldness of the stone contrasting with the restless movements of the flickering words on the tape relaying

## THE QUINTESSENTIAL EUROPEAN EVENT

news of another world disaster. Alongside it a text by the artist is despondent and cynical in tone, and bitter towards the callousness and pointlessness of violence and human condition.

A single, slowly revolving figure in which are simultaneously expressed aggression, terror, macho militarism and the full, exaggerated horror of the soldier as war-machine brings the spectator straight back to the present. Robert Longo's *Universe of the Zombies* recalls American comic-strip Vulcans, Viet Nam soldiers, Japanese Samurai and classical gladiators. Animal-like in its sharp-toothed double-mouthed snarl and arched back, frozen in mid attack, its anguished staticness contains a strange kind of collective pain, rather like the African carved figure ridden with nails, the fetishised focus for society's anger, fear and aggression. The use of bronze emphasises a historical, classical context which both mimics traditional state statues of heroes of war and echoes the violence of Renaissance figures such as Michaelangelo's 'Head of the Medusa'. The reference to *Zombies* suggests both the alien attackers of American comics and the mindlessness of militarism.

Ian Hamilton Finlay's three wooden guillotines towering menacingly over the picturesque gardens of the slick design-filled Orangerie provide the most chilling epitaph of all. A simulation of classical/historical references to the isolated individualism of Age of Reason and the French Revolution suggest a contemporary equivalent state of being. The guillotine blades, made from characteristic Hamilton Finlay stone, are carved with elegant inscriptions from Milton; 'Frighten me if you will, but let the terror which you inspire in me be tempered by some grand moral idea'.

A moral idea on a grand scale dictates the work of the painting group Irwin, whose work suffers no dilemma between polemic and art market. Showing in the otherwise dreadful 'K-18' 'aperto' section, Irwin have taken over a small warehouse brick room in which is placed a large woodcut of a factory in their native mining town Trbovlje. Soaked in blood and placed behind glass, surrounded by coal in a thick iron frame, cornered by torsoes

and supported by two small square gravestones. A selection from the gestalt presentation of fifty works from the series *Was Ist Kunst* completes the installation, along with graphics by the design and architecture sections of the larger organisation 'Neue Slowenische Kunst' of which Irwin form one third.

The sense of unease conjured by Irwin's provocative iconography, which includes an ambiguous use of images and symbols from the Third Reich, attempts to operate that forcefield of catharsis in a regenerative sense echoed in the restorative qualities of Frederick Jameson's 'homeopathic' theory and in the work of Hermann Nitsch, with whom the group are planning a future collaboration. The context within which this work has been created — liberal communism, no art market — is significant. The piece contains none of the institutionalised pretentiousness of the grand statements uttered within the post industrial urban Western art world.

The dichotomy set up here between polemical statements (Haacke, Holzer, Golub, Group Materials, Levine, Kinzer etc) and the fetishisation of art as consumer object produces an uncertainty of meaning and purpose, in which Western society allows the destructive powers of its political and economic values to be challenged and attacked by one area of its cultural production whilst simultaneously embracing an art which upholds and perpetuates those same values. In short, Documenta 8 reflects precisely that crisis in late eighties postmodernism in which art as we know it has ceased to exist. It is replaced both by an obscure, self referential 'art from art' consumer object and by acceptable social comment. Whether that comment can perform any real function within the constraints of its production, and whether performance can flourish within stifling cultural context such as Documenta is open to debate. Perhaps the most successful solution is that of the greatest strategist Beuys, whose ghostly presence is echoed everywhere within Documenta, in Nam Jun Paik's multi screen video installation of a Beuys performance in Edinburgh, in his installation in the central Freiderichsmuseum space, but above all in his 7,000 oak trees, which will continue to flourish long after Documenta has gone. ●

# BEHIND THE AKTION

Over the past two years the most powerful person in performance in the world has been the unassuming, often elusive, figure of ELIZABETH JAPPE. Dutch-born, living in Germany, she has been responsible for constructing the ambitious performance programme for Documenta. At the opening event she came out of the shadows, and was in fact the most publicly seen of the Documenta organisers, taking responsibility on the ground for much of the chaos and controversy of the performances. ROB LA FRENAIS heard some of her views on the way the event is developing.

**Rob La Frenais:** At what point did you start working on the Documenta project?

**Elizabeth Jappe:** About two and a half years ago at my first meeting with Schneckenburger, when he asked me to start.

**RL:** What kind of strategy did you put into play in terms of your selection?

**EJ:** Well, I started from a time-structure. Of course I had general ideas about what I wanted to be in it. But I first made this structure, putting the programme into these blocks, and then it was my idea to make these themes.

**RL:** Expanded Performance and so on.

**EJ:** Yes. And therefore, each of these weekends would be different. Of course I had some people in my head I knew I would like to have in. Then I started to get information, to get a wider point of view, to meet more people, to see what was going on in other countries.

So last year I travelled a lot. I travelled to the United States and Canada, through Poland and Hungary, and spent a few weeks in Italy, France and so on. I was just collecting as much information as possible.

**RL:** In terms of the main Documenta, what did you feel that your brief was? Presumably your personal preference was affected by that.

**EJ:** Well, in the beginning, I had no idea at that moment what Documenta was going to look like. Schneckenburger himself had no idea. So, I developed my ideas independently from his. What I think was quite strange is that we had the same basic ideas, but what came out in his exhibition was very different from what came out in my performance programme. In the exhibition I think something very clean, quite clear, came out, and in the performance programme there was much more experiment, much more adventure in it. I had not the pretension that everything done in the performance programme was absolutely top-level. I

like to take risks.

**RL:** Do you think that sets up a conflict between the performance programme and the main Documenta?

**EJ:** No conflict. But we tried to really integrate the performances into the Documenta exhibition. It's not easy... it was still seen from outside as two things. For example it would have been much better to have a space for performance inside the exhibition.

**RL:** One of the criticisms I've heard of the performance programme has been that those invited, many of them mature artists in a mainstream way, have felt they still have not been considered equally to other Documenta artists, and that this separation of the performance programme has exacerbated this. Plus little incidents, such as performance artists not being given catalogues, unlike the painters and the sculptors.

**EJ:** I must say one thing, that if you look at the number of artists in Documenta, there are about fifty performance artists to a hundred and ten painters and sculptors. These two numbers do not represent the percentage of performance artists to visual artists in the normal way.

There is not one performance artist to every two painters or sculptors. But I wanted to have many performance artists in the programme because I wanted to be able to show the diversity of the work. The performance artists complained because they had less space in the catalogue, too. I must say it would have been possible had we invited only fifteen and not fifty artists.

**RL:** Why did you invite fifty rather than fifteen, if you felt there was this statistic?

**EJ:** Because, since performance is a very alive art, I think it was important to show that there was this multiple aspect of performance art. With fifteen artists it would have become very monumental, and performance is not monumental, it is something living.

**RL:** Well, yes, this is the case, but you could say that some artists

have started dealing with these monumental themes. For example, the English artist Stuart Brisley. I believe there was a dispute around this with

regard to his coming here. Giving him as an example, what I'm getting at is; naturally this diversity should be represented, but I feel that there are artists who work with performance and installation, who have been working for a long time and have been dealing with the main themes of art, and I wonder whether or not applying this paint brush, this idea of diversity right across the board has not had the usual effect of devaluing the work of live artists. This is a criticism I have heard.

**EJ:** Yes, we have had problems with some artists, and it was not possible to find a solution to the example of Stuart Brisley. I had asked him, quite a long time ago if he wanted to do a performance, and then he also contacted Schneckenburger, because artists had the possibility to make proposals for the exhibition. He wanted to show his sculptures, and his sculptures were not accepted. Many people were not accepted. The number of artists in the exhibition itself was so limited, so many people — even interesting people — had not been accepted. That's the concept of Schneckenburger, it's not my concept. So, some artists have wanted to be in the show and I wanted them to do a performance; some of them accepted not to be in the show and to do only a performance, and others took another position and said if I'm not in the show I won't be in the performance. I don't

# BEHIND THE AKTION



want to be presented only as a performance artist, is what Stuart said. I had to accept it, I was very sorry about it.

**RL:** Rather than talk about specific examples, I wanted to use the example of Brisley to point to a newer principle, which is that people should not be tied down to the role of 'performance artist' just because they have done a lot of performance. One of the problems of performance art is that it has become a genre.

**EJ:** No, there are also other examples. But it is not as though performance artists do not have pieces in the exhibition. I tried to turn it this way — there are other artists who do both performances and visual work who are in the exhibition as well as in the performance programme. It does not mean that somebody who has done performances in his life will never be accepted as a visual artist. Jurgen Klauke and Ulrike Rosenbach are both in the performance section and also in the exhibition. And they are not considered less visual artists because they have done performance.

**RL:** In terms of the monumentalisation, where do you feel that the spirit of Beuys lies in this situation? Is this vast canonisation appropriate? It goes back to an instinctual view I have about this Documenta which is that it seems to be concretising, cementing, these reputations rather than creating new myths. Can you comment on that?

**EJ:** I do not really agree with you. It's not just the person, and not just the visual and plastic work of Joseph Beuys that is being monumentalised now. I know that in Germany there is a younger generation — they have not been students of Beuys, they are only indirectly touched by Beuys — but his spirit is very important for many, many young artists. It's not that they imitate him. The basic idea of the vanishing of the limits between life and art, is still very important to the young generation of artists in Germany. I see the spirit of Beuys everywhere. I think that he is, not as the creator of art pieces, but as a *Spiritus Rector*, still very much present.

**RL:** I remember from a previous conversation that you had said you were looking for artists who combined their life with their art, making life-based works. I wonder if you could explain how that fits in with some of the work you have selected for Documenta?

**EJ:** The expanded performance

weekend — these were mostly the people who work in this way, who don't distinguish any more between their private life and their art. Their house is their studio. There are some others who create situations for a limited time, for example a group of people who start an office or a travel agency, with the whole experience of such a social structure but with another intention, another consciousness.

**RL:** Can you comment on the controversy about Charlemagne Palestine's *God Bear*. (A giant 'epic plush sculpture' of a teddy bear, that visually dominated the proceedings, but seemed to cause embarrassment to the Documenta organisers, who moved it from its original position).

**EJ:** This was exactly one of the examples of what I was talking about before. I invited him as a performance artist. Then, he told me he wanted to be accepted as a sculptor and sent me information which I passed over to Schneckenburger. He thought that the work did not fit into his conception of Documenta 8. At that moment the *God Bear* didn't exist. I told him I was still interested in a performance. Then he found a way to realise the *God Bear* project, quite at the last moment. A few weeks before the opening he told me that the *God Bear* would be arriving, and he asked for it to be placed somewhere in Kassel for the opening. Schneckenburger agreed, and we found a nice place to put it — overlooking the River Fulda, on an old mediaeval tower, looking over the river — a beautiful place and we were all very happy about it. We built a platform, and always tried to get the exact measurements of the bear, but never got them. On the day before the opening the truck arrived with the bear, with the constructor of it from the Stieff toy company and he said the platform was much too small, we can't put it here. So we had had the wrong information from the artist himself. So we were obliged, within one hour, to find another place, because the truck was there with the driver, and they could not stay two days. We had to move very fast to find a place for it. Now Schneckenburger had set one condition — you can put it anywhere you want, as long as it does not touch the installation-idea of the outdoor sculptures. He had his idea of putting up the sculptures in the park and so on, and he could not accept that suddenly, there's a bear in the middle of it.

**RL:** Why not? Actually, why not?

**EJ:** Because he had a space-

conception and he didn't want his space-conception to be disturbed by a bear. (laughter) He had nothing against the bear, but he didn't want it to . . .

**RL:** Of course the Bear is a certain symbol for Germany, and it is very interesting how a construction like that suddenly becomes the symbol of the conflicts in Documenta.

**EJ:** Schneckenburger accepted having the bear somewhere in the Documenta frame — the bear is in the catalogue — he had nothing against the bear but he couldn't integrate the bear into his space-conception. So we found a place for it, and Charlemagne more or less accepted the place. But then two days after we put the Bear in this space we found out that the local Kassel Arts Council was due to put up a tent there for their own festival. In the meantime the artist had decided he wanted the bear to stay till the end of Documenta — it was his decision, it was going to tour — he changed his mind. So we had to move it, and hired a big crane, found another place, transported the bear to another place. But the owners of the park suddenly found out there was a bear in their park, and told us to immediately take it out — they didn't want a bear! In the meantime Charlemagne had been contacting all the local arts organisations, and everybody had told him — we want to keep the bear, we'll help you to keep it here. We had told him the bear could stay but we could not afford the cost of moving it, local organisations promised help but in the end they did nothing. So it was transported back, close to where it was next to the tent, and Charlemagne is very angry with everybody, not only the Documenta organisers. It turns out that nobody is against the bear, but nobody wants to take responsibility for it.

**RL:** As I say, it's interesting how it has become a great symbol. Of course, the answer is to put it in front of the Frederichs Museum (where the main exhibition is situated). It would be a wonderful symbol for Documenta. It would be the first thing people see.

