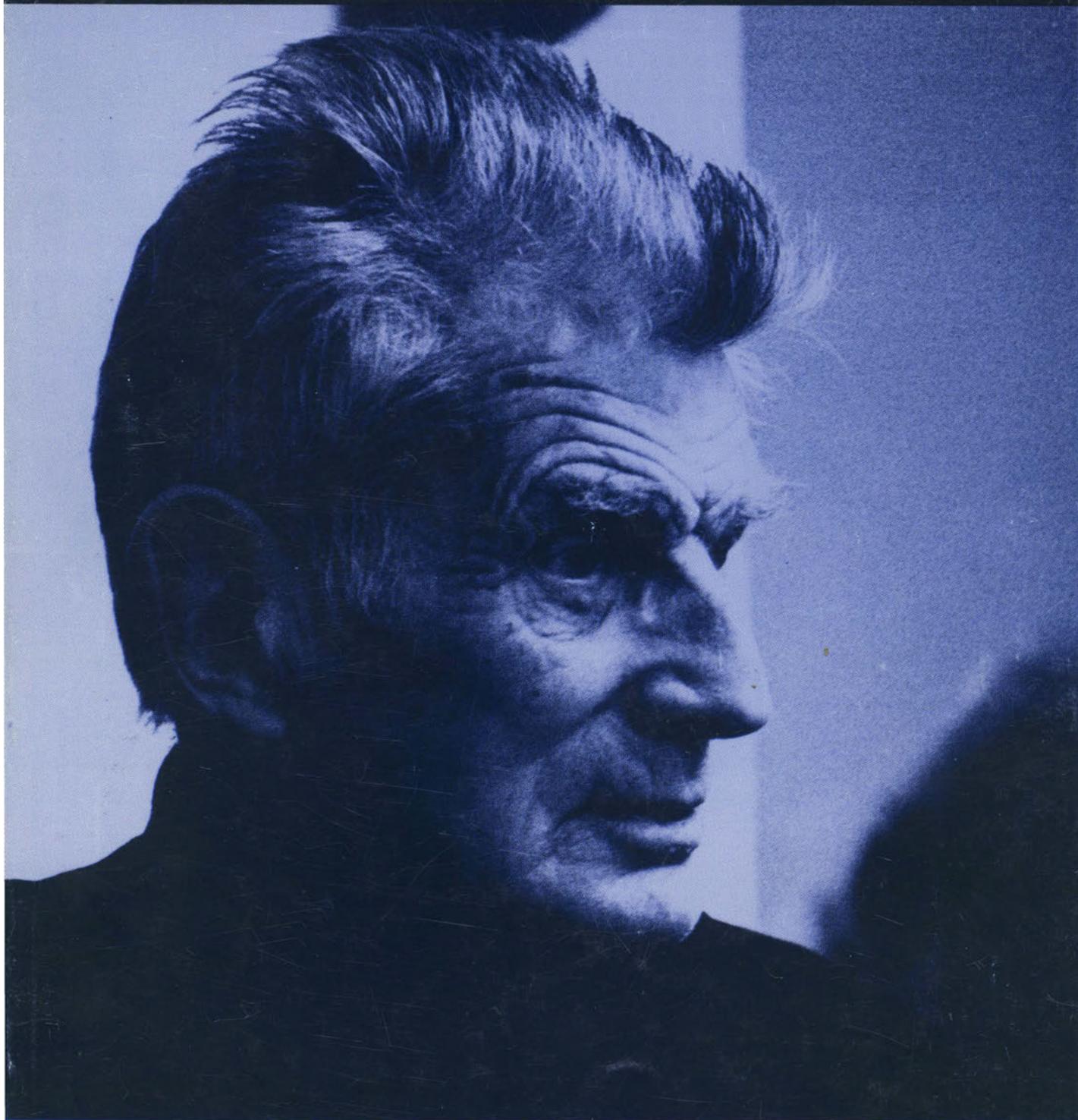


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Editor Gray Watson
Administrator Tony Grey
Design Gabriella Le Grazie
Layout Anthony Andrea
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Samuel Beckett. (photo John
Minihan)

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**Tim Brennan, *Whatever You Say,
Say Nothing*, 1989.**

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Editorial

Starting with this issue of *Performance*, the section containing reviews of performances, exhibitions, events and installations will be supplemented with reviews of books, and of films and videos.

Given the magazine's function as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas relating to all aspects of avant-garde art, it is only appropriate that it should point to and discuss other publications in which relevant topics are explored further; and certain books — documentary, biographical, theoretical, etc. — most obviously fall within this category. By contrast, films and videos are for the most part art works in their own right: only occasionally do they perform a primarily documentary function; and only very occasionally could they be said, in any *direct* sense, to be making a comment in terms of their own medium (in a way analogous to that in which written texts often do) on issues arising within the context of other media such as dance or performance art.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which, in addition to the intrinsic interest of much work in film and video, these media do occupy a special position in relation to the enterprise of the avant-garde as a whole. This is because they combine — admittedly, in their own particular ways — two qualities which are normally perceived as irreconcilable and yet which, with varying degrees of emphasis, are also felt to be of central importance: ephemerality, or truth to the fleeting moment; and lastingness, or the wrenching of some space for reflection out of the relentless flux of passing time.

If one had to name one quality which was most crucial to the avant-garde sensibility, it would perhaps be the will to transformation. In a relatively cool and formal sense, this is true of Cubism, which occupied the key role which it did in relation to the development of modern art because it articulated the early twentieth century paradigm shift from a largely passive mode of perceiving the world to one which highlighted the *activity* inherent in perception. In a more passionate way, and one which made more explicit the connections with both emotional and social life, Dada and Surrealism proposed that art was only justifiable insofar as it contributed to transformation both at the individual and at the collective level. Indeed, some form of will to transformation, whether it be with the specifically mystical colouring of Kandinsky or with the more open-ended

neutrality of, say, Duchamp and Cage, underlies all the major achievements of modern art.

It should be clear, if such notions are taken seriously, why art relying on the making of saleable objects such as paintings and sculptures is hardly ideal; and that it is likely to contribute — as it undoubtedly in practice does — to what might politely be called a confusion of criteria. Thus the development of conceptual art, land art and, perhaps above all, performance art was absolutely logically consistent with the central aims of the avant-garde enterprise. What medium could be more suitable, not so much for the *representation* of the transformation process as for its actual enactment — or, perhaps better still, its *embodiment* — than one involving the artist's live presence?

But while it is clear enough that the will to transformation is at variance with the values of the art market, and that, if the artist's concern is with changing life rather than making commodities, an art form which stresses the living moment has evident advantages, there are nevertheless also considerable disadvantages — all too familiar to those involved with performance art — inherent in the medium's non-durability.

These disadvantages seem all the greater at times when there is relatively little public interest in live art. During the 1960s and '70s, the audiences for live art events may have been limited, but there was perhaps more often than now the sense that enough of those-in-the-know were likely to be present, and that there were enough other people eager to find out what had happened, for the one-off event to be contributing effectively to a real and exciting cultural dialogue. The more that performance art is perceived — utterly wrongly, of course, in the opinion of this magazine — as a merely specialist taste, the more problematical becomes the lack of some form of recording system which might allow the seed contained in the work to bear fruit when the cultural soil becomes again more fertile.

To an only slightly lesser extent, the same applies to such forms of fine art as site-specific installations, as well as to visual theatre (in contradistinction to text-based theatre, where at least the text itself is durable). It applies, in fact, to all the types of work with which this magazine is principally concerned. Film and video, however, although time-based, are in principle as durable as painting, sculpture or any other

medium; and scandalous though it is, for example, that certain films which are undoubtedly amongst the most important artworks produced this century, and which merit frequent re-viewing, are still not available in video shops despite the deluge of dross which is, it is some consolation that this situation is physically quite easily redeemable.

This is a matter which will be returned to in *Performance* in the near future; and, in fact, it is planned that in addition to the new film and video review section, there will shortly be several feature articles on the subject.

It is also planned that readers' letters will be published in the near future. The reason that they have not been recently is that nearly all of the letters received since the re-launch — most of them very enthusiastic about the new format, a few disturbed by certain aspects of it, several containing helpful suggestions — seem to have been written to me personally as Editor, or to the magazine's staff in general, rather than with a view to publication. As soon as enough letters are received which *are* evidently intended for publication, a letters section will be included. There is not the slightest doubt that this will become an especially important section of the magazine.

Gray Watson



Who Ignited the Fires Of London?



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The emphasis in the present issue is on the performing arts rather than on fine art. Paul Allain takes us up into the Tatra Mountains in Poland to look at the work of the theatre company Teatr St I Witkiewicza. Andrew Renton guides us through the complexities and, as he argues, the evasions in Samuel Beckett's late work, so far less well known than such early pieces as *Waiting for Godot* — but which is just as worthy of our attention, both in its own right and because of its close connections with performance art. Performance art as such only makes a direct appearance in the form of a four-way conversation, including the artist, around the work of Tim Brennan in Arnhem. Paul Newham then investigates the under-realized potential of the human voice, in the light of some psychological considerations deriving from C.G. Jung and James Hillman. Finally, Catherine Brownell takes a long hard look at the language of current dance criticism, and finds much wanting.



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Paul Allain

DRAMA IN THE TATRAS

Teatr St I Witkiewicza



Teatr St I Witkiewicza's
production of **Dziuk's Cabaret**
Voltaire, premiered in 1986.
(photo Wojciech Plewinski)

Teatr St I Witkiewicza's
production of **Witkiewicz'**
Beelzebub's Sonata, Zakopane,
1989. (photo Wojciech Plewinski)

Zakopane is a two-hour bus ride out of Krakow, on a narrow road that climbs steadily into the Tatra mountains. A cultural centre at the beginning of this century, its artists have recently drifted towards Krakow to earn a difficult living, but there is one group who have reversed this trend. Four years ago, some of the graduates from the Krakow Drama Academy moved to Zakopane to set up their own company — Teatr St I Witkiewicza.

They take their name from the playwright, philosopher, artist and eccentric, Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885-1939). He spent most of his life in Zakopane, when he wasn't touring the tropics with the anthropologist Malinowski, a close friend, or fighting the Tzar's army in the Russian revolution. Along with Gombrowicz and the novelist and painter Bruno Schulz, Witkacy, as he is more commonly known, is the main inspiration for contemporary Polish theatre practitioners. Tadeusz Kantor started his career with productions of his plays, and he was the most commonly performed playwright during martial law. With a shared enthusiasm for this man, the Krakow students decided to use his name, and to live in the rarefied environment where he worked so intensely and prolifically.

Copies of Witkacy's paintings, produced while under the influence of drugs, adorn their large theatre complex, lifting it out of the grey background of the small side-street. The mansion contains a long foyer in three open sections and a larger studio with a very long ballroom-style hall which has a proscenium stage at one end. The foyer doubles as a gallery, and the dressing rooms and offices are up the rickety stairs. There is a grand atmosphere of former wealth.

The group is small by Polish standards for a building-based theatre company employing only nineteen people: technicians, administrators, a musical director, nine actors and two directors. Andrzej Dziuk, the artistic director, is responsible for most of the productions. In their four years of existence, they have built an adventurous and eclectic repertoire that ranges from Witkacy's plays, through devised shows based on texts by writers such as Garcia Marquez, to Shakespeare. Their reputation for innovative work of a high standard is the more remarkable because of their relative inexperience. They have performed mainly in Poland and are one of the most popular young companies there. In the 1960s numerous student groups were created, like Teatr STU in Krakow and Theatre of the Eighth Day in Poznan, but audiences are now looking for fresh ideas and new companies, particularly after the sterility of the martial war years. I learnt from a student in Gdansk that it is almost obligatory to visit this theatre when hiking in the mountains. They are termed a 'professional' company, according to Polish theatre bureaucracy, because they have been officially trained.

The first of the two productions which I saw was an adaptation of Witkacy's *Beelzebub's Sonata*. His plays are surreal and absurd and notoriously hard to stage. The beautifully designed and produced programme for *Beelzebub's Sonata* surprised me for a quality and contemporaneity that I had not found in most

Polish products. It was just one of the benefits of ample state subsidy, also evident in the four-man band, who might be deemed an expensive luxury in England. They accompanied the piece sparingly with moody, muted jazz, and contributed to the development of the central theme of artistic frustration. The devil's sonata is eventually written by the tormented scribe, but not without Hell taking over the stage in the form of a teenage seductress, repeated unsuccessful suicide attempts, and teasing horned imps. His payment is such that he enters in the last act like a mannequin with a fixed grin and a sick-stained bib, and just about manages to kill himself.

The actors reflected the madness of Witkacy's spirit with seriousness and intense concentration. The performance and characters were visually explicit, so that my lack of Polish seemed unimportant — in Polish theatre the mood is one of the most vital elements. Dziuk had also enjoyed using his theatre-space, as in each of the three acts another acting area was revealed: in Act Two to depict hell, and in Act Three, on the distant proscenium stage, to show two strippers contorting on a trapeze illuminated by lightning flashes. These two were later replaced by human clockwork dolls, waltzing and bowing, commenting on the main action by their disturbing presence and adding to the atmosphere of the grotesque. They echoed the contrived artificiality of the characters on the main stage indulging in their obsessive desires.

Particularly striking was Dziuk's use of the big window, which at times lent the building the atmosphere of a church. The play opened memorably with an orange light falling through the glass onto the sleeping bald-headed writer. A bearded man peers in and enters through the window and later the writer is framed by it as he swings from a rope, dead, and the devil conducts his sonata which swells to fill the whole theatre. The space of the theatre allowed the complicated action room to breathe, though the lighting was often too dark, a common feature in Polish theatre.

In Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, with some of John Donne's sonnets interpolated, similar themes were developed as in *Beelzebub's Sonata*, though I found the much wordier performance harder to enjoy. It was more traditional, played in the round on an elevated stage. To break the tension of Faustus enacting his agony, the chorus of the devil's minions, who were also the musicians, at one point ran amok in the darkness, causing hysteria among the audience. To start the show, the devil lit a bowl of flame in the foyer, immediately creating a sinister mood which was heightened by the fact that the performance started at 10.30 p.m.

The grinding double bass that underscored the piece was distractingly monotonous, but the moments when the music erupted into flamenco carousing were exceptional. As Faust and the Devil drunkenly revelled and the music exploded with energy, the carnivalesque Death figure stabbed a dead boar that hung from the ceiling in a narrow pool of light, and a steady fall of snow. It was a



Teatr St I Witkiewicza's production of *Witkiewicz's Beelzebub's Sonata*, Zakopane, 1989. (photo Wojciech Plewinski)

memorable picture, much more fully developed than the images in junk of the Angels of Heaven and Hell which hung over the audience and which were occasionally revealed by lights; images whose potential was never fully realised.

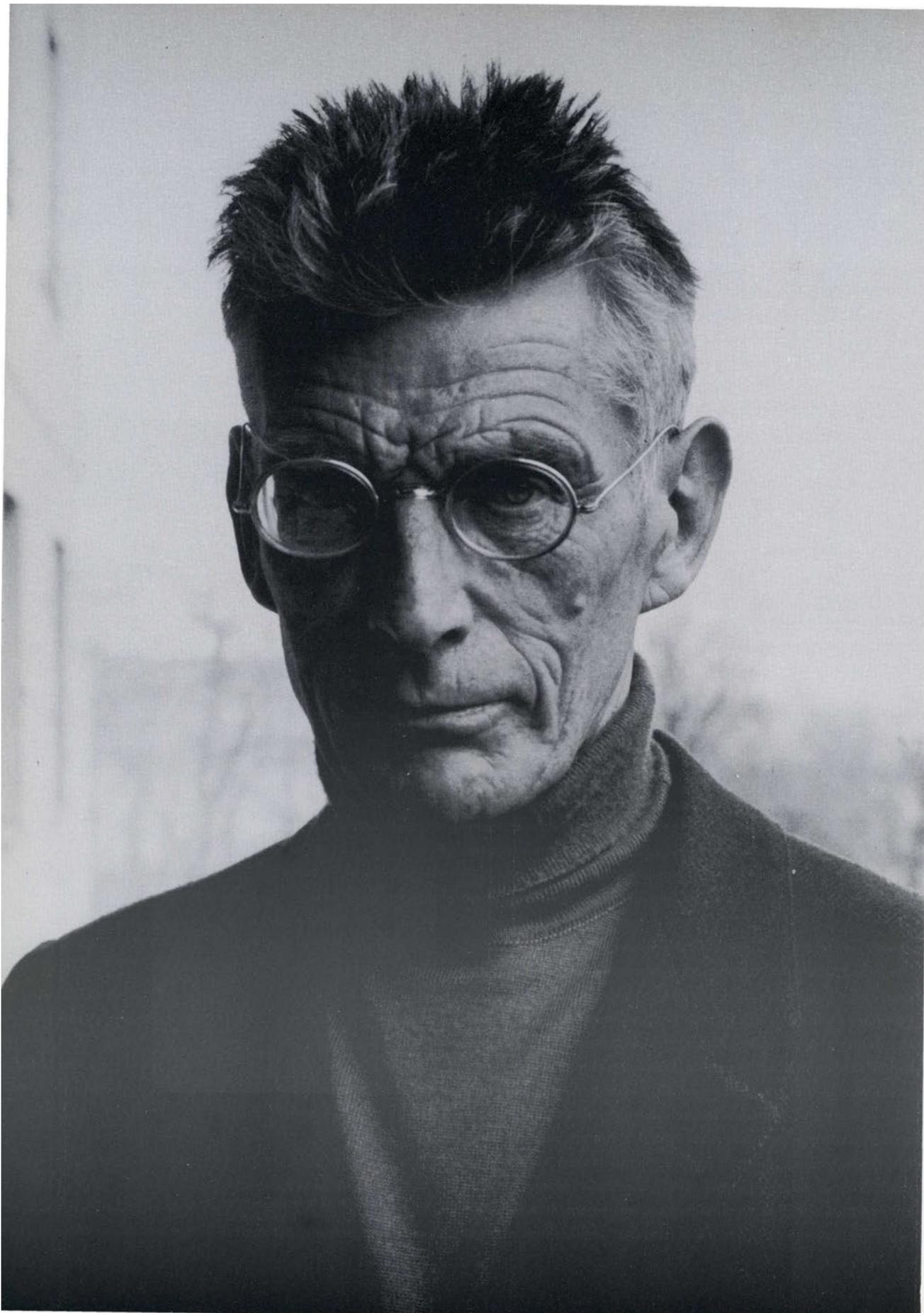
Again the performance was vigorous and physical. When Faust bitterly spat at the audience in a mockery of the Catholic Church's incense ritual, I was immediately aware of the thrill and sense of danger incited by this Satanic performance in a country with such a high Catholic population. Sadly for me, I was also aware how the moral of *Doctor Faustus* is reiterated every Sunday in packed Polish churches, and I longed for the group's challenging style to be reflected in the content.

Throughout the Summer season, when most other theatres shut for a month or two for holidays, the company alter their repertoire of eleven plays every two days. This is demanding for the company, but excellent training for the actors and a measure of their commitment to the group. (In Poland, though, it is common for actors to stay with a company for a large part of their career.) This rotation is undertaken in order to attract an audience who, in this small town, are mostly tourists. Of these, the great part are young people and students, who packed out the theatre both nights I was there, in a potentially quiet mid-week period. Their response was excited and enthusiastic, and they were evidently undeterred by the relatively high price of the tickets. (By our standards the price is ridiculously cheap, about 60 pence, though for this one can also travel the length of the country by train.) In Winter the fame of Zakopane as a ski resort must help to fill the theatre.

There are also some people, like myself, who come to Zakopane just to see the theatre group. This is a high recommendation in this isolated area. The group have opportunities to perform at several festivals within Poland throughout the year, but most of their work is shown in Zakopane, at their base. With many years ahead of them, this young company might even go on to achieve as much notoriety as their mentor did; like him, finding inspiration on the fringe of society, in the beautiful Tatra mountains.

Teatr St I Witkiewicza's
production of *Misterium*, 1987.
(photo Wojciech Plewinski)





Andrew Renton

TEXTS FOR PERFORMANCE / PERFORMING TEXTS

**Samuel Beckett's Anxiety of
Self-Regeneration**



Samuel Beckett directing,
Riverside Studios, London, 1984.
With Budd Thorpe. (photo John
Minihan)

Samuel Beckett. (photo Hugo
Jehle)

**An exhibition of John Minihan's
photographs "BACON BECKETT
BURROUGHS" was held at the October
Gallery, London, during February and
March 1990.**

BECKETT READING BECKETT

The implications of the loss of Samuel Beckett will take time to be fully understood. Until his very last months he was still producing ever-diminishing texts. Beckett's work has always been about coming to an end. The text itself is drawn into the game as ending that text becomes its very subject. Yet despite this tendency, he continued 'to end yet again',¹ time after time, when many believed that he had taken a particular genre to its most minimal extreme. Indeed, I would like to suggest that Beckett's later works, both in prose and drama, create quite radical new genres in themselves. Beckett's reputation seems to rest on a handful of plays, such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, and perhaps the *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* trilogy of novels. But all these were completed in the 1950s, and Beckett's self-discipline would become more extreme over the following thirty years or so. Perhaps it is simply because Beckett's later works are comparatively much shorter, and cannot fall comfortably into production or publishing schedules, that the later work has been undervalued. Now that the canon is complete, a reassessment must take place.

The fragments which comprise *Stirrings Still* were Beckett's last words to be published during his lifetime. These texts are densely self-allusive, and read as being as much a commentary on Beckett's self-imposed, inescapable lexicography and iconography as about the will to an ending. This pulsion is, in both prose and drama, a performative, (de)compositional act. However, *Stirrings Still*'s closing sentence, 'Oh all to end',² gives only half the story. Beckett's creative anxiety is not only one of influence but also one of continuity. Very often the impossibility of proceeding informs characterization, such as it is, as well as the form of discourse. This anxiety of being forever about to foreclose can actually displace the narrative, creating a sort of fissure in the text which allows Beckett to rebuild his work from a decentred base.

Although Beckett has employed self-regenerative devices in his texts from as early as — and most notably in — *Watt*, in his later texts he has sought the precision of a system that would, having been fully 'programmed', create a text automatically, as the system worked itself through to its conclusion. In this way Beckett's mode of work becomes what one critic has called an 'allegorization of the work's autonomous status'.³ The *process* of composition becomes the trope within the composition. Yet combined with this quest for an absolute conjunction of form and content (still troubling him since his first words on Joyce),⁴ there is always a pragmatism which Beckett necessarily evolves because of the impossibility of that system.

