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Bob Cobbing **Augusto Boal**

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Editorial

IF ever proof were needed of how little understanding there is, on the part of the international Western art establishment, of the ways in which contemporary art might possibly be of some real use to humankind, the it could be provided by looking at the massively over-funded and over-trumpeted exhibition 'Metropolis' on view until 21 July at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin.

Given that, like the Reichstag, the Martin-Gropius-Bau stands literally adjacent to the former Wall — with the added factor that from its windows is visible one of the few sections of the Wall near the centre of town which have been deliberately preserved, as too is a grassy mound which contains the rubble of the Old Gestapo HQ, and also that the building is to be part of the new 'cultural centre' taking shape around the Potsdamer Platz and intended to celebrate the overcoming of the division of Berlin and by extension of the Cold War — it would be hard to think of a venue with stronger symbolic resonance, both geographically and historically. The exhibition, of course, pays lip-service to the addressing of this context, but it is the superficiality and the half-heartedness with which, taken as a whole, it does so, that represents such a wasted opportunity.

Certainly there are some excellent individual works in 'Metropolis' which do engage with the geographical and historical context. Katharina Fritsch's installation, for example, in one of the top floor rooms overlooking the preserved section of Wall and the grassy mound, interacts with that sinister view in a highly evocative way, employing only minimal means: the whole room is painted a deep, rich pink, while a sound-track composed of the amplified sound of strong wind, with all its connotations of melancholy, desolation and the passage of time, permeates the space.

The geographical and historical context is also engaged with by Marcel Odenbach's video installation *If the Wall Shifts Towards the Table* — not through its siting, but through its internal layout and imagery, both of which refer to the Neue Wache, the small Neoclassical building by Schinkel on Unter den Linden which has been used since the Second World War as a monument to the victims of Fascism and which was guarded during the days of the DDR, with a much remarked-on incongruity, by typically Prussian jackbooted soldiers. A particularly poignant element in this work is a close-up portrait on videotape of a young soldier's face, in which Odenbach brings out an undeniably poetic sensitivity.

Bill Viola's video triptych *The City of Man* engages with the theme of the 'metropolis' in a more general way. As with Fritsch, it is as much as anything the economy of means which impresses; but here there is no doubt that we are taken well beyond the realm of the atmospheric into that of the metaphysical — not that from Viola one would expect anything less.

Yet such works are the exception, not the rule. Indeed it is indicative of the organizers' attitude that the video pieces are separated from the main exhibition and tucked away in a section of their own, downstairs near the cloakrooms. A small amount of video work has been allowed to find its way into the main exhibition, but it is so confusingly crammed in with other pieces that it is impossible to view it properly — in contrast to other (more object-based) work, whose allocation of space sometimes borders on the wasteful. It is also noteworthy how disproportionately few women artists are included in the show. But what really gives the lie to the claim that the exhibition is addressing its geographical and historical context is the fact that the very few artists from eastern Europe who are included, so evidently form a merely token presence.

For this is a Western show, through and through. Its obsessions are the same old obsessions as those which have dominated the Western art world for many years, tied as it is to the New York-Milan-Cologne dealers' axis. Here, truly, is furniture art: some of it literally looking like furniture (the baneful presence of Richard Artschwager, whose very name no doubt recommends him to those for whom the subject of art is an end-in-itself, could be taken as emblematic of the whole exhibition); most of it — with, as we have seen, some honourable exceptions — at least **functioning** like furniture, suitable for adorning the walls or floors of those for whom art is a diverting intellectual game and who lack the imagination to see beyond the existing Western capitalist order of things, whether they openly extol its virtues or, as is more often the case, affect to be 'deconstructing' it.

The opening up of the Wall, together with the collapse of authoritarian Communist power in eastern Europe and the widespread disillusionment with the ideology which had been used to justify that power, constitutes a truly momentous development. Indeed a good case could be made out for ranking 1917 and 1989 alongside each other as the two most symbolically important dates of this century. For, in a very important sense. Communism has been **the** experiment of the twentieth century. Marxism seemingly

offered, for the first time ever, a lever by means of which human beings could take hold of their collective destiny. As a result of the laying bare of the mechanisms of historical change which had been Marx's truly prodigious intellectual achievement, 'enlightened' and 'progressive' forces were, it was thought, supplied with the necessary conceptual tools for altering history's course. That such high hopes should have turned to such disappointment is, as has often recently been remarked, tragic. But it is also instructive; and not just in a strictly political sense, but in a wider cultural sense as well.

What is most needed now is to learn from the Communist experience. One lesson is undoubtedly the value of humility and prudence: those of us who still believe in the possibility of exercizing some real effect on the direction of our collective destiny must at least reflect very seriously on the manifest failure of others before us who have professed the same aim. But perhaps the most fundamental lesson that can be derived so far — there will doubtless be many more to come — is the relatively greater importance of psychological as opposed to economic factors in the historical process than either a Marxist or (for there are such things nowadays) a capitalist account of history recognizes.

That is one of the main reasons why the furniture art beloved of the Western art establishment is so shallow; and that is why the kind of art which is truly revealing about, as opposed to merely reflective of, our present cultural and historical situation is that which opens us up to aspects of human experience which remain for the most part unconscious — including both the neurotic obsessions which keep us locked in certain vicious circles of habitual behaviour and, more constructively, the hardly yet tapped potential in the human makeup for radical growth and transformation.

Some such artists have been embraced by the art establishment — Anselm Kiefer, conspicuous by his absence from 'Metropolis', is one — but, in such cases, their acceptance is usually for rather more limited reasons. A change of criteria is required; and, for that to come about, there must be a thoroughgoing change in the understanding of what art can usefully achieve.

Gray Watson

no. 64

This issue concentrates on five artists, all of whose work crosses disciplinary boundaries. There are two South Americans, with widely divergent conceptions of art's liberating potential. The irrepresibly vivacious Argentininan creator of Ephemeral Art, Marta Minujin, is interviewed by Richard Squires; while aspects of the Brazilian Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed are discussed by Barbara Norden. Both the North American John Cage and the Englishman Bob Cobbing produce works in sound which, from different perspectives, break down the barriers between the verbal and the musical; yet both are equally fascinated by the visual possibilities of the notation or 'score'. Richard Kostelanetz discusses a little-known side of Cage's oeuvre, his work in the medium of the Hörspiel or radio play; while Fiona Becket surveys the whole of Cobbing's career in sound poetry. The borderline between what is and what is not language - or writing - has also been a recurrent theme in the work of the North American artist, based principally in England, Susan Hiller. Guy Brett leads off this issue with an analysis of Hiller's latest major work, *An Entertainment,* whose starting point is the far from innocuous traditional puppet show, Punch and Judy.

Guy Brett

WICKED, WICKED, WICKED

Susan Hiller's *An Entertainment*

Facing page:
Susan Hiller, *An Entertainment*, 1990, videobeam projection, installation at Matts Gallery, London. (Photo Edward Woodman)

'I was watching a newsreel. Suddenly I no longer knew just what it was that I saw on the screen. Instead of figures moving in three-dimensional space I saw only black and white specks shifting on a flat surface. They had lost all meaning. I looked at the people beside me, and all at once by contrast I saw a spectacle completely unknown. It was fantastic. The known was the reality all around me, and no longer what was happening on the screen...'

- Giacometti (1945)

Susan Hiller's new video installation *An Entertainment* was shown at the Mappin Gallery in Sheffield in December last year and at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow this April. The piece was initiated by Matts Gallery in London (which also commissioned the very impressive catalogue) and it was showing there in January 1991 as war broke out in the Gulf. It seemed to me extraordinary that this work was so little commented on in the press at the time, given its pertinence to events. *An Entertainment* was not about the Gulf war, nor about war itself, but it was certainly in one sense about violence. However, its pertinence comes perhaps more than anything else from the unorthodox, most imaginative ways in which it is related to what it usually meant by the topical.

Susan Hiller has recounted as one of the reasons for abandoning her early career as an anthropologist her realization that anthropologists' findings about indigenous people were being used by the United States, and other powerful societies, to dominate and exploit those peoples. She also lost faith in the anthropologist's method of 'participant observation' and in the general notion of scientific objectivity. When she decided to become an artist she took up painting. But later she transferred (a process itself marked by irony and insight) a kind of anthropological method to her practice as an artist, a scientific methodology which became a pictorial and sculptural language. It was done in the spirit of 'I don't care what it's called, that's what I'm going to do.'[1]

One of the ironies of this earlier work was that Hiller used methods associated with knowledge and mastery in the disciplines of science—sorting, categorizing, labelling—to explode the myth of mastery in the disciplines of art. In other words, her work gave us an aesthetic experience which arose out of fragments which refused to cohere into traditional expressive wholes. It is hard to do justice to the liberating feeling of being temporarily suspended from the conventional boundaries separating 'factual' and 'imaginative' domains. However, in more recent work Hiller has moved somewhat away from the methodical calm associated with anthropological or sociological enquiry. She has moved towards intensity of psychological experience. Almost all her recent works (such as her video *Belshazzer's Feast*, the slide/audio sequence *Magic Lantern*, the photographical

Susan Hiller, *Landing*, 1983, Ripolin on canvas-mounted wallpaper.

piece *Secrets of Sunset Beach* and the painting series *Home Truths*) seem to entail bursts of light and colour, or 'signification', surrounded by or interspersed with darkness. Whether you see the darkness as the 'dark side', or as the void, or the incoherent, its entry is always as significant and as empowered as the light. This dialectic is overwhelmingly the characteristic of *An Entertainment*, which is based nevertheless, like almost all her previous work, on the investigation of a cultural artefact.