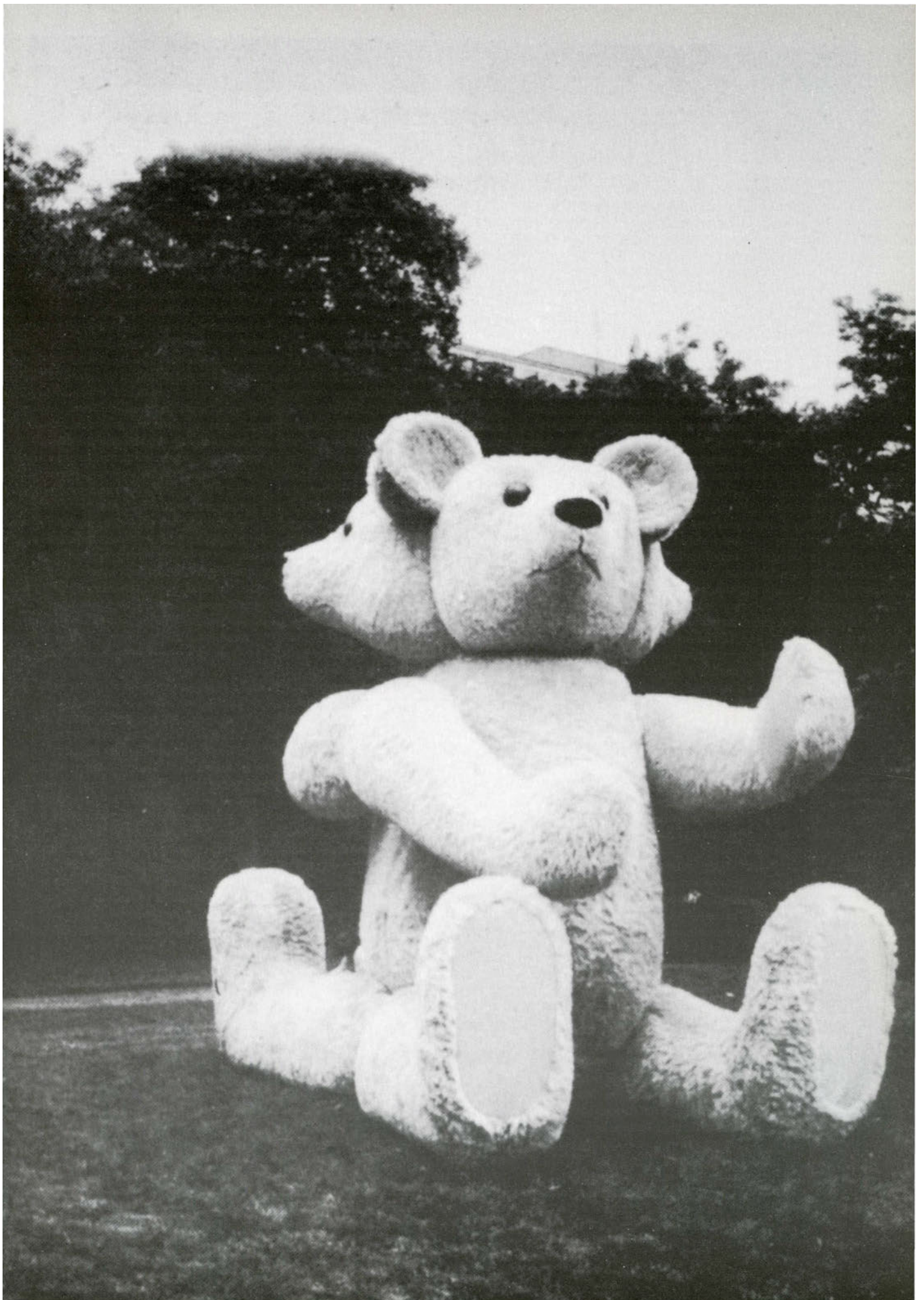
**EJ:** Schneckenburger and the Documenta committee cannot, they do not want to accept it as a symbol for Documenta. It's not their interpretation of Documenta.

**RL:** But in a sense, if you look at the philosophy as it would appear, of Documenta such an organic evolution of a symbol should fit within the concept.

**EJ:** Then I think you should really ask Schneckenburger himself. I cannot give the answer.

**RL:** On one hand it's very absurd that there should be all this fuss about a teddy bear. On the other hand it is a very potent symbol, and the





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Elizabeth Jappe



PHOTO / ROB LA FRENALS

effect it's had on the organisation is very interesting. Don't you agree?

**EJ:** Yes, I can accept, and I like the idea that it's becoming a symbol, because people want it to become a symbol. I also understand Schneckenburger's decision, because there is already a work in front of the Fredricianum which is quite invisible, but it is there. As a curator he cannot accept that a work coming in later can destroy the work of an artist who was already there. I accept that. I understand it. I even think he is right.

**RL:** A lot of money and effort has been poured into the Documenta concept. Do you think it has become time to reassess that as a totality?

**EJ:** Yes. I don't want to speak against Documenta, but I really think things have to be rethought. I have the feeling also that it has become such a big thing, and such a pretension to be the most important art exhibition in the world. This is such a terrible responsibility, that the organisers cannot really be free in their decision, because they always have this terrible oppression — what is the world going to say? You can hardly take any risks.

**RL:** The desire to create a world-scale event is of course also in the minds of critics and curators internationally. One of my criticisms of what's going on here is that there is either a re-affirmation or destruction of reputations taking place. Myths and legends have been created around Documentas in the past, but this year no new myths are being created. Reputations have been placed on a pedestal and in some cases knocked over. I feel that performance for example IS becoming important again, and this importance should have been more stressed in this Documenta. It may have successfully attacked the monolithic concept.

**EJ:** It was quite new to bring so many performances into the exhibition. In earlier Documentas there

have been a few performances at the opening, perhaps just a few afterwards, and now there are many, and nobody knew exactly how to handle this within the overall frame of Documenta. My problem, for example, was that journalists got the information about the performances and they never went to see them. At the opening, for example, all the journalists went to see the exhibition and not the performances. Next time, I would do it differently, make different proposals to the critics, make a different kind of publicity for the performances.

Because I'm always very optimistic and I think that people come and inform themselves of what's happening, but really people are so lazy, they never ask themselves what's going on. And journalists, especially now they get everything soft, already pre-digested, have no curiosity.

**RL:** Do you think a major world event such a Documenta should remain in Kassel?

**EJ:** I think there is a problem. People are willing to come once, in five years, to Kassel. People come from all over the world to the opening. They come and see the exhibition once. Everything that goes on after the opening — many, many activities, I have the feeling that all this energy is lost — people come and see it but . . . when they come to Kassel they know they can just take what is there. They cannot come all the time because Kassel is so far from any art centre. Only very few people have the possibility to see much of the performance. If Documenta was in an area in which many culturally interested people live, people could go and see it all the time. I live in Cologne, and Dusseldorf, Essen, and Bonn are all close. If there is a performance in Bonn I take my car and drive. For performance this is very bad luck, because nobody will travel there

just to see one performance.

**RL:** That's the practical aspect. What about the philosophical aspect? It strikes me that there seems to be a view, in terms of making an exhibition of world importance in a place like Kassel, a desire to extend the art into the social sphere, using this as a model. Integrating the art, not just on an architectural level, but also within the social fabric. Has Kassel been transformed by such an event taking place? Does it have a social meaning for the city? Are you saying that this project is a failure, has not worked?

**EJ:** I think the real integration of art into the city is more a kind of dream. Because to integrate art into society, that society also has to accept it. Documenta is not really accepted by the population. People say when something happens — 'Oh, that's Documenta,' and it's a negative statement. The population of Kassel does not identify itself with Documenta. Not at all. I have more and more the feeling when I hear people shopping, or in the street, that this is something that's just disturbing their normal life.

**RL:** And this is part of a larger intolerance?

**EJ:** Yes. I have the feeling that some years ago people were more open to see something new, to accept provocation for example. And now they are not. People just want to be secure, and art doesn't make you secure. I think that it also has to do with the reactionary spirit that is spreading everywhere in Europe.

**RL:** A new polarisation between artists and society?

**EJ:** I think, after the late sixties, artists and intellectuals really hoped to change society. Beuys is typical of this. The Beuys idea was very large at that moment. There is a feeling more and more that this was too optimistic, too Utopian, to think in a few years you can change the mind of a whole society.

**RL:** You are suggesting a retreat to a ghetto of artists?

**EJ:** Well, ghetto seems like having to defend yourself, also against the outside world. That's not what we are looking for. We have to accept that even if we want to open up towards society, society is not interested. So if we always sit and wait . . . we become frustrated, like a woman who's always sitting and waiting for her lover. And the lover never comes. If you always sit and wait for society, and society never comes to you . . . you invite them once, and then once more, and once more and finally you say 'OK, forget it'. Just let the artists stay together and do the work we want to do — without them. ●



# MYTHS, MONSTERS AND MUTATIONS

**KEN GILL**, one of the founder members of Projects UK, Newcastle, has lived for some time now in Berlin. Here he reflects on the nature of his adopted city and on a major Berlin event which attempted to create a fusion or 'mutation' of rock music and performance.

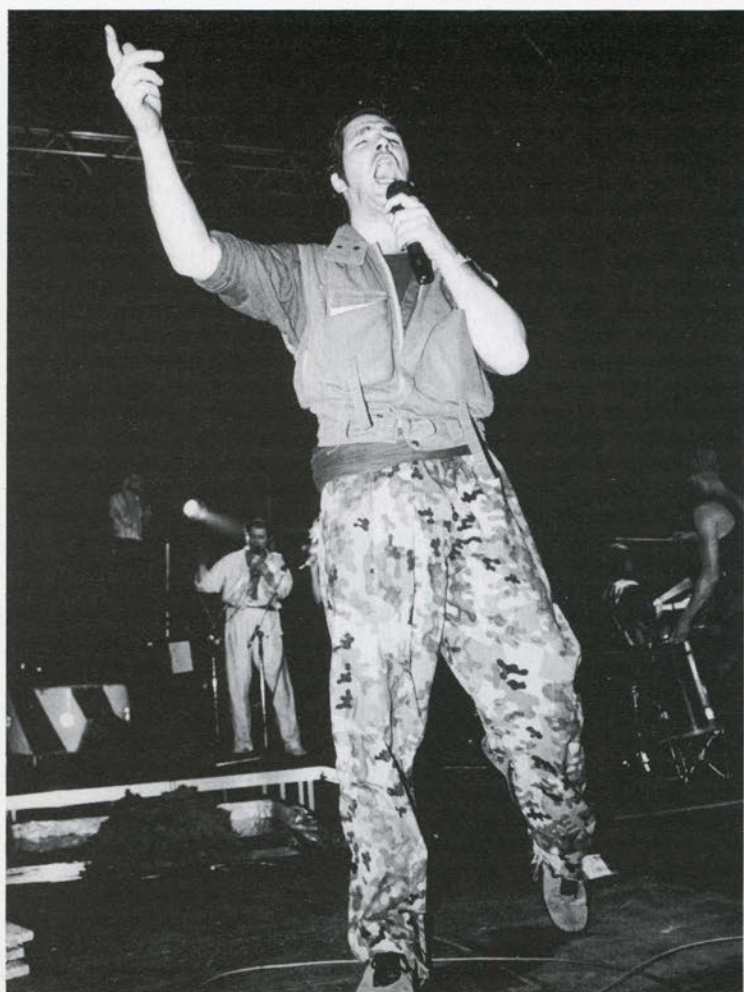


PHOTO / PETRA GALL

1987 MAY BE remembered more in Berlin as the year of the riots, than as the city's 750th anniversary. In the spring there were three major street battles with police firstly over the census, then over Reagan's four-hour visit, for which 10,000 West German riot police were drafted in, and then more turmoil after a demo because of the death of a man in police custody (suicide . . .) following the first riots. *Denken an Bolle* is a graffiti slogan I have seen, which a cynic could interpret as the '87 version of a post May '68 'Remember Prague' daubing. Bolle is the German equivalent of Safeways, and a large branch was looted and burnt to the ground during the first skirmishes. I am sure it was meant in black humour, because as a rallying cry 'Remember Bolle' summons up a comic image which somehow illustrates the impotence of opposition on the street in the West Berlin police state (one cop per one hundred people in the city plus the allied armies) coupled to a very right wing government. The German method of dealing with riots is to move more riot police into the area and wait for it to happen again!

Against this background the festival Myths, Monsters, Mutations struck a sympathetic chord, as the majority of participants were artists whose work is earthy, expressionistic and physical — many of whom deal to some degree with big issues such as death or personal identity. There is certainly no

Minus Delta T



## MYTHS, MONSTERS AND MUTATIONS



doubting the theme's popularity, as it attracted audiences of up to two and a half thousand each night. On the whole the programme promised to be a sensory extravaganza, shamelessly non-intellectual, but somehow an artistic expression in the spirit of the moment. The selection looked like that on paper, including the likes of La Fura Dels Baus, Einstürzende Neubauten, Diamanda Galas, Art Minus Delta T, the (Hungarian) Galloping Coroners and others, but in reality most performances were full of sound and fury, signifying very little else.

The venue for Myths, Monsters, Mutations was the splendid Tempodrom, a massive circus tent which lent the ideal ambience to the 6 day festival. The week got off to a curious start with the Dutch group Target II. To begin with, a large robotic arm suspended from an overhead frame with video cameras mounted on moved around a central area and scanned the audience, zooming in on people. The images were projected onto a four metre square screen. Two Isadora Duncan-type dancers then came on stage and performed somehow in relation to the robot. There seemed to be no development of this interaction that I could readily perceive however, and the whole thing smacked very much of techno-wizardry in the manner of an audio-visual stunt that might be used at the Motor Show to launch a new car.

An unannounced surprise addition to this was Ivan Unwin from Manchester, England whom I would describe as a junior Actionist. His *Residue Septic Activity* involved the liberal use of white flour, body bags of raw meat, a nasty looking electric drill and a certain studied indifference to the dangers of electricity.

Outside the tent Knut Hoffmeister was finishing a Vostell-like assemblage of 40 assorted televisions embedded in a trussed-up Ford Granada playing the full gamut of Berlin television stations plus video material of his own films. The idea is as old as the hills, but the piece had a certain straightforward integrity as a simple statement on the thirst for consumption, and in the dark with the headlights on it looked terrific.

Day two began once again with Target II, but their show was curtailed

early as one of the dancers was clouted on the head by the robotic arm. I unfortunately missed the Frank Chickens, but arrived to see the whole of Der Plan's show. Described as Dusseldorf's 'cult band' they reminded me a lot of the Residents. Without an intimate knowledge of the German language it would be unfair to attempt an appraisal, but essentially using pre-recorded songs, all composed in a deliberately bland muzak style, the three men mime, often with highly coloured cut-outs on a small all black box-stage. Usually there is some simple, often absurd, narrative. For example a jolly, smiling sun arcs over the stage, a sturdy tree in the foreground, and then a tractor moves to the foreground; curtain. After each number the curtains closed. The all-important lyrics were clearly high in irony, and greatly enjoyed by a captivated audience. Non-German speakers could enjoy some amusing images such as the cubist pop group: a full stage painting like an animated Guernica, or a giant eye ball with a mouth attempting to scoff a four storey hamburger.

La Fura Dels Baus aside, the only other performance that did not take itself deadly seriously was Berlin's own Butzmann and Kapielski. Working in the tradition of Fluxus their *Neo Be Be Teutonic* was a chaotic journey into musical incompetence and cute conceptualism. I liked them, but a lot of people seemed somewhat bewildered. The 3 part 'schrank opera' was of particular note, the climax of each act being punctuated by the collapsing of a wardrobe.