The balance between an absolute ideal and its precipitated, practical modifications is not necessarily compromise in its qualitative sense, but emphasises the tension between the control of the writer, and the extent to which he

participates within a self-representative text. What forces the regenerative system into play evolves from two distinct anxieties. Firstly, the writer fears that his text will never be written and resorts to a kind of Mephistophelian pact with a procedure which will guarantee him at least the semblance of an embodied text. Secondly, the writer fears the act of self-disclosure, and uses this device to veil what he feels nevertheless obliged to say:

'What am I to say? I said
Be yourself, they said. Say Yourself.
Myself? I said. What are you insinuating?'⁵

The humour of this unguarded moment in a *faux départ* for *Ohio Impromptu* cannot disguise the traumatic potential of the writer speaking of himself as himself. Beckett's various processes of formalization and systematization allow him to speak behind a protective structural device which both contains what he has to say and also forces it to be said.

Ohio Impromptu is perhaps Beckett's most obvious reference to his literary precursor, James Joyce.⁶ It also reveals a struggle for independence whilst attempting to deal with the isolation of that independence. The play portrays the act of reading not only as performance, a speech directed at an expectant audience, but it is also, perhaps, an uncanny monologue, where the spectator may see in Reader's double, Listener, a representation of the internal semiotic of talking (or reading) to, and of, oneself. The image of the table-bound reiterating reader repeats itself obsessively throughout the later phase of Beckett's work.

This act of self-reading is a disruptive device, which repeats itself in the television play *Nacht und Träume* and also in *Stirrings Still*. I shall devote the rest of this article to a parallel tendency in Beckett's work towards abstracted, detached self-regeneration. In a world without subject, both the prose and theatrical texts in Beckett's canon become dramatic, performative, as we witness them being composed before us.



Ohio Impromptu, Harold Clurman Theater, New York, 1983. (photo Martha Swope)

AD ABSURDUM/AD INFINITUM

Watt is perhaps the first and largest-scale attempt at using the systematic as a means of continuance. Steven Connor sees a tension between closed and open sequences in the book, where 'in the one, structure predominates over sequence, in the other, sequence asserts itself beyond the control of structure.'⁷ For Connor, the implications of these sequences for the work as a whole are still more significant:

'If we see the book as duplicating a structure of finite sequence then this makes it self-enclosed, and, on its own terms, exhaustive. But we might

also want to see the book as an infinite series, or rather as part of an infinite series of arrangements of every possible group of elements. There is no possibility of closure for such a book, only abandonment.⁸

This is a problematic paradigm which becomes most self-evident in the later texts, such as *Lessness*. We should not forget, however, that this 'exhaustiveness' of sequencing in *Watt* is often far more complex than Beckett pretends it is. Beckett will often play with the semblance of an exhaustive sequence, labouring the device for comic effect.

Watt promotes these systems not only to divert the reader from what might possibly manifest itself as the writer's anxiety, but also to perpetuate a text whose linear events as given would soon dissolve into unaccountable non-events. *Lessness*, written some thirty years later, appears at a stage in Beckett's work where there seems to be a tacit acknowledgement that the non-event is perhaps all that may be hoped for, and that the creative impasse is almost the trope itself which informs the structure of the piece. The text starts from a position of a lack. Written in 1969 in French as *Sans* — literally, 'without' — the title alone points to a troublesome lack of closure. Without, unless transformed into a noun, which it does not seem to be here, normally requires two nouns to function correctly: something must be lost from something else. By the time the text is translated in the following year, what could operate as adverb, preposition or conjunction has, ironically, become a noun, reflecting a state of being. The lack has become its own text.

At the time of writing *Sans*, Beckett's theatrical work had reached its own impasse as *Breath*. Here the stage is, to paraphrase *The Lost Ones*, depopulated, with only detritus to show a once present being. Action, such as it is, takes the form of a recorded vagitus played twice. With additional specific interplay of light, and the 'framing' of the performance by the curtain, the piece lasts approximately thirty-five seconds. *Breath* alerts the reader of Beckett's work as a whole to a kind of achieved failure. It takes Beckett's drama as far as it will go. It has minimalized stage-ritual to a seemingly irreducible level. If *Breath* is such a 'successful failure', it is because it achieves precisely what the writer has consistently worked towards, failing to leave an opening by which he might regenerate any text at all.

In a similar way, Beckett's prose had become more and more intractable. *All Strange Away* gives way to *Imagination Dead Imagine*, which is followed in turn by *Ping*, a distillation of a hugely complex process, involving *The Lost Ones*, which in turn generates *Lessness*.⁹ The body in the room, familiar from the trilogy, is deprived of all constitutive elements. Description desires to inform (or not inform) the reader of a paradoxically specified lack of feature. It is not only the detailed description which is missing, but any feature by which the reader might comfortably ascribe a sense to the internal 'reality' of the piece.

We know by Beckett's own confession that *Lessness* is specifically derived from *Ping*. *Ping*, in fact, seems to determine its own near-impossible progression by the sonic, non-semantic device of the title which punctuates the text. Sometimes it is disruptive, forcing a tangential strand of discourse, at others it seems only temporarily to postpone the act of saying. Yet *Ping* does manage closure of a sort. Its self-conscious problematic of being 'unover' finally gives way to 'ping silence ping over.' (*Ping* 151) *Lessness*, meanwhile, must have seemed at the time of writing, unstartable. Beckett has made a virtue of this impossible premise, and has built it into the fabric of the text. Although the published text is complete in less than five pages, it has already repeated itself once, giving every indication that what we have as the received text is a fragmentary section of an infinitely recomposing system.

The subject regresses from the immaculate proportions of 'White wall one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never seen' (*Ping* 149) to 'In four split asunder over backwards true refuge issueless scattered ruins.' (*Lessness* 154) In a rare moment of public self-commentary, Beckett confirms that:

'*Lessness* has to do with the collapse of some such refuge as that last attempted in *Ping* and with the ensuing situation in the refuge.'¹⁰

Beckett then elaborates on the structure of the text:

'Ruin, exposure, wilderness, mindlessness, past and future denied and affirmed, are the categories, formally distinguishable, through which the writing winds, first in one disorder, then in another.'¹¹

He has not, meanwhile, been reticent in clarifying his method of arranging the text.¹² Perhaps of most significance is his unpublished summary:

'LESSNESS proceeds from PING.

It is composed of 6 statement groups each containing 10 sentences, i.e. 60 sentences in all.

These are first given in a certain order and paragraph structure, then repeated in a different order and different paragraph structure.

The whole consists therefore of $2 \times 60 = 120$ sentences arranged and rearranged in $2 \times 12 = 24$ paragraphs.

Each statement group is formally differentiated and the 10 sentences composing it 'signed' by certain elements common to them all.'¹³

The process is as radical and comparable an arch-Modernist gesture as the dodecaphonic system of musical composition of the Second Viennese School, most faithfully rendered by Anton Webern, where each of the twelve tones of the chromatic scale cannot be repeated before the remaining eleven have been played. Composition by this method can begin with a twelve-note row, which is then

rearranged in canon, inversion, retrograde, retrograde inversion, etc., into an increasingly complex musical texture. Perhaps the work which Pierre Boulez develops from this, where he even manages to control the dynamics of the score under a rigorous system, is a still more useful parallel. What is important for these purposes is the essential unit out of which the entire piece may be composed, and from which all its subsequent forms may be analyzed.

BREAKING THE FLOWS — EVASIVE TURNS

Beckett resumes his experiment in self-regenerative texts with *That Time*. Although *Not I*, the one work completed between *Lessness* and *That Time*, contains its own distinct formalist elements, in *That Time* it is clear from the first drafts that some variant patterning of the three voices (A, B, C) will be the determining characteristic of the play. Three stages of Listener's life are combined into a diachronic presentation. As each narrative continues by means of interrupting the other two, the combination obliges Listener, and the theatre audience, to assimilate the tri-partite structure all at once. In addition to this there is a fourth level of discourse that takes place in the play, which consists of the embodiment of the Listener (i.e. the head alone, isolated in space — in one sense, indeed, more of a disembodiment), the opening and closing of his eyes, his 'slow and regular' breathing, and his final smile. This is synchronous with the audience's experience of the play, yet as perpetrator of the three voices, Listener also provides an additional time dimension to the piece.

Everything in *That Time* is mediated by two devices: (1.) the arbitrary combination of texts according to an external pattern; (2.) the semiotic effect on stage of Listener as perceiving entity. Listener's rôle is to provide a focus or synchronicity to the texts, yet he is as enigmatic at the end as he is when he first comes into image. His smile at the end of the piece is perhaps his one truly motivational gesture. However, it occurs subsequent to a significant shift in pattern as the voices draw to a close:

I	ACB	ACB	ACB	CAB	<i>Silence, Breath</i>
II	CBA	CBA	CBA	BCA	<i>Silence, Breath</i>
III	BAC	BAC	BAC	BAC	<i>Silence, Breath, Smile'</i>

The irony of the play, as shown by Listener's smile, is that this is the first engagement of body to text, achieved only as the scene fades to black. Perhaps Listener has actually gained control over the pattern, and forced its change. At the very least there is the wry pleasure in this achieved perpetuum for its own sake. The implication seems to be that were this to start all over again (as so often implied in Beckett's work) the pattern would be stuck in this unchanging, unchangeable rut of BAC.

THE EMPTIED SELF — PURE SYSTEMS

The structuring of *That Time* is a classic example of Beckett's use of formal devices as a means of protecting the deepest-rooted autobiographical elements. In his television play *Quad*, there is even less danger of any autobiography emerging. If *Quad* is a play (and there may be serious arguments against it) its impetus must stem from the emotional inability to write a play proper. One might say that Beckett stands at one stage removed from a 'writerly' obligation here. He contributes only a system, from which logic could construct the entire action of the performance. If there is any trace of an experiential, or lived reality, it is so obliquely codified that it is rendered unrecognisable.

In *Quad*, Beckett provides the process of complete optional exhaustion. There is no dramatic exposition as such, nor is there any sign in the drafts that Beckett intended there to be. An earlier, unpublished draft, 'J.M. Mime',¹⁴ not only maps out all the solutions to the movements but also the possible errors. 'J.M. Mime' stands as a metatextual necessity to *Quad's* asymbolic, residual phenomenon. (*Quad II* empties meaning still further.) Martin Esslin introduced the BBC broadcast of the piece as 'a poem without words',¹⁵ which is at once helpful and misleading. Esslin has captured the paradox of elements which function as pure signifier, but the result is not a poem which seeks to communicate. Rather it might be expressed as a *poetics* without words, in the sense that Beckett constructs a network of potential semantic interrelations that will never connect with each other, nor with anything beyond the performed text for that matter. If indeed there is a genre in which *Quad* might (uncomfortably) rest, it could be ballet, as suggested by the kind of precision required by the phrase, '[s]ome ballet training desirable'.¹⁶ Then again, it communicates more readily on the abstracted level of music. Neither words nor the body can operate in a state of absolute abstraction. *Quad* comes close to realizing its own definition of what *Footfalls* articulates as 'motion alone'. In *Quad*, Beckett seeks to distil the pure energy of movement that tries to turn away from the inevitable signified of the body. We are close to Félix Guattari's paradigm of 'subjectless action'.

We can see Beckett attempting the emptying process in *Quad* that he later achieves in a paradoxical way in *Worstward Ho*. In the latter, the body becomes an impossible moving machine, having been reduced linguistically to a limbless trunk. The reader is required to integrate essential function into physical impossibility. *Quad's* four 'characters' seems to embrace themselves like May, and generate the same, albeit quickened sound of footfalls which give her play its title. Each wears a cowl that covers the limbs, the face, any feature. These are bodies created solely for motion. They are defined in performance by colour, and their respective 'home' corner. Otherwise, they are '[a]s alike in build as possible . . . sex indifferent' (*Quad* 453): without organs. When *Quad II* fades up on the scene once more, the colour has gone, and unless one traces a pattern for each player



Quad (Quadrat I + II),
Süddeutscher Rundfunk,
Stuttgart. (photo Hugo Jehle)

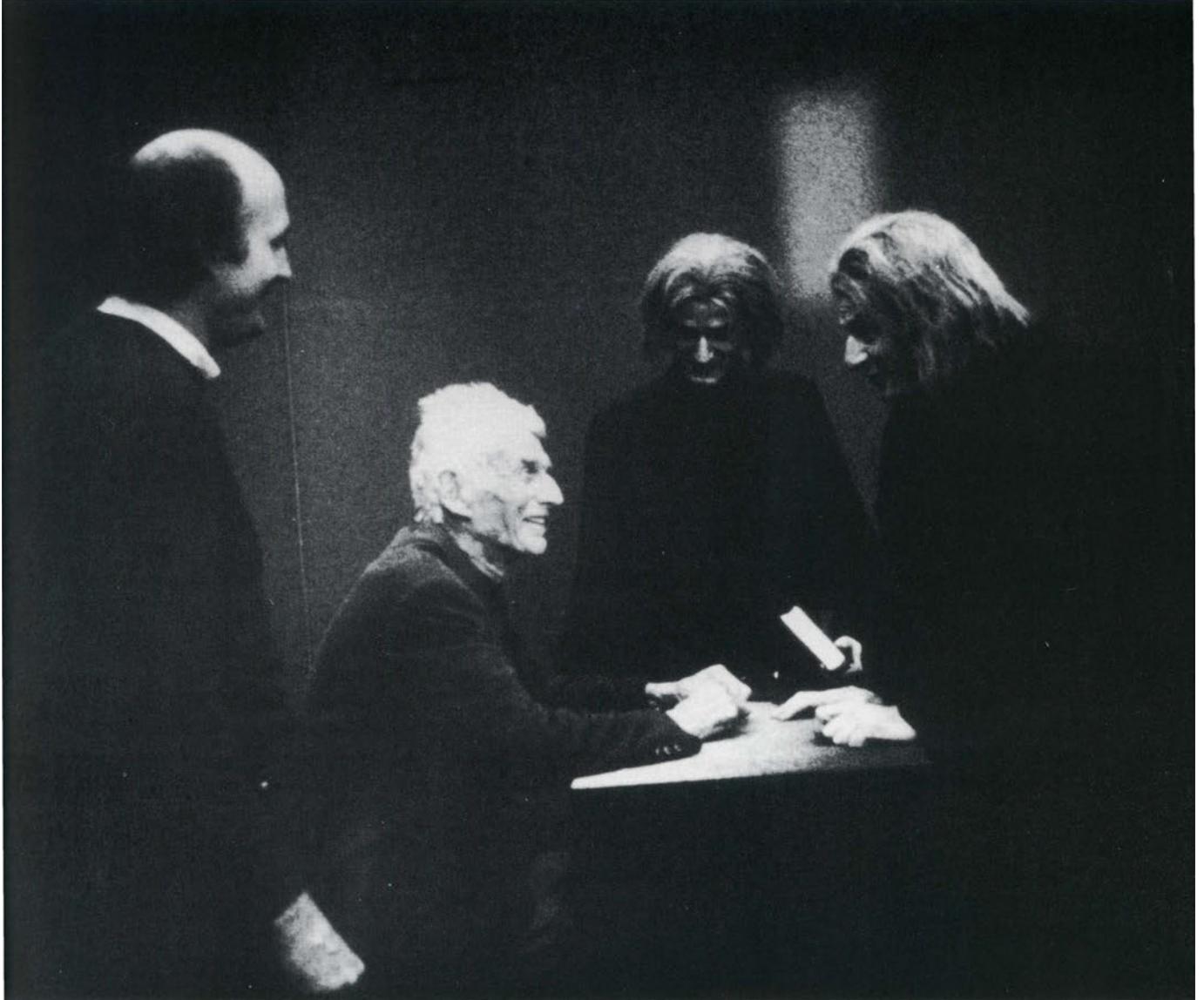
from his corner throughout the series, holding as many as four patterns in the mind at once, it becomes impossible to tell one from another.

Indeed, each player and element is of equal value. When Beckett chose to cut into, and out of, the image mid-game, to open and close the Süddeutscher Rundfunk production, it was to convey the semblance of the familiar, endless cycle, and to deny priority to one as progenitor of the others.¹⁷ There is no interaction as each player echoes the next, but the relationship is reciprocal and unbiased. The quest for absolute form as opposed to a meaning-laden misweighting creates Beckett's desired effect of non-communication. Even the way that Beckett phrases his treatment emphasises that there is nothing hidden beneath the immediate semiotic effect:

'Four possible solos all given
Six possible duos all given (two twice.)
Four possible trios all given twice . . .
All possible light combinations given . . .
All possible percussion combinations given . . .
All possible costume combinations given.' (*Quad* 451-452)

Like the definitive opening of *Ping*, where the scenario is '[a]ll known', this projects an idealism which we know is not achievable. It is no accident that Beckett chose to publish his original scenario with variations that resulted from the Süddeutscher Rundfunk production appended, but not integrated into the text. The performance must necessarily engage with a pragmatics of form, but the text must stand unadulterated, and true to its original construction. In this respect, one might reverse Enoch Brater's suggestion that '[i]n these plays [i.e. *Quad I* and *II*] there is no real script, only the *pretext* of one . . . The performance we see on the television *is* the text.'¹⁸ On the contrary, despite the diagrams, formulae and 'given' processes, the text of *Quad* is as controlled a statement of writing as any Beckett has made. Beckett's production of the text is an acute piece of self-analysis that acknowledges the impossibility of its own idealized form. The Stuttgart modifications that Beckett has appended to his text reveal some of the pragmatic processes involved in realising the piece. They confirm the interpretive texture which can and must be imposed upon the system, or even against it. Other productions of earlier plays with which Beckett has been involved have sought to impose order and thematic harmony on less regular forms. It is a form of intense self-revisionism which, when Beckett's production notebooks are published at the end of this year, will reveal an entire theory of dramaturgy. Yet Beckett seems to recoil from this process in *Quad*. It is as though he has created the text *in absentia*, and reached a critical realization, fearing the possibility of an absolute asignification. The drama is introspective: it looks into itself as text and formula combined. Dramatic motivation and projection, so successfully eradicated from the

Samuel Beckett during rehearsal of *Nacht und Träume*, Süddeutscher Rundfunk, Stuttgart, 1983. With Jim Lewis. (photo Hugo Jehle)



original text, are reinvented in Beckett's production notes:

'Should solo player avoid E? yes if centre dramatized tabou & this rather than avoidance of collision the motive when two or more. Consider brief halt in all cases at point of deviation & simultaneous suspension of percussion, not to resume till manoeuvre completed & direct course resumed. Sudden silence & stand still. Brief halt again when diagonal rejoined? Sudden simultaneous resumption of sound & motion.'¹⁹

This is both practical and emotive. In these notes Beckett complicates and over-specifies, element by element, to create an enriched music of light and sound. The ideal integration of elements (i.e. the first scenario without modifications) is given minute variants which expose the patterns of the piece by their very irregularities within the system. In the final recording of *Quad*, Beckett suspends the percussion instruments in the central phase of the third series. This allows the rhythm of the footfalls to emerge from the dense polyrhythms of the four percussion sounds. The counterpoint that has always been present now becomes the stressed rhythm that the percussionist must follow. At the same time, this gap hints at *Quad II*, where there will be no rhythm but that generated by the players themselves on the square. There is an obligation to motion which resists Beckett's suggestion that '[e]ach hastens towards brief respite.' The respite becomes integral to the pattern as we see and hear it. At the same time Beckett develops a *praxis* of desire which sets these rhythms into motion. The concept of 'tabou' defines this cult of evasion within a performance that, unlike any other drama, seeks introversion. This parallels the anxiety of the writer who works in code but has contrived to destroy the legend which could dismantle the enigma of how this motion began. Beckett's personal 'big bang singularity', which sets his world into motion, is untraceable, unre/markable. Even he must impose its significance belatedly.

LAST REVISIONS — EXCLUSIVE SYSTEMS

Beckett's final dramatic work, *What Where*, is, in many ways, a text of summation which turns to its audience to break the code, and complete the work:

'Make sense who may.
I switch off.' (*What Where* 476)

With this, the voice of Bam (V) closes down the play (and, indeed, Beckett's entire dramatic *oeuvre*), switching off his own light, and provoking the final loss of all play on the playing-area. This must surely read as the author's final message to his critics.²⁰ If *Ohio Impromptu* at least attempted a form of self-revelation, and *Catastrophe* a grim self-parody, this last communiqué to those drawn to interpreting his every word finds Beckett seeking permanently to absent himself

from the situation. The work is one thing; the meaning of that work follows after the fact. *What Where* is unique in Beckett's dramatic work in that Beckett revises his text so drastically for the televised version. Pierre Chabert's subsequent theatrical production retained and further developed these modifications (presumably with Beckett's approval) despite their evolution specifically from within the genre of television.²¹ In this respect, *What Where* tries to wind down the iconographies of the *oeuvre*. The experiential in the television is reduced and reduced until Beckett reaches not a new, absolute minimalism, but rather restores the inevitability of an earlier icon, the isolated head. However much he tries to break his own mould, Beckett tropes his way back to the power of the archetypal Beckettian image.

As I have noted, *Quad* is so successful according to Beckett's reductive criteria that it all but closes off the possibilities of (re)iteration thereafter. *What Where* draws from the unimpeachable purity of *Quad*'s form, in an attempt to reopen a well-sealed closure. Between these two plays, Beckett wrote *Catastrophe* and *Nacht und Träume*. One might link the latter to *What Where* and *Quad*, since they all function in the same medium. Similarly, *What Where* can be seen as a distillation of *Catastrophe*'s political engagement. This is Beckett's personal theatre of cruelty. However, *Nacht und Träume* is more closely related to *Ohio Impromptu* and *Stirrings Still*, by its reiterated scene of reading. *Catastrophe*, meanwhile, is written in so disruptive a style in the context of the *oeuvre*, that one cannot help but think that Beckett was obliged to step out of sequence, to create a dialogic discourse which would revive the sequence of self-regenerative texts.²² The motions towards Protagonist's raising of his head provide the real catastrophe; *Catastrophe* is not the play, but rather a protective epiphenomenon, which only functions to situate Protagonist and his action, and the creation of a Beckettian paradigm.

Of course, *What Where* draws from both *Catastrophe* and *Quad*, but it is *Quad* which informs the systematic execution of information (in more than one sense). The cycle, however, does not come full circle, but rather implies one:

'BOM enters at N, halts at 1 head bowed.

Pause.

BIM enters at E, halts at 2 head haught.

Pause.

BIM exits at E followed by BOM.

Pause.

BIM enters at E, halts at 2 head bowed.

Pause.