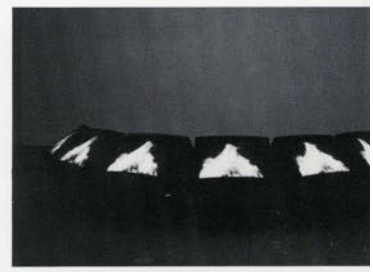
* * *

One of the most intriguing things about the insights into the contemporary world one can take from *An Entertainment* is that they come from a direction so unlikely it makes one inwardly laugh with pleasure at the artist's audacity. Hours of super-8 film of Punch and Judy performances, taken in various parts of Britain over a three year period, were the basic material which was elaborately reconstructed to form the sequences of the 20-minute video. One soon realizes, however, that the choice of something so excessively framed and contained, a tiny theatrical entity with its roots in carnival, relegated to childrens' birthday parties or tourist brochures, has certain connections with other artefacts which Hiller has used to delve into 'the unconscious side of our own cultural production.'[2] It has a connection, for example, with the 'rough-sea' postcards collected in coastal towns which make up *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1976), or the pages of British and American encyclopedias on slide in *Enquiries/Inquiries* (1973), or the memorial inscriptions commemorating self-sacrifice in *Monument* (1980-81). Besides the subtle revelations these works make as evidence of a 'foreigner's' perception of certain aspects of English culture, they can also be seen as referring to the processes whereby tempestuous, elemental forces are covered-over, mediated, or mis-recognized. But whereas the found materials in earlier works were rearranged with a method similar to the curator's, the Punch and Judy recordings have been transformed: intensively selected, stripped of narrative content, re-combined and above all enlarged to wall-height and almost to abstraction, in sequences co-ordinated for four video projectors and sound in an enclosed room.

* * *

At Matts Gallery people gathered for a few minutes in the office before being invited into the exhibition space. There, four Hi-beam video projectors at head height pointed across the room, one at each of the four walls. As we waited expectantly for *An Entertainment* to begin, I felt we had assembled as an audience in a peculiar way. These were not the conditions of watching domestic TV, nor was it like joining a queue at the box office and then filing into a row of seats with all eyes facing in one direction. What is created is a kind of decentered spectacle. There is no right direction to face and there is always something one cannot see, cannot bring under

one's perceptual control. Hiller had used TV in *Belshazzar's Feast* deliberately as a focus for the stare, but in order to unfix it, to loosen it into reverie, the equivalent of staring into the fire. Here, multi-projection changed the relation of the images to space, to time, and to one's body. It became impossible to exercise a detached observation (of the kind Jean Baudrillard has likened to the 'remote sovereignty' of the driver's or pilot's perception, which is almost interchangeable with that of the video-game player as was so ominously seen in America's assault on Iraq).[3] The audience constituted itself uncertainly. Some people walked, some formed immobile groups facing in various directions. As well as the fleeting images and sound we were curiously aware of one another.



Susan Hiller, *Belshazzar's Feast, The Writing on Your Wall*, 1983-4, video installation. (Photo Edward Woodman)

An Entertainment is paradoxically a work which is both highly structured and fragmented. It manages to combine the intelligence of critical distance with a powerful creation of mood, the feeling of being in the midst of a communal aesthetic experience at its most intense, surrounded as if by carnival giants, an extraordinary achievement of extraction from the quaint little format of the Punch and Judy. This combination of two modes — the intellectual and the psychological — is mainly done by the editing. Hiller has compared her editing to 'knitting', and in its richness it goes beyond what one normally sees on TV, or even on artists' video. This is not a mere technical complexity. It is really a tension between technical wizardry and cultural memory. She takes the true measure of devices which are usually consumed instantly in the frenzy of TV or the relentless babble of radio shows — devices which have great poetic possibility. You feel the impact of, for instance, the turning cube which shifts from one scene to another, the sinking of the whole scene into the 'floor', or, in sound terms, the cry which echoes and reverberates away into silence. Thus one 'scene change' which evokes echoes of something theatrically very ancient (like the parting of curtains or the image sliding in from the 'wings') may alternate with the rapid electronic shifts of modern TV. And all this is structured for the four walls of a room, in which the mysterious corners are no less important that the overt 'screens'.

What one experiences through this 'knitting' retains some elements of a didactic presentation. Snatches of the Punch and Judy dialogue heard through the puppeteers' rasping voices mingled with childrens' cries and ambient noises are first 'read' by a cool academic voice-over: 'Poor Judy, what a pity, what a pity!', 'Horrible Baby, horrible baby, wet, wet, wet!' (but this is marked by irony since the anthropological voices here are 'foreign' voices, interpreting aspects of British culture, a reversal of the traditional relationship). But this didacticism is swirled away into a visual and aural *mis-en-scéne* which emphasises the central violence, the violent struggle which, as we have always been aware without caring too much about it, characterizes the Punch and Judy plays.

For example, bursts of violent action as Mr Punch beats Judy with his stick, and cacophonus ambient noise, may be relentlessly repeated, divided each time by

freezing the motion and a vertical scene change. Or the establishment of a static, 'domestic' setting (a dresser with plates and cups) may be followed by fleeting glimpses of huge figures crossing the wall, like Punch and the Ghost in one sequence who join in a cosmic battle like Goya's fighting giants. At several points Hiller has used a video device of splitting and twinning images (reminiscent of Rorschach-test blots), so that two puppets locked in combat become like a form of pulsating amoebic life or a sinister fluttering bat.

Through these physical sensations we become aware of a similarly complex intellectual content. On the one hand, the raw social facts of the Punch and Judy scenario are made as plain as can be. As Hiller herself has written: 'the baby-battering, wife-beating, homicidal violence of the central character all too clearly reflects the actual conditions of patriarchy, and the emphatic centrality of the nuclear family and domestic setting all emphasize what is commonly known but universally denied.'[4] These violent scenes blithely continue as part of the education of any English child. On the other hand the completely topical reality is linked with archaic splits and dichotomies which are present in symbolic form in the Punch and Judy, manifested particularly in the struggle between the puppeteer's right and left hands. Since the right-hand puppet can never be worn on the left hand, and vice versa, the two sides of the conflict are apparently as irreconcilable and unchanging as that of Cain and Abel. This, according to Hiller, makes Punch and Judy 'genuinely mythic — that is, it places itself beyond ethical categories and social contextualization.'[5] The addition of a stick to the carnavalesque figure of Mr Punch (a peculiarly British innovation?) further sharpened his role:

> 'It was the Big Stick that made Punch what he is. The weapon-wielding Punch is the true mature Punch, for whom nothing is serious, nothing worthy of respect. Punch mocks at morality, marriage, paternity, friendship, learning, law, order, death, and the Devil himself. Life is an empty joke'[6]

Hiller herself has warned against taking her work simplistically or one-dimensionally. Her own opposition to patriarchal domination does not make the work a polemic against those abuses. Neither does the identification of the mythic nature of the material entail a celebration of that position. Rather, Hiller has described the aims of her new work in another way: to recover 'for all of us' the sense of terror which is latent in a phenomenon like Punch and Judy and only real to children; and at the same time, by an amplification of the whole illusory, unbounded and immaterial quality of the light projection, to allow us 'the temporary illusion of a magical escape from reality'[7], a transcendent experience.

* * *

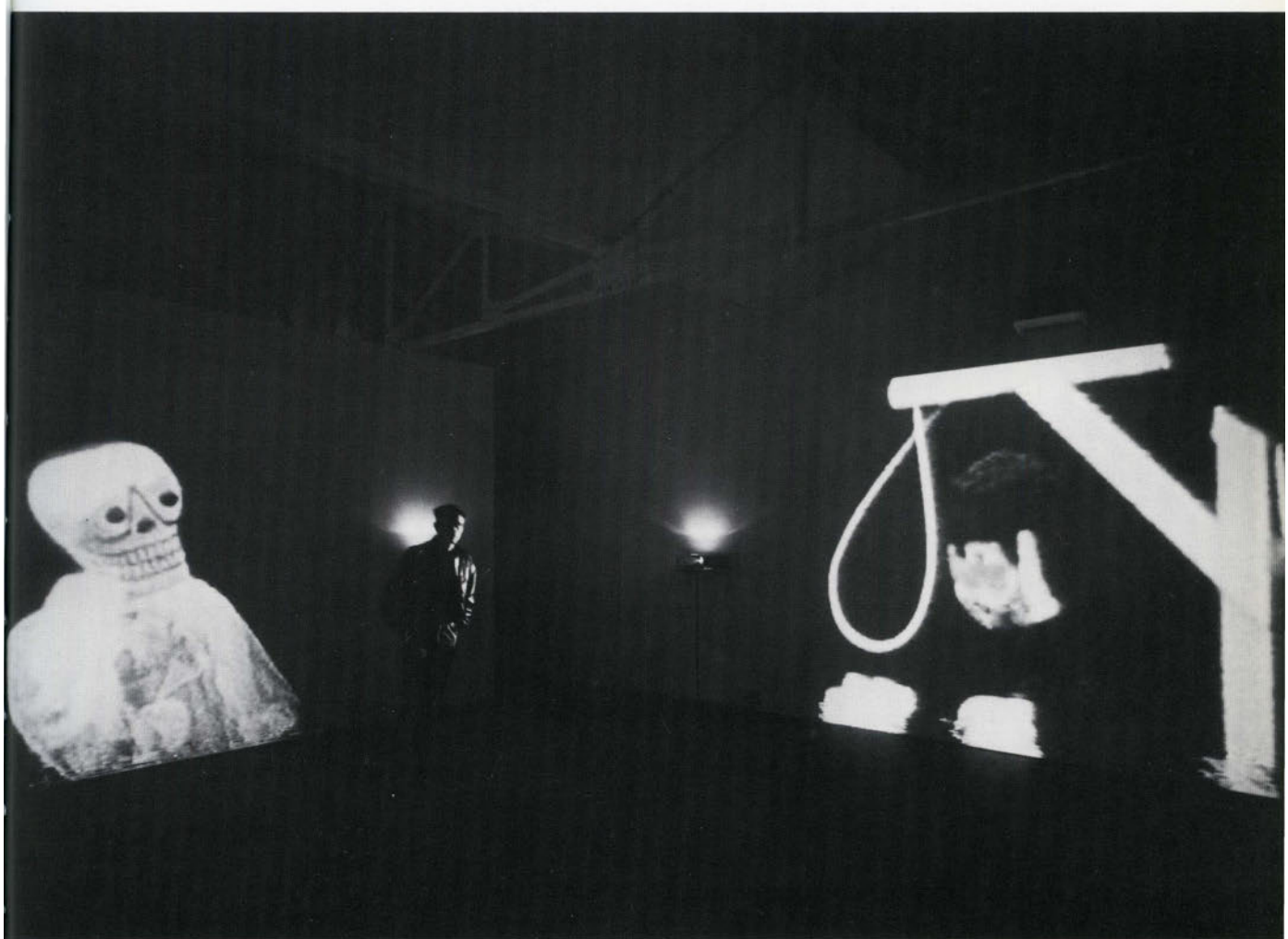
Why should these two aims come together and what do they signify? It seems to me that what Hiller has extracted from this supposedly innocuous entertainment for