Programming them on the same night as the very po-faced Einstürzende Neubauten also shows great flair. Germany's number one music attraction still enjoy a large following, but they are really a spent force: a rock band with two metal bangers rather than a drummer. Like several other artists during the week, they demonstrated clearly that making as much noise as possible does not make the work more effective, let alone interesting. Live, they lose control of the light and shade that exists on their records, especially '½ Mensch', and just go hell for leather, but still restrict themselves to playing 'songs' which seems to me to be at odds with the spontaneity they wish to induce in themselves and the audience. Likewise, Zev, who plays assorted metal junk and gongs, seemed to have one idea and stuck to it. With a collection of pipes on a ring he swung them around so they sounded like bells and crashed them on the floor over a period of five minutes or so. Each gong he banged repeatedly never changing timbre or building rhythmically, syncopating,

etc. Consequently no particular alteration in perception in the listener occurred, no resonance of any kind built up, in fact no particular strategy at all was pursued, it was just very loud and went on for a long time.

Over the week, three different performances stood out from the rest for differing reasons: Diamanda Galas for the sheer power of her work plus the clarity of intent and presentation. La Fura Dels Baus for their massive popularity, and Minus Delta T for their daring in tackling the impossible: they were the only artists to really take chances in the whole festival.

Diamanda Galas was on top form. As usual the Diva's stage presentation was immaculate, utilising stark and uncomplicated lighting to enhance the moods of the work. Her whole stage presence and initial entrance is as a prima-donna, maximising audience anticipation, building the drama of the moment when she finally appears on the darkened stage to a filmic bass rumble, hair wild, white faced in a black ball gown.

The whole melodrama could so easily have been dreadful Hammer-tack, but it works because as soon as she opens her mouth and sings, something extraordinary happens, and one is drawn almost inextricably into a chilling, vertiginous world. The work has an undeniable potency, and it almost seems as if the jabbering voices are speaking *through* her. She describes this grandly as 'intravenous sound', but it seems more likely to be the coupling of a masterly technique with an almost palpable intensity. When she performs *The Litanies of Satan*, she seems almost possessed. It's disturbing. Although she only performed two older pieces, *The Litanies . . .* and *Wild Women with steak Knives*, the promise in her newly recorded work is that she is leaving behind the altogether dodgy Satanic Majesty stuff, and writing material potentially much more disquieting in content, dealing in real world horrors of AIDS and religious fanaticism. She is tremendously popular in Berlin and is clearly an artist whose work can reach a wide audience without being compromised. By the same token, I sense she is someone who would provoke violent reactions to her work simply through the way it is presented: I am sure that if one were in the wrong mood her whole shock horror gothic show would seem laughable.

La Fura Dels Baus provided the big spectacle people seemed to desire. The Catalans give an audience nowhere to hide, and are sufficiently unfettered by intellectual complexities in their work to keep the majority interested. Essentially that is all their show was: a spectacle with a thread of narrative to keep it going, a kind of sci-fi battle

between two opposing hordes, with a couple of sketchy heroes as the main players. Performing in jock-straps, they descend from the roof on ropes with the expertise of monkeys, they career around on giant trolleys, they chuck entrails, blood and water around, there is loud tribalistic music. In short everyone has to think fast to avoid getting wet or covered in flour. That is the long and the short of it, but it is also unmistakably a play on sado-masochism. The one long quiet scene in the piece is as two embryo-like figures are submerged in giant glass

water tanks. They sit/float in the water breathing through aqualungs unable to get out (there is a grid over the top of the tank) bobbing gently in the water. It is both a soothing and worrying image. Another person approaches each tank from the outside and a form of ritual ensues as the character embraces the tank erotically, then pushes the other figure with a stick further under, then climbs into the tank where they both struggle under water, then finally rescues him. Later the same S-M games ensued as two opposing characters were strung up by hands and legs on the

large trolleys and variously abused and teased. The audience loved it — the group playing an extra night by popular demand after the festival. Gladitorial chest-beating is popular everywhere I suppose, but the coupling of homo-eroticism with images of bondage, burning and drowning left a bad taste in my mouth.

The most ambitious presentation in Myths, Monsters, Mutations came from the Mike Hentz/Karel Dudesek 'hard-core art group', Minus Delta T, with their *Death Opera*. The reputation of this group runs ahead of them, and on

La Fura dels Baus



PHOTO / PETRA GALL





## MYTHS, MONSTERS AND MUTATIONS

the strength of the press they have received, and the stories that circulate, The Temple Of Psychic Youth seems like a Sunday school in comparison. They are undoubted masters of hype, and spent most of the Festival press conference enlightening us as to the content and intent of the Death Opera, but I was as unclear at the end of that twenty minute spiel as I am now having seen it. I am tempted to say that, like Genesis P. Orridge, they are really more interested in building the myth than in clarifying their work. In fact clarity may be the last thing they want. There's no denying the uncompromising nature of some of their earlier actions. The notorious De Appel incident some years ago when

the audience was stripped, caged and held to ransom. *The Bangkok Project* which involved stealing a 5½ ton standing stone from Wiltshire, and transporting it by lorry to the Far East. A photo project of theirs was particularly mind-boggling. Large prints of the two main protagonists with the Ayatollah Khowmeni, Lech Walesa and the Pope among others. The hair raising methods that must have been engaged in order to gain some of those images I find extraordinary.

Having said that, Minus Delta T did not pull punches in presenting the Death Opera. It was a shrewd move to use the highly stylised operatic form as it allowed them to mix their more "sensory" methods with theatrical ones such as singing, video projections, dancing, etc. The circus atmosphere of the piece was enhanced by the locale, there was a real sense of excited anticipation. A huge world map hung over the large stage of 'jetties', ramps, raised and sunken zones, the audience milling around various volumes of the installation. It looked very much like a

television studio, with areas where scenes looked likely to be played out: a small pool of unidentifiable liquid, two greenhouses — one turned out to be a changing room, the other a kitchen. As with all their work, everything was filmed, photographed and sound recorded.

Twenty five people took part in the piece which began with projections onto the three enormous video screens, at the back, with text such as 'do you know fear, do you know the taste of blood, do you know the smell of death' etc. The image of a barking alsatian then heralded the start of the action, as musicians, singers and dancers began. This was where I lost the thread of what was going on, or what was being sung about. Video images of computer information to do with missile capabilities I seem to remember, and the various 'abuse the audience' acts that were perpetrated throughout, such as throwing flour over everyone (again! 3rd night running!) and later spreading a crescent of burning petrol around the group of spectators at the stage front. Later still a powerful fire hose was turned on this group which effectively drove them back. Almost immediately afterward hundreds of bottles of wine were given out to the audience, and the group sat down to a huge banquet in the centre of the stage, a number of the audience joining them. Almost as if they had passed the initiation ceremony of flour, fire and water.

What specifically *Death Opera* was about, what it was forwarding and de-bunking, remain mysteries for me. What seems more clear is that like the earlier actions, Minus Delta T are continuing in a quest to re-sensitise an audience, to allow it to experience real events and emotions. The main problem with this is that it is always 'negative' experiences such as fear that are wished upon that audience, they seem always to control the situation.

For me, one lesson to be confirmed through this festival is that multi-media, albeit fairly non-cerebral, performance has broad popular appeal, as it presents the possibility of actual audience involvement in some kind of cathartic experience, just as pop concerts have always attempted to do but been generally thwarted by the limitations of the medium. Within the highly regulated society that is West Germany there is a deep yearning to experience primeval sensations within some sort of theatrical setting. I think that was the intention of Monica Döring in organising "Myths, Monsters, Mutations", and at the risk of backing the views of the right wing press, I think for many people who took part in them, that was the reality of the recent riots. ●

Diamanda Galas



PHOTO / PETRA GALL

One of the most wasted opportunities, from the point of view of art having any relevance for the contemporary world, is that critics writing about the connection between art and politics almost invariably understand 'politics' in terms of an already existing frame of reference.

One all-too-typical example of this was Andrew Graham-Dixon's review of Gilbert and George's recent London exhibitions, at the Hayward and d'Offay Galleries, for *The Independent*: after ridiculing the terrible duo's pretensions to be revolutionary on the grounds that the youths in their photo-pieces looked too 'limp-wristed' and 'coy' while they themselves looked insufficiently 'threatening', he went on to say that there might, however, have been some political significance in pieces like *Doom* in that they addressed the issue of 'inner city decline'. Inner

beyond an accumulation of factual information. His work operates at an entirely conscious level, whereas it is the specific function of art to create a bridge between the conscious and unconscious. Nor does this simply mean bringing in psychoanalytical considerations in the way that, for example, Victor Burgin does — though this is certainly a vast improvement. For Burgin treats the unconscious in altogether too conscious and controlled a way, effectively containing it before it can truly disturb or enrich. Gilbert and George's work, on the other hand, does bring up things which genuinely disturb and enrich, which is the result of a far more intuitive and confessional approach. Their conscious political views, as individuals, are only of anecdotal interest (it would be as intelligent to dismiss their work as merely 'right-wing' as it would be to

the utmost value to our culture as a whole, and hence indirectly to the future of this planet.

This can only be understood, however, by those outside the small minority of people who are personally in tune with the art in question, and the potential value of this work can only therefore be realized, if the intuitive explorations undertaken in the art are followed up and complemented by intellectual and theoretical work of a more systematically coherent nature, drawing on and cross-referencing with such disciplines as anthropology, biology, economics, literature, psychology, sociology, etc., as well as political history and theory. Otherwise, the insights remain seemingly random: so that, whether or not the art is feted and acclaimed, it stays confined within the framework of the art world, which

What is the role of politics in European art today? Do artists always want to be 'on the side of the angels'? GRAY WATSON asks some pointed questions about what we desire from art.

# INTEGRATING THE BEAST

city decline is a real enough problem, no doubt, at a practical level; but the phrase had become a cliché long before Margaret Thatcher and Prince Charles jumped on the bandwagon. So, come to that, had — long ago — the simplistic notion of 'revolution' as some seizure of power through a manly show of force which Graham-Dixon seemed (I may be maligning him) tacitly to have in mind. That journalists need to continue using such stale and superficial concepts may, although regrettable, perhaps also be understandable, but if art is to make its specific contribution to our understanding of political reality, it must operate at an altogether deeper and more original level.

That is why someone like Hans Haacke would much better be thought of as an investigative journalist rather than an artist: he knows in advance, and so do we, exactly what his ideological stance is — it is one which any half-way politically literate person can comprehend with ease — and he adds nothing to our understanding

dismiss Picasso's or Ernst's as merely 'Communist', or Michelangelo's or Giotto's as merely 'Catholic'.) There is, come to that, little reason to suppose that the conscious political views of any artist are much more profound than the average politician's taste in art: it is in a much subtler way that art can offer radically new insights into political reality. And indeed much of the best contemporary art — I am thinking here of the work of, among many others, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Dieter Appelt, Alice Aycock, Helen Chadwick, John Duncan, Jan Fabre, Roberta Graham, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Barbara Heinisch, Rebecca Horn, Anselm Kiefer, Suzanne Lacy, Vivien Lisle, Denis Masi, Anne and Patrick Poirier, Alain Resnais, Ulrike Rosenbach, Rachel Rosenthal, Lydia Schouten, Barbara Smith, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Katherina Thomadaki and Maria Klonaris, and Teresa Tyskiewicz — does offer insights into political reality which, although hardly even recognized as having anything to do with politics at all, are potentially of

means essentially that it is treated as a somewhat up-market and esoteric hobby, a matter of personal taste. The necessary conceptual contextualization requires not imposing any existing framework onto the art, but rather learning from it and using its insights as the basis for a complete transformation of the political paradigm.

This is not a new need. Ever since the time of Goya, much of the best art has thrown out clues which could have helped to transform the political paradigm more profoundly than any mainstream political theory (Marxism is almost certainly the main example) has in fact done. In its shallower moods, the Romantic movement may have simply glorified irrationalism but Romanticism still retains extreme relevance today because, without despairing, it faced up to and shone a spotlight on those aspects of human life which make what was best in the Enlightenment, progressive ambition — that we should take control of our own destinies rather than being



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buffeted around by fate — so difficult of achievement. This difficulty is not simply a matter of conflicting class interests, even 'in the last resort'. Human irrationalism is not solely, even indirectly, a result of class oppression, poverty, enforced ignorance, etc.; nor, come to that, can its worst aspects — bigotry, prejudice, violence — at all easily be separated from what is most inspiring and worthwhile in terms of human potential, a fact very clearly seen by, for example, Georges Bataille.

Potentially helpful clues about the workings of political power continued to be thrown out by all those movements which reflect the influence of Romanticism: Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism, etc. In the case of Surrealism, the connection between politics and the irrational was, of course, more consciously articulated than ever before; but significantly, it was far less in the theoretical writings of André Breton and his associates than in such paintings as Max Ernst's *One Night of Love* that the most interesting insights were achieved. Surrealism is a typical example of a movement which has been superficially accepted as part of our established high culture, but without any real understanding of what it was trying to communicate, being gained. In particular, our culture has been unable to take on board the significance of the intimate relationship that exists between the sacred and the obscene, and the relevance of this for an understanding of our present political options. Hence it is not surprising that the reaction to post-war artists like Carolee Schneeman and the Viennese Actionists, who challenged moral taboos in an uncompromisingly direct way, hardly went beyond shocked outrage (or, conversely in a few people's cases, childish glee): the conceptual framework necessary to appreciate such art's potentially helpful contribution to our understanding of ourselves and the world was lacking.

It is highly relevant that when great art is dealing with what could be described as evil, the artist never sees himself or herself as solely on the side of the angels, projecting the evil onto others. That, one can see in retrospect, is largely why *Guernica* is a great painting, because for Picasso the bull was as much himself as it was fascism. That, one can also see in retrospect, is largely why Goya was an infinitely greater artist than Jacques-Louis David, or Max Beckmann than Georg Grosz, or Rachel Rosenthal than Barbara

Kruger. Propagandistic art, which fails to recognize the demonic in the artist's self, is not only morally deficient, in terms of love and generosity; it is also intellectually deficient, in that by comparison with more confessional art it has much less to teach us about the reality of human feelings and action.