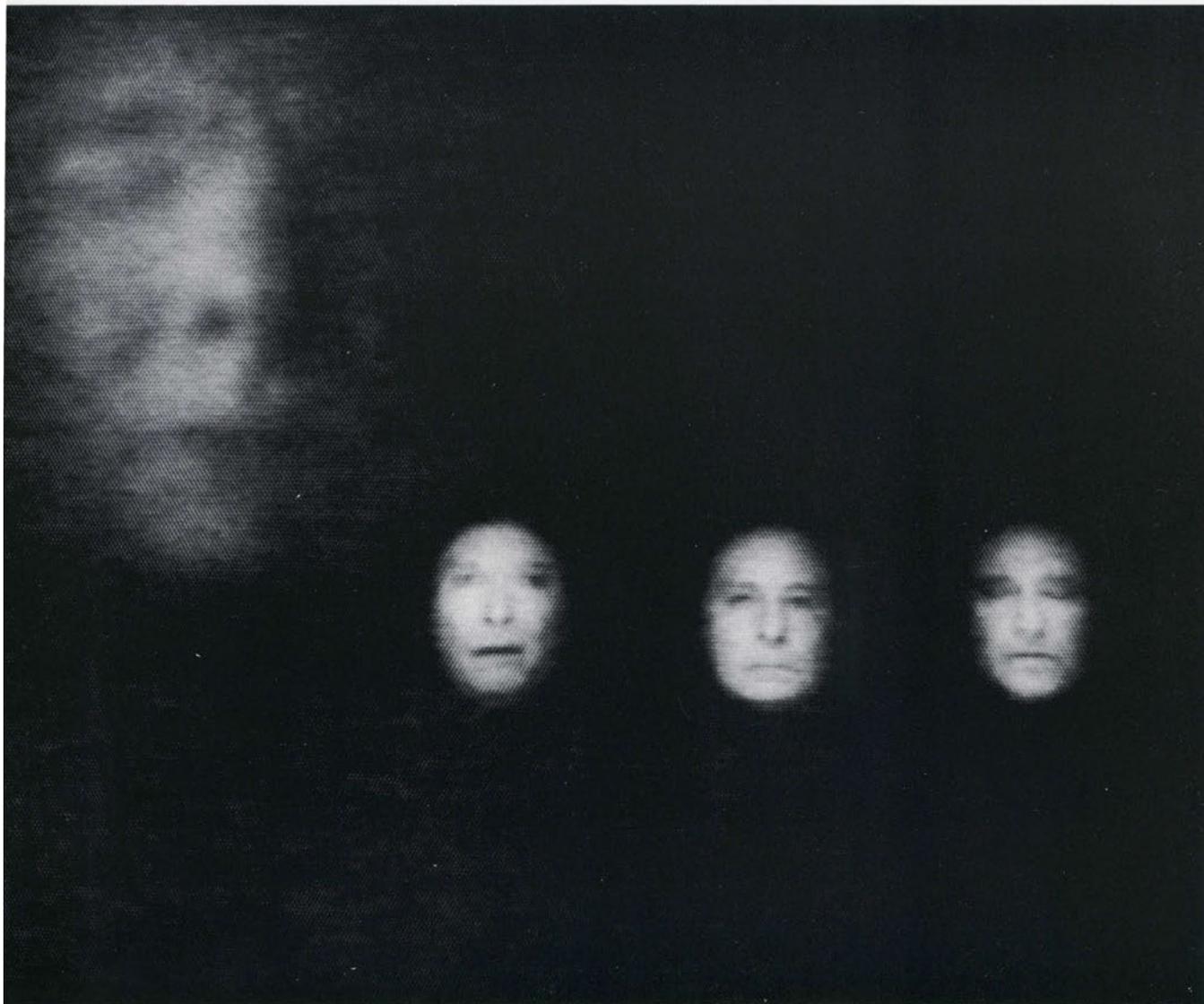
BEM enters at N, halts at 1 head haught.

Pause.

BEM exits at N, followed by BIM.



Catastrophe, Riverside Studios, London. (photo Nobby Clark)



Pause.

BEM enters at N, halts at 1 head bowed.

Pause.

BAM exits at W, followed by BEM.

Pause.

BAM enters at W, halts at 3 head bowed.

Pause. (What Where 471)

This is a 'pre-action' of which Beckett is so fond. It previews the entire action that follows 'with words'. Bim interrogates Bom, Bem interrogates Bim, Bam interrogates Bem. Each fails in his mission. Bam leads himself away, obligated to the system that he 'surveys' from his alternative perspective as V. The motions begin with the implication that Bam has previously interrogated someone and failed, as indicated by his bowed head. The final appearance of Bam in the sequence, again with bowed head, turns time back upon itself to allow that interrogation to take place.

This is the essential pattern of the piece, but it is enriched by other repetitions and resonances. These contrive a linguistic renewal within the text which, by their permutational quality, undergo a secondary process that kills off meaning. The play becomes an arena of the 'once-meant', where abstraction of language predicates a series of signifier/signified ratios (of events or objects) that play with a level of meaning long since valueless from overuse; what has been called 'a banalization of torture'.²³ The objects of interrogation are 'it' (i.e. the 'what') and 'where', or, to be more precise, 'that he said [it/where] to him.' This latter phrase, incidentally, is transformed as the text works its way through its self-eradicating drive to 'That he said where.' Beyond the text, this might become an unspeakable 'That I said where to me.' The truth of the matter is that, despite this, all the characters are reflections of Bam.

As he was planning the final television version, Beckett was contemplating a system of colour-analysis, derived from Rimbaud's 'Voyelles'. Poetic *praxis* and rigorous classification combine:

Süddeutscher Rundfunk
production of *What Where (Was Wo)*, Stuttgart 1985. (photo Hugo Jehle)

'Bodies & movement eliminated

Faces only

Full face throughout

As alike as possible

Differentiated by colour

BAM — Black

BEM — White

BIM — Red

BOM — Blue

(cf Rimbaud's sonnet)²⁴

Beckett has already eliminated the prospect of motion. With these colours *and* movement, *What Where* would resemble *Quad* just a little too much. Yet even the colour must go in the final analysis.

The result is an unforeseen transformation, showing Beckett paradoxically at his most open to suggestion, and also at his most repressive.²⁵ To all intents and purposes the television version is a new play, but it seems to result from the writer not wanting to project himself so far as to create a new play. It is the last in a series of systematic renewals which work for and against the act of writing. True to his system to the last, Beckett's revised *What Where* is a re-systematization of a system. The dramatic *oeuvre* has reached a form of self-imposed closure, and this last play must turn into itself for renewal. Beckett has already given us 'the works', in the words of V's pun, but the process of self-regeneration will continue of its own accord.

NOTES

1. 'For To End Yet Again', reprinted in *Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980*, London: John Calder, 1984. All further references to Beckett's shorter prose will be cited in the text, with page references from this edition.
2. *Stirrings Still* was first published in *The Guardian*, 3 March 1989, p. 25. Published in a separate volume, London and New York: John Calder and Blue Moon, 1989.
3. Allen Thiher, *Words in Reflection: Modern Language Theory and Postmodern Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 106.
4. 'Dante . . . Bruno . . . Vico . . . Joyce', reprinted in *Disjecta*, London: John Calder, 1983. 'Here form is content, content is form.' (p. 27.)
5. Transcribed from the facsimile of the *Ohio Impromptu* manuscript held at Ohio State University, and reproduced in (eds.) Morris Beja, S.E. Gontarski and Pierre Astier, *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983, between p. 190 and p. 191. My transcription differs from the one offered in the following pages of the book.
6. The most notable allusions to Joyce are the 'long black coat . . . and old world Latin Quarter hat' which he so often wore, and the 'Isle of Swans', L'allée des cygnes, in the Seine, where Beckett and Joyce would walk together. It is perhaps also worth noting a certain peculiarity in Beckett's constant allusions to these two great literary precursors, James Joyce and William Shakespeare. Can it be mere accident, or a more subtly evasive twist that, for Beckett, Joyce is most important for his drama, whilst the arch-dramatist of them all figures largely in the prose work? There is a similar irony to be found in Beckett's later prose texts which read very much as dramatic monologues (and many, such as *Company*, have been performed as such), whilst a play such as *A Piece of Monologue*, seems to negate its very title by a telegraphic, notational style of text, marginally at odds with the scene presented before the spectator.
7. Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 31.
8. *Ibid.*
9. John Pilling notes that *Ping* is 'a reduction of the material from the drafts of *The Lost Ones*.' *Samuel Beckett*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 50.
10. Samuel Beckett, *Lessness*, London: John Calder, 1970. Statement on dust jacket.

11. *Ibid.*
12. See, most notably, Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 265.
13. MS lodged in Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Quoted in Rosemary Pountney, *Theatre of Shadows: Samuel Beckett's Drama 1956-1976*, Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988, p.154. It is interesting to speculate on why Beckett feels so able to clarify his method in such detail. Perhaps he fears that his system would be buried too far beneath the weight of the words themselves. By the same token, the system provides the desired evasive turn from that very weight of over-determination.
14. 'J.M. Mime' was probably written in 1963, and is contained in a notebook held at the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, MS 4664. It is reproduced in facsimile in S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985, pp. 201-208.
15. *Quad* was first broadcast in Britain on BBC 2, 16 December 1982. Esslin also uses this phrase in 'A Poetry of Moving Images', in (eds.) Alan Warren Friedman, Charles Rossman, Dina Sherzer, *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987, p. 74.
16. Reprinted in *The Complete Dramatic Works*, London: Faber and Faber, 1986, p. 453. All further references to Beckett's plays will be cited in the text, with page references from this edition.
17. In the Süddeutscher Rundfunk production, the cuts that open and close play are so severe that they could only have achieved by sectioning the action mid-flow. In *Quad II*, however, the image is faded up and down quite gently.
18. Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 110.
19. *Quadrat* notebook housed at Reading University Library (R.U.L. MS. 2100). Dated 'Stuttgart April 1981'.
20. In fact, Beckett's final written work is a short text entitled 'what is the word', another systematic text, which attempts to create an extended phrase towards that elusive word. The whole enterprise, it seems, is 'folly', which may indeed be the word the writer was looking for all along. First published in *The Sunday Correspondent*, 31 December 1989, p. 32.
21. *What Where* was first performed at the Harold Clurman Theatre in New York, 15 June 1983. Beckett worked on the television version in June 1985 at the Süddeutscher Rundfunk studios. Pierre Chabert's production was premièred at the Théâtre du Petit Rond-Point on 22 March 1986.
22. That the play was dedicated to Vaclav Havel, and was first performed at the Avignon Festival's evening of solidarity with the Czech dissident, in 1982, must also reinforce the political nature of the play. In *Catastrophe* we see cruelty; in *What Where* we must reconstruct it. It should be noted, albeit tangentially, that it was one week after Beckett's death that *Catastrophe's* dedicatee became the President of Czechoslovakia.
23. '... [C]omme s'il s'agissait d'une banalisation de torture.' Programme note for the 1986 Rond-Point production, presumably written by Pierre Chabert.
24. R.U.L. MS. 3097. The *Was Wo* notes consist of pages torn from a notebook, and accordingly, their order is difficult to determine. They are unnumbered but fall into two sections. The first is dated 'May 85', and seems to have been worked out just before, or at the start of, his work in Stuttgart, while the remainder seems informed by experiences during the production.
25. Martha Fehsenfeld notes the following comment by Jim Lewis, Beckett's cameraman in Stuttgart:

If you want to compare this production with all the others for television, there's one major difference. And that is that his concept was not set. He changed and changed and changed.

'"Everything out but the faces": Beckett's reshaping of *What Where* for Television', *Modern Drama*, Vol. XXXIX, June 1986, p. 240.



Krapp's Last Tape, Riverside Studios, London. (photo Nobby Clark)



Ivan Gaskell

FREE STATE

In Conversation with Tim Brennan

**Tim Brennan, *Free State*, AVE
Festival, Arnhem, November
1989. (photo Sharon Norris)**

As part of the International Audio Visual Experimental Festival, Arnhem (16-22 November 1989) the British performance artist Tim Brennan occupied a low, barrel-vaulted brick cellar for several hours at a time over three days. He placed a trestle table near the bottom of the steep, rickety staircase by which visitors entered. He flooded part of the floor where he paced or stood hunched, occasionally complaining of the cold. A single upright chair and a mirror stood near the back wall. On the table lay an Irish republican newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, open at a long article giving suspects practical advice on how to avoid incriminating themselves and others when under police interrogation. Brennan asked successive Dutch visitors to translate some of the English text into an exercise book also on the table. This request served to begin exchanges in the course of which the initiative passed from performer to visitor and back again in unpredictable and — because of the circumstances — sometimes ambiguous shifts. As a visitor I swiftly found myself inevitably drawn into an uncomfortable position of interrogator, even though it soon became obvious that Brennan was not simply playing the rôle of prisoner. There was no structure of pretence, rather an atmosphere of ambiguity which the exchanges between visitors and performer enhanced. Discussing the circumstances of the work became part of the work itself.

I was in the cellar at the same time as British video artist **Susan Brind** and Australian sculptor **Simon Penny**. Some of those present knew one another, others had not previously met. Brennan pointed out that a visitor the previous day had added to his or her Dutch translation of a section of the newspaper article the following German phrase, resonant of war crimes investigations: *Unterfragung? Ich bin unschuldig. Ich hab' es nicht gewußt* ('Interrogation? I am innocent. I knew nothing of it').

What follows is a transcription of some of the exchanges which then took place, exchanges which — amongst many others, equally valid though unrecorded — became part of the work.

TB: What is the intention that lies behind this German quotation? Maybe we can talk about that.

IG: Displaced guilt. If you're made to feel as I felt coming down here, that you are party to — complicit in — a process that you normally wouldn't want to have anything to do with and yet it's being done on your behalf officially by the organs of the state, then you want to shift that sense of guilt of being complicit by saying 'I have nothing to do with this', so you write something like that. That's just a rationalisation, but that might be one explanation for it.

[Wanting to question the confrontational element in the work and feeling that the position of the table created a barrier inhibiting visitors from entering the same

space as the performer, Susan Brind then suggested moving it further into the room.]

TB: Where would you move it to?

SB: Well, I'd quite like it actually over here, near the centre of the space, because then when people walk to it, if you were in a situation with your back to them they would actually see your face in the mirror and I quite like that contact. I think then the viewer can make a choice and after all you don't have to read everything that's there. I haven't read all of the text. That isn't to dismiss it, because of course it's relevant to you in making the work, but actually the ambience of the space is far more demanding on me than the text because I'd much rather trust my personal response to the situation than rely on written language to tell me how to interpret what's going on.

IG: But it isn't only that. The position of the table isn't only so that you're directed towards the text. It forms a physical barrier which when you come down here puts you [TB] immediately at a disadvantage and that to me was very strong. It's manipulative . . .

SP: In what sense does it put Tim at a disadvantage? It objectifies him?

IG: It's because it makes it like a cell in which the people who are here and the table here are stopping him from getting out unless it's with our permission.

SP: I read that as conceptually part of the piece . . . for me this environment is about that confinement. I think probably from the point of view of the piece it's more effective if the viewers feel that Tim is in fact confined and doesn't have an escape route. Whether it's there or not is basically immaterial. Unless it's conceptually part of the work that there is in fact a potential escape route and it would seem to me that that's totally contrary to the newspaper article and the idea of involuntary confinement and interrogation.

IG: Yes. I think the table works very effectively here, but it is, as Susan was saying, when you think about it, a manipulation of the space on your [TB's] part. But then the whole thing is set up by you from the start anyway, so — so what?

SP: Isn't Tim putting himself — at least right now — in a position of someone who is subject to confinement and manipulation by another authority? That reads very clearly.

SB: But the thing that's interesting for me about the possibility of intervention is this — this discussion where one realises how one's own position can shift. There is actually an active attitude about the possibility of intervention. I don't particularly want to be continually walking into performances and witnessing another confrontational situation between performer and viewer. It's far more

exciting for me to enter into a dialogue like this and discuss the possibilities. Usually this all goes on between viewers outside of the situation in a bar afterwards, where actually seeing the effect of that kind of discussion is rather unsatisfying.

IG: Well, you can't see the effect of it. It has no effect.

SP: Yes, but on the other hand I don't think that confrontation and this kind of open dialogue during the work are necessarily the only two poles in that situation. I think it's quite reasonable if Tim wants to set up a situation which he constructs which is not necessarily confrontational with the viewer, but does include the viewer engaging with the aesthetics of the work while the work is in progress. That's fine, don't you think?

SB: In this particular work, yes . . . Perhaps partly my doubt is a reaction to some work that I saw last night on video which I found extremely confrontational with the audience in such a way that it positively alienated me and . . . ultimately I think reinforces things that perhaps it's trying to critique; and that's where the possibility for dialogue here for me has been interesting because we're actually talking seriously about what possibilities there have been rather than just, you know, going and getting a dose and going off to a bar.

IG: But even if Tim chooses to set this up as it is now and you get this sense of guilt when you come in and you're involved in a way that you don't necessarily want to be, then at the same time there's an ambiguity there because, as I think he was implying, there's a shift. But in the end that position that I find myself in as this unwilling participant is completely on the performer's terms, so the power relationship is like in parallel mirrors and I find that in itself interesting.

SP: Yes, the thing that concerns me about engaging the work in process — this particular work — is that it seems to put Tim in a schizophrenic position. In a way he's already in a schizophrenic position because he's constructed the relationship where we are the subjects, but are made to feel that we are in a position of authority — which is a really curious situation of structure between him and the audience and then partake in normal dialogue . . .

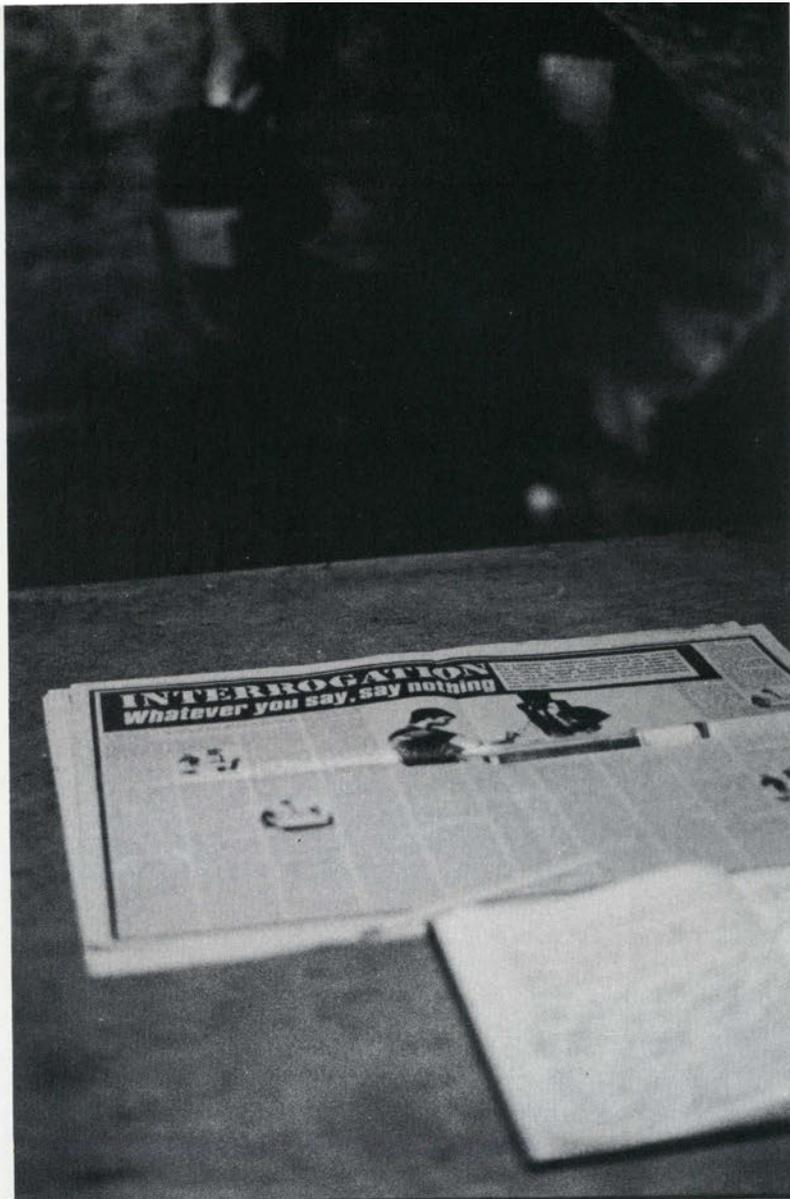
IG: Yes, you don't know quite where you are.

SP: It's really confusing.

IG: It's confusing, and that's part of the power manipulation ambiguity. It's tied in with it.

SB: Yes . . .

IG: Now, if we really exerted our power, we'd ask you [TB] what you wanted,



Tim Brennan, *Free State*, AVE
Festival, Arnhem, November
1989. (photo Sharon Norris)

where you want the table — and then do something completely different.