children, and the way she has done it, touches on some profound anxieties that we have today about culture and its fate. A key to these dilemmas is the notion of 'denial'. Previous works of Hiller's have shown, among other things, how culture is created and ideology instilled (or how we enroll ourselves in culture and ideology), by denial. Her *Home Truths* series, her paintings which use mass-produced wallpapers (many designed for childrens' bedrooms) as a ground and support, revived a range of intense experiences 'repressed' in the patterned motifs; *vanitas* and abundance motifs, the tail-ends of myths and philosophies, gender-defining sweet and sentimental images for girls and aggressive war-scenes for boys. 'Our culture *papers over*'[8], Hiller has said. Her own painted marks in these works both accentuated what was latent in the patterns and introduced a field of darkness, non-sense, and potential vitality. She pointed up a double and linked denial: of the relation of the images to lived experience, and of the transcendent power of art.

The same is true of *An Entertainment*, amplified (and even epitomized) by the completely different responses of adults and of children to routine performances of Punch and Judy. The adults have an 'absent-minded'[9] attitude to representations which for the children are terrifyingly real. Part of the childrens' socialization therefore is to deny the experience and be made to think of it as sweet and entertaining. In this split between the adults and the children, there seems to me to lie the paradigm of a wider cultural predicament — as if the response of the children stood as the model for a living culture, and that of the adults for the typical bland touristic experience to which all cultures today (bar the one that has created the conditions) are in danger of being reduced. It is precisely the living aspects of another culture which meet our own culture (including its fantasies) at a point of dialogue or argument, which have to be denied for this culture to be served up to lazy tourists. It is not only a denying but a duping process. Among these tensions, Susan Hiller's pieces occupy the interesting position of works of 'high' culture which entertain the possibility of a popular culture through an excavation, both straightfaced and ironic, of forms of kitsch culture.

Susan Hiller, *An Entertainment*, 1990, installaction using 4 hi-beam video projectors, quadraphonic sound and 4 interlocking 28-minute videoprograms. (Photo Edward Woodman)

It is revealing that the myth of Punch and Judy should have survived only for children. In one sense it could be seen as part of a tradition (especially developed in England) of addressing to children matters which could not be dealt with in adult expressions: not only matters of 'sex and violence', but also of the imagination, as was seen so clearly in Victorian and Edwardian times, when the tendency was at its height, in Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear for example (both interestingly liked with traditions of non-sense and foolery). The Indian psychologist and writer Ashis Nandy has unerringly pointed to the denials involved. In his book *The Intimate Enemy* he has analysed some of the reactions of English (and other European) intellectuals to India in the colonial period. The English felt compelled to see their 'self-controlled and adult' culture in polar opposition to an India they characterized as 'infantile and immoral' (the resulting psychic turmoil is classically exemplified, according to



Nandy, in Kipling, who spent his earliest childhood in India).[10] In this perspective, Punch and Judy would seem to represent a projection to children of that hard, masculine psychology, that refusal to engage with one's other except by brutal negation, lying behind the 'self-controlled and adult'' culture.

* * *

But I feel I am edging towards taking this work of Susan Hiller's as a polemic. I am extracting a meaning from her references and sources rather than from the way she has *worked* them (another typically English tendency: to crave literary or moral explanations of art and feel adrift without them). What is the nature of this 'working'? For one thing, in 'retrieving for us the sense of terror' it is not only Punch and Judy which is taken out of its customary, socialized frame of reference, but also television. Both are expanded together. The piece could be seen as a parable of the extraordinary dilemmas accompanying our socialization of new technology, especially television with its vast development to become on the one hand, as Günther Grass has despairingly called it, 'the inventor of our new reality'; and on the other hand the equally striking mental and imaginative restrictions binding its actual use. Susan Hiller's treatment of the electronic media — television here, slide projector and tape recorder in other works — has subtly implied a throw-back to the time of their first invention. Then, when they still only had the status of 'sideshows', they were not considered simply devices for 'reproducing the real' (a misapprehension in any case), but for discovering new phenomena, for suspending disbelief, for scaring, for producing a 'thrill in the dark'.

It was this experience which was re-lived by Giacometti when he saw the newsreel in the Montparnasse cinema in 1945. Hiller's work has intensified the conditions for a *creative* confusion between the reality on the screen and the reality all around one, especially in the possibilities suggested by Giacometti's glance from the screen to 'the people beside me'. In fact, when watching *An Entertainment,* we feel we have been constituted as an audience on exactly this basis. I, for one, recognized the meaning of a description Hiller has given of one of the aims of her work, when she said that she believes that 'a community can be created out of a recognition of our collective cognitive confusions and misrecognitions.'[11]

We are brought to face some massive contradictions: between the brutality of the Punch figure relentlessly repeated and the delicious escape into clouds of coloured light; between a stinging critique of an ideological indoctrination and a celebration of play, abstraction and ambiguities of meaning. At the same time there are a number of devices which seem to 'round' the video sequence as a form of continuum. The scenes are often interspersed with the far-off sound of real of carousel music partly obscured by voices, and, at the end, the four walls dissolve into a kind of night sky of sparking electronic particles (like Giacometti's 'specks shifting on a flat surface'). Rather than a simple 'meaning' it is a quality of profound imaginative understanding

that one takes from Susan Hiller's work. Taken as a whole, her work now amounts to a courageous opening up of a whole range of habitual opposites, or dichotomies of thought, which we have inherited and which, as she says, 'afflict'[12] us. There is even pleasure in compiling such a list: the visual/verbal, drawing/writing, light/dark, life/death, female/male, self/other, one's own culture/other cultures, past/present, nature/culture, love/hate, oppressor/oppressed, singular/plural, individual/collective, real/representation, knowing/not knowing, public/private, artist/audience, child/adult, sensuous pleasure/intellectual enquiry, and so on. 'What looks like a failure to make cognitive distinctions may in fact be a recognition that the popular modern antonyms are not always the true opposites.'[13] Perhaps the 'topicality' of Hiller's work lies in feeling beyond these antonyms, and it is in this way that one could read *An Entertainment's* multi-dimensional space.

NOTES

1. Susan Hiller, talk at *Quantum Leaps* event, Adelaide, Australia, 1982, excerpted in *Artlink*, vol.2, no. 4, September-October 1982.
2. Ibid.
3. See Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto Press, 1985, p.128.
4. Hiller, 'Hand Text', unpublished notes on *An Entertainment*, 1990.
5. Ibid.
6. Michael Byrom, *Punch and Judy: Its Origin and Evolution*, quoted by Susan Hiller in 'Hand Text', op. cit.
7. Hiller, 'Hand Text', op. cit.
8. Hiller, in conversation, 1990.
9. Hiller, 'Hand Text', op. cit.
10. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, p.6.
11. Hiller, 'Reflections', William Townsend Memorial Lecture, University College, University of London, November 22, 1989 (unpublished).
12. Hiller, 'Hand Text', op. cit.
13. Nandy, op. cit., p.99.

Richard Squires

EAT ME, READ ME, BURN ME

The Ephemeral Art of Marta Minujin

Above:
Marta Minujin.

Facing page:
Marta Minujin, Statue of Liberty in radishes.

Performing artists could learn a lot from the Argentinian artist Marta Minujin. In this era of multi-culturalism it's surprising that her work is not better known. While most people working in the general fields of performance are content with audiences that might range in number from fifty to a thousand people, Minujin's recent works of 'ephemeral art' in Buenos Aires have typically drawn more like fifty thousand. The massive turnout for works like the Panetone Obelisk (also known as the Edible Obelisk) and the Parthenon of Books - the first mounted during the rule of the junta and the second celebrating the return of the democracy - is a tribute to their perfectly tuned symbolic power. They are the kind of works which prove that art really is a force of nature, equal to politics, warfare or agriculture. I spoke with her at an exhibition of her sculptures in Washington D.C., and later at a friend's house in New York; our conversation focused on some of the more recent events in her thirty year career in the arts, a career that has taken her from happenings in the '60s, through performances in the '70s, to the ephemeral art (her own coinage) in the '80s.