One of the excuses used most often by those who dislike art delving into human irrationality, except in a safely propagandistic way, is that art which does so is merely 'expressionistic', implying that it is only of interest in connection with the individual psychological problems of the artist. Obviously, much bad art exists which is just 'expressionistic' in this sense. It certainly does not, however, apply to the Expressionists or, for example, to Hermann Nitsch or Barbara Heinisch; and Nietzsche, who was an immanent influence on all these artists, was uncompromisingly clear in his denunciation of 'expressionism' in that indulgent sense. No serious artist needs reminding that strict form, even if it is not always immediately perceptible to the spectator, is an essential element of all good art; nor does anyone watching, for example, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker dancing, need reminding that often enough quite perceptible strictness of form, far from being incompatible with emotionally intense subject-matter, vastly enhances its power. Nor, indeed, does anyone with any understanding of art's capacities need reminding that at its best it achieves a certain universality and objectivity. The unwarranted accusations of 'expressionism' levelled by so many critics against much of the best recent art betray unacknowledged fear: fear, above all, that the revelations which such art makes will explode the dream which these critics, in common with so many others in our society, still cherish — that human nature is different in kind from, and separable from, animal nature. Their dream, essentially, is still the Dream of Reason satirized by Goya; and it is not unrelated to the Apollonian dream which Nietzsche contrasted with drunken Dionysiac reality. To accept and to integrate the Beast Within is not to surrender to it; successfully accomplished, it is to enhance immeasurably both one's awareness and one's creative powers, although no sane person would minimize the difficulties along the way.

It is, perhaps, this desire to drive a wedge between the human and the

animal which prompts another more sophisticated ploy, very frequently resorted to by those who wish to belittle and contain the disturbing implications of human irrationality: the obsession with language. Their mainstay, of course, is Lacan: rather than denying the irrational, Lacanians wrap it up in obscure, often pseudo-mathematical, jargon. In such people's hands, the study of 'language' is used not to deepen our awareness of what it is that the id is trying to communicate but precisely to direct attention away from that. Their particular brand of psychoanalytical theory becomes a massive defence mechanism against the actual experiencing of the subject-matter they purport to be studying.

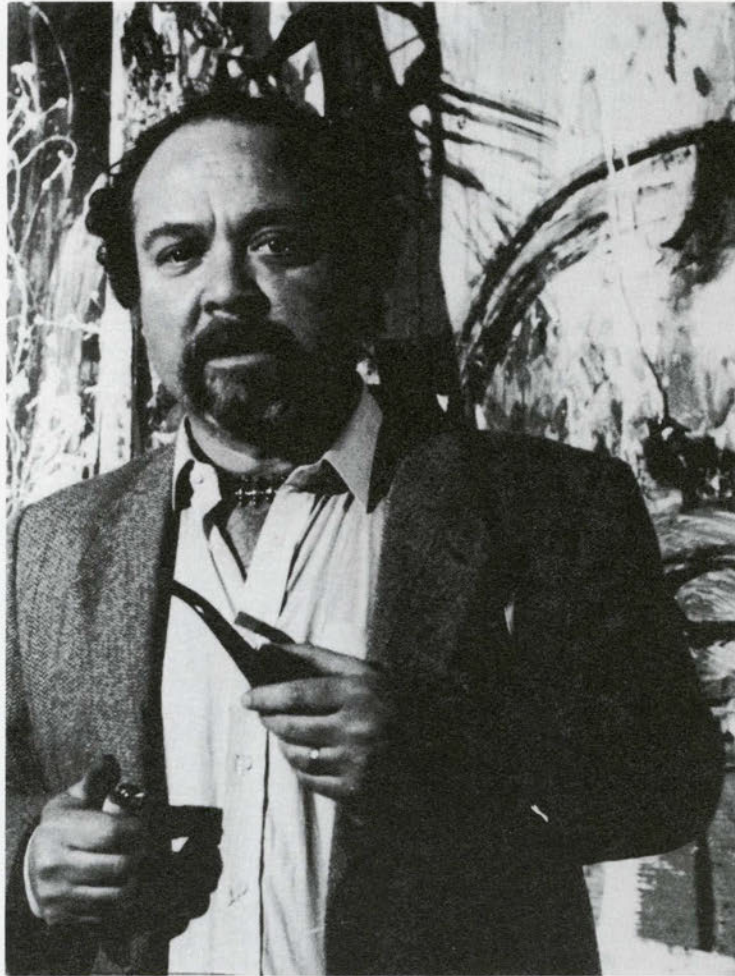
What is needed, therefore, is an entirely new conceptual framework which does not sidestep but deals directly with the unconscious and irrational element in human affairs. Without neglecting formal, linguistic and semiological issues, it should be more fundamentally concerned with content. Psychoanalysis and related psychological traditions should be particularly heavily drawn on, in an open, non-dogmatic spirit; in this connection, Melanie Klein would probably be far more helpful than Lacan. The relationship between psychoanalysis and politics is still a pitifully under-researched area, and most of the work which has been published in it clings to the (post-) structuralist orthodoxies. Starting, however, from Freud's sketchy comments on mass psychology and from such books as Moscovici's *The Age of the Crowd* and Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*, some progress can be made, although it is clear that such thin beginnings will almost immediately need enriching with other material, whose relevance may at first appear more tangential. In the process, our understanding of what constitutes the 'political' is likely to be altered entirely.

This new conceptual framework is needed not only so that much of the best contemporary art — and in particular much of the best contemporary performance art — which at present has to operate in relative obscurity, can receive the wide appreciation and the high evaluation which it deserves. It is also needed because anyone interested in the future of this planet cannot afford to overlook what this art has to offer. ●

In Britain mini-festivals of international Performance Art are unheard of but have become a regular feature of artistic life in most European countries thanks, in large part, to the efforts of one man, EGIDIO ALVARO. TARA BABEL recently participated in one of his events in Paris which she here reviews as well as talks to its prolific and charismatic organiser.

VERRIÈRES, THE NAME referring to the glass skylights, is the working studio of seven French artists, who share this bright spacious atelier. The 14th district of Paris, traditionally recognised as an artistic stronghold for young contemporary artists, now seems to live off bygone days and romantic notions of a reputation that kept Paris the centre of the art world for many generations. The reality of the eighties has brought a keener sense of practicality and a wider margin for experimentation. Verrières, as a group of artists are developing this potential, collaborating with other organisers, opening their studio doors for well publicised exhibitions of their own work and lending the space to more alternative ventures such as *Intervention 3*, an International Festival of Performance organised by an extraordinary Portuguese man — Egidio Alvaro. Alvaro is the director of Gallery Diagonale/Espace Critique in Paris, professor of the course 'Performance in Europe' at the University of Paris VIII and organiser of many festivals around Europe and sometimes further afield in Canada and America. He never seems to miss an opportunity to meet and search out new artists and venues, enabling him to create a continual chain of events and dialogue in the area of live art. So when Alvaro summons you, I would advise that you drop everything and go if you want to witness an event injected with spontaneity, energy and something different. I bought myself a cheap five day return and caught the train for this festival which took place on the 5th and 6th May. The event came about through an exchange with Germany, when last year Egidio took a group of Parisien artists to Cologne to *Moltkerei Werkstatt*, and now, for this year, enlarging the workshop and expanding the exchange to include twenty or so artists from France, Italy, Portugal, Germany and the UK who all gathered at Verrières for these two rather compact days financially assisted by OFAJ (Office Franco-Allemand

# CROSSING THE DESERT



Egidio Alvaro

pour la Jeunesse.)

The events were indeed varied including action painting, dance, improvised music, multimedia performance and a specially made sound sculpture made by German artist Gunter Demnig. Much of the improvised dance was rather predictable. Suspicious in its concept and at times unbearably embarrassing to watch. The dance groups in attendance were *Multitude*, (France), *Angie Heisl*, (Germany) and *Maroussia Vossen* accompanied by *Jacques Bruyere*, (France), the latter stirring up the most vitality, a gymnastic dancer and a lone percussionist whose beats assaulted the high ceilinged room with

aggression and defiance, the dancer's body competing against the drummers rhythmic virtuosity.

There seems to be a revival of action painting in Europe, although I suspect it was never entirely out of fashion. Painters who seek more than the two dimensional surface of the canvas, who become aware that the process supersedes the end result and the confrontational aspect of this process produces in effect an authentic and positive perception of a visual image.

Jacques Guého and Luc Lerouge, two experienced painters carry out their tasks with a passionate conviction and intent that encompasses personal concepts, visual imagery, and



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immediate reaction.

Guého begins from behind the audience, lecturing the bemused onlookers in an exaggerated dramatic fashion, wearing a straw hat and wrap around skirt. Barefoot he approaches his paper to the accompaniment of a latin American congo drummer whose rhythms seem to dictate the marks he will make on the paper. After about twenty minutes Guého produces his painting 'Liberte, Quelle Liberte!' a kind of mythological birdlike figure suspended in flight.

Luc Lerouge attacks his surface with a paintbrush attached to long sticks like spears, he leaps and acts instinctively, taking perhaps a few seconds to decide the next colour. The audience responded enthusiastically, and sometimes even heartily applauded if they agreed with a certain colour, and toward the end two people beside me started to giggle uncontrollably as Lerouge ekked out the finishing contours in black paint. Here I became more aware of a different attitude to live art in Europe than in Britain. The European seem less restricted and reserved in their reactions.

The Portuguese contingency, always present at an Alvaro festival, this time consisted of Antonio Olaio and Icaro. Olaio rates highly as a painter in Portugal and his live work always seems to add a kind of whacky humour to any event. He has an amazing voice which he uses for his sung piece *The Cross-eyed Reporter*. His lyrics amount to a surreal poetry, juxtaposed phrases and playing on puns. Olaio sings and dances using instant props, telephones, plastic bin liners, cut up card, and a written translation in French on a long strip of paper. He is extremely funny. Upstairs, the wonderful Icaro created a night time spectacle. Under a strobe the artist ran around, sometimes pressing envelopes into peoples hands, or working with objects on the floor, culminating in a shower of glitter which looked beautiful in the light. The ambiguity of his actions under the strobe, worked like a dream, short and sweet.

Elizabeth Morcellet leant toward the more theatrical approach to performance. She has worked extensively in Europe since 1978 and lives between Paris and Nice. Her recent work is mainly derived from 'memory', in that memory always traverses the present, and takes the form of short vignettes of romantic encounters, ambiguous relationships and the projection of her own

sexuality. Her new series of works become a kind of scenario. She picks an unknown man to work with her live. She desires of him certain things, fighting, waiting, crying, laughing, leaving, basically the stereotype behaviours of a relationship. Face slapping and kissing are very real in her work. The live action is the first experience of these things for the characters, and therefore is real, an experience of life for her. She expresses her femininity as the male character becomes her object of desire. She is humiliated, loved, abused and admired, not only by the man but by the audience as well, who assume a voyeuristic position. I was convinced and moved by her actions.

Another favourite of the solo women performers was Catherine Meziat's performance *How to Believe What You See*. She uses delicate illuminations, in this case strips of light projected as slides, she moves dreamlike as the light passes through her body moving toward and away from the source of light. With the pressure of her feet, she burst little bags of water over sand, which hinted of the sea. In the smokey, boozy atmosphere, her action was like a breath of fresh air.

In contrast, the raucous Marie Kawazu directed and manipulated her audience, gathering 'volunteers' and putting coolie hats on them in a bizarre parody of the orient. As a personality she is extrovert and energetic, but in a performance she becomes dynamite, bright garments and colourful props enhance the organised chaos. Her work is carried by her forceful nature and incredible voice with a confidence often lacking in live performers today.

The duo Schmiz & Druz from Cologne devised a piece *Pour une frau et un mann*. They have been working together since 1983 and their themes are based on day to day existence, their situation as man/woman as an artist, and the artists products. In their statement they say their performance functions on three levels, 1. Language ie. text compositions, 2. Visuals ie. room installation, 3. Dramaturgy ie. theatre-like actions. A main component they use is plastic — floor covering, plastic people. Their life size sculpture *Schmiz & Druz*, a representation of themselves, becomes alive through their creators' actions. They work up and down the space, the seated plastic couple at one end, slide projector at the other, they realise ten acts 'for the "bourgeois"

internationaux', translating their script into German and French, they move together in sync, perfectly composed, leaping over the plastic people, finally exchanging places with them in a well rehearsed, witty and harmonious performance. The construction of Plastic people, the interest in theatre, the search for a direct and concrete form of expression, a continuous awareness of the body and usage of artistic language are all characteristic in the art-performance of Schmiz & Druz.

Finally of interest was R.U. Sevól, a Neoist, (a collective movement founded in Montreal around 1979), from what I can gather Neoism uses a collected code of language and gestures or 'activations' carried out by Neoists over the world. Sevól now uses the catchword 'anti-neoism' to describe the element of black humour present in the activation of Neoist themes. The piece of Neoism at Intervention was another version of 'Isms' history, where Sevól washed rags inscribed with various 'isms' ie. expressionism, rayonism, opism, and hangs them on washing lines. He has previously used plates for the 'isms', the themes are repetitive. Sevól is currently working on his first solo non-neoist performance, titled *Lune de Fiel*, a pun on the French word for honeymoon, loosely translated into bilemoon. I have a feeling it will be a strong work.

The great thing about Alvaro's festivals, is that firstly he lays down a challenge to the artists in many ways and he opens the doors to a wider communication between people as people and people as artists. I think he is essentially a very important figure in live art in Europe yet he himself keeps a low profile, I put some questions to him to discover more about his motivations, projects and raison d'être:—

**Tara Babel:** How long have you been involved with experimental/performance work?

**Egidio Alvaro:** Since 1974.

In Porto, Portugal, I organized an international festival that brought together 13 artists. Each had a week to show an exhibition or do an installation and they could intervene with performances. Each week there was one or more open discussion between artists and the public. This took place just before the Portuguese revolution, attendance was high and so was the interest.

That festival was a real turning point



for young Portuguese artists. It gave them their first opportunity to talk and live with quite important international artists. I had invited Miller and Cameron from England and Robin Klassnick of Living Spaces. It was at that point in time that international exchanges were born in Portugal which, each time afterwards, brought together sixty or more artists from many countries. Later I created *Alternavea*, International Festival of Living Art.