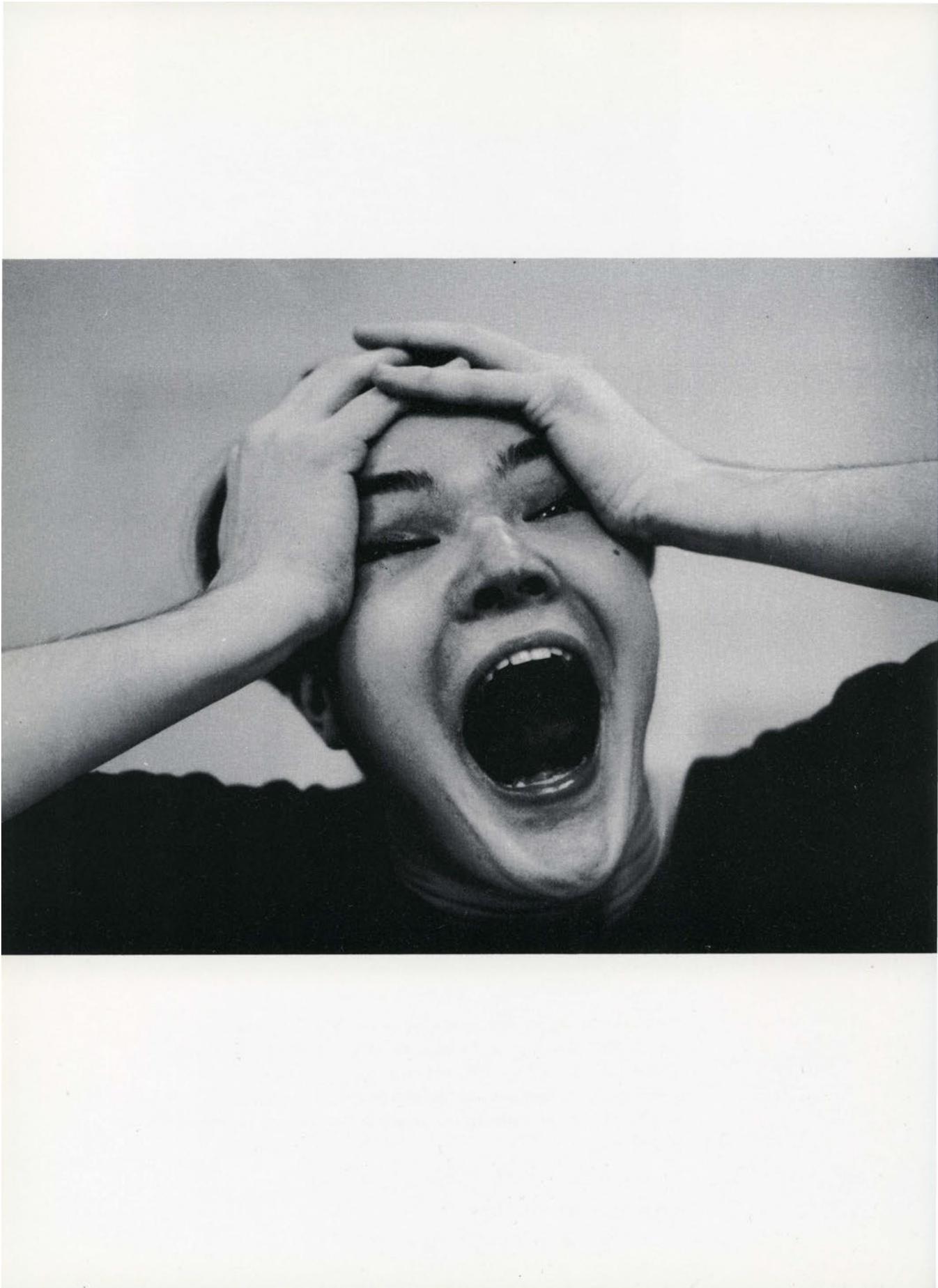
[Laughter]

And then you, you might anticipate that and say what you *don't* want. But that's what interrogation is all about. It's this: you've got two competing wills — which that article brings out — though of course, really in the end you haven't, because the odds are stacked — just as they are here.

TB: I've specifically not said anything for a while. What I've found interesting is that the shift had taken place. And then the question that I'd like to ask is this: when the authority shifts to you and I can go and sit over there and you are all actively engaged talking about the nature, form and content of the work, how far are you going to take command, take custody of that authority, before you allow me back in?

JG: Yes, exactly.

TB: So, er . . . it's cold in here.



Paul Newham

THE VOICE AND THE SHADOW



Workshop sessions at Academy
of Live and Recorded Arts,
London. (photo Paul Newham)

In performance the voice, unlike the body, has rarely been considered as a medium containing the substance of innate expressivity divorced from an extraneous narrative structure.

A study of the history of performance in Western Europe reveals that the Dionysian spirit of the human voice has been fettered by the Apollonian structure of either music or language where it has been forced to serve the mechanics of tone, note and scale in opera, and metre, dialect and articulation in drama.

The use of the vocal instrument to communicate a musical score in opera perpetuates a dualistic aestheticism which opposes the beautiful to the ugly and ensures that the domain of performance plays host only to the former.

For, a culture which describes music as the antithesis of noise and regards music as the emissary of beauty, necessarily produces an aesthetic in which to musicalise is to beautify. If, in addition, this culture confines the expressive capacity of the human voice in servitude to music, the voice itself becomes inextricably linked to the presentation of beauty and bound to a process of beautification.

In opera, the means by which the voice is so confined is the classical scale, contained by the pianoforte, which represents the fundamental code and structure of musicality upon which the voice models its vocabulary of communication through the process of training. This training educates the voice to execute its capacity to reiterate, reverberate and sustain the notes of the classical scale which is defined by scientific measurement in frequency of sound vibration, perpetuated through the concept of the octave.

This partnership between vocal expressivity and the substance of beauty is further enforced by the implementation of a second means of confinement in which the performing voice is restricted, by artistic prohibition, to the range which it is able to sing with a tonal beauty. It is from this process that the precise quality of the beauty is defined by the concept of *soprano*, *tenor*, *baritone* and *bass*.

This division between that part of the vocal range which is defined as music and that which is noise can be observed frequently in discussions regarding the operatic voice, where we meet in abundance comments like:

‘Actually, a singer’s range for noise is not much greater than a layman’s. Many businessmen can gurgle a low C, but it takes a bass to sing it.’¹

The politics of this attitude to the expressive capacity of the human voice are particularly apparent when observing the narrative to which the vocal range of the musical score is applied in the opera — the libretto. This observation reveals that the narratives frequently relay events which are, when measured against the moral principles by which our culture progresses, unacceptable — promiscuity, lust, incest, deception and murder. This combination of the aesthetic principles of the musical voice and the sociopolitical injustices presented by the narrative show

opera to provide our culture with an artistic form which necessarily involves the beautification of that which at the same time our culture defines as evil.

This fundamental paradox or contradiction within the operatic form has been precisely investigated by Catherine Clement with particular reference to the fate of the female characters as written in many libretti. Here she reminds us that whilst we are assuaged, massaged and seduced by the beauty of the music, elevated to a degree of emotional sensitivity and elation which arrests all faculty of political assessment, the story of an innocent woman being strangled by a jealous man is being told before our very eyes.²

The process by which the beauty of the form negates the ugliness of the content through the use of vocal expressivity can also be observed in the tradition of classical drama, where the elocution of the spoken word replaces the exactness of the tone, and the poetry of the language replaces the harmony of the music. Training the voice for this form involved nurturing a precision of diction with which to articulate a poetic description of the narrative event: its structure is syntax, metre and clause; the verbal replaces the musical.

In opera and poetic drama the pre-verbal and pre-musical utterances which *expose* emotion through the vocality of sound are repressed through the binding of the vocal instrument to a linguistic or musical system which *describes* emotion in a narrative context.

However, there is no evidence for this confining of the voice at the roots of Western European narrative performance — Greek tragedy. In fact the evidence is to the contrary. W.B. Stanford, arguably the most articulate and useful of the Greek Scholars, tells us:

'Every play [in Greek tragedy] has its nexus of inarticulate sounds of grief or fear or joy or triumph and other emotions — sobs, groans, screams, gasps, laughs and ululations . . . Onomatopoeic words are frequent in descriptions of these vocal gestures . . .

In contrast with these inarticulate sub-human noises, the most frequent and most expressive noises of Greek tragedy are articulate though not quite verbal in the sense that they are not generally subject to the rules of syntax, they do not belong to the categories of noun, verb etc., they are not declined or conjugated, and they have no descriptive force. These are the utterances usually described as interjections or ejaculations (epiphonemata). They are the most primitive of all human sounds, more like animal cries than speech. They are of supreme importance for the emotional effects of Greek tragedy, setting up physical and emotional vibrations that no articulate words could. Yet editors often ignore them and translators are commonly satisfied with a perfunctory "oh", "ah", or "alas".³

WOLFSOHN AND JUNG: VOCAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Intrigued by the possibility of reclaiming this forgotten area of expressivity within performance, I have turned to the work initiated by Alfred Wolfsohn who pioneered what has since become the most authoritative performance research in the field of vocal expression and to whom both Grotowski and Brook have acknowledged their debt.

Alfred Wolfsohn was a German Jewish medic working in the trenches of the first world war. During this experience he became both fascinated and horrified by the extraordinary sounds which the adverse conditions and suffering elicited from the voices of the soldiers.

After the war Wolfsohn began to suffer from a mental illness, characterised by a psychotic disturbance manifested in aural hallucinations which re-membered the voices of anguish first heard in the trenches. Finding the treatment of medical psychiatry of no help, Wolfsohn took up singing lessons which enabled him to develop his own voice as an expressive instrument in an attempt to exorcise these lingering voices. Dissatisfied with the way in which the training confined his voice to a range which he knew to be far more restricted than that which he had heard, he terminated the lessons and began a process of individual investigation.

Wolfsohn turned his psychoses inside out: he performed a soulful reversal by which he *became* the aural hallucinations which haunted him; he sang the voices, occupied their sphere. He turned psychological illness into imaginative artistry, giving substantial voices to the voices of the psyche's fantasy. Not only did Wolfsohn recover from his illness, he became a masterful singing teacher enabling singers to overcome serious problems of fatigue.

To escape from Nazi persecution Wolfsohn left Germany and came to London in 1939 where he continued his research with a team of devoted followers which included actors and singers; and those who trained regularly with Wolfsohn were able to extend their vocal range from two and a half to four, five, six and in some cases eight octaves.

This feat aroused the interest of doctors, laryngologists and biologists who had thought that the expressive range of the human voice depended upon the vibrational frequency of the vocal folds and the anatomical structure of the larynx as a resonating cavity. They predicted therefore that those pupils possessing the extended range would display physiological abnormality or damage. However, this proved not to be the case.

An examination of two of Wolfsohn's pupils by Professor Luchsinger at the Zurich Laryngological Institute in 1956 using X-ray, high-speed film and a stroboscope concluded that this 'vocal phenomenon' need not be rare but could be achieved 'generally through systematic work'. There was seen to be no

abnormality in the physiology of the pupils; in fact the doctors were surprised by how relaxed the throat was seen to be during the formation of the sounds.⁴

When Wolfsohn died in 1962, the team of researchers which had grown up under Wolfsohn's direction passed the leadership to an actor who had been the most gifted pupil: Roy Hart. From this work was born the Roy Hart Theatre Company, which developed the work into the field of performance, challenging previously held views and aesthetic principles regarding the capacity, beauty and expressivity of the human voice.

Concurrent with the development of Wolfsohn's work with the expressive spectrum of the human voice during the first half of this century was the research of C.J. Jung into the imaginative spectrum of the human psyche which has provided an invaluable framework of analysis with which to understand the significance of image in vocal and physical performance, particularly his later work on the nature of the 'complex'.⁵

Jung studied the way in which the human psyche or imagination plays host to a spectrum of emotions, instincts, ideas and characters which have been inherited genealogically or absorbed from the cultural environment in the formative years. Jung described the way in which these psychic or imaginative elements are expressed through the dreams, fantasies and behavioural patterns of an individual and through the mythology, religion, folklore and art of a culture. In so doing, Jung facilitated a methodology by which the characters and narrative structure which formulate religious mythology and artistic culture reflect the structure of — and thus provide an allegorical metaphor for — internal psychological processes, as it is from them that they emanate.

Through his study of this process of *personification*, Jung observed how the contents of the psyche or imagination often constellate into what he called 'the little people', small 'splinter psyches' or 'mini-personalities', i.e. psychological principles which express themselves in human form. Jung also recognised that when these constellations manifest themselves through the fluctuation in the behavioural patterns of an individual they exercise varying degrees of autonomy over the individual.⁶

Jung named these constellations 'complexes' and it was his research into this area that led him to his fundamental proposal that every individual is essentially multiple. The individual was for Jung a vessel through which many figures play out their lives.

During the period in which Jung studied the appearance and structure of the 'complex' he became particularly interested in what he called the *shadow*, the part of psychological images which constitute and inform the darker, torrid, perverse and 'downward-pointing' part of the personality, that is to say those aspects which tend to remain disguised and hidden beneath the grace and manner of the persona's publicity, those parts which an aesthetic interpretation would equate

with the concept of the ugly.⁷

Whilst Jung and his associates observed the way psychological images are expressed through the optical geometry of painting, the character matrices of fairy-tales, the narratives of folklore and the symbols of religion, Wolfsohn initiated a body of work which enabled the aural expression of these images through vocalisation.

Wolfsohn recognised that if the voice was to be permitted to express the nature of the psyche in its entirety, then just like other mediums of expression, it would have to be permitted the space to express the ugly, yelling, screaming, sobbing, animalistic, primal, pre-verbal utterances which are the rightful expression of the shadow. It was the prohibition of the shadow in the voice upheld by classical singing that Wolfsohn's work challenged.

In classical singing, the voice is nurtured to possess a beauty of tone within a given range — usually around 2 to 2.5 octaves. At both ends of this range the voice begins to express a change in quality or an initial inability to sing the note. The approach to training which Wolfsohn's work initiated involved beginning work at these very places where the voice apparently breaks down, suspending the morality inherent in a judgment of its aesthetic quality and perceiving it in psychological terms as a viable expression of a point on the psyche's spectrum ranging from beauty to ugliness.

The performance work which developed out of this research — firstly under the direction of Roy Hart, and later within the ensemble — elevated this work to an aesthetic dimension by using the entire spectrum of vocal capacity in performance.

The ensemble describe the process by which the voice was released from confinement to a single range as a psychological investigation which involved liberating themselves from a fear of height and depth and transcending the idiosyncratic voice which had been shaped by the specific narrative circumstances of life.

This psychological process involved not only accepting Jung's belief that each individual psyche hosts the spectrum of images which unite the imagination of humankind into a single connected collective imagination, but also believing that the voices of these images could be expressed by every individual and was prevented from doing so only by the inhibitory obstacles of unresolved or unrecognised psychological matrices. The epistemological tenets which underpinned this vocal research were therefore synonymous with those of Jung's work and can be seen in direct contrast to Freud's. Freud's psychoanalysis reconstructed a specific autobiographical narrative in which he contextualised the psychological images central to the patient's neuroses, tracing the origin of the image and the cause of the neuroses to a specific event or events in this narrative of the patient's past. On the other hand, rather than contextualising the images in the patient's narrative, Jung conducted cross-references between individual dreams

and fantasies observing how their structure was represented in different guises in every culture.

He consequently revealed how the roots of images originate not in the sociological circumstances which influence the development of consciousness but in unconscious universal structures, a kind of system of genetic blueprints which have 'existed since the remotest time' and which are continually reinvented through the classical personages and motifs in folklore, myth, literature, art, fairy-tales and religion of a culture, and through the dreams, fantasies and fluctuating behavioural patterns in the life of the individual.

Jung saw these structures as comparable to the Platonic idea, with no material substance of their own but, like the 'axial system of a crystal', providing an 'a-priori pattern' which informs the shape of the image. He called these universal structures 'archetypes',⁸ and he understood the process of psychological development and the aim of psychotherapy to be the integration of the diverse — and often conflicting — complexes into consciousness, nurturing a single, centralised, coherently consistent personality.

Following Jung's death, however, the leadership in the field of research which he had initiated passed to James Hillman who, whilst accepting Jung's proposal of a multiple personality theory, opposed his quest for centralisation.

HILLMAN: AGAINST CENTRALISATION

Hillman argued instead for therapy to nurture a model of health based on 'de-integration', a continually transient process by which any one of the 'little people' live partially or totally autonomously through the individual at any one time, each being taken as central in its turn.

Hillman argues that a developed individual is not one who has gained conscious centralisation and integration of the diversity in the psyche's spectrum, but one who accepts the autonomy of their de-integrated nature proposing that an 'individual cannot provide a norm even for himself.'⁹ Hillman introduced the term Archetypal Psychology to describe this new development in the field distinguishing it from Jung's original work by de-emphasising integration and by placing greater importance on the autonomy of the archetypes, their capacity to manifest an independence, a degree of autonomy, i.e. a life of their own divorced from the individual psyche in which they manifest themselves.

"Therapy works through the paradox of admitting that all the figures and feelings of the psyche are wholly "mine" while at the same time recognising that these figures and feelings are free of my control and identity, not "mine" at all . . . Paradoxically, at the same time these images are in us and we live in the midst of them. The psychic world is

experienced empirically as inside us and yet it encompasses us with images. I dream and experience my dreams as inside me and yet at the same time I walk around in my dreams and am inside them.¹⁰

The dream became the fundamental material for analysis in Jungian and post-Jungian psychology in which images are not released according to a linear progression of narrative events, but are formulated to circle around a central thematic obsession. The discovery of this non-sequential nature of the dream furthered the development of psycho-analytical research de-emphasising the significance of narrative and stressing the innate primacy of the image itself.

Archetypal Psychology thus opposed the Freudian and early Jungian approach to dreams which viewed them as reflections upon the narrative of the waking life and instead perceived in them a non-sequential reinvention of fundamental and archetypal images emanating from a cultural and psychological history transcendent of the dreamer's individual life.¹¹

This progression away from a concern with narrative, towards a certain respect for the independence of image, is reflected in the development of performance from the first to the second half of this century.

THE PRIMACY OF IMAGE

The fundamental material of which the tradition of narrative theatre has been composed and by which it has been preserved is the written text, a tradition which has equated *author* with *authority*, placing performers in interpretative servitude to its structure.

The performance methodology which has upheld this tradition emanates from the research of Stanislavski upon whose work the majority of performance training in Britain is even now directly or indirectly based. This training educates the performer in the synthesis of literal, coherent, centralised characters with an imagined autobiographical history in a recognisable social context. In this theatre the performer's art is to align his or her behavioural matrix to befit the character configuration implied by the text and maintain a consistent dedication to this character for the entirety of the performance.

This art-form perpetuates an entirely Freudian view of the human condition which culminated in the so-called social drama of the '50s but which as subverted by the development of a body of theatre which explored the presentation of character divorced from narrative and image divorced from character.

This non-narrative theatre demanded a different quality of involvement from the actor in which he or she was liberated from naturalism's mono-centric obsession with the presentation of a single character, enabling the development of a de-centralised fluidity. With this fluidity the performer was able to embody a wide spectrum of configurations within a single performance. Moreover, within these

Workshop session at Academy of Live and Recorded Arts, London.
(photo Paul Newham)



configurations the notion of character often became less important than other dimensions such as kinetics, light, shape — dimensions which had always been the substance of sculpture and painting, but which within performance had hitherto been central only to dance. This new way of working therefore had more in common with dance than with acting.

In the development of the post-balletic tradition of dance which sprang from Cunningham, the performer was not confined to movements which expressed a single character or propelled the progression of a sequential narrative. This dance was, however, utilising the gestural histrionics of character/narrative based expression as material for its work, an area pioneered by Steve Paxton.

Steve Paxton is an American dancer who performed with Merce Cunningham's company, was an instrumental contributor to the work of the Judson Dance Theatre and developed two interrelated mediums of work — Contact Improvisation and Pedestrian Movement.

Paxton's work with Pedestrian Movement sought to de-emphasise the elements of muscularity, virtuosity, fineness and a physical vocabulary unique to the dance floor and instead to elevate the body's natural, organic, gestural, kinetic activity to the aesthetic dimension of the dance, an area of work which continues to influence new dancers such as Yolanda Snaith. Snaith describes her use of pedestrian movement as emanating from a scrupulous study of 'the obsessive ritual of everyday activity'. Her choreography explodes and invigorates banal domestic actions with manic and precise repetition.

Her last piece, *Germes: Lessons in Social Skills Part Two*,¹² evolved a network of images which were linked thematically — though not narratively — by the subject of Victorian child rearing practices. *Germes* also used text, describing the appropriate means by which the proper behaviour may be encouraged in a young female, taken from the nineteenth century *Ladies' Journal*. When the dancers speak this text we are presented with a highly complex relationship between physicality and vocality which is radically different from the relationship maintained by drama.

In drama there is a heterogeneous or tautological relationship between voice and movement in which both point to the same end, both serve to communicate and describe a single point in the progression of a character through a narrative structure. The performer moves and speaks *as if* one character.

When the dancer speaks, on the other hand, there is a dislocation between the movement and the voice. Snaith may be moving through kinetic images which emanate from a sense of the punished child whilst speaking text appropriate to the chastising matron, meanwhile the costume may be suggestive of a third presence — a nun representing the tradition of Christian education. The dancer holds a disassociative relationship between voice and movement in the balance.

The problem which faces Snaith and all practitioners combining vocal and

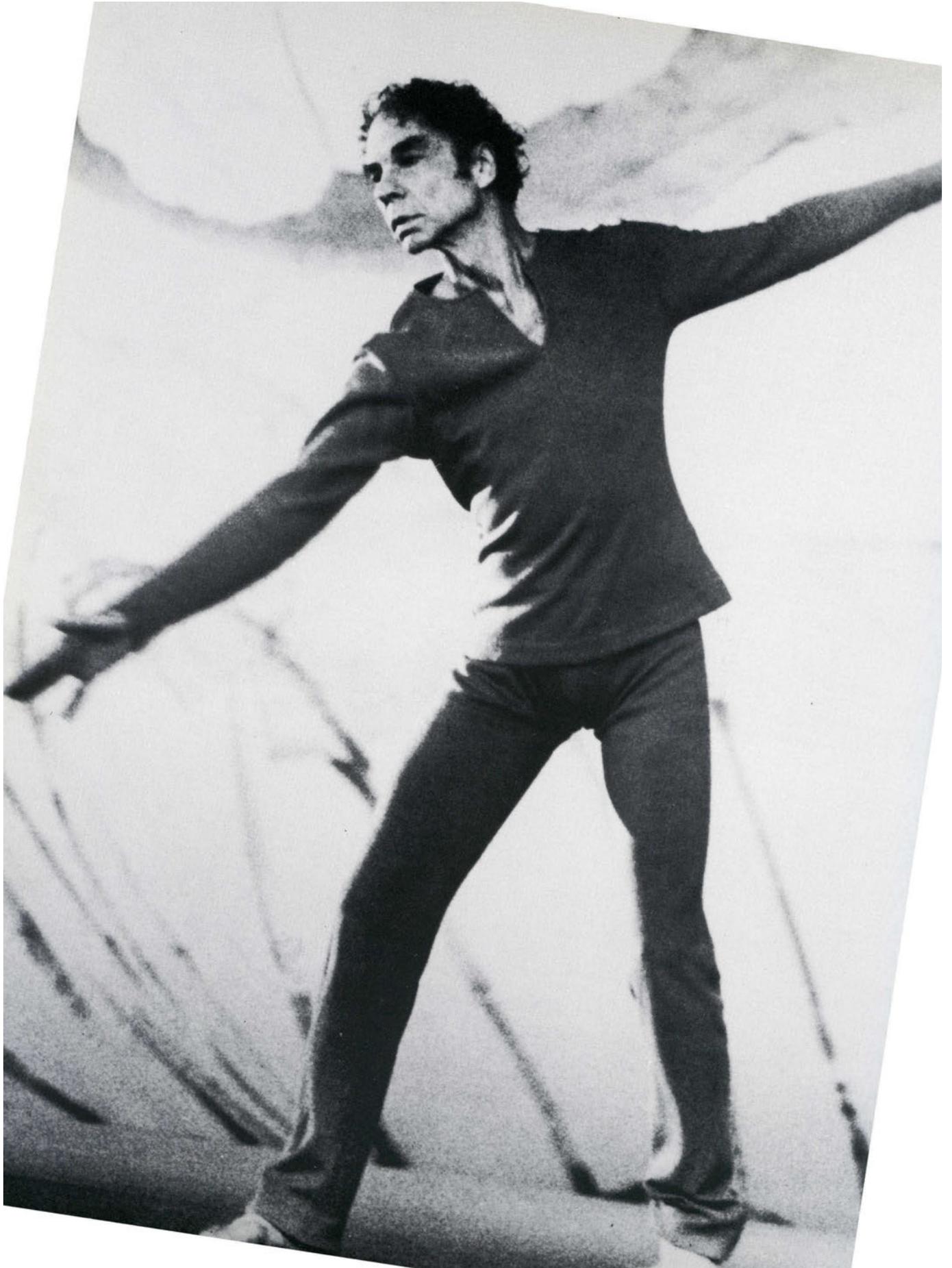
physical dimensions in this way is how to free the voice from the tyranny of mono-centricity, for as hard as the performer tries to hold the dissociation between the two dimensions, the voice is always tyrannised by the rhythm of the body and the metre of the text. The kinetic punctuation of the movement is involuntarily aligned with the syntactical punctuation of the text as both are served by the same physiological process of breathing.