Richard Squires: Let's begin by talking about the Edible Obelisk. This was an obelisk in the center of Buenos Aires, standing more than 100 feet high and made from some 30,000 loaves of Panetone, or sweet bread, that you erected in 1979.

Marta Minujin: Yes, the Panetone Obelisk.

RS: And after the Obelisk had stood on view to the public for ten days you lowered it to the ground, where a crowd of 50,000 people were waiting to eat it.

MM: Yes. When I came back to Buenos Aires from the United States in 1975, I said that everything is so straight and rigid and perpendicular that I want to make it all lie down. I did a performance called the University of Failure, you remember, and then I said I was going to demystify the myths. In order to do that I had to lay down the Obelisk, because the biggest myth in Buenos Aires is the Obelisk that is like the Washington Monument.

RS: And did you think the Obelisk represented the junta?

MM: No, it represented the hard part of society. The Panetone Obelisk is when I invented ephemeral art. Much more giant than a happening.

RS: Why did you think of making it out of sweet bread?

MM: When you eat the myth, you de-sacralize the myth. You make the old myth fall, to make room for the new myth.

RS: How did you find someone to give you 30,000 loaves of Panetone?

MM: Always it's a miracle. I was doing an exhibition of pop painting. Finally somebody bought a painting, and he was the biggest producer of Panetone in Argentina. He has eight factories of Panetone, and he made eight million Panetone

for Christmas, because at Christmas everyone in Argentina eats Panetone. So when I took the painting to his house, I say with all your sweet bread you have to make a monument and stop all your factories for me. Stop all you factories, I say, and I start making him crazy, like calling him 45 times a day, following him saying give me the Panetone, give me the Panetone! I bug him, I bug him, my daughter was getting born and the day my daughter was born he said yes. He gave me 30,000 Panetone and he even paid for the construction - 30 metres high, it's like 12 floors up in a building. Then it stood there 10 days and then a crane came and put it down and 50,000 people came to grab the Panetone.

RS: How was it constructed?

MM: It was a gigantic steel frame with chicken wire, and all the Panetone loaves were in plastic sacks. So for seventeen days we have all these people placing the Panetone, one by one, onto the frame.

RS: How did you attach them?

MM: Tying them with string. And then I was giving away Panetone, because this Panetone was very expensive. So I announced in all the papers and the crane came and put the obelisk lying on the ground, and the people came and I only have 30,000 Panetone. So people started to say give me the Panetone, give it to me! And I became afraid because they became very aggressive. Pregnant women and old men would kill themselves just for Panetone. So I went up in the crane myself - I had to escape and hide in the crane because people wanted to kill me, because I said just one Panetone for each person. They would say no, I want ten, give me ten - so that was a happening. I was almost killed by the people. They are locusts I tell you. Violent and punching each other and blood.

RS: Really? Blood?

MM: Yeah - blood and everything - just for the Panetone, just because it's free.

RS: Were they hungry?

MM: No they were crazy! The people were like flies. I had to stop the whole thing. We set the crane to make the Panetone go back up, and the people were sticking to the Panetone, to the Obelisk. It was dangerous - somebody could get killed, I could go to jail. Firemen came with water and they put all the water on the people to chase them out.

RS: You hosed the people down with firehoses?

MM: Yeah, really, don't laugh. The firemen came with hoses and then we had to make the whole place dark and then the people left. (And you know that the man die in a heart attack, the owner of the Panetone factory. He behave so crazy he had a heart attack and he died, one week later. So the family hate me - but he was very fat

and everything.) So it became so violent that I had to retire from the scene. It was the same thing as with the chickens: you prepare a scene but it becomes so violent that you have to retire.

RS: The chickens?

MM: Yeah, the chickens in the football stadium in Uruguay. Then I was like 23 years old, 1965. I prepare the whole thing because I was very very crazy. I was completely insane. I was in a hotel and I rented two big buses. Then I grab fat women, muscle men and all that and say I will pay you $10 if you come and act in this performance. And they didn't really know what to do. Then I put ads in all the papers - come to me - come to a happening in the football stadium. So Sunday morning many people come. I rent a helicopter from the American army and I buy 500 chickens and put them in the helicopter.

RS: Five hundred?

MM: Five hundred live chickens. It was a big helicopter like this room. I have soldiers helping me with bags of flour and lettuce. So all those people came, I went into the helicopter and what happened? First the fat women go lying down.

RS: Where? On the soccer field?

MM: Yeah, that's it. All the muscle men grab women and kiss them, all the prostitutes kiss the men in the mouth, all sorts of different actions at the same time. Then I went in the helicopter up and down and throw all the chickens and lettuce on the people. All the flour and all the lettuce and I play some music from Bach. They chased me from Uruguay. I could not come back in twenty years. Because some people could get killed.

RS: From the lettuce?

MM: No, the chickens - heavy chickens on your head. It was crazy - pow, pow, pow. Like bombs all the chickens.

RS: Did the chickens try to fly?

MM: Yeah, they try, but not so good. So some of the people got hurt in the head. And they said it was cruel to the chickens, because some of them died. But you see all the chickens disappeared - the people took them all home. And they ate the chickens.

Marta Minujin, Panetone Obelisk, 1979.

RS: And you like to call this ephemeral art?

MM: That was a happening, but it's like ephemeral art. They both have massive participation, but ephemeral art has a building too. The most fantastic thing about ephemeral art is how to create it, how to invent it. It works in four stages. The first stage is to get the money; to get the money is part of the happening, because only a

person who is crazy or stupid can give you money for something like that. This is a work of art, because you have to become a magician to get money from someone who will get nothing back. Then secondly to build it because it has to be like a building, and for nothing because nobody gets any money - not even me - everyone works for free, so the enthusiasm of the people is fantastic. I get architects, engineers, rich people, poor people to work for free, just to make a building. The people become very involved. For the Parthenon of Books I got 75 people to lug the books for free for 15 days. Then you build the scene, like a gangster, because you never have permission to do it. And the third stage, the beauty, like to make the Parthenon of Books, it's a beauty. The work is done and the people see it. It's beautiful to see. In the fourth stage the people take over: because I can get all the books, I can put all the books there, I can get all the Panetone, I can put all the Panetone there; but I cannot take it away - it would be too much work. It would take me two months. The millions of people come and they grab the books and grab the Panetone and in two hours they take away the whole thing.

RS: I remember you wanted to recreate the Statue of Liberty out of hamburger, lying down in Battery Park.

MM: Yeah and then the men come with blow torches to cook it and the people eat. I even write to McDonalds and everything and I could not do it because here in the United States you have too many laws about food. I have a drawing of it here. *[They look at drawings of various projects]* Look - the Panetone Obelisk, Margaret Thatcher in corned beef, the Tower of Piza with butter, I never done it. The Statue of Liberty of hamburger, the Parthenon of Books, the Berlin Wall with frankfurters, Carlos Gardell on fire, and this is the next one, the Tower of Babel with books from all over the world.
RS: And this is the Venus of Cheese?

MM: No, no, this is Margaret Thatcher with corned beef. The Venus de Milo Cheese is a minor work. A minor work because it is small, compared to my other pieces. It's the same size as the real Venus de Milo but done with 220 kilos of cheese. And the idea is the people eat the sculpture.

RS: And the people came and ate the Venus of Cheese.

MM: Yeah and they play music and everything. I did four like that, all in Argentina - the Venus of Cheese, Margaret Thatcher in corned beef, the Statue of Liberty in strawberries, and the Minotaur in cherries. Margaret Thatcher and the Statue of Liberty were maquettes for the giant sculptures that didn't happen.

RS: So you'd have a show and everyone would come for dinner?

MM: Yeah, but not always. With Carlos Gardell it was all fire. And the Parthenon it was all books. Carlos Gardell was so ephemeral - was so controlled by emotion. The

Marta Minujin, Carlos Gardel in flames, 1981.

people cried.

RS: Who was Carlos Gardell?

MM: The best singer in the world, in Argentina, like Elvis. I arrive in Colombia for the Biennale at Medelin, and I saw that Carlos Gardell died there in a fire accident. I thought about doing a Carlos Gardell gigantic sculpture with cotton, because cotton is the first material in Colombia. So I went to a factory and they gave me tons of cotton in big, big bags. And then I order the figure of Carlos Gardell five stories high in metal, very heavy. It was raining and in 15 days I covered that metal structure with chicken wire and then I asked seventeen people to put in all the cotton and I

wrapped him, Carlos Gardell, in plastic. It was raining, raining, and the people were crazy - 10,000 people, it was in all the papers - Marta Minujin, one South American artist, she's going to burn Carlos Gardell. So everybody start to scream fire, fire, and I could not do it because it was raining and suddenly the sky cleared and it was like a miracle. I took all the plastic out and we took the special torches...

RS: Did you light it from the bottom?

MM: From the bottom. It was a little wet, but caught immediately. It was amazing and the people cry and the people sing, and everybody ask me questions.

RS: Were the people crying because it was so beautiful?

MM: Yes, because the fire give you emotion.

RS: And they thought of Carlos Gardell and they saw him on fire and they thought of him burning to death.

MM: No, no - because just to make such a gigantic thing - it's five flights up! Gigantic. I don't even know how I did it. And then I went back home and all those bills started getting to the Biennale and I didn't pay, nobody paid. So they took all my sculpture and I could never come back to Colombia. But most of the time I can never come back to the countries.

RS: But you paid the foreign debt of Argentina.