**TB:** Does your association with live art relate to any part of your background or experiences?

**EA:** My interest in living art came after deep reflection on the actual role played by the art critic in contemporary society and also from my previous involvement in 16mm film, literature, cultural activities within the community and also my interest in African rituals.

I realized that the critic's role as chronicler or as mouthpiece of such and such fashion didn't suit me. At that time, I was far more aligned with a Dada or even Futurist spirit rather than a desire for any sort of career as socio-critic. Later, my sentiments were reinforced thanks to acquaintances I had among artists and organizers of Happenings, Fluxus and Body Art. In any case, I was always independent, inflexible under pressures of the market or in accepting institutional compromises.

**TB:** There don't seem to be many people around that are as (unselfishly) supportive and enthusiastic about promoting and presenting performance work in a wide variety of different venues, as you are.

Have you got an ulterior motive?

**EA:** Of course!

Step by step; the more I organized festivals, the more I became aware of the undermining radical change in socio-cultural modes that they entailed and of the importance of such alternative manifestations in the future of contemporary art because I have always felt art to be a product of civilization.

The institutional system of the time was evolving, more and more, toward an essentially market oriented concept and it was that which motivated me to keep the sparkle of methods capable of taking in hand, even with little funding, the necessary mutation of art, alive and operational.

On the other hand, the heated contact with artists whose creativity struck me as being strong and revelatory; facing up to problems running through contemporary creativity; the desire to go as far as is possible in the sense of provoking and conducting a veritable current of innovation in art history; the fascination that this adventure and the difficulties it exerts upon me; all of these have given me sufficient motives to continue.

**TB:** Apart from running *Diagonale*, do you have an obligation to the 'art world'?

**EA:** I've founded two reviews, art reviews; first *Artes Plásticas* in '75, in which I'd made known many young artists and critics and then after, in '85, *Interface*. *Interface* will take a preponderant role in the field of new artistic forms and medias (performance, video, visual poetry, installation, mail art, xerography and

the most recent contemporary music) and also in the listing of international events that are most significant.

I also write many texts for artists whose work interests me and I try to project something other than the conventional image of the art critic, one that is non conformist in the field.

**TB:** Do you yourself make art?

**EA:** In so far as I see a festival as a living entity, a separate sort of creation in itself as a whole with all its particular rules; I do make art. I therefore work with a difficult medium to grasp and understand on every level; for example, a city: (with all its social strata, political/cultural nooks and crannies, its own interests, hatreds and incomprehensions) and a living pigment, the artists themselves who participate in the festivals and whose motivations and work I know and who I integrate into the weaving of an evolving action that often finishes at its climax and which can also leave behind cultural time bombs that could eventually change the evolutionary course of the micro societies where I present such work.

Less directly, though, I also do mail art. The way I conceive it is very personal, a sort of enquiry into the questions that occupy me: the role of artist and art, creation and perception ...

**TB:** How do you see performance in relation to a gallery situation?

**EA:** It will always be bad for a gallery to take on the context of performance, there is nothing or almost nothing to gain. Performance requires a lot of investment and energy. Very often, traces of a

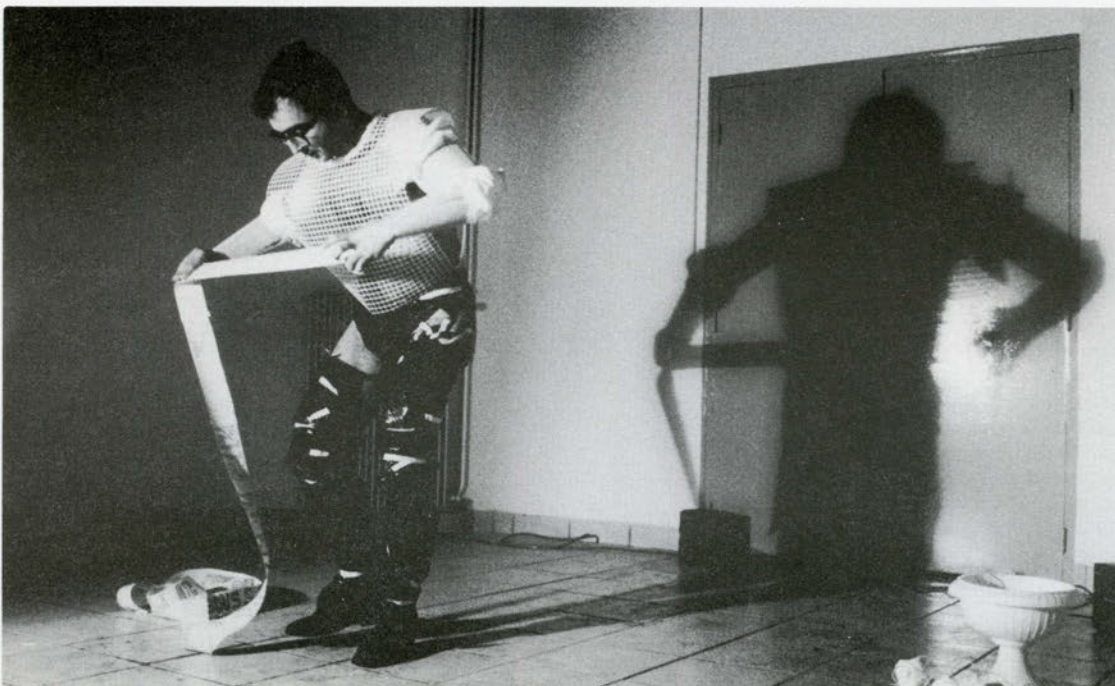


PHOTO / BERNARD FRANCOIS

Antonio Olajo —  
Intervention 3

# CROSSING THE DESERT



performance are left on floors and walls that can't be removed. The galleries today that are interested in performance put it on mostly as a form of mundane publicity which is irrelevant.

**TB:** Briefly, what do you talk about at your lectures at Université de Paris VIII?

**EA:** At l'Université de Paris VIII, I screen videos and project slides of work by European artists in performance, of the last ten years, and try to analyse their specific field of performance. My lectures are structured by country and, therefore, I point out the cultural identity, roots and the mark made in areas of experience in daily life by each artist; also, their parallels and differences.

**TB:** Do you think that conditions for a working artist should be easy or difficult?

**EA:** That depends on the artist. However, I think that each artist should be able to use the minimum at hand that is indispensable and necessary for their work/creation. The art of today is not only the activity of certain isolated individuals, it's a powerful machine of evolution and change and the kind of art being done is decided each day in the arena of metropolitan centres. The artists freestyle should be let loose. Most often, sadly enough, institutions act as the breaking system of this motor, occulting barriers or as voids of silence rather than their primary role which is that of catalysts that support creative research.

**TB:** Would you agree that the work of contemporary women performance artists seems to be more predominant than that of their male counterparts?

**EA:** That varies from one country to another. In Latin countries the number of men in performance is greater. In Northern Europe, the number of women that invest themselves in this creative domain is more significant.

It seems to me that a direct relation exists, rather than a subtle one, between this situation and the cultural role played by women in each society and culture. In so far as the quality of the work itself is concerned, I think that women are more percussive, more direct and closer to suffering. They sum up, very quickly, and "resee" reality with an amazing emotional power. As for men, the "thought process" is frequently conceptual, rather more detached and abstract. Yet,

of course, this is but my impression of the two that does not take particular cases into account.

**TB:** At the moment, whose work do you most admire?

**EA:** Each, for particular reasons, that I've tried to outline better in my texts but any list will take into account those I've seen and name those I've read about and also artists whose work strikes me as being singularly powerful:

Miguel Yeco, Elisabete Mileu and Antonio Olaio, from Portugal; Jordi Cerdà, from Spain; Roberto Barbanti, from Italy; Orlan, Plassun Harel, Catherine Meziat, from France; Marie Kawazu, Mineo Ayamaguch, from Japan but living in Europe; Claude Paul Gauthier, Claude Lamarche, Nathalie Derôme, from Québec; Jorge Pell, from Argentina; Kees Mol, Lydia Schouten and Marcelle van Bommel from Holland; Ria Pacquee, from Belgium; Natascha Fiala, Susanne Kirst, Stephen Reusse, from Germany; Miller and Cameron, Rose English, from Britain; Allana O'Kelly, Nigel Rolfe, from Ireland, Tara Babel and a good many others but my list is too long.

**TB:** A lot of British artists are quite unaware of what is happening in Europe, is this the situation vice versa, or do you think it may be a fault on this side?

**EA:** The situation is comparable on both sides of the channel and is aggravated when Québec, Brazil, Latin America and, well, when most Latin countries in general are mentioned.

It's because of, in many cases, the

weight of institutions that don't fund, independent festivals, that don't subsidise young artists (particularly those in performance judged too scandalous). Institutions filter information. They silence or gag that which is alive, untameable and racy. Also, the artists themselves aren't sufficiently organised (and never will be) to take charge of the whole operational and promotional vistas. It's in exactly that capacity that critics like myself could play a decisive role.

**TB:** Sometimes, as has happened here, performances have been censored (by the authorities) before public presentation, how would you deal with this?

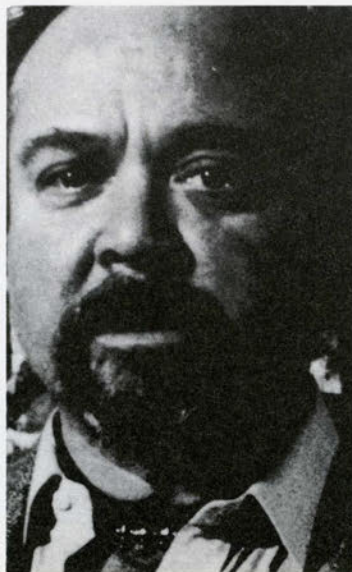
**EA:** Personally, I've always put on the restricted. If I feel an event should have a place in a programme, I'll do everything possible to ensure that it be done. I then assume all consequences, it has already happened a few times. In any case, if we believe ourselves to be in the right, censorship should not stop us. If we accept brutal censorship, we place ourselves in a position that is very close to accepting censorship's most insidious form; autocensorship, that kind which is associated with the fear of museum, gallery, media and art review blacklisting. If we have to cross that desert, we shall cross that desert.

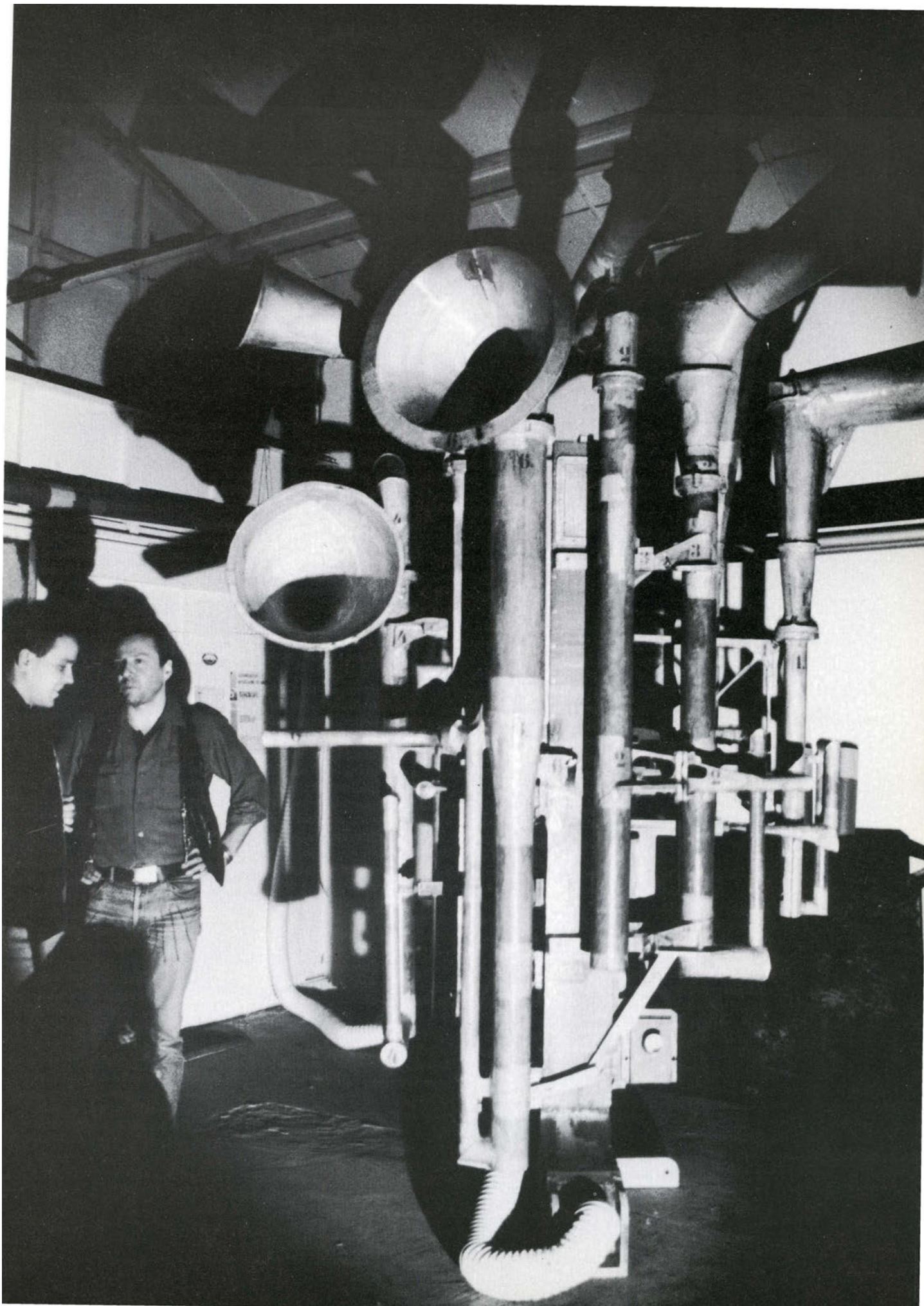
**TB:** What have you planned for the future?

**EA:** I'm in the midst of activating the extraordinary Alternative European Circuit. Next year, I'll organise festivals here, there and will do practically anything possible to participate in those organised by others. At the same time I'll organise a big intercontinental festival for next year; European artists will go to Québec and New York and artists from both places will come to Paris. Later, but it's already on board, I'm thinking of Africa and Japan. In the meantime I'm co-ordinating a festival in Porto, Portugal: an international festival of performance and video. Then, in November, here in Paris, an international festival of music, dance and performance.