It is through the investigation of this dissociative relationship between movement and voice that practitioners such as Snaith are brought to realise the impoverishment in our performance culture of adequate research and development in the field of non-narrative vocal work. The difficulty could also be seen in Second Stride's collaboration with Vocem, *Heave Ablaze in His Breast*,¹³ which attempted to deconstruct the traditional heterogeneous relationship between movement and voice perpetuated by opera, in Laurie Boothe's *Terminus*, *Terminus*¹⁴ and in Annie Griffin's *Ariadne*.¹⁵

This current interest which physically based performers are showing in the voice should be seen perhaps as a sign of a concern which will characterise the next few years of performance work. Perhaps therefore it should also be seen as a plea for serious attention to be devoted to a much neglected and under estimated medium of human expression.

NOTES

1. George Martin, *The Opera Companion*, London: John Murray, 1988, p. 23.
2. Catherine Clement, *Opera Or The Undoing Of Women*, Trans. Betsy Wing, London: Virago, 1989.
3. W.B. Stanford, *Greek Tragedy And The Emotions*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 56.
4. Luchsinger, 'Phonetic & Stroboscopic Researches Into Vocal Phenomena', in *International Journal Of Phoniatory*, Volume 8, 1956.
5. Cf. Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works*: Volume 8. Bollingen Series XX. (Trans. R.F.C. Hull. Ed. H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler & Wm. McGuire, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
6. C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*: Vol. 8, p. 200; Vol. 13, p. 62.
7. C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*: Vol. 10; Vol. 9i, p. 293 & p. 419; Vol. 5, p. 576; Vol. 12, p. 553; Vol. 16, p. 354.
8. C.G. Jung, *Collected Works*: Vol. 9i, pp. 79ff.
9. James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, London: Harper & Row, 1977, p. 88.
10. James Hillman, *Revisioning Psychology*, pp. 31 & 23.
11. Cf. James Hillman, *The Dream And The Underworld*, London: Harper & Row, 1979.
12. Institute Of Contemporary Arts, London, October 1989.
13. Arts Centre, Warwick University, December 1989.
14. The Place, London, October 1989.
15. The Phoenix, Leicester, November 1989.



Catherine Brownell

A LATE DEVELOPER

The Language of Dance Criticism

Merce Cunningham, *Points in Space*, 1986. (photo Robert Hill for BBC)

Edwin Denby, the American dance critic, admitted in 1949 that dance criticism was still in its infancy, and thus totally inadequate to transmit the progressively more complex choreographic concepts operative at that time. A survey of press reviews of recent Merce Cunningham seasons at Sadler's Wells indicates that this state of affairs has still not got much better.

Forty years on from the Black Mountain 'happening' that provided a paradigm for Cunningham's 'total' compositional method, his work has spawned a whole tradition of non-narrative and non-linear dance. Dance criticism, however, in its response to Cunningham-related work, is still largely obsessed with narratives, techniques and kinesthetics (an attempt to identify and identify with, the dancer's muscle sense), to the virtual exclusion of the work's visual, aural, formal and theatrical components.

Cunningham's approach to choreography is philosophical and analytic: he experiments with ideas and concepts of movement and the relationship of dance to the other media which go to make a complete work. His method is generally to pursue the effect of arbitrary steps, form and line of movement, rather than meaning and self-expression. He believes in the independence of each art form, a view shared by his collaborator, John Cage: 'the arts, far from communicating, converse among themselves. The more foreign they are to each other, the more useful the dialogue.' (*For The Birds*, p. 162)

Traditionally, dance is distinguished from other art forms in that it is transmitted wholly through human effort. It is also a transient art — the dance exists as long as the dancers are dancing. Aware of this critics have viewed dance as a display of human talent and ability within the context of a clear narrative and criticism has focussed on the mechanics of the dance, the capability of the choreographer and the virtuosity of the dancers.

The psychologist Rudolf Arnheim analysed our perception of movement by separating it into two categories, sequential and simultaneous apprehension. He states that dance, like a film or symphony '... must be apprehended as a sequence, but that this sequence must not be temporal in the sense that one phrase disappears as the rest occupies our consciousness ... the work grows step by step into a whole and as we accompany its progress we must constantly hark back to what has disappeared from direct perception by ear or eye, but survives in the memory ...' (*Art and Visual Perception*, p. 374/375). By contrast a painting can be observed simultaneously and in its entirety. 'The observer scans the various areas of the picture in succession because neither the eye nor mind is capable of taking in everything simultaneously, but the order in which the exploration occurs does not matter.' (*ibid.* p. 376).

The perception of contemporary, non-narrative dance, however, needs to be understood somewhere *between* sequence and simultaneity — the images are received through time in sequence, but must be retained simultaneously in order to

grasp the structure of the whole work. The observer, weaned on traditional dance, is not used to perceiving non-narrative and non-linear dance on the same terms as a painting and yet it is just this sort of perception that best suits work like Cunningham's. It is a problem Cunningham himself recognises: 'One reason the dances are particularly difficult to see is that they are not structured linearly. One thing doesn't lead to another. As a student of dance composition I was taught that you led up to something, some climax. That didn't interest me very much. I rather like the idea of things staying separate, something not leading up to something else . . .' (Jacqueline Lesschaeve, *The Dancer and the Dance*, p. 133).

Sequence art, moreover, is traditionally synonymous with narrative, but the peculiar nature of non-narrative dance poses problems for the observer who has difficulty memorising dance phrases as they unfold if there is no 'story-line'. The implications of this in the language of dance criticism are two-fold: non-existent narratives are nevertheless construed from the choreography as a way of remembering the order and development of the dance movements; and secondly, the memory retains only the most powerful responses, emotions and impressions which both support and give rise to this narrative.

The apparent need to create a narrative around a piece is not something that Cunningham is hindered by. In *The Dancer and The Dance* he is quoted as saying: 'We did a piece called *Winterbranch* some years ago in many different countries. In Sweden they said it was about race riots; in Germany they thought of concentration camps; in London they spoke of bombed cities; in Tokyo they said it was the atom bomb. A lady with us . . . was the wife of a sea captain and said it looked like a shipwreck to her. Of course, it's about all those and not about any of them, because I didn't have any of those experiences, but everybody was drawing on his own experience, whereas I had simply made a piece which was involved with falls, the idea of bodies falling . . .' (p. 105).

Whatever the personal process involved, much of the criticism I wish to survey ends up being an impressionistic story. Jan Parry described *Grange Eve*, an up-tempo piece, as: 'a celebration, a hoe down rather than a royal garden party, or a wedding feast for eight brides and eight brothers . . .' (*The Observer*, 26.7.89). Describing *Pictures*, Judith Mackerell wrote: 'In the first [duet] he [Cunningham] was very formally tender, partnering with a watchful precision, but the second grew into a core of intense privacy as the other dancers began to leave the stage . . . it was almost wrenchingly passionate . . . perhaps the feeling of triumph in Cunningham's all too vulnerable strength, or her trust, or their shared intimacy.' (*Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 3). Cunningham, his arthritic feet forcing him to shuffle amongst the agile dancers, often provides the crux for their narratives. He has been variously described as 'yielding the ground to younger dancers . . .', 'passing amongst them like a remote magician,' 'resembling a mixture of a pixie and Prospero,' 'a King Lear flailing against the injustice of

ageing.'

Points in Space was described by one critic as 'sinister, claustrophobic and whispery . . .' where the dancers 'looked vulnerable . . .' (Judith Mackerell, *The Independent*, 25.7.87), and by another as a piece which has a 'serenity . . . that gives it an oriental quality . . . imbued with tenderness . . .' (Jan Parry, *The Observer*, 26.7.87). This tells us both a great deal and very little about the piece, but certainly a great deal about the critic. Some responses are overtly personal: 'I remember being completely absorbed in a single dancer's progression across the stage when I was distracted by a sense of stillness on the edge of my vision — another group forming . . .' (Judith Mackerell, *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 33). In her article on the Cunningham season Angela Kane acknowledges the personal imagery and emotion which the work generates simply through the drama and excitement of the movement: 'The surface articulations, the images we respond to first lead us deeper — into the substrata of significance.' (*Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3).

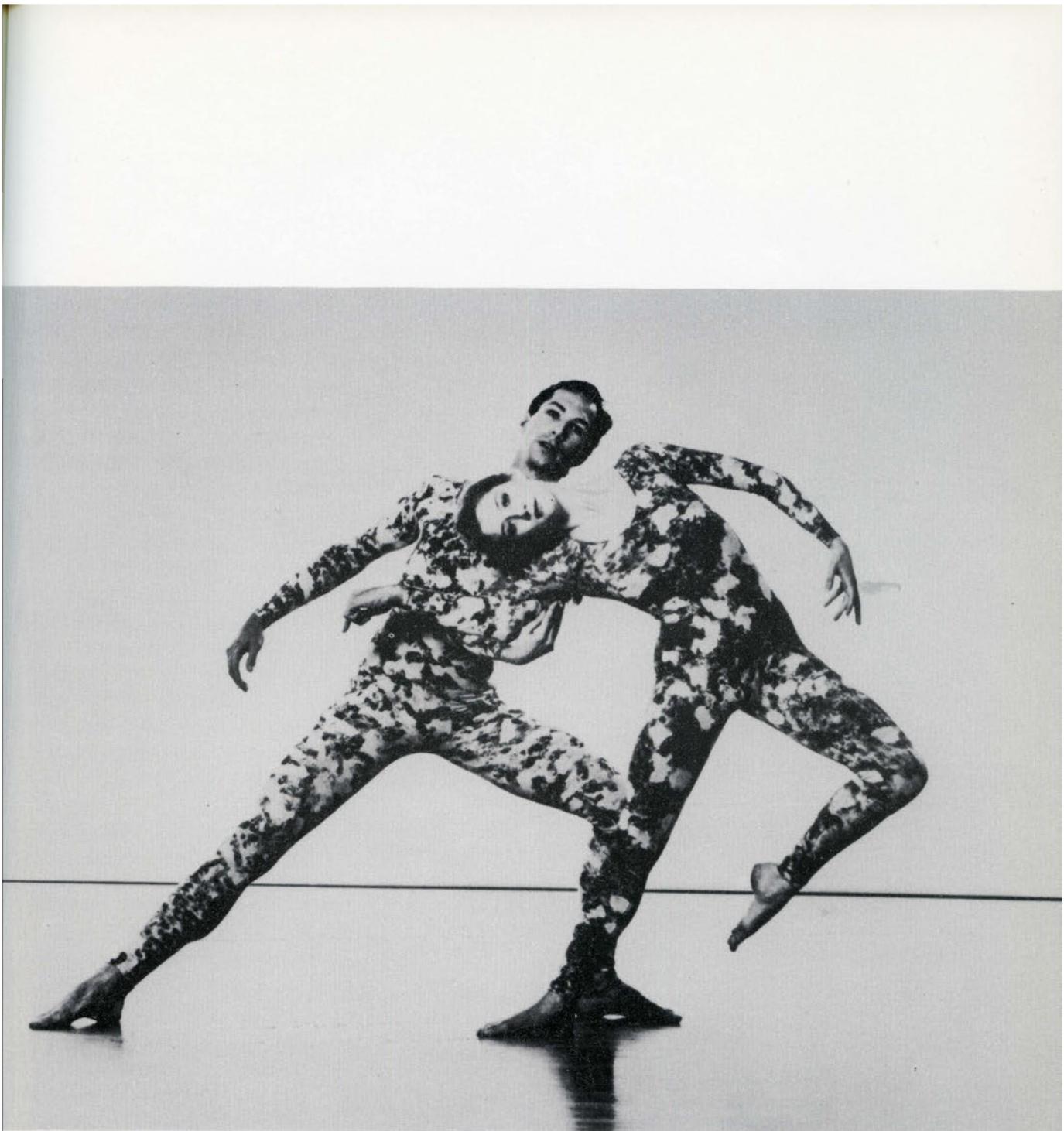
The critic is invariably unable to detach him/herself from the human endeavour involved in the dance and watch it as a purely visual image. The affinity felt between fellow beings, between the person watching and the person performing, results in an instinctive admiration of the human effort and skill involved in the dance. This is also a habit carried over from classical ballet which, from choreographic format to individual character interpretation, operates as a vehicle for virtuoso display. Cunningham has fought against this instinctive affinity with the dancers and has striven to achieve detachment in the audience's perception so that pieces could be viewed as pure movement, the dancers mobile sculptures moving through architectural space.

The difficulty is to accept them simply as instruments/tools who bear the same relationship to the choreographer as paint to the painter. What is really adverse to the instinctive human sensibility is the dehumanisation of the dancer, transition of dancer to abstract form. This isn't to say the dancers are cold and without emotion.

So, far from being interpreted as 'the medium' of the choreographer, dancers are invariably propelled to centre focus by critics. Apart from slipping in information about the latest newcomers to the company in mid-prose, critics use the names of dancers: 'Solos for Alan Good, Rob Remley and Patricia Lent pierce the calm,' ' . . . a marvellous moment when Good slides his arm slowly under Kerr's, across her shoulder blades and initiates a high arch up and away from his support.' (Angela Kane, *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3). 'Catherine Kerr's exquisite slow stretchy solo . . . which is like a curved and interlocking embrace.' (Judith Mackerell, *The Independent*, 25.7.87). Such a mentioning of individuals is not unmerited, but is totally irrelevant.

The danger with this kind of critical writing is that empathy toward the dancer

Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Points in Space*, 1987.
(photo Lois Greenfield)



can dominate the appreciation of the work as a whole. This is apparent in critical writing where the concentration, above all, is in the physical nature of the dancers' manoeuvres and the human effort involved. The dancers experience a kinesthetic energy which the critics try to recapture. John Percival, for example, writes of 'jumps' and 'squatting' (*The Times*, 29.7.87). Both are actions we can relate to on a kinesthetic level, we have experienced them, but this says little about their particular function within the dynamic and visual identity of the work as a whole. To complete the picture we are thrown back on our own imaginative resources.

Since critics will persist in using kinesthetic language to transmit visual images, the results will continue to be frustratingly confusing and dull: 'It's a wacky set of variations on the circle and duets in which the stage is often swarming with couples; the women perform complicated on the spot variations while the men jump, lunge and flap their arms around them. At times the mass movement organises itself into simple, almost folksy, rings only to dissipate into even more manic partnering . . . The movement too keeps dissolving into weird and disconcerting jokes. In one section the men become bullying puppeteers shoving and pulling their partners' limbs. Four women do ring-a-roses in a giant elastic band, and there is a male section where Merce Cunningham and the boys start dancing with walking sticks.' (Judith Mackerell, *The Independent*, 25.7.87).

As though aware that even such word pictures, whilst perhaps capturing something of the visual energy, are unsatisfactory, classical dance terms are frequently thrown in: 'both move in place — one leg developpés from behind, reaches forward and coupés in front to begin the phrase again . . .' (Angela Kane, *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3). This serves to reinforce three things: the dislocation of the detail from the overall effect; the technical skill of the dancers; and an elitist and jargon-riddled dance criticism which is unintelligible to those without a knowledge of classical ballet.

Frequently, however, the critic does feel an obligation to transmit to the reader what he or she will see when actually watching the performance. A few references are usually made about the stage set and costumes but these are often unenlightening: 'Charles Atlas's dramatic lighting helps compensate for his dreary costumes' (John Percival, *The Times*, 29.7.87), 'William Anastasi has provided a handsome backdrop' (J. Cruikshank, *The Times*, 22.7.87), '. . . marvellous sense of colour, the elements of dance, music and the designers colours achieve perfect unity.' (D. Dougill, *Sunday Times*, 7.6.87). In such writing the visual concepts and identity are not perceived as being central to the work.

Although I have dealt here with the least helpful critical attempts to transmit the stage event, there is a perceptible shift in dance criticism towards greater recognition of spatial and dynamic patterns, the interaction between the forms and the performance space, and the relationships between the dance, the music and the decor. With work derived from Cunningham's a considerable force in present-day

dance, and with systems from performance art and theatre increasingly informing dance composition, some critics throw up their hands and declare themselves to be totally mystified. From critics such as John Percival there is always the distant, and not so distant, echo of 'but is it dance?' Some critics, however, are coming to terms with these new systems. Discussing *Cargo X*, a sparse piece concerned with visual forms, Judith Mackerell considers 'line': 'It is line that motivates much of the movement as Cunningham ingeniously sets bodies tilting over sharply-angled legs, has an arabesque paralleling the counter lunge of the lean of one body cutting against the next. Adding to the design is a step-ladder . . . which is constantly manipulated by the dancers so that its angles either echo or disrupt their own.' (*The Independent*, 2.11.89).

The presentation of dance on video and television relieves the responsibility of the memory, it can be watched many times and analysed, and it can heighten the awareness of spatial effects. Of *Channels-Inserts* Angela Kane writes: 'I was curious to see how Cunningham had incorporated the dance material filmed at the New York studios into a dance for a single space venue . . . Spatially, Cunningham has divided the stage into corridors of activity . . . and it's the sense of circling, roundness and continuity which I found a welcome contrast to the lines and tangents of the film. Choreographically, little has been changed, but the different spatial emphases have given the work an additional dimension.' (*Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3).

We can see a new vocabulary and approach being grafted onto the old in Kane's and Mackerell's writing. An appropriate vocabulary is gradually emerging. Dance criticism is obviously a late developer, and only now, almost forty years from the beginning of Cunningham's company, is it reaching the age of majority, if not maturity.

Reviews

Reviews are arranged geographically, by the venue at which the performance, exhibition, event or installation being reviewed took place: firstly London; then other towns and cities in the United Kingdom, in alphabetical order; and lastly towns and cities in other countries.

LONDON

Scena Plastyczna

Herbarium; Moisture

ICA

Reviewed by Paul Allain

The small Polish city of Lublin, situated about 100 miles south-east of Warsaw, boasts no less than five experimental theatre groups, of which three in the course of last year toured Britain. First came the Gardzienice Theatre Association (reviewed in *Performance* No 58), and last, appearing at the Bloomsbury Theatre in November, the Chilowa Group. In between, with performances in Glasgow, London and Cardiff, we saw Visual Stage (Scena Plastyczna) of the Catholic University of Lublin, bearing the stamp of its dynamic director, Leszek Madzik, a worthy successor of the likes of Kantor, Szajna and Grotowski.

Madzik's 'philosophical theatre' was exhibited in two pieces — *Herbarium* and *Moisture* — performed, over two days, at the ICA in October. Both are quite short (the first lasting little more than half an hour), yet intense enough to satisfy. They form part of a repertoire of altogether twelve pieces which have made the rounds at many festivals — from Berlin to Monaco — during the nineteen years of the group's existence. All present an amalgam of striking images and music, without words or any narrative. Madzik's quest for a

universal theatre language, speaking to the unconscious, is both eminently exportable and enduring. His performers and technicians, recruited from Lublin University, are changed every three years. The creative drive and input, however, are his alone.

The result is far from bland, indeed little short of electrifying. Lighting is minimal, but highly revealing in what it illuminates. In *Moisture*, we see a huddled figure swinging from a trapeze, with water dripping from it onto the black plastic floor, and with the whole silhouetted by a distant backlight — a tragic picture in miniature, recalling the vagueness of remembered dreams. *Herbarium* is pitched at a similar level.

Madzik's work has strengthened and deepened with experience, as well as with a growing awareness of international movements — always, however, from a characteristically Polish perspective. His outsize marionettes are gentler than those of Bread and Puppet. His music draws on models as diverse as Peruvian folk and synthesiser groups like Kraftwerk. But all these influences, including that of Robert Wilson, are controlled by a personal vision represented by figures of death, femininity, eroticism and desire, the last shown most effectively in the opening sequence of *Herbarium*. Here a man in white suit swings on a rope inside a white boxroom lit by a stroboscope,

with two women also dressed in white walking underneath. The mythological, sculptural effect of such a tableau is heightened by the addition of music.

Madzik makes full use of the space at his disposal. Thus, entering to watch *Herbarium*, the audience sees stage-hands informally chatting in the stage area, which seems empty apart from a few ladders placed along the side walls. Immediately, after a brief blackout, the man is swinging in a white room created by means of fabric curtains. This in turn, after a second blackout, dissolves into a corridor running the whole length of the theatre, along which three giant female puppets walk slowly. Such complex scene changes are conjured up to great dramatic effect. The final scene, showing rag dolls dropping from the ceiling to the accompaniment of punctuated music, is a grim epitaph on Auschwitz.

Madzik's preoccupation with death and destruction — he wants to 'show life from the perspective of death' — springs from his country's tragic and turbulent history. Yet his theatre is by no means depressing. Rather, it has the aura of a religious Mass, comforting in its repetitive ritual, lacking only the presence of a deity. Though no project is ever scripted in advance — he carries the whole in his head — everything is informed by great dramatic force and seriousness.

By contrast with this technical brilliance, the Gardzienice ensemble from the same city

forswears all technology and cultivates the physical instead. Polish theatre, which astonished the world in the '60s and '70s, thus has lost none of its ability to surprise. The question is whether it will thrive and develop with equal vigour under Poland's new — more liberal but also more parsimonious — political régime.

People Show No. 95

The Big Sweep

Hampstead Theatre

Reviewed by David Hughes

One of the truisms of theatre — well, one of Peter Brook's anyway — is that each performance is a clean slate. When the curtain comes down it wipes the slate, creates a *tabula rasa*. One of the joys of theatre, though, is that after-images remain in the mind's eye long after the stage lights fade. Some of the images that stay with me are those created over the last two decades by the People Show: Mark Long's ranting tirades and suits stiffened with white paint, or his sidling along a dark corridor doing buskers' tricks with cigarettes; Victorian women beating bunches of flowers with umbrellas; Dawn suspended from block and tackle high above a parking lot, or just standing still on stage; George Khan blowing his tenor sax, never looking comfortable; or Emile flying through a window with a mad Camembert on his shoulder. And perhaps the most resilient

memories are of atmospheres, created with minimal means as if by magic.