MM: To Andy Warhol. Yes, it is true. I saw him in the Café Odeon in New York, and I say to him that he was a king there and I was like a queen in Argentina, so I would pay the foreign debt to him in the gold of South America, which is corn. Because corn is originally from Argentina. So then he says yes, and I find some crazy people to get the corn in the market and paint it orange, because it was not really orange like in South America. And then he died. No - then we went to the Empire State Building and we signed the corn and we gave it away. He always liked me.

RS: And you just gave the corn to anybody who was there?

MM: To anybody; but nobody wanted to get it because they were afraid, even though Andy Warhol was there.

RS: Can we talk about the Parthenon of Books a bit?

MM: The Parthenon of Books is my best project. It was so beautiful to see. Like if you go out in the middle of New York, in Central Park, you see an hallucination all in silver, and it's the Parthenon - the same size - but all in books.

RS: How did it happen?

MM: I was going to do the Parthenon in a Greek sweet called Toronne, because I was into eating. It's very strong and hard and you break your teeth on it. I was going

to all the factories, but I fail. Then suddenly - because I believe in destiny and strange things - I went to a bookstore and somebody gave me a book on the Parthenon, a fantastic book, a big book. And immediately I say I want to do the Parthenon of Books. Because the military were in power and many books were forbidden, but then the election came and Alfonsin was getting to be President.

RS: So it was a way to celebrate the return of democracy?

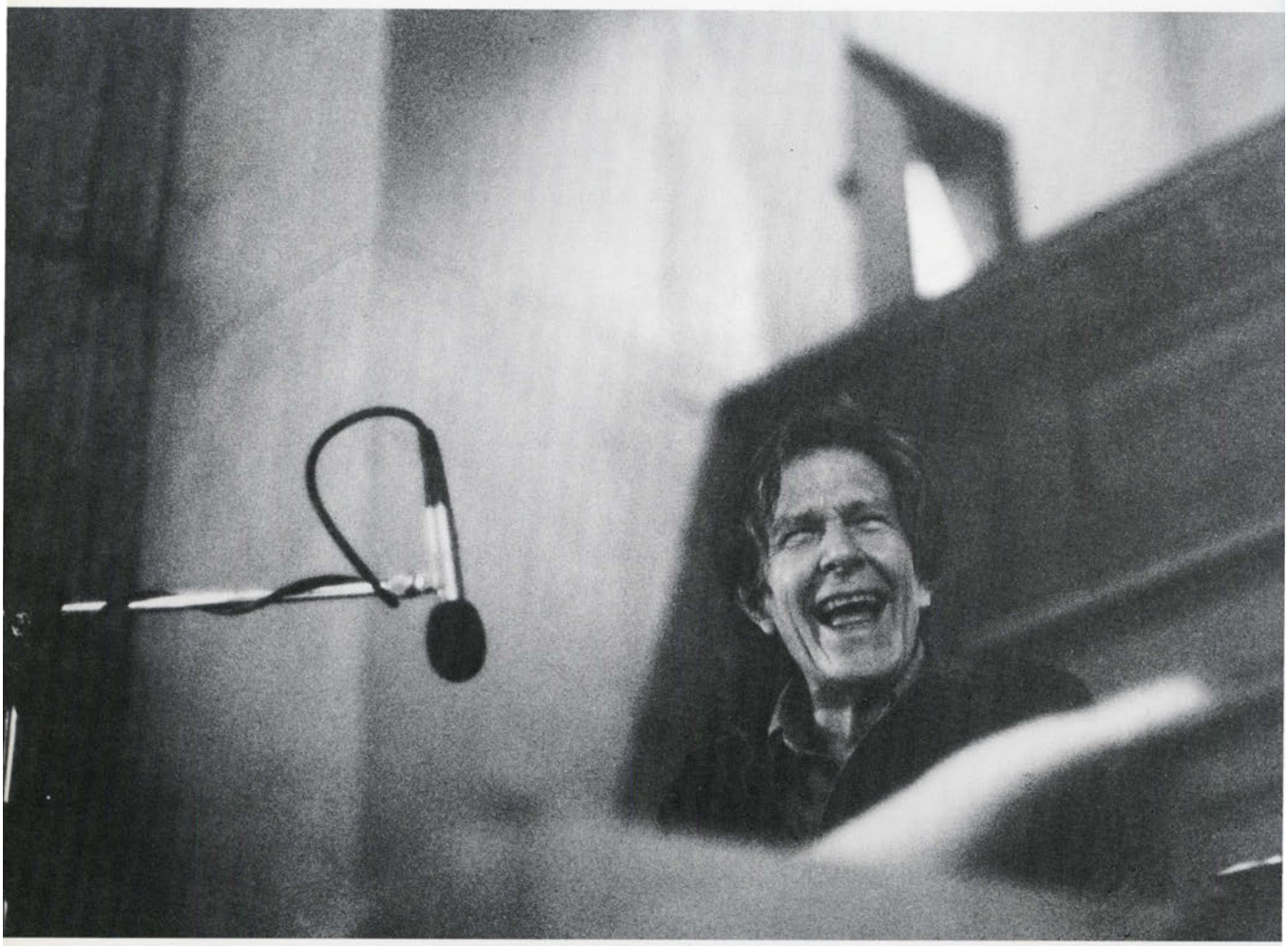
MM: It was called the 'Image of Democracy'. So in the middle of Buenos Aires - like here in Central Park - I started building that Parthenon. It was big, it was fantastic, it was life-size. And you could put it on its side or upside down - you could lay the Parthenon down - because I want to lay things down and put them back up without breaking. So it was a lot more expensive.

RS: And who gave you the money?

MM: In my work everything is magic. I met a girl and immediately we had a very good vibe. She says to me, 'I know the richest man in Argentina,' so I say, 'Bring him to my studio.' She went and fell in love with him - she was married but she fell in love. She brought him into my studio and she convinced him - because he does not care about anything. He is still the most powerful man in Argentina, like Rockefeller. He came to my studio, and she was kissing him, and I don't know what she was doing. And he said yes O.K. and signed a check. Also I went to the book fair and then all those publishing houses gave me $60,000 in books. Some other people too would come and donate books. It was very nice, in the middle of the city, like being at 57th and 5th. All the radio stations, all the T.V., all the newspapers were to cover it. And I got the best writers to come and very slowly to give the books away, each one a big book. A good book. But the people came and almost destroyed the Parthenon in two hours. They didn't wait, you see, and the famous writers were all pushed away. It was an adventure.

RS: Did you feel like Athena at the end?

MM: Oh, I loved it, it was a party, a miracle. It was the best. The best, best, best.



Richard Kostelanetz

TRANSFORMING THE HÖRSPIEL

The Audio Art of John Cage

Facing page:
John Cage. (Photo Paul Yule)

'Poets should emphatically be brought into the wireless studio, for it is much more conceivable that they should be able to adapt a verbal work of art to the limits of the world of space, sound and music. The film demands the visual artist who has also a feeling for words; the wireless on the other hand needs a master of words who has also a feeling for modes of expression appropriate to the sensuous world.'

- Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound* (1936).

Few artists realize the ideal of true polyartistry as completely as John Cage, who has not only rechanneled the progress of music but has made substantial contributions to literature, theatre and, more indirectly, visual art, extending into all domains his radical esthetic preference for non-focused, non-hierarchic and uninflected structuring. Thus it is wholly in character that late in the seventh decade of his productive life he began occupying yet another artistic terrain, one so unfashionable that, its familiarity notwithstanding, it has no critics and few rewards: radio.

Given the lack of interest in anything artistically challenging on the part of radio in the U.S.A., it is not suprising that Cage has done most of this kind of work in Europe, notably for Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne. These radio pieces are produced not by WDR's music department, which in fact does broadcast transcriptions of Cage's music, but by the *Hörspiel* department, a department distinct from literature and feature.

The German word *Hörspiel* (plural *Hörspiele*) literally means 'hear-play'. Traditionally it has referred to radio plays; not so much the soap operas or comedies typical of American radio but rather pieces of a much higher intellectual calibre. In American radio, the closest analogue would be Archibald MacLeish's *Fall of the City* (1938); while perhaps the most famous English-language radio play of this kind is Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1953). As there is no exact English equivalent, I shall use the German term throughout this article.

The Germans place a considerable value on the *Hörspiel*. There are several annual prizes, the most prestigious being the *Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden* (or 'war-blind'). *Hörspiele* are also collected into textbooks which are taught in universities and high schools. Anthologies and critical books are frequently published; while current critical issues are discussed at annual conferences. Twice a year the *Hörspiel* department of Westdeutscher Rundfunk issues a book-length catalogue of forthcoming productions: in each one of these WDR books there is more 'radio art' than has been produced in the United States since radio was invented.

Within the past two decades, a producer on WDR's permanent staff, Klaus Schöning, has developed a distinct alternative to the traditional German *Hörspiel*. Interested in sound as well as in words, he turned first to the great European

experimental poets, such as Ernst Jandl, Franz Mon, Gerhard Rühm and Ferdinand Kriwet, as well as to the composers Mauricio Kagel and, later, Clarence Barlow - in Rudolph Arnheim's terms, masters of words with a sensitivity to aural expression. Schöning called this more acoustic work the *Neue Hörspiel,* and in his pioneering anthology of that title (1969) all those *Hörspielmacher* (exept Barlow, who is younger) are represented. Where radio plays had previously defined an intermedium between literature and theatre, Schöning gravitated to the area between literature and music. Indicativley, the surest measure of his success, in his colleagues' eyes, has not been how many listeners he has but how many of the *Hörspiel* prizes his artists have won.