Travel, confrontation, dialogue, direct experience of life now for the future of art in general toward a stronger reason for the coming of age of ephemeral performance. I also wish, of course, to go to *Edge 88*. ●

*This interview was recorded in French and translated into English by R. U. Sevil.*





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# DIFFERENT GHOSTS

Gary Stevens & Company  
ICA, London  
Reviewed by  
ANNIE GRIFFIN

THIS IS A difficult piece to write about for a start. The show was presented as a 'work in progress', and I think it's meant to be about what doesn't happen. No doubt when *Different Ghosts* is ready to tour it will be clearer that what's not happening isn't happening.

Nonetheless, it was a very enjoyable evening. To give a rough idea of what *does* happen — six people in costume of several periods inhabit the stage with various pieces of furniture, a carpet, and a number of small objects. The action veers from fragments of a Victorian melodrama ('You've read my diary! But I've been keeping it since the age of three!') to the mundance job of moving props, as when Gary Stevens lugs an iron fireplace across the stage, not knowing exactly where it should go, but clearly aware that it should go somewhere. There are many props, and many exits and entrances in this world of not melodrama, and many important truths are revealed; as when the man in sumptuous Georgian dress is asked where his buttons came from. He claims he doesn't know, but soon all the 'invisibles' who made his costume — the button-maker, the collar-maker, the embroiderer, are climbing on him to finish their piece of work. The carpet of the drawing room is suddenly pulled back to reveal a shoe-maker working away at a pile of unmade shoes. Someone notices the lamp is burning out, and soon the whole company, including the shoe-maker, is involved in the game of the room burning up.

The entire performance is played as a game. Theatricality, costumes and furniture become sources of pleasure rather than vehicles for a narrative. There is everything, in fact, except a narrative; a difficult project. The skill of the Company pulled it off — their playing was so light, so easy and clear. And the less Gary Stevens does, the funnier he becomes. Maybe it's his nose. *Different Ghosts* is simply entertainment which constantly discards any justification for its existence. One of the final sequences is a series of entrances. The performers keep going off, just to keep coming on again, because coming on is so delightful. Who needs a play when you have everything else? ●

# NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST

Riverside Studios & Air Gallery, London.

Reviewed by MARJORIE ALLTHORPE-GUYTON.

I am told that if the sound is too loud then I am too old. I am told that to be worried about the blatant Nazi imagery (yes *Nazi* not simply fascist) is to miss the point. But art that bears an insignia which seems to celebrate a marriage between the Honourable Artillery Company and the Ancient Order of Foresters and which embraces an organisation and programme like a Critical Path Analysis has to be asking for it. Red Pilot, Irwin, Laibach: theatre, art, music — the three main components of NSK — comes as a shock not because it is different but because it is all so *familiar*. It is characteristic of Western arrogance to be surprised that a small republic in North Yugoslavia can spawn a collective of artists who seem to have got the measure of Western contemporary culture. From Art & Language to Anselm Kiefer, Queen to the Beastie Boys, the Royal Opera House to Stephen Berkoff, Richard Rodgers to Quinlan Terry, NSK, like the seven dwarfs, have assiduously hammered away at the precipitous face of post modernism and exposed the dreadful faults in its structure. By their extreme eclecticism, their 'no style', they hold a mirror to the West revealing the unity in its variety which conceals its late capitalist excesses. Irwin's use of the 'new' figuration, the revival of the old genres: landscape, portrait, still life, reveal that this unity is underpinned by those late nineteenth century

bourgeois values: intolerance to difference, permanence against change, concealment of modern technology which later helped to spawn national socialism.

Against this scenario NSK's deliberate pilfering of Nazi images would seem to disinfect not only their Slovenian cultural history, for centuries dominated by a Central European, specifically German, culture but perform a useful surgical exercise on current Western art forms. But we might ask does this carry contradictions? NSK at their present stage of pupation regard themselves as politicians and align themselves with the State by adopting its demogogy and its language. In the *Unbearable Lightness of Being* Czech novelist Milan Kundera elaborates on the language of politics which he regards as 'unthinkable without Kitsch . . . the aesthetic ideal of all politicians and all political parties and movements'. Kundera acknowledges his debt to the German critic Herman Broch who in 1933 unequivocally argued against the virulence of Kitsch which he regarded as the 'evil in the value systems of art'. By embracing the banality of Kitsch NSK is in danger of falling into the trap which Saul Friedlander identified as 're-mythologizing Nazism on its own subtle terms'. NSK might also ask whether their Gesant Kunstwerk is not an anti-system, anti-thetical to art. Each department of their practice must conform

# CLASS OF '87

The Place, London. Reviewed by STEVE ROGERS.

*Class of '87* invited three well-established artists, Pete Brooks, Geraldine Pilgrim and Kirstie Simpson, to present a work made with their students at a high-visibility, high-reputation, central London venue. The results represent an important development for the colleges and their students and also for the artists. Pete Brooks, formerly of Impact Theatre, is resident theatre artist at Lancaster University. Brooks' work has always come out of a lengthy process of discussion, improvisation and experiment. Often a work starts with no more than a set design and some broad concepts and the performance is found through the input and ideas of the performers and other collaborators. His recent major music-theatre work *The Sleep* was

made in this way and started out as a work with students at Lancaster. Clearly this kind of opportunity is invaluable to artists and students alike. The work for *Class of '87* entitled *The Archeology of Desire* was a beautifully articulated resume of the theatrical language Pete Brooks has been developing over the past ten years. It consisted of a developing geometric pattern of gestures, actions, images and music, expressing the habits and obsessions with which we attempt to anaesthetise ourselves from the pain of spiritual emptiness. Brooks himself gave a rare performance which enabled him to laugh at himself as when in a repeated cycle of obsessive actions he appears to fall asleep. All of the performances were never less



PHOTO: GEORGINA CARLESS

Parlour games in *Different Ghosts*



PHOTO / REBECCA SINKER

Irwin  
Was Ist Kunst

to the 'immanent, consistent spirit'. Have they then replaced art by the spirit of inquiry?

Red Pilot (named after a Futurist Manifesto) state in their manifesto 'We have built an observatory for conquering parallel worlds'. Their cosmo-kinetic production FIAT is Nietzschean revaluation of Greek Tragedy, only the wit of the Slovenian text was lost on its largely English speaking audience who remained stonily silent to such gems as (Jason 2) 'I have always admired people who believed they were progressive and felt like brothers. They get disturbed when talking about each other. They forbade themselves to dream of female thighs and guitars in the moonlight. They made a great step forward. They rejected flesh and began praising machine'. The production also lost power by the physical constraints of the River-

side theatre: being led down a short metal tunnel and out of a rabbit-fur lined hole was no more intimidating than the way-in to Santa's Grotto at Harrods at Christmas. The set with its Malevich Cross, circle and triangle had a powerful mix of pagan and catholic associations, particularly the body in the box, like an illuminated saint — or something out of the *Tomb of Ligeia*. Jasons 1, 2 and 3 were suitably homo-erotic posing prettily on top of the circle. Parodying the ubiquitous silliness of war memorials. But the whole was an unresolved confection of cabaret and symbolist theatre which was neither violent nor *camp* enough. The chorus of the Jasons would have gained by being even more wet (although they irresistibly brought to mind those London buskers of the fifties, Wilson, Keppel and Betty.)

The regular musical injections of Laibach's — like Lee Marvin, mind numbing and crunching — was less terrifying than irritating. And it weakened by disjuncture and contrast the mere human timbre of the actors' voices. Overall Dionysian profanity (Laibach, those bows and arrows) was subsumed in an Apollonian, Egyptian style rigidity which left one feeling distinctly empty inside.

Likewise IRWIN brings us a profusion of stuffs (wax, coal, blood, bitumen, plaster, wood, metal) of *matter* and ask *Was Ist Kunst* addressing Heidegger's question "whether 'art is or is not an origin in our historical existence'" (read Slovenian history). From Virgin to Vermacht, Landseer to Breker, IRWIN plunder their Republic's iconography which like all genre painting and sculpture is highly representational but anti-realistic. A dominant figure, the *Gestalt*, of the *Slovene Athens* is The Sower, which all Slovenian artists, 'external collaborators without the authority of decision', are invited to paint. IRWIN'S own expression of the subject follows Millet but theirs is less a monument to the peasant than to the metaphorical act of sowing. (Like Oskar Martin Amorbach's Sower which hung in Bayreuth's House of German Education, the bedrock of the National Socialist teaching programme). Only there is a subtle twist in that IRWIN have used computer technology to reproduce in airbrushed paint the image. A nice trick, particularly as some members of the group are adept copyists — down to the craquelure of the surface of a nineteenth century still life. What IRWIN have produced is still a second hand art just one step on from inquiry; they know *pace* Heidegger 'such reflection cannot force art and its coming-to-be'. But it paves the way. Conditions in Slovenia are not those of London or New York. As a senior Yugoslav journalist is quoted as saying 'The young are allowed to make all the mistakes they want'. Until perhaps, these are no longer regarded as mistakes. ●

than articulate, the design and music were both beautiful and evocative, making the show deeply satisfying by any standards. It remains to be seen, but I suspect that this performance represents something of a critical moment for Pete Brooks. A final vindication of the work he has produced for ten years and a start in a new direction. This is borne out also by *The Sleep* which hinted at some radical new directions for one of Britain's most innovative directors.

Since the sad, but inevitable, expiration of her *Hesitate* and *Demonstrate* company, Geraldine Pilgrim, one of the founding mothers of British performance-theatre, had made virtually no public work. But if *Careless*, her production with Trent Polytechnic students is anything to go by, she has not been idle. Of all three of the *Class of '87* works Pilgrim's piece stood out as representing the most significant changes for the professional artist involved. *Hesitate* and *Demonstrate* productions were justly renowned for the exact precision of their startling images, for being at the same time dense and lyrical, and for appearing, filmically, behind a pristine flat surface. *Careless* displayed a willingness to experiment again and to take new risks. (There is no way, except in the Broadway musical, which *Careless* at times seemed to parody, that you can be precise with more than 30 people on

stage.) Gone were the familiar *Hesitate* and *Demonstrate* tightly framed, boxed sets, gone were the highly charged, immaculately timed gesture/images, gone was the sense of a, sometimes oppressive, seriousness and in their place was a wide open stage, a layering of action which ranged from the provocative to the absurd, the simple good-humoured, and the chaotic.

What it retained was Geraldine Pilgrim's familiar and continuing concern with the texture and visual imagery of English middle-class life, and in particular with the self-oppression of women who inhabit this world through their compliance with male objectification. Her own resistance to this process is stated by placing women at the spiritual centre of her work. Her use here of the importance of Being Earnest, performed a la regional rep but in three greenhouses, as a starting point was classic Geraldine Pilgrim. The surface is constantly interrupted and distorted through a bewildering variety of imaginative interventions. The production, whilst the least technically accomplished of the three, had a greater sense of occasion than them all, and was a brave and adventurous work.

Finally, Leicester Polytechnic dance students presented a series of self-devised miniatures

followed by a large work for 13 women choreographed by Kirstie Simpson. This, remarkably is the first time Simpson has created a work in which she does not perform herself. However, it at all times looked like her own work which confirms that she had developed a recognisable and distinct language. A lyrical but strong femininity taking a joyous delight in the female form and in women working together. The simple range of movements employed, and the rhythmic geometric patterns described made it strangely reminiscent of Laura Dean but without the clinical coolness. *One One Outcome* was a really pleasurable work, as Simpson's work always is, and she was well served by these young dancers.

*Class of '87* is an important new area of opportunity for our under-nourished innovative artists. It is also important for the schools and students participating, giving them a valuable focus for their work, an opportunity to work in a professional context with good creative professionals, and the experience of having their work seen by a detached, 'professional' audience.

Well done Lancaster University, Trent Polytechnic and Leicester Polytechnic for supporting both the artists and their students in this way — and well done 'The Place' for taking on this risky project. It must continue. ●

## 100 Foot Walking Wall & The Tidal Barrier Event

Hull Reviewed by STEVE ROGERS  
devised by Karen Rann and John Stead

HULL IS THE kind of place that is ideal for public works of art. It has wide streets, numerous parks and squares, splendid and grotesque public buildings and, of course, the famous docks many of which have been flattened or lie derelict against the broad grey Humber.

The *100 Foot Walking Wall* was designed to draw attention to the city itself by obscuring it. The wall, a single length of white fabric held between poles, was paraded through the city centre, its flat impenetrable whiteness contrasting with grand and ornate Victorian architecture as well as blotting out the grime and dereliction of much of it with a pristine, sensual barrier. It is a clear and simple idea but in practice the wall itself was too prone to the difficulties of keeping such a length of fabric taut against the wind, and the problems of crossing the busiest part of town. As it buckled and flopped it diverted attention away from the effects of the wall towards the problems of making the event itself. The result being more arcane than reflective.

The walking wall terminated at the tidal surge barrier where the second separate but related event took place. *The Tidal Barrier Event* was designed to make the spectator take a fresh look at a familiar feature of the cityscape. The barrier itself is an extraordinary feat of architecture and engineering. A monumental rectangular frame supports a massive steel barrier which is lowered across the river Hull to prevent high tides flooding the dock area. The event consisted of the lowering of the barrier to the accompaniment of John Stead's swirling electronic music and a ritual of panic and preparation performed by a group of dancers in the glass stairwell on the side of the barrier frame. The tiny scale of the performers against the weight and grandeur of the barrier itself made them insignificant and trivial adding little to the event. But they did, however, serve along with the music to create a focus on the barrier itself as it crept almost imperceptibly slowly into position. It was a truly awesome spectacle, attended by several hundred spectators, that testified to human ingenuity in defending lives and livelihoods against the elements. The poignant irony of the event being that the area around the barrier which was once the thriving heart of this great commercial centre has been raised and flattened, not by natural forces but by market forces against which the people of towns like Hull have yet to find an effective defence. ●

## DONNA GIOVANNI

DIRECTOR JESUSA RODRIGUEZ'S version of the Mozart/Da Ponte opera, as presented by LIFT, is a very, very confusing show.