The People Show Cabaret has been on the road for some years in the absence of full stage shows, but at the Hampstead Theatre the oldest and newest members came together for No. 95. And this time with a title to go with the number: *The Big Sweep*, a pun which finally admits what has often been there informing their work, the cinema.

Puns, indeed, abound. The 'sweep' of the title becomes the sweeper/vacuum cleaner, or 'hoover' in the elegant passes of the dance with hoovers; the main character is based on J. Edgar Hoover; and the entrails of the president are extracted through his mouth by the application of a hoover nozzle.

As ever, the work is highly allusive and densely striated: Chandleresque private eye movie rubs shoulders with the 'movie about Hollywood movie', Hitchcock rubs shoulders with the low budget musical, James Bond with *film noir*, and the whole is processed through the tale of F. Bradley Inkerman's obsession with collecting grisly bits of body. He already has Martin Luther King's 'mojo', Rosa Luxemburg's breasts and Che Geuvara's bottom — objects connected, we are led to suppose, by the CIA's involvement in the lives or deaths of those characters. CIA and FBI seem to be interchangeable, as do all the other sets of initials that proliferate throughout the show.



When the president's entrails go missing, the might of the FBI is marshalled to track them down, but eventually it is F. Bradley (J. Edgar Hoover) himself, disguised as Marilyn Monroe, Blanche DuBois and Scarlett O'Hara rolled into one, who descends to the slapstick world of Hollywood agents, extras and stuntmen to retrieve them, but not before the ultimate kitsch recreation of the classic Monroe image, with skirt ballooning over an air duct. An elaborate set of deceptions is necessary to infiltrate this world and the denouement sees F. Bradley playing Blanche in a stage version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, absurdly transposed to the North of England in Thatcherite depression and renamed *A Meatcar Named Amore*. The closest comparison to the spirit of the final section is probably *Viz* magazine.

What is truly wonderful about the whole show is Jeff Nuttall, founding father of the People

Show, as F. Bradley. The abiding memory will be his trumpet solo, in full drag with pink ribbons, accompanied by George Khan's muted sax: as direct a reference as one could hope for to *Some Like it Hot*.

I saw it early in the run and it hadn't fully come together. But it was instructive to see all the elements in place and yet not working properly. The most telling scene had Long and Chahine Yavroyan as Blues Brothers/CIA agent composites wandering around an empty stage, backlit with blue light and creating a dense smog with their cigarettes. Classic People Show ingredients for a magic moment. Yet it failed. Usually, a People Show performer can just stand on stage and it's a scene, a distinctive atmosphere. Here the diffused elements served to show how much their work has always fundamentally relied on rhythm and 'presence'. Presence is a difficult word to use, it can't be defined, but you know it when you see it, and I am left searching for a metaphor for it. In fact, I'm tempted to say that jazz is the metaphor that works best for them when their work is at its best: going with the swing, being there, player and instrument one. I'd love to have seen the show after a couple of months on the road, because in that first week they really weren't 'present' at all.

The Practice

The Origin of Table Manners

Watermans Art Centre,
Brentford, and ICA

Reviewed by David Hughes

I first saw Richard Gough fifteen years ago at Chapter Arts Centre. As Cardiff Laboratory Theatre (Cardiff Lab) he and Mike Pearson were staging a poor theatre, physical and non-verbal *Gilgamesh*. The props were wooden broom handles. My abiding memory of it is Gough's 'trickster' tramp swigging from bottles of brown ale, one of which, with a twinkle in his eye, he offered me and which I, with panic in mine, declined.

On the evidence of . . . *Table Manners*, which he has directed, his work has lost none of the sardonic humour, honesty and sense of celebration of those early pieces, not to mention their underlying paranoia; though here he mobilises text, costume, a company of seven actors, recorded music and stage lighting within a more complete scenic space.

It is a little surprising that he hasn't slipped from view, like the ocean liner on which . . . *Table Manners* takes place (in the moments between catastrophe and a watery grave). Insolvent, due to commercial ventures that didn't pay off, Cardiff Lab went under four years ago. Happily, The Practice (the performance ensemble of the Centre for Performance Research) and this show, on which work had



already begun, have been salvaged from that lost Titanic. Indeed, there are rich pickings here for anyone wishing to speculate with their time and a little hard cash — if only the price of a ticket.

Before I am accused of hopelessly mixing my metaphors, let me protest that I do no more than the show itself. A running buffet of visual invention and metaphor, the rituals of eating stand for all those civilised veneers that hide our repressed emotions, fears, dreams and animal instincts. Fragile at best, these social masks are finally stripped away. Beautifully and poetically structured, . . . *Table Manners* ranges from set piece to set piece, from the diners who tango with their tables to ironically sentimental treatments of *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and *I Just Called to Say 'I Love You'*, from a ghostly Last Supper to a hugely funny rendition of Roland Barthes' essay 'Steak and Chips'.

And this is only the appetiser. The next course, the sequel to this piece, is even now in preparation.

FARNHAM

Sivia Ziraneck

ICI VILLA MOI

James Hockey Gallery

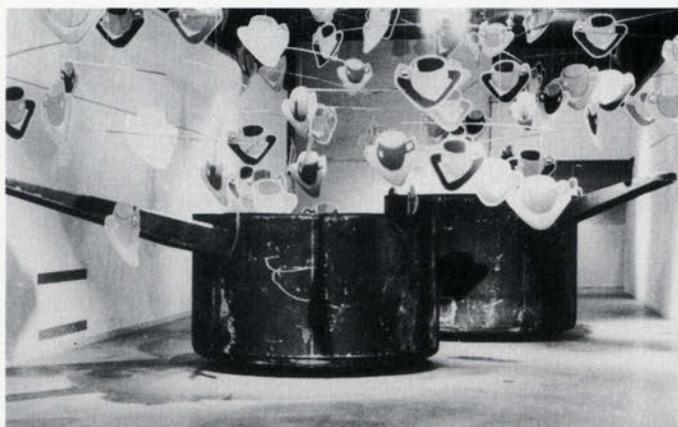
Reviewed by Jeni Watwin

This latest project by Silvia Ziraneck has been jointly commissioned by the Cornerhouse in Manchester and Watermans Art Centre in Brentford and is touring to the recently re-opened James Hockey Gallery at West Surrey College of Art and Design in Farnham. ICI VILLA MOI comprises an installation, a performance and a publication. The latter offers a visual retrospective of Ziraneck's 'perfs' since 1974.

The last time I put thoughts on Ziraneck's work into writing was on the occasion of her exhibition and performances at the Anthony Reynolds Gallery in the winter of 1986. For that presentation, 'International with Lipstick', she brought together a selection of her 'oeuvres' (little found objects) to create a permanent installation amidst which she gave live

performances. That was her first experience of creating a space for the spectator to view in her absence. Since then she has put together a touring exhibition to accompany the publication of her book *Very Food* and, as a contribution to Southampton's performance week in the summer of 1989, she produced an installation 'Somewhere in Saucedom'.

The images in these permanent displays have been closely linked to her written texts and to the objects in her performances, and often were one and the same. Until this current show there had always been a sense that Ziraneck in person was needed to complete the picture and one was aware of the space created by the absent artist. This is not the case with ICI VILLA MOI. In the venue at Farnham the scale of the gallery matches the ambition of the work — the two giant saucepans and ninety-five teacups and saucers are shown to brilliant effect in a pink rectangular room with daintily painted skirting and the occasional wall decoration to match. It is not simply the scale which gives this piece the resolution that its predecessors perhaps did not have. The steel saucepans, eight foot in diameter with dark untreated surfaces, immediately impose upon the viewer by their sheer volume. These massive, looming shapes are complemented perfectly by the fluttering, brightly printed teacups which hover above and wittily challenge the weight and assumed seriousness of the pans below. Although in visual terms



this may represent a departure from Ziraneck's previous installations, there is nevertheless a consistency in her approach to materials. The teacups are taken from a photomontage RESPONSIBLE LIKE A PIG in her book *Very Food*, and, like many props in her earlier work which came from car boot sales and junk shops, the saucepans are made from a twelve foot long metal storage tank found in Loughton, Essex.

What impresses me most about this work is the fact that it takes on the scale and epic character of outdoor sculpture associated with the 1960s and '70s, and still evident in some city centres today. Yet Ziraneck challenges the monumental, statuesque and seemingly immovable nature of so much of that work. Here, we are introduced to something more domestic, more humorous; and, in place of polished bronze or shining steel, there is junkyard scrap, carefully wrought, and teacups, tastefully printed.

The image conveyed by this ambiguously monolithic kitchen

equipment reminded me of a line in Ziraneck's performance CHEZ Z (SHE SAID) at Riverside Studios some six years ago where she was found 'LOOKING DEEP INTO THE DEPTHS OF A SAUCEPAN I SEE MORE THAN THE DEBRIS OF A DREAM'. Her 'dream' is further developed in the performance which accompanies this installation and in which the epic tale of 'the home' is unravelled.

'VERY SCALE, VERY SELF, VERY VILLA, VERY MORE, VERY MOI. VERY VERY MOI.' There is a sense that home is created out of the theatre of life. In this case a life which does not deny ambition through housewifery, but one in which new technology is at the disposal of the home and with whose help empires are built. 'LETS REELAXAY WHILE THE HOUSE IS DOING ITS JOB'. For some it may seem that the home and the person are interchangeable, that material possessions become obsessions and that the house takes over.

'SHELVING YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS'. But woven carefully beneath the surface of this exuberant performance which is dotted with patios, and alcoves and niches, is a sense that we *do* need space — somewhere to live, somewhere to work, somewhere to make our own domestic dramas. It is only when 'the house is doing its job', so to speak, that we can take on board all of life's other challenges. 'THERE'S THE VILLAS, THE CAN'T GETS, AND ME. I WANT LOVE AND RESPECT BUT FIRST — I WANT A VILLA. A VAST VILLA; ONE NEEDS MUST VOULOIR IN BULK. SCALE STUFF. A USED CASTLE. EVEN A USED CASTLE WOULD DO ME'.

The house is not only huge but it has become mechanized. The wooden crane in the performance winches the teacup into position and the 'PUSHBUTTON ROBO SUCKOMATIC EEZEKLEEN' is made ready for action. Ziraneck has created her own environment, her own 'architecture', out of domestic dreams and DIY. ICI VILLA MOI has enlarged the traditional role of the housewife to a scale of epic grandeur and it has taken Ziraneck the artist onto a launching pad from where she (and all other women in their homes) will be poised to become the creators of tomorrow, the builders of the future.

GLASGOW**National Review of Live Art****Third Eye Centre***Reviewed by Matthew Springford*

The 1989 National Review of Live Art provided a unique forum for a broad, eclectic range of new performance work. Both established and unfunded artists contributed to a colourful — if relentless — series of performances, installations, videos and lectures. This diversity of work was complemented by an atmosphere of critical debate which, despite moments of sectarianism and occasional banality, had a lot to offer and confirmed the National Review as a much needed, thoroughly exciting and regenerative assembly for the live arts.

In view of this, the official Platform Debate, set up on the last day for the artists involved to discuss their work, was disappointing, and revealed a general lack of historical understanding. Too much time was wasted in bickering about what exact form the National Review itself should take, and on whether or not it contained too much 'theatre'. Far more urgent, in my view, is the need to create a whole new vocabulary to articulate the kind of experience and thinking which informs the best new work in this field, if it is ever to reach beyond its own relatively specialized audience into other areas of society; areas where individuals may ultimately

have more power to bring about social and political change.

Any such ambition, it must be said, was lacking in the work of Scena Plastyczna, a company invited from Poland, who seemed to have dispensed with meaning and content altogether. Instead the emphasis was on a truly extraordinary technical accomplishment: a series of breathtaking if unrelated images, with hugh drapes and puppets. It was undoubtedly visually stunning but I couldn't help feeling there was some vital flaw in their rationale. It was not just the reduction of performance to circus that I objected to, but the fact that, like so much modern experience, it was delightful while it lasted, only to dissolve into a sense of emptiness as soon as it was over.

In contrast, the best work was underpinned by a clarity of thinking and a sustained transposition of theme into form. Lindsay John's installation/performance, *Wojna* (War), for example, was firmly grounded in a personal transformative vision, and precisely for this reason embraced a broad political spectrum. As with John's other work, it was wildly esoteric, yet reflected a thoughtful and acutely attentive investigation into problematic areas of human experience.

Less premeditated, but equally sustained by a rare and spontaneous magic, was Alan Maclean's *Ratman In The Rain*, based on the case study by Freud. I had seen this performance at the ICA in May,

where it seemed excruciatingly two dimensional. It clearly was not just 45 minutes of repetitive, garbled and neurotic rat-speak; but after half an hour it had begun to feel like it. This time, Maclean had chosen to perform it outside in the rain, in a basement-level lane adjacent to the Third Eye Centre. As passing Glaswegians began to join in with the performance, it transcended anything that Maclean could have planned or had control over. The more abuse he took, the more the audience supported him. Which in a way seemed to manifest just the kind of ambivalence central to the subject matter of the case study; the duality and coexistence of love and hate. Maclean was clearly put off by all this, unaware of how this development of a context had strengthened his work. He gave up before he had finished and later claimed that he had been distracted and lost the structure of what he was doing. He was received warmly, however, and he certainly earned it. For us it had been exhilarating to watch him walk so bravely across the boundaries of performance and reality. True, his life may have been in some danger: but then I wonder what he expected when he planned to shout and sing continuously at 11 o'clock at night in the middle of Glasgow.

Oscar McLennan and Kevin McAleer

 Third Eye Centre

Reviewed by Ian Smith

The tongue-in-cheek billing that read 'Two giants of storytelling' turned out to be not so far-fetched. The skills on parade this evening were worthy of a bit of hype. The irony is that Oscar and Kevin deal with little men. Oscar, the eternal misfit, with the aid of some minimal sound effects and lighting, drew us into the tiny world of the jilted lover. Lonely, drunk and confused, this sad little character gathered up bits of the past and re-ran them in an effort to spot the mistakes. The mistakes were obvious and unavoidable, exaggerations of the kind of behaviour we are all prone to on occasion. (One suspects Oscar may just be a bit more prone than most.) But this was no maudlin dirge. Sharply absurd poetic images crept in as seagulls and vultures naggled him with endless 'I told you so's.' His confessional priest, complete with plastic radio, was almost certainly naked under his cassock, and the thematic station tannoy continually reminded us that it was time to 'all change'. Stand-up comedians often deal with this sort of 'personal disasters' theme, but with crass humour and direct pleas to the audience. What makes Oscar worthwhile is his ability to muse, develop horrific imagery, scramble time, and leave us all suspended in empathy when he declares 'It's all over'. He is a

poet on legs, and his rolling eyes serve to illustrate that he's giving himself a hard time, not us.

Kevin just talks. And for the first ten minutes he makes it clear that a good ninety per cent of conversational language and real life storytelling is made up of absurd and pointless 'ums and ahs', 'you sees' and 'in a manner of speakings'. The audience were gurgling with laughter from the minute he threatened to open his mouth. When the tales of home life and self-entertainment began to unfurl we were taken into a totally pointless and hilarious world where two short planks really would go out and gather sheep to pull over the families' eyes. Samuel Beckett meets Ivor Cutler. By the time Gary Glitter arrives to literally take the biscuit (his black gloved hand crept into the tin), and the whole family dons platform boots, most of the audience seemed to be crying with laughter. Like Oscar, Kevin deals with material formerly covered by standard comedians, e.g. suggesting that the Irish are not altogether on the ball. His unique skills, however, come from his language, timing and delivery. Together they create a humour that enables us to delight in innocence, and wonder if our own lives really make much sense by comparison.

NOTTINGHAM

Roberta Graham
 in collaboration with
Ken Hollings

 Pale Battalions

 Castle Museum

Reviewed by Jane Bevan

Pale Battalions is a multi-media installation exploring the violence and tragedy of the so-called 'Great War'. This complex and intelligent work consists of video, photographic collage, large polaroids and slide/tape installations, based on three years of research by the artist on the battlefields of France and Belgium, and in military museums and establishments.

Pale Battalions is not a simple anti-war statement nor an ironic jibe at the Military, with their grandiose war memorials and archival museums, but rather a unique collection of exceptionally well researched images, sounds and sensations, each one loaded with a sad beauty and a profound sense of loss. It is no exaggeration to say that *Pale Battalions* aroused feelings of the deepest sadness both in visitors with some experience of war and in others who can only guess at the anguish. Memorable images such as a woman in mourning tortuously wringing her handkerchief, or row after row of small white crosses marking the graves of loved ones, mixed with the sound of gunfire and marching feet, create a certain atmosphere of nostalgia as well as thoughtfulness. But any romanticism is then systematically torn apart by the



artist revealing the underlying theme — the vulnerability of flesh against metal. For these nostalgic images are juxtaposed with messy, bloody fragments of bodies, lying in the mud — death here has been prolonged and undignified. In this subtle and compulsive way, Roberta Graham invites the viewer to confront not only the ugly realities of war but our own attitudes and romantic inclinations when dealing with the subject. It is not a question of good guys and bad guys, right or wrong, but a need to face up to the past with compassion and sympathy; acknowledge the tragedy as a first step towards a deeper understanding of human nature.

'The Wound Man' is a lightbox on which a life-size naked male figure stands vulnerable and exposed. This universal and stark statement reminds us clearly of the sacrifice

made; land and wars are won with soft flesh and innocent lives. As the viewer moves in and out of the perspex panels, various parts of the body are cut and severed by shells, scissors and truncheons. The Wound Man accepts death with no defence and no barriers between the metal and his flesh, as though his fate had already been decided elsewhere.

For a provincial museum with a very diverse and varied audience of all age groups and interests, a slide/tape installation of this professional quality was a great success. The richness of images and ideas revealed such a serious intent and deep personal commitment from the artists that the public's attention was immediately engaged.

To complement the exhibition, Graham selected a series of pastel drawings by the artist Henry Tonks (1862-1937) from the Royal Army Dental Corps

Museum in Aldershot. These extraordinary portraits of young pilots who received plastic surgery for war wounds were commissioned for medical reasons. Nonetheless, the cool, unemotional record of injuries is a chilling reminder of the acute physical pain experienced by many.

WARWICK

John Zorn's Naked City

University of Warwick:
Butterworth Hall

Reviewed by John Gore

I first encountered John Zorn through a tape of *The Big Gundown*, passed on to me by a friend in London: the hip, cultural, metropolitan hotline seldom makes a detour directly through the West Midlands, and who could blame it? Here was the music of Ennio Morricone, which I thought I knew, lovingly transformed into, well, something else again. Shortly afterwards I bought a copy of the album from a bargain bin in Birmingham.

Zorn's approach is an intense fusion of references and influences from diverse sources. Here you would find New York jazz and deceptively familiar workmanlike Hollywood and TV soundtracks rubbing shoulders with Luciano Berio and Europe's mainstream conservatoire tradition. Curiouser and curiouser, I thought, none too grammatically. It was music familiar enough to be readily

absorbed, and yet spiced by arrangements quirky enough to complement Morricone's own.

Passing references in magazines and half a South Bank Show led me to recognise a new, wild and wacky media darling about whom things should be known, if only to have something to discuss with my friend in London.

When the much heralded *Spillane* was released Zorn's filmic obsessions became clearer, and his fascination with the styles of pulp score composers continued to baffle and fascinate in about equal proportions: who does this man think we think he is, I remember thinking. Then came *Spy vs Spy*, a totally contrasting and explosively distilled reworking of favourite tunes by Ornette Coleman into some sort of thrash metal pogrom. By now the media was insisting that this man had something new to say. I was still baffled and fascinated.

When I finally came face to face with Naked City, three miles from the nearest urban nightmare in Warwickshire's green and pleasant land, it was with an ambivalent expectation.

Naked City is a formidable line-up of individuals who work as a sympathetic and well integrated unit — obviously well drilled by the tyrannical Zorn, who stopped the set during one thrash number, which was indistinguishable from the rest, so that guitarist Bill Frisell could get it right (then Frisell got it right and it was still indistinguishable). Frisell, of



course, had an instantly recognisable style and Fred Frith gave the bass line a typically inspired lyrical and harmonic depth. Wayne Horvitz on keyboards seemed, if anything, under-used in the ensemble, but Joey Baron's eruptive exhibitionism behind the drum kit created an unexpected and thrilling dynamic within the band. But despite the strong musical personalities, this was, without any question, Zorn's band. Scrupulously eccentric, his presence is the focus of everything. His musical contribution on characteristically unburnished alto sax may be minimal, but the spiky charisma is all-pervasive.

Each set was a sequence of brief excursions into, or scenes from, Zorn's dilettante repertoire, introduced or subsequently explained with wry, sardonic, New York comment; intrusions which were endearing

at first, then irritating and finally predictable and downright obtrusive. It was only in the second set that the band began playing more extended pieces and Zorn's exceptional talent for abruptly changing mood and tempo became appreciable. These filmic, montage effects were easily the most satisfying of the evening.

The repertoire offered something for everyone: thrash metal to delight the technicians, John Barry's aural syrup to comfort the fainthearted and those who came thinking it was a porn show, and another set of material more readily identifiable as the home territory of Frisell and Frith, a kind of deconstructed New Age montage of references. Sectioned in this way you could come and go and make your own interval.

I came, I saw, I admired. I left none the wiser. In the immortal words of one of Zorn's own 30 second compositions 'Eat Shit, Jazz Snob!' Sure, but what about the rest of us?

ARNHEM

International Audio Visueel Experimenteel Festival (AVE)

De Gele Rijder, Filmhuis, Gemeentemuseum, Hooghuis, Marienburg and Oceaan

Reviewed by Ivan Gaskell

The fifth AVE festival, which ran from 16 to 22 November, midday to midnight, was the most ambitious yet, showing artists' video, film, sound and

computer work — including video sculpture — installations and performance from twelve European countries (including Britain) and Australia. AVE is essentially a student event and is conceived as a non-competitive survey of these media, primarily within art schools. However, there was also a fair leavening of mature work. This included a highly professional thirteen minute piece shot in 35 mm colour film stock by Hartmut Jahn, from West Berlin, *Die Entführung Europas*. Wittily adapting an episode from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Jahn commented ironically on male fantasies about women and male rivalry. The festival catalogue (which gave details of all work being shown) also listed a forty-five minute performance version with the same title involving 'a tryptichon-mix of film and video and life endoscope-camera, a violinist and an opera-singer'. I should have liked to have seen this, but it did not appear in the day-by-day programme (such a festival is subject to constant rescheduling) and even if it had happened on the day I attended, I may not have heard about it until afterwards. As always in multi-venue events, one hears about things one would really like to have seen, but which occurred while one was somewhere else engrossed in banalities.