Even though Schöning did not enter Cage's life until 1978, the latter had already taken a long creative interest in radio, as well as in its principal storage medium, audiotape. His *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1939) was written, to quote his publishers' catalogue, for 'two variable-speed phono-turntables, frequency recordings, muted piano and cymbal; to be performed as a recording or broadcast.' In Cage's mind, when he wrote this piece, were certain unprecedented capabilities of the new radio studios. A few years later, Cage was commissioned to produce 'music' for Kenneth Patchen's radio play *The City Wears a Slouch Hat;* and what he wanted to do here likewise presaged future work: 'Take the sound out of the play, and make music out of those sounds.' Several years after that, he premièred Imaginary *Landscape IV* (1951) for twelve radios and twenty-four performers, one of whom manned the volume control of each machine while another changed the stations, in response to Cage's scored instructions. *WBAI* (1960), named after New York's Pacifica station, extends a principle established two decades before as 'a score for the operation of machines [at the radio station]. Durations are graphed in space, their length in time being determined by the performer.'

The second strand behind Cage's recent radio art was his early intrerest in audiotape, which is so familiar to us now that we tend to forget it became commonly available only after World War II. Prior to that, sound was recorded on continious wire which, while it could be cut, could not be spliced easily: that is, its parts could not be reassembled without making thunderous telltale sounds. Precisely because acoustic tape, by contrast, could be spliced gracefully, sounds separately recorded could be fused together without distracting interruptions. Cage remembers that when the French composer Pierre Schaeffer first introduced him to audiotape in 1948, he rejected its possibilities; but within a few years, he was working on *Williams Mix* (1953), which I for one consider the principal neglected masterpiece in the Cage canon. Here sounds were gathered on tape from a vast range of sources, and these tapes were cut into small pieces, some much shorter than the width of the tape, and then spliced together into an aural pastiche that is continually leaping from one kind of sound (and one acoustic space) to another. To complicate the audio experience even further, Cage required that eight tapes be made, and that in live

concerts any or all of them could be played simultaneously. On the only recorded performance of this work (from the twenty-five-year retrospective concert of 1958) all eight taped 'voices' are heard.

Cage's first work for Schöning began with the invitation to read aloud one of his recent *Writings Through Finnegans Wake*. These are a series of characteristically Cagean texts in which he extracts, sequentially, certain words from Joyce's classic and then sets them on mesostic axes composed from the name 'James Joyce'. (If the vertical axis of an acrostic is flush left, a mesostic has its axis in the middle.) In Writing for the Second Time through Finnegans Wake, which he chose to read for WDR, the opening is:

wroth with twone nathandJoe
A
Malt
jhEm
Shen

pftJschute
sOlid man
that the humptYhillhead of humself
is at the knoCk out
in thE park

Asked to add a 'musical background' to this declamation, Cage decided to gather sounds recorded in all the locations mentioned in Joyce's text. For guidance, he consulted Louis Mink's recent *A Finnegans Wake Gazetteer*. Always a prodigious corespondent, Cage wrote to friends around the world and asked Schöning to do likewise; but since most of Joyce's places were in Ireland, he decided to spend a whole month there himself, recording not only everyday sounds but also examples of local music. All these field recordings were then gathered at IRCAM in Paris, where Cage spent a month (and, by design, only a month) assembling them by means of chance operations onto sixteen track tape machines, making dense mixes, at once cacophonous and euphonious, which, though varying in detail, are roughly similar for the entire duration. The work that resulted from this was *Roaratorio* (1979).

Whereas some Cage radio pieces have contained much less sound than his music used to have, others have contained much more; for Cage has been at different times a prophet of both minimalism and abundance. *Roaratorio* falls securely into the second tradition. The continuous bass is the sound of Cage himself reading. On top of that is an abundant mix of sounds reminiscent of *Williams Mix;* but whereas nothing in that earlier piece has a sustained presence, in this new one the sounds of Irish music tend to stand out from the mass. In this last respect, *Roaratorio* structurally resembles *HPSCHD* (1969) which has always stood for me as the earlier

masterpiece of Cagean abundance: in that earlier work, beneath the continuous microtonal din is heard the sound of seven harpsichords, playing selections of music from Mozart to the present.

His next major piece for WDR, *James Joyce, Erik Satie, Marcel Duchamp: Ein Alphabet* (1982), also began with text, but this time mostly translated into German.[1] It consists principally of mesostics which Cage wrote out of his own head on the names of these three heroes, all of whom, in Cage's curious judgement, have made works which 'resist the march of understanding and so are as fresh now as when they first were made.' Interspersed among the mesostics are long passages from the writings of these men, the dramatic structure being an imaginary trialogue which incidentally reflects the fictitious conversation between himself and Satie that Cage first published in 1958 and subsequently reprinted in his book *Silence* (1961).

The WDR production honours the conventions of traditional radio theatre in that roles are assigned to specific performers: the French musicologist Daniel Charles reading Satie (in inept German); the American artist George Brecht representing Duchamp (in better German); Cage himself reading Joyce (in the original neologistic superEnglish.). As the narrative passes through various scenes, their settings are occasionally reinforced with sound effects which tend to be very abrupt, usually sketching a scene suggestively (rather than filling it in). As other figures are included, their voices are represented by yet other performers, speaking in German: Dick Higgins as Robert Rauschenberg; Christian Wolff as Henry David Thoreau; Buckminister Fuller as himself; etc.

Ein Alphabet reflects the arrival of audiotape in that it was composed from many parts which were recorded separately - in fact, on two continents, at different times. Insofar as I can understand German, I think the work very good, but Cage himself is unhappy about the leaps from scene to scene. 'All those scenes,' he recently told me, 'have beginnings and ends. That's what annoys me.'

Muoyce (1983) is a more typical Cagean performance. Essentially it is a solo reading of his *Writing for the Fifth Time through Finnegans Wake;* but to complicate the largely uninflected declamation, Cage decided to use a multitrack audiotape device he had used before (mostly in live performance). The first of the piece's four parts has him whispering the same text simultaneously four times all the way through, in a nonsynchronous chorus; the second part is a self-trio; the third part a duet; the fourth (and shortest) part a solo. He interrupts his whispering for full-voiced speaking only when the original text had italics. Here, as well as in the previous work that resembles it, *Empty Words* (1974-75), I have personally come to find the minimalism trivial. But, always true to his principles, Cage says, 'I find this one easier [than *Ein Alphabet*]. What makes this easier for me is that the quiet sober mind is assumed and is not disturbed, even by the lightning imitations which come through the loud interrupting sounds, because they don't really interrupt. Once they are gone, the whispering continues.'

HMCIEX (or *HEC-mix* with its letters alternating) was commissioned in 1984 by both WDR and International Composers in Los Angeles, which benefitted from the Olympics fallout. Even though it is a dense mix, it is also a simple piece which, contrary to Cage's esthetics, does not resist understanding. In honour of the Olympics it is an international pastiche of folk songs.[2] One quality that separates HMCIEX from Cage's earlier mixes is that its sources are longer, and thus more often identifiable on first hearing.

Cage has done several other pieces for WDR. Some have been largely unadorned transcriptions of his recitals of his own poetic texts, including *Themes and Variations* and parts of *Diary,* a late 1960s poem that remains a favorite of mine; one of them, *Mirage Verbal* (1989), a writing through the notes of Marcel Duchamp, was in French, which he reads remarkably well. The most distinguished recent radio composition, in my opinion, is *Writing Through the Essay 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience' (Thoreau)* which was first broadcast in 1988. This rather abundant work began as a mesostic text based on the vertical axis of an Erik Satie title - 'Messe des Pauvres.' Against this constraining structure Cage and his assistant Andrew Culver entered into the computer, as source material, the text of the classic Thoreau essay. Out came the first available words, horizontaly arrayed, whose letters fit into the verticlal axis. As Culver wrote in a personal letter, the computer 'was allowed to cycle back to the top of the source text until [without duplication] a full search string was no longer findable in a single pass. It ground to a halt at eighteen writings through [passes through the text]; the latter ones are, of course, shorter.' Read aloud at normal pacing, the initial section ran twenty-one minutes; the last only thirty-six seconds.

Invited to work at the Center for Computer Music at Brooklyn College, with the assistance of Charles Dodge, Frances White, Victor Frieberg, Paul Zinmann and Ken Worthy, Cage asked that all eighteen sections be 16' 47" long. Whereas an elongated text subjected to precomputer tape manipulation would drop radically in pitch, the new technique of linear predictive coding, first developed in Dodge's *Speech Songs* (1973), allows both vocal pitch and duration to be identical. However, since the same voice at a single pitch would be monotonous, Cage decided to make eighteen more readings, each 14' 04" in duration, where his vocal pitches would be varied. The last compositional step involved a random mix of all thirty-six sources to determine which one would enter the final mix.

For the WDR broadcast, however, Schöning did not merely play this finished Brooklyn tape. The tape was played continuously, with each track emerging from a different loudspeaker, in a maximal acoustic environment specially prepared in a church in Kassel on the occasion of the international Documenta exhibition in 1978, and it was this that Schöning recorded - using the Kunstkopf stereo microphone whose configuration resembles human ears, which accounts for the fact that the WDR version is best heard through earphones.