The show is played by five women and one man, and the more or less full score is sung to the accompaniment of a single piano. The voices are only occasionally strong enough to take hold of the Mozart and convert it into something genuinely Mexican or genuinely rough, which is a shame. The set is a giant blow up of the face of an orgasmic woman. The costumes are gorgeous, and are continually parted and lifted to reveal naked flesh. The performers continually pose themselves in clownish, grotesque or melodramatic groupings. Everybody plays everybody, which means that the Don is played by a series of women, hence the title.

And hence the confusion.

Watching women groped, assaulted, deceived, pierced and stripped by a man would not normally be much fun in the theatre, but when the man is actually a woman, it's more fun (I think). It is nice to see naked breasts stroked by women's hands. It is good to see women being strong and funny and sexy. At least, that's what I think we were supposed to be seeing. As it is, the performers aren't sexy at all; every languorous or strident baring of breasts (executed, one feels, exactly as the director requested) is followed by a hasty covering or exit. Moments

## JUNCTION TRANSMISSIONS

Sender, Video Exhibition,  
Battersea Arts Centre.  
Reviewed by NIK HOUGHTON

CLOSE BY CLAPHAM Junction lies Battersea Arts Centre, a venue which during June and July has been home to a timely new project titled *Sender*. I say 'timely' because video exhibition was suffering something of a low period recently and in *Sender* what's on offer is not only an accessible and — dare I say it — fun, screening situation but a jumping off point for issues related not only to video art but also the way that work is exhibited. What's further encouraging is that *Sender* also commissioned work for the exhibition and that the more established 'names' of video art have been eschewed in favour of newcomers.

The result of this initiative is an exhibition located in an overstated re-creation of a flat, tacky sitting room; sleazy bedroom; and grubby kitchen — where a monitor in each room allows for three parts of the *Sender* programme to be viewed. This departure from the more normal gallery situated monitor-on-a-white-plinth context is long overdue yet while the presentation is

to be wholly applauded weaknesses remain in some of the actual works on view.

Helen Underwood's *Television Landscape*, by example, aims to draw connections between the "elsewhere" of TV transmission and real-time, yet its an uncertain and murky film-to-video piece which is only slightly more than a 'landscape film' (Horse in a field, wind on the sea, empty house, burning wood fire etc). *Women/Images II*, from Christine Lewis, seems similarly fuzzy as the artist focuses uncertainly on the mythology of women and a whispered voiceover overlays iconographic imagery and family snapshots.

Stronger by far is Janus Szczereks *SLAB, Sit Listen Absorb Buy* which condenses an 8 hour performance piece by the artist into some 10 minutes. In the performance Janusz was tied to a chair in front of a TV which showed endless repeats of a single TV ad. Yet this is more than simple documentation and the theme of submission to TV. Power and dominance is carefully cut with other footage to produce a tight package which is never anything less than gripping. Less immediate, perhaps, is Graham Ellard/Mike Jones *Small Appliances* tape where a dash through the delights of domestic consumerism are underlined by disconcerting phrases. (An image of a coffee set is sub-titled

'Nice Container') a vase of flowers prefaced with 'Nice Choice'.) An elusive tape, this one, yet the puzzle has resonances beyond its viewing.

But if what-you-see-is-not-quite-what-you-get with Jones/Ellard things are a little more straightforward with David Leister as the film maker plays quirky and clever games with a gleeful charm in *Magic Act*, a sub-Lumiere catalogue of film tricks, and *Smoke*, a flickering 1920's styled pop film. Next to Leister's jokiness Brett Turnbull's *Act of Faith* comes across as a lumbering, drum thundering vision of hell as footage of Spanish religious festivals is cut with dark excerpts from a threatening performance. Powerful stuff though quite what the intention is is unclear more than being a depiction of a grim and violent nightmare. . . Finally though what is in some ways more important than the work on view-space necessitates only name checks for the other tapemakers Andrew Fitzpatrick, Mike McDowall and Simon Robertshaw — is the attempt to offer an alternative to existing systems of exhibition. There are important issues and talking points to be found in *Sender* and although I can't go into them here I have a feeling that the forward thinking of *Sender* is going to have healthy repercussions beyond its Battersea confines. ●

## Compañía Divas, Shaw Theatre, London Reviewed by NEIL BARTLETT

after the final naked orgy, the lights came up too soon — to reveal performers hurriedly clutching for robes with which to conceal their embarrassment. This is not what one expects of performers committed to the 'bold and irreverent study of eroticism' promised by the programme. And if the sexual territory of the Don himself is being reclaimed, then why is another actress meanwhile playing his victim, Donna Elvina, as a conventionally laughable sexual hysteric, legs always in the air to expose her naughty underwear (get it?).

Quite quickly the audience begins to think to itself, maybe this kind of stuff is really radical in Mexico — I mean, showing your breasts. Maybe that's a very brave thing to do, daring to tamper with a masterpiece of male mythology, maybe that's a daring thing to do. And its at this point that the problems really begin. Because this is a LIFT show, it is presented completely without context. The audience does not know, for instance, if this company is a feminist collective using low budget and populist styles to attack male conventions of performance — the kind of work which would be very exciting, for instance, at the Oval in London. Equally, we don't know whether this is the product of the international art scene, borrowing a few ideas from feminist theatre in order to be "taken seriously". I have a nasty feeling that it's the latter, since the arch and obscure references to visual arts history

(lots of details copied from works by Bernini, Botticelli and Manet) assume that the audience is well versed in such highly cultured things. We don't know if the borrowings from a 'rough', burlesque style of music theatre refer to a living Mexican tradition, or are academic attempts to dress up some pretty conventional music theatre. We don't know if Don Giovanni himself is a current symbol of male violence, or just a vague figure from the elitist world of opera. I don't even know if Mexico has opera houses, or if these women are, by their own standards, exciting singers or not. I really don't know why this show has been brought to London. Do the organisers of LIFT want to shake up our ideas about opera, or about Mexico, or about feminist theatre, or about visual theatre? Their publicity material is content just to promise us naked women, 'Mozart', 'popular Mexican tradition' and 'shifting baroque tableaux' and then leave us to flounder. The problems of Don Giovanni as an evening's entertainment come as much from the way the show is being sold as from the show itself. Left to fend for itself in an anonymous London auditorium with no identifiable audience, it ceases to be a work which is very clearly trying to say something and becomes just another attraction on the picturesque and cultured international festival menu. ●

IN MANY WAYS, the site for the Bow Gamelan Ensemble's latest work was a sort of 'coming home'; firstly, because the chosen site — three large disused vaulted sheds bordering on a dark, flowing river and gradually sloping mud flats — was, perhaps, the ideal environment for a number of individuals committed to imbuing the discarded industrial detritus of the past with a bittersweet (literal) resonance for the present.

Secondly — and more importantly for both fans of the Gamelan and those artists with a watchful eye on the development of high-profile initiatives for time-based practitioners — the three members of the Gamelan — Paul Burwell, Anna Bean and Richard Wilson — have been steadily strategising the concept of the group; amidst the last few year's activities of touring the Gamelan portfolio to locations throughout Europe and America in the back of a transit van in a series of 'hit and run' presentations, the Gamelan have also been establishing a precedent for taking on large, controlled sites with substantial monetary backing and an at least adequate provision of time for constructing the environment that they want.

An important precedent, indeed, mirrored by the evident excitement of both cognoscenti and newcomer alike as they crowded onto a series of crude layered benches fifty yards across the river. An impressive lighting array illuminated various disparate elements within the sheds: a string of vacuum cleaners hanging like metallic buzzards from the rafters; a group of suspended metal lockers conferring suspiciously whilst rotating in the darkness; a rusted vessel (a post-industrial outrigger canoe that referred

perhaps to the Gamelan's Indonesian origins) lodged in the mud. Helpers swarmed in the background amongst the shadows for the duration of the one hour, ten minute set, which began with the now familiar sight of flames enveloping a Bow sign. As the three core members scurried off on a series of catwalks to mobilise different pockets of action, there was a palpable sense of *re-activation* in their activities; this may have been 'art' in its present context, but the sounds and visuals recreated — if not resurrected — the work ethic origins of this site. Hard to distinguish from one another in their sou'wester uniforms, the workers punched their clocks and began to labour: Burwell, enveloped in pink smoke hammered out a furious riff on a set of cannibalised drums, whilst Bean and Wilson intermittently popped up to cannon the metal lockers against one another, and turn spring-encrusted pontoons into sounding boards. Metal bins conversed with one another across the site, their mouths slamming open and shut as back-lit fog emanated from their bowels; flares exploded apocalyptically, inducing nervous titters from the audience; steam valves produced a melancholy — if sometimes comical — maritime lament; whilst the three members converged on the boat for more percussive activity a vast sheet of water rained down from the shed ceiling, lit by a triangulated yellow beam.

The Gamelan's intention, though, was not to create a constant cacophony. Each mini-event was structured as a definable segment, and low-key moments emphasised both the alien qualities and beauty of these curious juxtaposi-

## A SMOKEY WATERSHED

### Bow Gamelan Ensemble River Thames, Watermans Arts Centre, London Reviewed by SIMON HERBERT

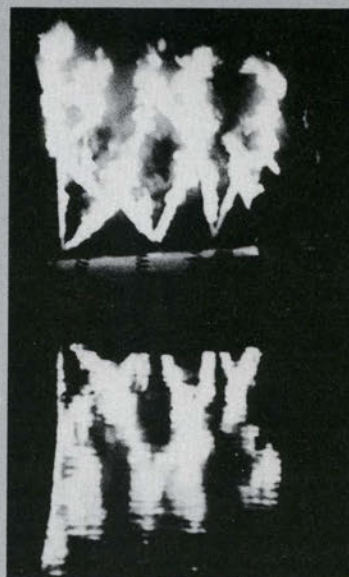


PHOTO / PAUL SLATTERY

Bow Gamelan Ensemble, OFFSHORE RIG

tions — never better realised than when a barge glided past the silent sheds with members of the Triveni Dance Group dancing on it, drawing appreciative murmurs from the audience.

It was a shame, then, that in their attempts to so meticulously telegraph the full emotional power of each segment, the Gamelan lost a certain feel for pacing — some individual segments were rather too protracted and, to a certain extent, committed the cardinal sin of boring the audience. Such a fault is obviously rectifiable (I saw the Gamelan on their first night, and you don't have dry runs with the price of fireworks these days . . .), as long as the Gamelan don't feel the need to give LIFT audiences their 'moneys-worth' in terms of duration, but is actually an inherent danger in adopting the mantle of the spectacle.

Audiences, faced with the new and unusual, quickly form insatiable appetites.

In this respect, the Gamelan's work at Watermans was reminiscent of the large, gaily-painted tins of biscuits that families hover around at Christmas. Faced with a variety of flavours and colours, one gorges oneself until only the plain crackers remain. Finally bloated and disinterested, one suddenly yearns for a more substantial meal of steak and chips. However, Christmas only comes once a year, and people have a right to treat themselves. The empty tin remains on the shelf until November 5th, when fireworks are carefully stored and produced from it by torch-light. Long may the Gamelan be brought down from the shelf. ●

# NIGHTLINE

A laser projection by Ron Hasleden & Bryanston Cross, Cambridge  
Reviewed by CLAIRE MACDONALD

THE RECEIVED MYTHOLOGY of the laser is interesting. Watching audience reactions to *Nightline*, which was minimal, abstract and repetitive, there was both a disappointed expectation of something far more theatrical and a barely concealed fear of the technology itself — was it safe to watch? Could it in fact cut the chimney it was projected against in half. It became clear over the fortnight run of the piece just how much the cultural association of laser technology is to do with war as performance. Lasers are the ultimate post human performers, cutting, zapping, immensely powerful and spectacular, an image reinforced through comics and cinema and within the rhetoric of defence. Laser technology is of course closely associated with defence research. Behind the collaboration which led to *Nightline* was a desire to use technology created for defence purposes if not directly as a statement about peace then as an imaginative intervention which was implicitly anti-war.

The image itself was unspectacular, deliber-

ately. A green dot projected 200ft against a Victorian chimney stretched down to an oval and shrank back at the rate of a heart beat and repeated over half an hour after dark each evening for sixteen nights and could be seen by about half the town of Cambridge.

It was abstractedly beautiful, it literally cut across the space illuminating everything in its path, dust, rain, smoke — but more than that the interest of the piece is as much in the context of its production. As an intervention it was classic, it divided opinion, engendered argument about art and science and its very simplicity enabled it to be endowed with a range of meanings beyond its quality as an image and which would have been obscured by anything either more spectacular or more directly representational.

The context within which it was produced was a community arts project, involving installation and performance on the site of old technology, Cambridge's Museum of Technology, an old Victorian pumping station kept in working order by enthusiasts. For that reason it is almost impossible to separate from its context, setting up the image involved a high level of collaboration and commitment — its not that in the end it could have been any image, it could not, but that the process by which it came to be and the intense discussion about art and materials, new technology and culture were part of its meaning for many of the dozens of people who became involved with it. In the end it acquired a strange animism, on its last night there was champagne in the rain and onlookers, pumping station volunteers and engineers watching its final seconds. And then it was gone. No trace, no winding down. Only when it was gone did it seem the whole space had changed within that fortnight and that the odd, repetitive, inhuman witness up on the chimney had somehow become part of the place. ●

# ECHOES

Jeremy Welsh,  
Cornerhouse, Manchester  
Reviewed by DAVID LOVELY

JEREMY WELCH'S PERFORMANCE took in everything from contemporary urban architecture to the Sun's bizarre folk demonology of Russian aliens, sink-eating women, and 'the boy with two brains'. Exploring issues of authenticity and reproduction, with replicas of the Eiffel Tower, Stonehenge and a Japanese samurai suit as touchstones, Welsh moved assuredly from monologue to video-screen to dissolving slides, amongst a complex web of analogue and distortion. The process recalled Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, albeit Welsh's conclusions, if any could be said to emerge clearly from this weltering, kaleidoscopic piece, were somewhat less sanguine.

performers with their audience; and, at the end of the piece, between Ayers, playing a deliberately inadequate ventriloquist, his dummy, the audience and the young girl whose presence in the work as Degas' danseuse is marvellously accurate and compelling.

Sexual role-playing is another theme explored in this complex work but in this Ayers seemed less than clear in his intentions. Only the dance sequence and Rosalind Moore's two songs had the sharpness this theme requires.