Another problem inherent in viewing a programme comprising a multitude of short works in different media from various sources is the need constantly to

readjust to the circumstances of production and the conventions within which any given piece is made. Videos from the Parisian production company Ex Nihilo aimed at France's television channel Canal + operate within utterly different parameters from, say, Robert Bramkamp and Silly Girls Film's monochrome 16 mm flawed space epic, *Der Himmel der Helden*, shot on location in Münster. While Ex Nihilo's Pierre Trividic examined the peculiar thermo-theological theories of a Californian Christian sect in *Réflexion sur la puissance motrice de l'amour* using the latest video paint-box technology, Bramkamp punctuated an adolescent love story of American-Soviet space rescue with chilling documentary footage of former astronaut James Irwin speaking about his experiences on the moon at a recent evangelical Christian mission meeting in Germany. From these already diverse products for quite different markets, the leap to Spaniard Antonio Perez's *Jardin electronico* — an abstract cascade of high colour density video interference — was equally enormous.

In the video on show, though, one recurrent feature was apparent. Irrespective of nationality, many video artists have been seduced by new technology, especially paint-box and computer-assisted image generation. This is partly a function of resources. Britain, not noted for generous provision in this area, is not immune.

Students from the Duncan of Jordanstone School of Art, Dundee, provided a display of electronic Scottish whimsy. Of these, Cavan Convery (*Flu-shot*, *Packshot*, *Clapshot*) has a real comic gift. Complex technology, though, is no substitute for a disciplined imagination, so Susan Brind's feminist, performance-based videos using no electronic trickery, such as *Men and Women*, provided very welcome relief from the pervasive meretriciousness.

Every festival has its version of the standard scandal. On this occasion one contributor (whom I shall not give the satisfaction of naming) acquired temporary celebrity by having the remainder of his work withdrawn after the screening of a head-banging video and revelation that another of his pieces included cat slaughter. The usual censorship-versus-free-expression arguments were rehearsed in the bars, though attention soon moved on to other issues. The bar at the Filmhuis and the cheap suppers served at the performance venue Oceaan provided focal points for meeting and exchanging ideas. The relatively less marginalised status of the media concerned and of contemporary art as a whole in the Netherlands and neighbouring West Germany meant that the self-consciousness of ICA-chic was entirely lacking. Behind the sometimes shambolic façade the fundamentals of organisation — largely by art student volunteers who take a year off to contribute under the wing of the leading venues and

the Arnhem Art School — worked with admirable finesse.

The performance work I saw on my one day visit was just as varied as the film and video. Tim Brennan's self-incarceration in a wet cellar was especially notable. [See article Free State.] Yvonne Austin gamely stepped in at very short notice to sit knee-to-knee before an audience of one in a tiny cubicle swallowing and regurgitating honey on to a salver. Flip Aartsen from Amsterdam produced a technically complex piece, *Drieoog*, involving three female performers, three video monitors, some stones and piles of shredded paper. The performers' live actions were presented simultaneously from different angles on recorded tape on the monitors, while occasionally other images appeared — a naked baby flashed briefly on to a screen as one woman held a stone aloft. Slowly the women moved from isolation to conflict to co-operation.

AVE is a frenetically relaxing occasion, a showcase for young talent, an event which deserves better support from established artists, teachers and curators, while from the British perspective it also confirms how culturally warping our prevalent Americocentrism can be.

HEROUVILLE ST CLAIR Normandy

Video Art Plastique

Reviewed by Fiona Dunlop

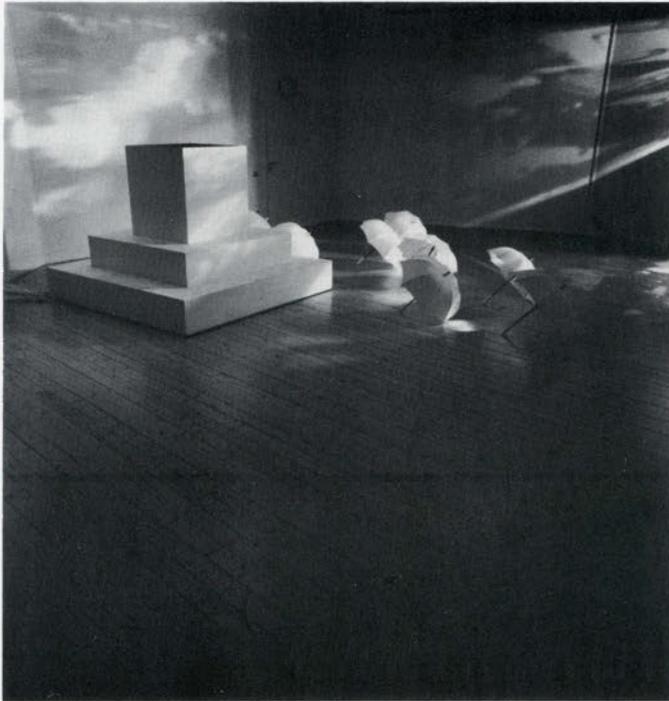
Video as an art form still remains closeted. Festivals proliferate then disappear as their audiences are limited to staunch videophiles and video artists themselves, not considered an enticing proposition for potential financiers. It can also be a narcissistic field in which the makers indulge in navel-gazing exercises or purely technical experimentation: closets finally create more closets. Video installations, on the other hand, generally get more of an airing as they can be incorporated into contemporary art exhibitions, but here the image on the screen rarely has any value in itself — it is a moving version of paint, wood or metal.

In France the festival of Montbéliard has reigned for the last decade, with Rennes and Hérouville Saint-Clair emerging more recently. The latter was founded three years ago and has forged an identity for itself on an international level, particularly concerned with the work of young video artists and those working with dance. Under the unusually dynamic wings of the local mayor (also responsible for an ambitious futuristic architectural project involving four European architects — Jean Nouvel, Otto Steidle, William Alsop and Massimiliano Fuksas — which may yet see the day), this festival held its 1989 edition

from 30 November to 3 December. A non-stop programme of films by French, Belgian, Italian, British and Australian video artists provided a rich opportunity to compare national characteristics and concerns — it was only a pity that no immediate comparisons could be made with current American production as, with more public exposure on national TV channels, it is inevitably more accessible to neophytes.

The Australian programme reflected much of the polychromatic brashness traditionally associated with that vast and active continent. Never afraid of colour, their video palettes swing from heavily realist subjects (heroin addiction or aboriginal land rights) to pure sci-fi fantasy as in Jill Scott's lengthy wonderland spoof. Selected and presented by Cathy Vogan, a Paris-based Australian video artist who created a video installation in the adjoining theatre, it reaffirmed the humour and spunk symptomatic of nations intent on creating a strong cultural identity.

Sophisticated techniques, ecology and low-budget humour were the vague threads of the British selection — a contrast to the mannerism of Greenaway's works, six of which were screened. Chris Newman's and Steve Littman's work focussed on suburban scenes, while Michael Denton's *Desert Plane* cut from images of fighter jets to macro shots of the countryside — nature subjected to high technology and the threatening



presence of war symbols. Contrasts between the mechanical world and nature also permeated Stuart Crundwell's *The Getaway* — a constructivist collage using a divided screen and multiplied images.

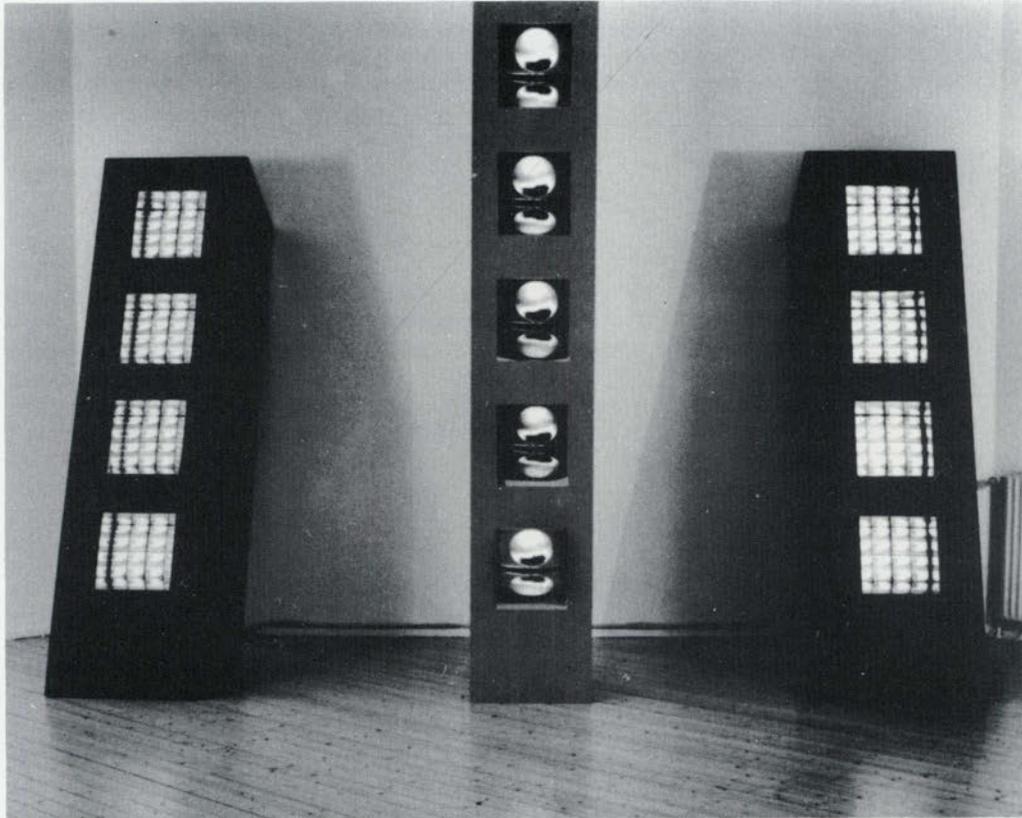
Belgian video art, according to its presenter Greta Van Broeckhoven, is severely underfinanced and therefore remains the concern of a restricted circle. Yet the eight videos presented here demonstrated a controlled and purist approach to the medium, often retracing the outlines of traditional performing arts. A major 85-minute piece by Koen & Frank Theys remakes rather than adapts Wagner's *Walkyrie* — these 'Nordic images, clear

and pure like Magritte' (dixit Van Broeckhoven) have apparently not been greatly appreciated in France. Less lyrical in tone, Maquestiau's *Pas de danse* is a structured piece evolving from a traditional ballet class in a derelict church, to a dancer in an empty urban street setting, to a final 'face to face' in which two dancers confront each other in a closed room, acting and dancing out their aggressions. *Hyena* by Vanrunxt is a concentrated study of emotion: close-up on a Eurasian face running the gamut of emotions — fury, despair, resignation. P. de Formanoir's video of Christian Cavez' whimsical war memories brings to mind the surrealistic images of French photographer Bernard

Faucon: 1940s celluloid mannequins are set in shady still-life interiors; footage of the Nazi occupation is cut in as the narrator humourously recounts his childhood memories reaching a climax when baby tries to kill a Nazi officer.

Obviously the main accent of this festival was on young video production in France — one of the rare countries which provides generous sponsorship for its video artists. Apart from the very '70s feel of the travel videos produced by the group Grand Canal, a major homage to Robert Cahen and a series of portraits of artists financed by the Centre National des Arts Plastiques, it was an eclectic range. The collective 'Heure Exquise!' provided high points with Vyncke and Zanoli's *Sous mes vêtements blancs*, an exquisitely languorous 30-minute recital by two dancers on and around a couch set in a landscape of chicken-wire and feathers. *Ultima II* by N. Widart explores fairy-tale attics of the mind with a latent violence; the voice of a mature woman narrating a stream of consciousness combines with ethereal light and overexposed images to reinforce the dangers of a young girl's literal and metaphoric exploration of her childhood home. D. & J. Nyst's *Saga sachets* involves no narrative: it kaleidoscopes images of the Himalayas, magnified insects and the gentle movement of a floating paper-bag into an evocative visual poem.

More accessible to the local public were the elaborate video



installations by Dominik Barbier, Miguel Chevalier, Michel Coste, Alain Longuet, Nam June Paik, Stephane Szendy and Cathy Vogan. Nam June Paik's work being the reference, both the sleek multi-monitor blocks of Miguel Chevalier and the mirrored well of Michel Coste achieved subtle effects without falling into the danger of overplaying technical potential or theatrical devices.

Illustrations: Michel Coste and Miquel Chevalier

NEW YORK

Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theater

Lava

The Performing Garage

Reviewed by Tim Etchells

Lava is dominated by a tape of Richard Foreman's voice, on which the writer, director and designer speaks more or less directly to the audience, 'discussing . . .' as he says in his programme note ' . . . many of the themes which have been at the center of my work for many

years.' Below this, and below the oscilloscope that very often translates the man's words into their own visual echo, a group of five performers run through a series of linked but in some senses autonomous texts and actions.

Foreman's text points up three kinds of reality it sees at work in the world: 'category one, material reality; category two, spiritual reality . . . ; and category three, randomness and chance, which is often mistaken for category two.' It is randomness and chance that are under discussion in the piece. The text goes on to describe how language, be it verbal or gestural, is an alien medium into which we are born and therefore always inadequate for the job of describing experience. These things established, the piece itself sets off on what we soon realise is a self-conscious fool's errand: to describe, remember, return to or perhaps induce a state that lies outside of this 'language machine'; a pure, experiential state.

Inevitably, *Lava* is conducted in the very system of language that it is trying to challenge. No doubt it is making a particular point out of using 'cool' discourses (philosophy, science, and the academy) as its stable linguistic texture. Its intention seems to be both to mount a challenge from within the academic 'language machine' by parody and subversion, and to foreground the limitations of this and other languages by placing them in mutual opposition. To

these ends the discourses on the tape are undermined both by themselves and by the counter-texts of speech and action on the stage.

The continued use of rather dry language, and the unwillingness to pit anything substantial against this, feels highly problematic. The lack of substance is most noticeable in the characters/performers on the stage, whose proposed reality seems to flicker: at times they are cued by what we hear on the tape; at times they speak in perfect unison with it (appearing to have the same idea at the same time); and elsewhere they seem to be in conflict with the tape or even to give up entirely the pretence of their own fictionality.

In this way we are reminded that the onstage world is merely an adjunct of the tape, of the author and of language. The tape itself becomes boring; often repetitious, the ideas are familiar and far from enticing in this context. The ontologically weak characters lack precisely the autonomy and the sensuality they need to create a real dialectical relationship with the tape. For a piece that wants to deal with quintessential experiences — 'the dance I did at the heart of my greatest adventure' — it all felt a bit gutless and dry. Its concerns and its (theatrical) construction begin to seem formulaic, an invitation not to the new and boundless 'category three' we've been promised, but to a rather tedious post-modern orthodoxy.

To some extent *Lava* covers its back against such criticisms. It is 'ever knowing', conducting its valorisation of category three in flirtatious and ironic terms, even seeming to acknowledge that the ideas under inspection are far from new. There's almost enough lightness in the work to see it as a gently self-mocking piece. Perhaps it is this strand that is the most interesting. There's a lot of polite irreverent fun in the action sections which illustrate the ubiquitous category three. The three male performers dressed as Nosferatu bring on stupid hats to create obviously gratuitous images, and wild scratching dances are performed to looped fragments of found music.

The strength of these latter sections seems to lie in their fragility, their transparently wilful attempt to be something, and ultimately their failure. Here the contradictions and ironies inherent in the piece are piled high enough to make it interesting. But this is a far cry from the formula games that are played out elsewhere. Overall, there is too little of the poignancy we get with the piece's final assessment of its own use of language to describe experience: 'Either these are bad arrows or there's something wrong with my aim.'

Films

Videos

Amanda Holiday

Umbrage

11 mins, Beta SP colour

Cordelia Swann

A Call to Arms

22 mins, U-matic colour

Sandra Lahire

Serpent River

30 mins, 16mm colour

Premiered at the French Institute, London

Reviewed by Nicky Hamlyn

These three pieces — two tapes and one film — are the latest to be completed under the joint scheme run by the Arts Council and Channel Four, and will eventually be shown on the Channel's *Eleventh Hour* programme.

At the French Institute, the work was shown in order of length, beginning with *Umbrage*, the shortest at eleven minutes. Amanda Holiday has enjoyed a short but so far successful career as an artist/film-maker. In 1988 she made a documentary on three black women artists and also received a bursary from the Arts Council's Black Arts Video Award to make a second such piece.

In *Umbrage* a young black woman carries her tattered umbrella on a fantasy journey through Northern terraced streets and lush, summery gardens. As Little Red Riding Hood she meets a smooth-talking black wolf in brown tights and white shaggy tippet, whose manner recalls the Lenny Henry character *Theophoulous P.*

Wildebeast. The use of nursery-rhyme fragments in a contemporary setting, and specifically the Little Red Riding Hood episode, invites comparison with Angela Carter's reworking of that story in *A Company of Wolves*. But where *Company of Wolves* was darkly sexual, *Umbrage* is light-hearted, even flippant, in tone.

The film begins promisingly with a beautiful close-up of the woman's face tilted upwards. Over this move the tiny shadows of a squadron of bombers, flying in a sky whose light turns the woman's face a luminous coppery-green. This is followed by archive footage of bombs falling from an aircraft's hold. But as this menacing beginning gives way to the self-conscious humour of the episodes with the two characters in the garden, the film loses tension. A more sober mood is regained towards the end with a novel version of *Rapunzel* in which the tower is replaced by a tall, white, clapboard windmill. From a tiny window at the very top, Rapunzel throws down a fantastically long rope of thick black hair to the waiting prince.

Although supposedly concerned with the protagonist's 'struggle to discern the difference between passion and violence', *Umbrage* was more memorable for the visual quality of its opening and closing images, and the *Rapunzel* scene. It was also notable as an example of work by a black film-maker that was not primarily concerned with black issues.



from: Amanda Holiday,
Umbrage.

A Call to Arms has taken over two years to make, and is the first new work from Cordelia Swann for some time. It marks a considerable departure from her earlier multi-screen Super 8 work, although it was shot on the same format, before being transferred to tape. The piece has great, if somewhat vague, ambitions: 'A *Call to Arms* is an allegory of the emotional and practical struggles of the artist. It also aims to overcome this turmoil with a new mythopoeic legend.' The tape is sumptuously beautiful, highly wrought and technically accomplished; and this accomplishment, it should be stressed, is due as much to Swann's treatment and camerawork as it is to the omnipresence of Tilda Swinton as the allegorical warrior. The film is composed of several short sections, each with a heading: 'Antique Glory', 'In Vain the Lofty Banner', 'Defeat', 'Captivity', 'Escape', etc. The imagery is sometimes elemental, with views of grass blowing wave-like on a hill-top or a golden, swelling sea, and sometimes dramatic, with swirling drapery or Gothic statuary lit very low-key. The Super 8 grain is so coarse that it appears as a patina, almost detached from the image it bears.

In contrast to this are the scenes with Swinton dressed in medieval armour or chain mail, brandishing her sword or loosing an arrow from her bow. Eventually she discards her weapons and is seen sitting in a white gown reading, or having

her hair combed in the lap of an old woman. Her noted ability to summon up emotional states through facial expressions is fully exploited throughout the film, as it was by Derek Jarman in his *War Requiem*. The film is considerably dramatised by the use of *Alexander Nevsky* for the music track; and there are also poems (one in Russian), along with other quotations.

The film's mythopoeic thrust begins with a restatement of the familiar image of the artist as errant individualist. This role is seen as inherently male, and therefore uncomfortable for women artists. (Hence the woman forced to adopt the *male* accoutrements of war). As the film unfolds, this old myth is displaced by the new, *female* one in which the artist is recharacterised as contemplative and socially interdependent. But although *A Call to Arms* is an exceptionally self-assured and formally well integrated work, its over- neat teleology, and its explicit references to Tarkovsky and Jarman (in its use of the *tableau-vivant*), bring it close to academicism. Furthermore, the details and implications of the new mythopoeia remain unilluminated.

Swann's earlier Super 8 triptychs such as *Again* were made with very modest means, but they were much more focussed in the way they energetically deconstructed and amplified icons in fleeting fragments of Hollywood movies. What this earlier work lacked in polish it more than made up for

in clarity and substance.

The last work; *Serpent River* (16mm film) by Sandra Lahire was the longest at thirty minutes. This is the third in a series of films to do with the nuclear industry and the attendant environmental and health problems. *Serpent River* expands its scope slightly on previous films to include political questions about the contrasting treatment by the Canadian Government of, on the one hand, a community of whites and, on the other, natives, both equally affected by the same polluted water supply.

If this account sounds like a typical review of a standard documentary, that is because in one respect this is the kind of response that the film begs. Although Lahire employs a lot of optical printing, refilming, multiple superimpositions, and two-colour separation, the film remains irreducibly *about* the problems of nuclear power, in this case what goes on at a uranium mine in North Ontario.

There are shots of water printed through colour filters to look radioactive, a drilling plant, lorries moving through the snowy landscape, a torso with glowing rib-cage and superimpositions of water, sunlight and ice, and radioactive torso with guitar player. The soundtrack is a busy montage of drilling, heart-beats, geiger-counter crackle, and lorries, punctuated by a woman's first-hand account of the dangers of

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Books

Ornella Volta
Satie Seen Through His Letters

Marion Boyars, £9.95

Jeff Nuttall
The Bald Soprano

Tak Tak Tak, £10.00 with cassette

Reviewed by David Hughes



from: *Ornela Volta, Satie Seen Through His Letters.*

On the face of it, *Satie Seen Through His Letters* and *The Bald Soprano*, 'portraits' respectively of the composer Erik Satie and of the saxophonist Lol Coxhill, couldn't be more dissimilar. Yet, in the reading of them, the points of connection heap one on the other: they are both full of historical anecdotes, as one might expect; the subjects of both draw their music out of a mixture of absurdist humour and musical allusion; both books are oddly divided, the Satie into categories such as 'Wars' and 'Lawsuits', and the Coxhill into a jazz song structure of intro, theme, rhapsodic chorus and theme; we see the theatrical sense of isolation of both subjects. And John Cage makes an appearance in both — he writes the introduction to the Satie, and in Jeff Nuttall's account of Coxhill's place in 20th century European jazz and performance art, Cage is one of the gurus who liberates music into the possibilities of sound-making rather than music-making.