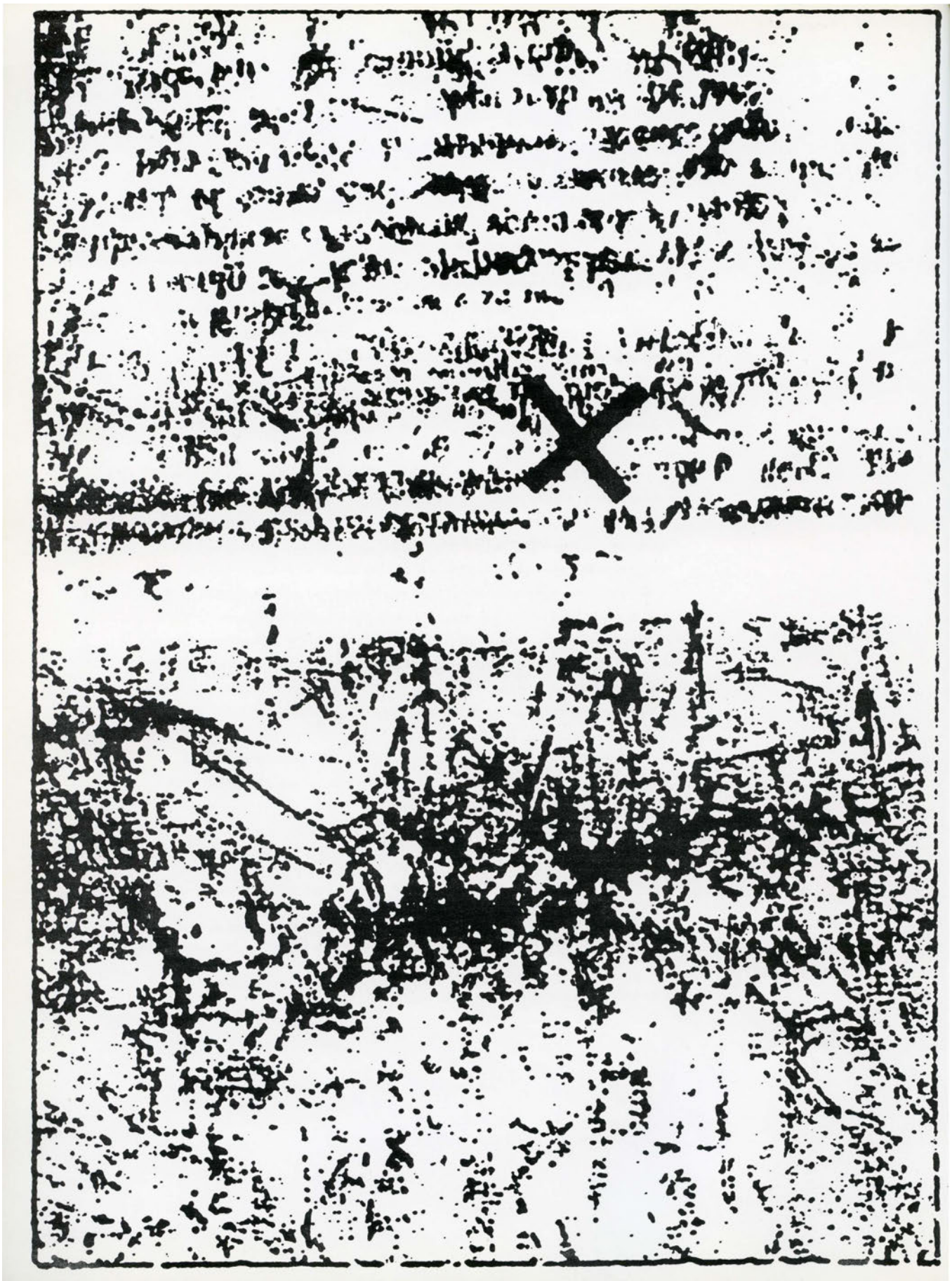
What, with Schöning's help, Cage has done in his radio art is to map out new possibilities for presenting recorded sound; and also, as a consequence of this, new ways of making records. When in the past Cage has been criticized for releasing records that were 'not as good' as live performances of his work, the reply has usually been that, aside from *Williams Mix*, his music was not written for tape. Now, given the demands of modern radio, he *is* composing for tape and is exploiting its unique capabilities. Had he not been in effect forced to operate within the specific constraints that radio imposes, it is almost certain that his art would not have developed as it has.

This article has necessarily been introductory since it discusses works which, unfortunately, are not readily available. The *most* available is *Williams Mix*, which is included on the three-record memento of the 1958 twenty-fifth anniversary concert.[3] *Roaratorio* can be found only in a box of the same title, published in Germany,[4] which contains a bilingual cassette of the work, prefaced by Cage's reading of a part of the text alone and succeeded by a short interview in English with Schöning, together with a fold-out score which hides as much as it reveals. Since *HMCIEX* was co-commissioned by a Los Angeles non-profit organization, it has been broadcast occasionally on public radio stations in the United States; but, to my knowledge, there have been no broadcasts so far outside Germany either of *James Joyce, Erik Satie, Marcel Duchamp: Ein Alphabet* or of *Writing Through the Essay 'On the duty of Civil Disobedience' (Thoreau)*.

The truth is that most of us will scarcely be able to begin to grasp Cage's achievement as a *Hörspielmacher* until all of his radio art is gathered between a single set of covers.

NOTES

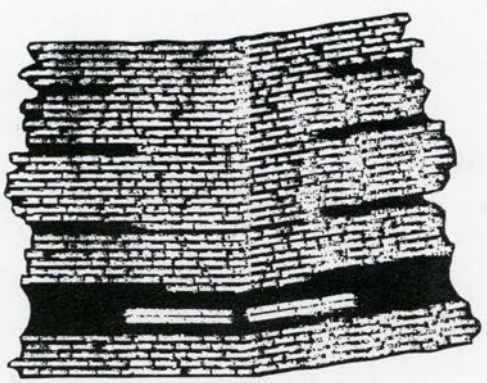
1. The whole original English text of 'An Alphabet' appears, along with Cage's spiky preface, in his latest collection of writings, X, Wesleyan University Press, 1983.
2. In that respect it is reminiscent of Karlheinz Stockhausen's similarly ecumenical *Hymnen* (1979); except that, whereas Stockhausen favoured Western sources, Cage draws more upon the Third World
3. From New Music Distribution in New York City.
4. By Athenäum Verlag in Königstein, near Frankfurt-am-Main.



Fiona Becket

LANGUAGE BEYOND THE LEXICON

The Sound of Poetry of Bob Cobbing



Above and Facing page:
Bob Cobbing, from ***bob jubile,***
1990.

Sound poetry is not poetry read aloud but sound uttered in response to a variety of graphic signs, with its own distinctive ontological theme. It is non-linguisitc and theatrical, presenting Being as Dionysian, a pulling out of all the stops. Bob Cobbing has been one of Britain's leading sound poets since the 1950s. His work is represented in over two hundred publications on contemporary poetry and performance. Much of his time has been spent touring either alone or in companies and he has built up an international following for his 'activity in sound' - a unique combination of sound and gesture, in which his highly visual printed texts are brought alive on stage as primaeval utterance, reminiscent of something between Dada poetry and Tantric meditative chanting.

Although a performer, dancer and vocalist, Cobbing's work at the same time shows an almost obssessive preoccupation with the book as a cultural artefact. His role as a maker of books is just as significant as his other roles. His poetry, an interface between music, text and gesture, is published in the form of primitive books and pamphlets from his own small press, Writers' Forum, run from a basement flat in north London: being responsible for the entire product is a deliberate decision on the part of the artist, keeping him in total control and maintaining what he regards as a very necessary distance from the larger commercial publishing houses. His work has, however, also been published in one or two more mainstream anthologies.[1]

Now seventy, Cobbing began his career as a school-teacher and as a colleague of Jeff Nuttall. In 1965 he left teaching, and for the next two years worked as the manager of the poetry department at Better Books, London, making it a leading venue for the readings and performances of a self-styled 'avant-garde'.[2] The basement at Better Books became an important venue for diverse performers, largely but not wholly on the fringe, and during this period Cobbing managed to create a space in which he could develop as a solo performer and enhance his public exposure. In 1965 the ICA staged an exhibition of visual texts, 'Between Poetry and Painting', which included his work; and in 1966 he was given time on the BBC's Third Programme. He also took part in festivals and exhibitions of concrete poetry in Oxford, Liverpool, Brighton and Falmouth, although a controversial performance of poetry and music at the Royal Albert Hall in 1966 resulted in his being temporarily barred from a number of British venues - a development which may arguably have helped to precipitate his shift into a more international sound poetry scene.

During the next few years, Cobbing gave performances at: the 'Expo Internacional de Novisima Poesia/69', Buenos Aires; the 'Exposicion Exhaustiva de la Nueva Poesia', Uruguay; the 'Vijfde International Mixed Media Festival', Holland; the 27th 'Berliner Festwochen'; the 'Oggi Poesia Domani Rassegna Internationale di Poesia Visuale e Fonetica' at Fuiggi, Italy; and 'La Revue Parlée' at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. He did continue to make some appearances in Britain, but now in a more definitely international context: in 1969, the Guildford Festival

included 'Poetry International Day' at which he performed; and in the same year he participated in a five-day poetry marathon at the Round House, London, as part of the Camden Fringe Festival. The most consistent venue for Cobbing as a solo performer has been provided by the Biennial Fylkingen Festival in Stockholm.

Cobbing is reluctant to admit that he has been consciously influenced by any particular school or movement. He acknowledges, however, that there is a broad tradition of visual poetry within which he is working, exemplified notably by the literary Futurists, chief among them Filippo Marinetti and Carlo Carrà. Marinetti's work in particular prefigures Cobbing's in its experiments with neologisms, orthography and onomatopoeia. The literary Futurists produced their own books and manifestos, and made their greatest advances in the field of experimental typography. Many of Cobbing's alphabet designs are challenges, in this same tradition, to the conventional linear form of poetry and text.