Along the way much else happened that was less easily deciphered. Much of this involved ingeniously constructed and rather elaborate waterworks as well as a revolving, flashing petrol pump and a talking toy dog that might have stepped out briefly from the exhibition in the gallery next door. Each prop started out wrapped in carefully contrived dust sheets rather like psychiatric-ward gowns from which they emerged to play out their crazy roles.

There is a Walt Disney spirit that pervades much of Ayers' work and one suspects that his intentions are more to charm that challenge his audience despite the seriousness of his themes. Whether *A Picture In The Form Of A Kite* belongs properly to performance art is another matter — pretty well every element of the work is straightforwardly drama, dance or music — but perhaps its the way all these discreet parts are welded together to form such a satisfying whole that makes Robert Ayers & Co one of the most interesting acts to watch at present. ●

# A PICTURE IN THE FORM OF A KITE

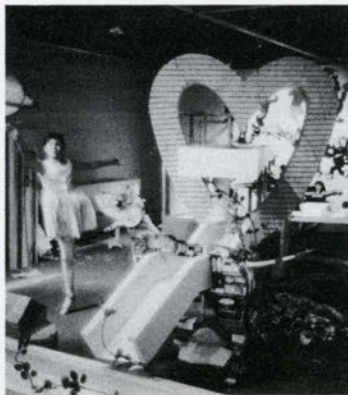
Robert Ayers & Company  
Castle Museum,  
Nottingham  
Reviewed by DAVID MANLEY

LIKE THE BEST painting or sculpture good performance develops, piece by piece, a repertoire of devices and motifs which run through the artist's works. It doesn't happen often enough — many artists working in this area show little continuity between pieces. Not so, however, with Robert Ayers and Company whose most recent work *A Picture In The Form Of A Kite* is bursting with elements of a repertoire which, whilst becoming more familiar, is also developing and changing.

As with the exhibition of which this work is part, (Art in Performance in Art) the notion of performance, the experience of the act itself, is a central theme. Ayers and his principal accomplices are encouraged by the form the work takes to perform in deliberately personal ways

and these individual acts occasionally threaten to overwhelm the piece as a whole. That said, these vignettes are all marvellously accomplished with Jane Scott-Barnett's dance routine exploring the relationship of the model to the artist being outstanding.

Relationships is another of the central themes of the work — the artist (in this case as much Disney as Degas) with his models; a County Durham man with his neighbours; the



More Disney than Degas  
— Robery Ayers &  
Company

PHOTO / ODED SHIMSON



Put at its most cynical, the message seemed to be that any form of human curiosity ultimately undermines itself. Travel guides tell us what to see, and everyone takes essentially the same photographs. Millions of these, to all intents, identical images must exist, yet few question their authenticity or purpose. From such simple beginnings as the manipulation of an abacus, some children's building bricks, or glass marbles, come the confusing 'echoes' of architecture and astrophysics, the hall-of-mirrors world of the uncertainty principle, the 'liquid cities' we all inhabit. Toytown topples into the towers of the World Trade Centre, aspiration modulates into cliché as we are led to explore a Disneyland fantasy of 'the City of Tomorrow' by a bland American voice-over. The tapping sounds from space that scientists tell us are the never-ending echoes of the Big Bang are turned into a digital reverse countdown, the echo of an echo.

The linear ideal of progress and discovery now seems impossible, exposed perhaps by this reductive link with our ultimate, unimaginable origins. In a world a-babble with information, disinformation, and the mere chatter of billions, it's a simplistic distortion. Welch's figurat of glasses layered between sheets of glass on a flashing lightbox was a nostalgic yet cruel representation of the vacancy and redundancy of the technocratic fantasy of an incorruptible modern world. ●

*Echoes* was commissioned by Projects UK as part of *New Work, Newcastle '87*.

# SEVEN WORKS OF SPIRITUAL MERCY & EMERALD POPPY

Sebastiane  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery  
Reviewed by JULIA  
ORKNEY

IN A GENERIC white gallery room, incense rises, slides cross-fade, bells are rung. We sip wine from paper cups, in the dark, awaiting PASSION. Somebody trips over a lead on the way to their seat . . .

Sebastiane was presenting the last performance in Wolverhampton Art Gallery's 'Live Art' season. He was a bit of a dark horse, his publicity consisting only of a poem and a painting of Narcissus. There were dim rumours of bloodletting. He had also done an installation in the town's tourist information shop; lost youths, razor blades, sand, flowers, Bloomsbury set paperbacks etc. etc.

I didn't expect to like him at all. I was to be pleasantly surprised . . .

As I entered the room a chirpy chappy, festooned with photographs, offered me a glass of wine and a Communion wafer from a table littered with lilies and hypodermics. So this was Sebastiane: hardly the pale aesthete I had envisioned. His amiable demeanour whilst dishing out the Communion Stuff would not have been out of place in Pizzaland.

On the paper cup was written 'SMILE MORE

TOMORROW'. (I think I did).

The performance itself was in two parts.

The First, *Seven Works of Spiritual Mercy*, consisted of stylised actions and slabs of echoing poetry delivered within a circle of pebbles, crucifixes, candles and other props. Tapes and slides ranged across religious beauty, mania, awe and power. One chunk of sound-track featured the Rev. Jim Jones' last speech; it occurred to me that Sebastiane may have poisoned the wine we had just drunk, Jones-Style: either I was wrong, or it is very slow acting.

The religious imagery covered familiar enough territory. The thing is, churches do this sort of thing fairly well themselves, so why set up a franchise, as it were? However, within his chosen territory, Sebastiane deftly rendered the spaces, actions and objects he was controlling both numinous and absorbing.

The second part, *Emerald Poppy*, grew naturally out of the first. A brief elegy to love and loss, with water, more flowers and more poetry. His sacred circle of pebbles was transformed back into a beach. The blood-letting, when it came was actually quite tasteful.

I left feeling that, although my misgivings had been justified and the performance had been fey, overblown and indulgent, I had seen a work of some power. Sebastiane makes virtues of his vices in a charming and beguiling fashion. I would say that he was Wolverhampton Live Art's 'Man of the Match'. ●

Mutus Liber  
Green Room, Manchester  
Reviewed by DAVID  
LOVELY

## THE KNIGHT AND THE BODY OF DAWN

MUTUS LIBER ARE a group of five artists from Turin who take their name from a seventeenth century alchemical treatise. Their work is concerned with the idea, current in the perennial philosophy of many cultures of the Italian and French Renaissance, expressed largely through the symbolism of light and of a mathematical, musical harmony.

*The Knight and the Body of Dawn* is a slow-moving, mysterious piece opening in semi-darkness with only the prone figure of the knight lying on a ground of powdered marble bathed in an aura of yellow light. Two other figures are visible, one seated facing away from the audience on a platform resembling a rose window while the other obscures her face with a bronze mirror. Very gradually, to the accompaniment of bell-like music, the action begins. The sound-track also includes spoken Italian text; Borge-

sian fictions purporting to be the writings of a twelfth century Persian mystic whose teachings provide the structure of the piece. Their meaning is obscure even in translation but the voice reading them has a gently awestruck, monastic tone. Two songs from the early morning world of medieval, provencale troubadours add narrative climaxes to the piece's gentle, light-suffused progress, re-inforcing an atmosphere of ascetic melancholy.

The action consists of a series of rituals, indefinite and inwardly directed, designed to bring the spiritually unconscious knight to the ultimate awareness of this literal illumination. In the beginning the light dims and a rainbow darts over the white powder towards the woman with the mirror. In the darkness she sends fragments of the rainbow dancing around the room, playing over the body of the knight, splitting the

beam into points of fire and iridescence, bringing them together in a conjunction of opposites. In the rose window the second woman moves over to the knight and gently caresses his body, mournfully brushing it several times with a black cloth. The music at this point becomes a woman's lament for her dead lover. Together the women kneel in front of a rope ladder twined with flowers symbolising the transition between heaven and earth. As one grips the ladder with both hands the other draws a pattern of birds on her back, and then begins to slowly bury her in powdered marble. A second song is heard about her knight's long journey away from his lover and his solitary death. Here the music changes again to the sound of the sea and bird song. A pattern of bird shaped rainbows appears in the darkness over the two women by the ladder.

Now at last the knight rises. He picks up a shell and begins to strike it with a metal rod causing a slight but perceptible echo. Finally he begins to sing, unaccompanied, Bernart de Ventadorn's *When I Saw The Nightingale Fly*, the song of dawn. For all its esoteric associations the simple power of this solitary voice is an apt culmination to a piece that was unusual in its quiet force. ●

**CUCKOO** IS A little bit of life in a new world. The stage is littered with old wooden furniture; rows of dark, empty wardrobes; lines and clusters of chairs; standard lamps and stools. SHO use the furniture to work with, to sketch with, and as they silently move it around the stage, half-making scenes of drawing rooms, bedsits and fragments, one is soon struck by what a perfect raw material this junk-shop stuff is for them. Furniture is real, it inhabits the scenes of all our lives and all our social history. It can't help but resonate when pushed into new arrangements. There are things we recognise here; bits of an antiquated world; people drinking tea; men reading travel books by a fireside, feet on stools; a man so cramped up with his chair that he can't open the wardrobe door.

To their credit SHO keep their fictions as hints only. Possible narratives to which we must supply the words, the beginnings and the endings. Whilst it is rich with stories and recognisable moments from British domesticity the show remains itself. It always remains only SHO working on stage, making things, moving from one section based on improvisation to another, with a minimum of fuss.

It has a meandering, whimsical structure which is only just possible because of the monosyllabic nature of the tools of the performance. An excess of one thing — furniture — that binds the piece together. Only a cello and its occasional musical interruptions seem truly out of place and attempts to use it in the action by moving it around like the furniture seemed weak

# CUCKOO

Station House Opera  
Riverside Studios, London  
Reviewed by  
**TIM ETCHELLS**

and half-hearted. It looked like something drafted in to enliven the proceedings and didn't really work. After you have the simple pleasure of guessing what they would do next with the objects, especially when hammers, saws and nails were produced, to push the world into still more uncharted areas, the shape of the show was unsatisfying. For some people, I'm sure, *Cuckoo* would have seemed a piece about social relationships, about personal relationships or even about a wider politics. The roots of these and other things are there. But for me, chasing my own thoughts as everyone must, through their junk shop built on quick-sand, their almost open text became an investigation of human possibilities and aspiration. Given a finite number of people, tools and objects, and a particular

class, how much can you invent is the question. What are the limits of this stage world or any other? To its credit *Cuckoo* answered that there are no limits. That we always find uses, structures and games. In the whole show not a single piece of furniture was destroyed out of frustration or anger. Things set about with saws and hammers were not so much damaged as altered to serve a new purpose. The man whose wardrobe wouldn't open sawed it in half until it did. Another nailed plank after plank onto a chair's legs until he'd made it 20 feet high, its legs ungainly and too weak to let it stand alone he supported it and let it down to rest; abandoned, sad, full of possibilities. It was a world of naives, calmly exploring with good-natured bewilderment, determined to make something of everything, of every setback. The performer whose clothes are nailed to the ground doesn't struggle or writhe, he explores the position. Trying to see perhaps what one could do nailed down like this that one could not do elsewhere.

Even at the end of the piece, when we've seen an hour and twenty minutes of rituals and inventions and the performers are moving further and further away from one another; too high on a platform; suspended in the air; a woman climbing into the darkness of a wardrobe; even then as the last light gives out on Julian Maynard-Smith, his face looking out at us in confusion, we're left with the sense that this world is just beginning — that the building and the breaking and the nailing one-another down will continue until morning comes. ●

## BRACKNELL 87

cont:

the British contribution to Time Code, an international experiment in co production that will also bring works by Robert Cahen (France) and Gustav Hamos (Germany) among others, to t.v. screens all over Europe this autumn. It should have been broadcast by the time Bracknell hap-

pens, but as the tape is still under wraps, the First Couple of video love comics will be absent from this year's programme. Graham Young continues to develop his idiosyncratic brand of English surrealism in the Accidents in the Home series: no 15, *Domestiques* was, for my Money (sic) the best thing in the recent series of Alter Image, and probably represents the UK's only hope of honours at the Eurofestivals this year. It is an elegant, eloquent and totally seductive work whose three short minutes stand up to repeated viewing.

But my primary concern is not to take stock of

what the better known have done over the past year, but to try to unearth new talent, or if not entirely new, then at least as yet unestablished. Last year's student prize at the festival went to Simon Robertshaw and this year he will be back with *Biometrika*, an accomplished, intelligent and innovative work that will I am sure be a talking point at the festival. Robertshaw manages the unusual double of producing a tape that deals committedly with a subject of serious social concern while at the same time defining new modes of visual presentation. Many a lesser work would earnestly advocate an argument but ultimately fail by not holding the interest of the viewer; Robertshaw is never hectoring or boring, his opinions are refreshingly uncompromising, though I fear some of his arguments would not stand up to the assault of 'informed medical opinion'.

Among this year's crop of graduating art students, Sheffield Polytechnic's Communication Arts school, where Steve Hawley now teaches video, has produced three lively talents in Liz Power, Leigh Cox and Colin Scott. Sheffield's position as the breeding ground for new video artists is rapidly becoming unassailable: in recent years it has produced Pamela Smith, Sven Harding and Mike McDowall, collectively Accident Tapes, and before them, St. John Walker and Clive Gillman, who, as Nine Attrition Magnetic are currently drawing attention to themselves.

At the time of writing, the deadline for entries to Bracknell is still some time away. I hope therefore that there are undiscovered treasures awaiting my attention in the August mailbag. The full festival programme will be available from The Media Centre, South Hill Park, Bracknell, Berks, from early October. ●

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*Monica Ross*

'Gold in the Furnace'

October 13th at 2.30 and 7.30pm

*Sara Jane Edge*

'Mine or His Story'

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## PERFORMANCE

wednesday 14th october  
**DOGS IN HONEY**  
2 A.M. EROTIC TIME

wednesday 21st october 8.00pm  
**ALASTAIR SNOW GUERRILLA SQUAD**

wednesday 28th october  
**RALF RALF**  
THE SUMMIT

wednesday 4th november  
**RICHARD LAYZELL**

wednesday 11th november  
**GARY STEVENS**

wednesday 18th november  
**ANNIE GRIFFIN**  
ALMOST PERSUADED

wednesday 25th november  
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