Ornella Volta's book suffers from an excess of peripheral detail, which is hardly surprising given that she's the Artistic Director of the Satie Foundation.

She has a penchant for launching into genealogies, and the thematic grouping leads to repetitions of incident that become irritating. What emerges is a picture of a charming, urbane wit — rather capricious, a prankster. This is not the book for those after insights into the theories of Les Six or the Dadaists, but there is a fine sense of how the interactions of personalities influenced the evolution of such performance milestones as *Parade* and *Relâche*.

The finest feature is the illustrations which occupy many of the broad margins. Among them are classic sketches by Picasso, Picabia, Cocteau and Satie himself.

Jeff Nuttall's life of Coxhill starts with the memory of their early performance work together, which was spiked by the affair which developed between Coxhill and Nuttall's girlfriend and performance partner, the elusive Rose. The form of the book resembles descriptions Nuttall gives of Coxhill's saxophone monologues: beginning with a crazy race through octaves, freak notes and shrieks, and then mellowing out to incorporate hints of melody, themes, musical references and rhapsodic flights. The book's 'intro' is just such a shriek. Subsequent analytic chapters combine reflections on jazz, performance art, the avant-garde, the place of the marginalized artist in British culture, and, almost incidentally, Lol Coxhill. Alternate chapters are prose

improvisations on Coxhill records. They are a mixture of the Beats, Dylan Thomas and Tom Waits, themes and images circulating and mutating.

Altogether, *The Bald Soprano* is a wonderful evocation of the creative personnel-swapping of blues and jazz bands, not to mention the hippy bands of performance artists, through the '60s and '70s. But the final chapters, and Coxhill's typically ironic postscript, situate him in the mainstream of today's 'serious' experimental music.

If I haven't given much of an impression of the Lol Coxhill that emerges, that's because the scope of the book is extremely broad, as much a creative exercise of Nuttall's as an account of his subject's creative life. But this is in no way to damn it. With much of the text contributed directly by Coxhill, the result is not merely a valuable performance history, but also an ecstatic literary jazz duet.

The Photofile Series

Thames and Hudson,
£4.95 each

**Robert Mapplethorpe
*Some Women***

Secker and Warburg, £30.00

**Hermine Demoriane
*The Tightrope Walker***

Secker and Warburg, £17.50

**Helen Chadwick
*Enfleshings***

Secker and Warburg, £16.95

Reviewed by David Hughes

One of the assumptions of book reviewing is that the book reviewed is worthy. It might be good or bad but, in any case, worthy of review. Pleasure doesn't really come into it. Pleasure, however, is exactly what prompts me to write about three books from Thames and Hudson's Photofile series. What made them so enjoyable was that they reminded me of the small, white books on the Surrealists, Dali, Miro, De Chirico and others, which we used to carry round with us in the late '60s. Books which fired and structured our imaginations. Were they Studio Vista or Thames and Hudson? There, I'm afraid, memory fails.

The glossy, black and solidly made pocket-sized Photofile books have a short, expert introduction followed by about sixty pages of colour and/or duotone reproductions (here, Eugène Atget, Jacques-Henri Lartigue and Helmut Newton). On the rear pages are biographies, bibliographies and notes on technique.

There is nothing surprising in the selections, they are the classic representative images: Lartigue's women caught in flight, Newton's women in bondage and Atget's highly structured and painterly studies of rural and urban Paris at the turn of the century.

Although these are pocket books for quick reference, or the coffee table, especially if the coffee table is rather small, the Newton raises difficult issues. His photos are always of

women, women as sculptural/structural objects, women as object of male gaze and fantasy, women ready and submissive, hard surfaced yet malleable mannequins, clothes horses to be dressed with or undressed to sado-masochistic fetish objects. Fetish objects to themselves, indeed, dislocated as they are from any sense of their own sexuality and desires. If they seem to express desire it is only that of the men who appear in occasional frames or the male who gazes at them.

In *Some Women*, 86 duotone portraits, Robert Mapplethorpe also photographs women in costume and women naked. But here he seems to collude with his sitters in their own blatantly theatrical self-presentations. Both photographers 'dismember' the body. For example, Newton exaggerates nudity through the agency of glaring red high-heeled shoes, and when he places a naked woman above a panorama of Paris, the geometry of the city seems to become a set of metaphors for parts of her body. That the model is looking at a reflection of herself in a mirror heightens the sense of identity being fragmented, constituted through a series of reflections: a sense of self depending on being reflected back from a series of others. Mapplethorpe's torso of weight-lifter Lisa Lyon is almost a parody of the sculpted Greek torso which is his frontispiece. It is as though we are to view Mapplethorpe's women in relation to a notion of physical perfection epitomized by the

Greek statue. But the statue is a relic, decayed, implying a knowledge of the distance between ideal and reality. When Newton shows us Lyon, it is the tensile quality of her body that shows through; Mapplethorpe shows the rather softer contours of the muscle. And indeed, Newton's women generally seem to be constructed from man-made materials (he plays on the ambiguity of mannequin and model), whilst Mapplethorpe shows us flesh — soft, vulnerable.

Both photographers also show us an isolated foot in a high-heeled shoe. Newton's is turned away from the camera, the leather tongue at the rear seeming to bite into the flesh of the ankle. As a rule the straps in his photos do seem to restrain, to bind and cage. The foot in Mapplethorpe's photo is in a slightly more loosely-fitting shoe. Turned side-on to the camera, the straps less biting, the severe angle of instep to toe gives the impression of ballet points, as though it is part of the costume of a social dance. But above all, it is an absurd shoe, a witty accessory. This is knowing image, not shackle. The polarities set up between Newton and Mapplethorpe, then, are the hard versus the soft, the bound versus the venerated.

What must be obvious by now is that one could take a much less disparaging position in regard to Newton. Rather than branding it sexist soft porn, one could see it as foregrounding the processes which construct female

identity, whereas Mapplethorpe shows us women aware of those images and playing with them. But the danger is that at the same time as the extremity of Newton's work exaggerates those processes, their obvious erotic power can easily command the attention entirely, whether repulsing or seducing one. Both show the gaps, but Mapplethorpe's are strangely empty, or perhaps charged with a kind of New Yorkish wit. Newton's are full with the resonances of metaphor. Perhaps the key is the self-knowledge in Mapplethorpe's women as opposed to the lack of it in Newton's.

Hermine Demoriane in *The Tightrope Walker* and Helen Chadwick in *Enfleshings* are also engaged with questions of identity and both use reflection and self-exposure in the process.

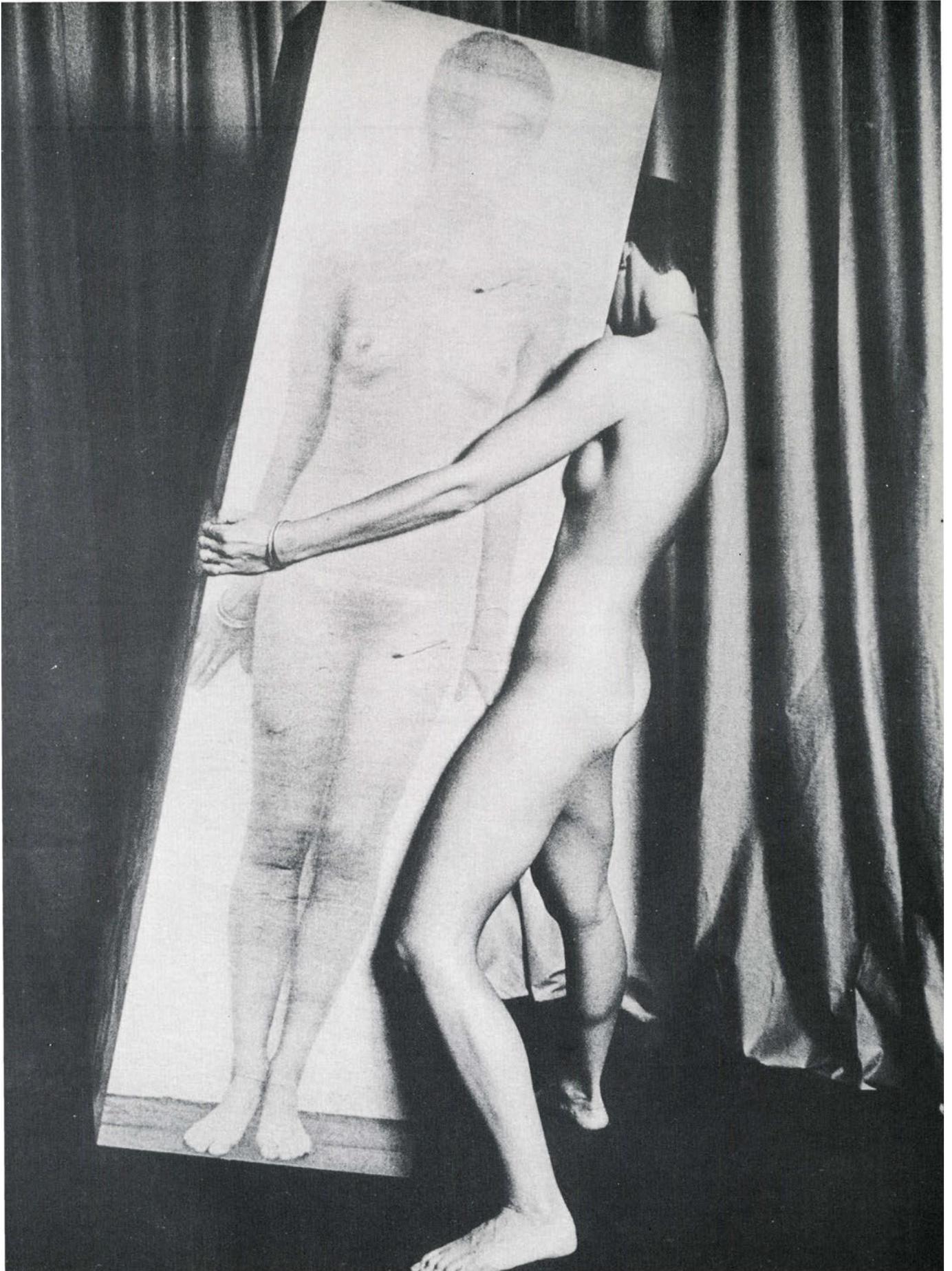
Demoriane, in a diary written at the time, charts her passage through the worlds of rock music and performance art as she learns to walk the tightrope. She meets disappointment everywhere, on the stage and in the bedroom, but she keeps going back for more. What draws our sympathy is that she is fully aware of her self-deceptions and weaknesses and it is good to know that even though she eventually lost her obsession with tightrope walking she is still a working performance artist. Indeed, a recent performance of her's was reviewed in a recent *Performance*. This is rather like Nuttall's book on Lol Coxhill, in that it gives interesting insights

into personalities and events.

Demoriane also draws on a number of sources to give a history of tightrope walking itself. There are many spectres in the book, many parallel lives to her own and in some curious way she seems to be invoking those lives in which walking the rope is poetry, a gentle art not a debased entertainment, to authenticate her own. What distinguished her act was that she stripped down to a bikini which was painted with what it hid, a gesture that made 'art' from a debased and titillating entertainment.

In *Enfleshings*, Helen Chadwick's document of performance work and installations, the strip is complete. She projects images of her naked self onto stylized icons of her past life as though mapping one grid onto another to see where they will connect. By literally fixing an image of her present self onto a 'pram' or 'child's wigwam' she seems to be asking 'how did I get to be what I now am? What are the influences and experiences that formed me?' The textual element clearly owes much to post-structuralist and psychoanalytic writing, other formative influences.

This is a difficult book which can either just be looked at for its excellent colour illustrations, or which can become the occasion of a meditation on the possibility of change, a preoccupation of Chadwick's as her installation 'Of Mutability' confirms. The epigraph to that



section reads: 'Before I was bounded, now I've begun to leak . . .' A culturally constructed identity will contain 'her' no longer. It is not a case of cynically manipulating image and identity with her, but analysing it, stripping it away to lay bare its construction, and even stripping away the surface and volume of the body itself, as though to guard against the possibility that identity is programmed into body. It is her cellular structure she finally presents us with.

Chadwick's initial move is to reject Western culture, followed by a return to the pre-linguistic domain of the corporeal. The first pictures are those of Chadwick measuring herself against her formative past, but by the end of the book, although it is in no way a causal or logical sequence, we are in a kind of primeval soup, with reproductions of her own body's cells laid over seascapes. At the end, then, we are at the beginning of life, and the question of what new life form could emerge from that state.

The book now assumes a double purpose. It is document of work produced, but also philosophical speculation. What would happen if we could redesign life from the cell up, reinvent culture? It is as though she is proposing an answer to one of the objections which is sometimes raised to the de-instituting of sexism, or the redefining of social roles. Namely that it is just tinkering with the surface, that there can

be no truly authentic redefinition of female identity because patriarchal structures already define the cultural and linguistic terms in which restructuring takes place. *Enfleshings* does not offer a solution, but sets out the terms of an investigation. Playing with reflection, projection and the body as the point of access to a pre-linguistic domain, there are inevitably many nude pictures of her, but she is a very shadowy and elusive presence, her body offered not as the object of prurient interest, but as the field of a philosophical debate.

Illustration: Helen Chadwick

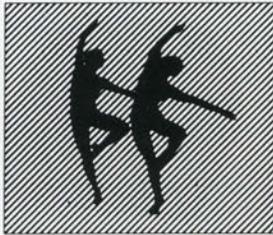
continued from p.71

working in the mine and the intransigence of the management. It is difficult to know how one is meant to see this film. In one way it is a kind of experimental documentary, although it doesn't engage with documentary codes in any systematic way. Alternatively it may be seen as an attempt to evoke the fear — paranoia almost, since radioactivity is unseen — and sense of omniscient danger that the miners feel. This the film certainly does do through its juxtaposition of images of natural beauty deformed by acrid printing colours, with the cheery rendition of the song *Uranium Rock* and the sign-board over the doorway of the *Uranium Capital Nursery School*. But whichever way the film is seen, there is a basic tension between the documentary endeavour and the formalist strategy that remains frustratingly unresolved.

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For ten years we have been running a unique Theatre course. It integrates physical and visual performance, encourages experiment and relates theatre to its place in culture. We are part of a campus which combines Music, Art and Theatre. The Department has bases in Devon and London and has been actively developing its European connections for a number of years.

From September 1990 the Department requires two LECTURER/PRACTITIONERS to work mainly in the PERFORMANCE and COMPOSITION areas of the B.A. (Hons) Theatre Degree.

MOVEMENT/CHOREOGRAPHY - interest and experience of physical theatre forms.

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Either could be negotiated as a full time or part time post.

Write or telephone for further details:

Jean Thoday, Extension 205

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International Festivals and Art Gatherings

1990

All year		Glasgow '90, European City of Culture tel 041-227 5429
March	<i>1-18 Mar</i>	Adelaide Festival Adelaide, Australia tel (61) 8-216 8600 and c/o South Australia House 01-930 7471
	<i>16-21 Mar</i>	Art Frankfurt 1990 Frankfurt, West Germany tel (49) 69-440 226
	<i>29 Mar-1 Apr</i>	Art London '90 London, England tel 01-486 1951
April	<i>19 Apr-5 May</i>	International Festival of Modern Dance and Movement Utrecht, Netherlands tel (31) 300-332 032
May	<i>4-26 May</i>	Mayfest Glasgow, Scotland tel 041-221 4911
	<i>4-27 May</i>	Brighton International Festival Brighton, England tel 0273-29801
	<i>17-30 May</i>	Edge '90 Newcastle upon Tyne, England tel 091-232 0862
	<i>18 May-20 Oct</i>	First Tyne International Gateshead, England tel 091-460 5804
	<i>25 May-10 Jun</i>	Bath Festival Bath, England tel 0225-460030
	<i>27 May-27 Sep</i>	XLIV Venice Biennale Venice, Italy tel (39) 41-700 311

	<i>30 May-29 Jun</i>	London International Opera Festival London, England tel 01-359 9926
		Granada Theatre Festival Granada, Spain tel (34) 58-263 695
June	<i>16-30 Jun</i>	Olympic Festival 1990 Manchester, England tel 061-236 4116
July		Salzburg Festival Salzburg, Austria tel (43) 662-842 623
August		Edinburgh Festival Edinburgh, Scotland tel 031-226 5992
September	<i>19-22 Sep</i>	Art Tokyo '90 Tokyo, Japan tel (81) 3-350 8588 and c/o Overseas Exhibition Services Ltd 01-487 5831
		Edge '90: The New Work Rotterdam, Netherlands tel 01-729 3007 and 091-232 0862
		Lisbon Festival Lisbon, Portugal tel (351) 1-735 131
October	<i>2 Oct - 10 Nov</i>	Dance Umbrella Newcastle upon Tyne, England tel 01-741 4040

*In the case of telephone numbers outside the United Kingdom, the Country Code is included, in brackets.
If dialling from the UK, just put 010 first.*

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All information is subject to change closer to the date.

YORKSHIRE ARTS

SUPPORT FOR VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS IN YORKSHIRE

Full guidelines are now available regarding grant aid for visual arts and crafts projects in 1990/91 including Exhibitions; Studio Development; Performance Art Events; Training; Community Placements; Education; Animateurs; Individual Production Awards for Visual Arts, Crafts and Performance Art.

Please write requesting the 'Guide to Support' and 'Menu' to:

Christina Henry
Visual Arts and Crafts Secretary/Assistant
Yorkshire Arts
Glyde House
Glyde Gate
BRADFORD
West Yorkshire BD5 0BQ

Kettle's Yard & Cambridge Darkroom.

POST - Morality

Kettle's Yard & Cambridge Darkroom are inviting submissions for the **1990 Open Exhibition** on the theme of the changing moral climate in contemporary society.

Please send an S.A.E. for further details and application form to Kettle's Yard, Castle St, Cambridge CB3 0AQ, marked *Open Show*.

Closing date for submission **25 May**, all applications welcome. Exhibition opens 10 November 1990.

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We're looking for a performance artist who can share the process of performance art with young people and teachers.

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Deadline for applications: end June. Realisation: Autumn Term.

H.T.B.A. are also inviting proposals for a major Time Based Work to take place at Spurn Head. £5,500 available.

For full information on all of these projects please send S.A.E. to:
H.T.B.A., 8 Posterngate,
Hull HU1 2JN.

Film and Video Umbrella

LIVE ART COMMISSIONS

The Film and Video Umbrella, supported by the Arts Council of Great Britain, are offering three commissions for Live Art projects as part of a touring exhibition to take place from early 1991.

The exhibition is on the theme **BETWEEN TV AND GALLERY** and will combine programmes of artists' video with live work. The show is expected to tour extensively in the U.K.

For information please contact:

Jeremy Welsh

Film and Video Umbrella
Top Floor, Chelsea Reach, 79-89 Lots Road
London SW10 0RN Tel 01 376 3171

- 1* Ken Campbell / Welfare State / Kipper Kids / Heartache & Sorrow
- 2* Roland Miller & Shirley Cameron / Demolition Decorators / Mods / Nuttall on Money
- 3* Genesis P. Orridge / Hummer Sisters / Happenings / Performance from Poland
- 4* Mary Longford / Academia Ruchu / Welfare State / Kaboodle Theatre
- 5+ Charlie Drake / Silvia Ziraneck / Sonia Knox / Stuart Brisley & Ian Robertson
- 6+ Fiona Richmond / Steve Cripps / Naked Art / Politics of Drag
- 7+ John Cage / Merce Cunningham / Lumière & Son / Tadeusz Kantor / Women's Images
- 8* Pip Simmons / Tom Saddington / Women's Performance
- 9 Ivor Cutler / Performed Music / Showbiz / San Francisco Mime Troupe
- 10 Roland Miller & Shirley Cameron / Chris Burden / Belgian Performance / New Video
- 11+ Brion Gysin / Lizzie Cox / Stuart Brisley / Steve Paxton
- 12 Caberet Futura / Richard Layzell / State Performances / Artists Enquiry into Art
- 13 Roland Muldoon / Gay Culture & Performance / Theatre of the 8th Day / Gilbert & George / Provisorium
- 14 Laurie Anderson / Acme Gallery / Miranda Tufnell / Music in Performance
- 15+ Yoshi Oida / Magic & Performance / Sex & Public Spectacle / Station House Opera
- 16+ Andre Stitt / Video Libraries / Circus Lumiere / Forkbeard Fantasy
- 17+ Geraldine Pilgrim / Hesitate & Demonstrate / Irish Performance / Women & Jazz
- 18 Robyn Archer / John Cage & Laurie Anderson / IOU Theatre / Independent Video
- 19+ Cathy Berberian / Neo-Naturism / New Image / New York Live / Nuovo Spettacolorita
- 20/21+ Psychic TV / Anne Bean / Philip Glass & Rhys Chatham / Rational Theatre / New York Video
- 22 Impact Theatre / Bloodgroup / Video Afterimage / Basement Group
- 23 Nan Hoover / Zap Club / Hermine / Paperpool / Sheffield Expanded Media
- 24+ Kazuko Hohki (Frank Chickens) / John Maybury / Urban Sax / New York Performance / Charlie Hooker
- 25 Joseph Beuys / Jan Fabre / Notting Hill Carnival / Marty St James & Anne Wilson / Music Supplement
- 26 Lindsay Kemp / Burnt Wreckage, Sculpture / Lumiere & Son / Performance Journeys
- 27 Silvia Ziraneck / Philip Glass / Fashion / Camp Art / Ddart / John Stalin
- 28 Derek Jarman / Kenneth Anger / African Magic / Performance Artists from Outer Space / Carnival
- 29 Gilbert & George / Ideal Home, Crufts, Boat Show / Freud & Performance / Bellringing
- 30 Molissa Fenley / Images of Deviancy / The Wooster Group / Adult Puppetry
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- 35 Els Comediants / La Gaia Scienza / Peking Opera / Bow Gamelan / Winston Tong
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- 53 Marina Abramović & Ulay / Tina Keane / Images of Men / Performance & Sculpture / Performance Documentation
- 54 John Fox / Kantor in Rehearsal / Radical Art in Scotland, Process & Product
- 55+ EDGE 88 Special / Articles by Dan Cameron / Sylvia Eiblmayr / Steven Durland / Gray Watson
- 56/57+ Station House Opera / Extremes in Performance Art / Tina Weymouth / Epilepsy / National Review of Live Art
- 58+ Fluxus / Arte Povera / Situationism / Marie-Jo Lafontaine / New Dance
- 59+ Carolee Schneeman / Performance Art & Opera / Beuys & Abramović-Ulay / Cage & Kantor

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