When Marinetti first appeared in front of British audiences, critical reactions ranged from a surly response to his 'farmyard' noises to a breathless admiration for his genius. Marinetti regarded his typographical compositions, as Cobbing regards his, as texts for performance - broadly speaking as full scores or notation. This puts both of them at a distinct remove from the longer tradition of pattern or shaped visual poetry, which is essentially imitative in form. That genre would include: devotional poems printed in the shape of an altar; war poems printed in the shape of an axe-head; Baroque epitaphs printed as crosses; George Herbert's 'Easter Wings', etc. Elsewhere, experiments with the written sign have given rise to minor movements like Letterism and Spatialism. Generally speaking, by contrast, Cobbing's text designs, like those of the literary Futurists, are expressive rather than imitative, expressionistic rather than pictorial.

In performance, Cobbing always makes apparent the necessity of communication and interaction with the crowd - encouraging a new audience to lose its inhibitions as it is confronted with what, to most people, is an unparalleled degree of self-abandon. He has not always performed alone, working with various improvisation groups including Abana and Bow Gamelan; and his work has also influenced people like the Trio Ex-Voco.[3] At the same time, like his British colleagues Lily Greenham and Paula Claire, his work institutes a dialogue with that of Paul de Vree, Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters. His name is also frequently coupled with those of Franáois Dufrâne and Ernst Jandl, although the latter is arguably more of a 'concretist' than Cobbing. If it is accepted that concrete poetry is verbal and iconic, then Cobbing's later work, dealing primarily with non-figurative images, has moved away from the territory of classic concrete poetry. Nevertheless, he is sometimes referred to as a concretist and has been well represented in exhibitions of visual, sound and concrete poetry. His texts have appeared alongside those of John Furnival, Dom Sylvester Houédard, [4] Ian Hamilton Finlay, Tom Edmunds and Kenholm Cox, as well as their continental counterparts Hansjîrg Mayer, Eugen

Gomringer, Franz Mon and Ferdinand Kriwet. Of these, not all would consider their work suitable for performance, working as they do in a primarily visual context.

Cobbing now performs regularly, as 'Birdyak', with Hugh Metcalfe. Metcalfe is primarily a guitarist, although he can draw on a variety of instruments, both conventional and improvised. Both artists work from the same text/score/poem, which has been devised by Cobbing. As Cobbing explores the ranges of vocal expression, so Metcalfe explores the (largely discordant) possibilities of the guitar and other noise-making media. He is an aggressive, rattled instrumentalist whose noise disturbance is a good foil for Cobbing's presence on stage. They have collaborated with several accomplished instrumentalists, including Lol Coxhill (on 'Alphabets of Fishes' and 'aberration') and Ma-Lou Bangerter.

Cobbing's interest lies essentially in the visual object as notation for performance. A comparison of 'three poems for voice and movement' (Writers' Forum 'fours', no.1, March 1971) with 'Stracci' (Writers' Forum, May 1988) reveals an evolutionary process in his work: a developemnt from expressive typography, where the emphasis is on the letter, to the non-linguistic image.

In 'three poems for voice and movement' Cobbing printed vowels and consonants in a free arrangement on the page, disregarding conventional order and making them overlap, wander and metamorphose into abstract shapes. The letters become animated, occupying spaces on the page which are conventionally denied them, as in Mallarmé's 'Un coup de dés'. The increasing and decreasing sizes of the letters in relation to each other, along with their printed blackness and physical density, provide codes for the performer, suggesting either a loud or soft tone, a gentle or extreme movement, and so on. The black letter is to all intents and purposes choreographed on the white page and the performer/dancer translates the sign into movement, just as the performer/vocalist interprets it into sound. The alphabet design is imitative only inasmuch as Cobbing is working within the range of English phonetics and is recalling sounds which are familiar to him. Other sounds - growls, grunts, screams - may well require non-linguistic signs in the score which is the point at which the artist pushes beyond the conventional limitations of language. This post-lexical universe of signs is the mode of 'Stracci', 'Stracci 2' and 'Stracci 3'.

Bob Cobbing, from ***bob jubile,*** **1990.**

The works in the Stracci group consist of photocopy prints of cloth, paper and mixed media which have been treated and produced according to the capabilities and limitations of the photocopier - one of Cobbing's favourite media. Printed in book form, the images confront the viewer in a format generally reserved for text, yet there are no longer any words. As a book, the practical and functional dimension of the text is made manifestly clear: Cobbing rarely performs without a book in his hand, so that it has become an artefact which is an essential element of the performance itself. The sixteen photocopy prints which comprise 'Stracci' are black and white studies in texture. They provide a tonal system of signs (lines and spaces) which are 'open' inasmuch as they represent unknown quantities, in contrast to

standard musical notation. The performer is expected to intuit a relationship between, for example, a close series of vertical lines and a corresponding sound. The imaginative effort is almost entirely in the interpretation of the piece at the time of the performance. To the viewer there is no obvious sequence implied by the arrangement of the sixteen compositions, nor is there any sense from the book that the images are collated in a sequential way - images recur but their relationship remains ambivalent.

If 'three poems for voice and movement' and 'Stracci' represent the chronological poles between which Cobbing's work ranges, there is nevertheless within this range a great deal of diversity. His early work makes more than a passing reference to the Beat generation. In the early '60s Cobbing, John Rowan and the group of poets who had become associated with Writers' Forum were engaged in promoting the work of Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and others in Britain. Cobbing's own early 'cut-up' poems are published in *Cygnet Ring: Collected Poems Vol I.* [5] These poems reflect, on the whole, an interest in the arbitrary and the accidental in text composition, and are essentially linear and conventionally 'poetic' in character; but the collection also includes a number of texts which are motivated by a visual sense and which are virtually 'text design'. These already make themselves available to non-linguistic oral interpretation as their visual design is more privileged on the page than their semantic content. In the untitled print taken from *Cygnet Ring* Cobbing has all but destroyed lines of text in order to develop a tonal composition which both is and is not language. The light and dark blocks of text interact, held together and integrated by the white of the page and the dominating 'n' forms which have lost their linear anchorage. Where a word or phrase breaks through the surface, it does so without context, having acquired a new strength, even freshness, in its isolation. This kind of visual design is an extension of the Beat cut-up without the personal involvement, angst or anger. Cobbing's work is supremely impersonal. Cut up again and again, the material becomes visual poetry. The next stage is articulating it as sound and gesture in performance.

The word in Cobbing's work, then, goes on a journey which finishes in sound rather than sense, in the narrowest meaning of the word. In the making of this journey, the humorous possibilities of new 'found' associations become apparent. In 1985 Aeon Press, run by Peter Finch, published 'Sockless in Sandals' (Volume 6 of the collected poems) which concentrates on found and treated texts. Cobbing plundered newspapers and the mass of unsolicited paper by which most of us find ourselves surrounded every day in such a way as to bring out the 'natural' accoustic rhythms and rhymes of a variety of discourses - journalistic, commercial, etc. Most of these poems are lists, lying somewhere between nonsense verse and a serious obsession with information. Many of them have an alphabetical structure: 'Alphabet of Californian Fishes' is an illustrated arrangement of 24 fish names beginning 'albacore, bobo, corbina, dory...' and finishing with '...yellowtail, zebra' ('u' and 'x'

are omitted). These names are to be spoken or sung in performance in order to re-invest them with a heightened intensity which gives the audience a sense of their physicality. [6] Another of Cobbing's alphabetical poems, 'acrilan, adidas, aertex...' which progresses through a series of trade names and products to '...xylonite, y-front, zipper' produces the same effect. Cobbing is not making any pronounced political gesture in his choice of material here: the feeling throughout his work is that reference to something does not motivate him particularly. He is more preoccupied with language as an impersonal medium than in the politics of the word as a referent.

During the performance of a piece of sound poetry very few props, if any, are used. Apart from having the text in front of him, Cobbing may have a primitive instrument (or found object) with a very narrow auricular range which he can manipulate in order to complement his own vocal contribution. Otherwise, as a solo performer, he relies only on his voice which, although not classically trained, has a broad range. His utterances are free and continuous, an emancipated verbal idiom - with, in much of his later work, no semantic content at all.

Cobbing's performances cannot really be called song, although he sings; cannot convincingly be called music, although they contain musical elements and he works from full scores. Listening to a recording of him in performance, one rarely gets the sense of a designed composition, although a piece will generally fall into the pattern of natural moods: for example, patches of quietness and contemplation will interact with louder, more dramatic passages. The same poem, performed several times over, will sound different, even though subconsciously he might retain successful passages from earlier performances. In this way the composition is re-written at each performance.

Cobbing has called his performance work 'primitive' and 'emotional' regarding it as having ancient, primal origins: recalling a moment when poetry was a matter of the whole body and not simply of the vocal organs. In returning to this primitive state, and allowing his improvised movements and utterances to be generated by the printed marks on the page, Cobbing hopes to resolve the very real split between poetry, music and dance. However, the texts - often complex studies in tone, line and colour - deserve a more deliberately choreographed interpretation than Cobbing ever presents. His performances oblige his viewers to question the value of complete abandon as art, and to assess where the difference lies between intelligent improvisation and meaningless activity which is merely lacking in rigour.

Cobbing is insistent that poetry must go beyond the word if it is to retain any relevance. He has made a decision to oppose the semantic with the gestural, making his 'poetics' one of physical movement: his vocal sounds draw one's attention to the mechanics of human utterance, to the muscular exertions of the throat and larynx. His texts move beyond the word to a language of sound and gesture which is, paradoxically, both a closed mysterious system signifying nothing, and an infinite

opening up of possibilities.

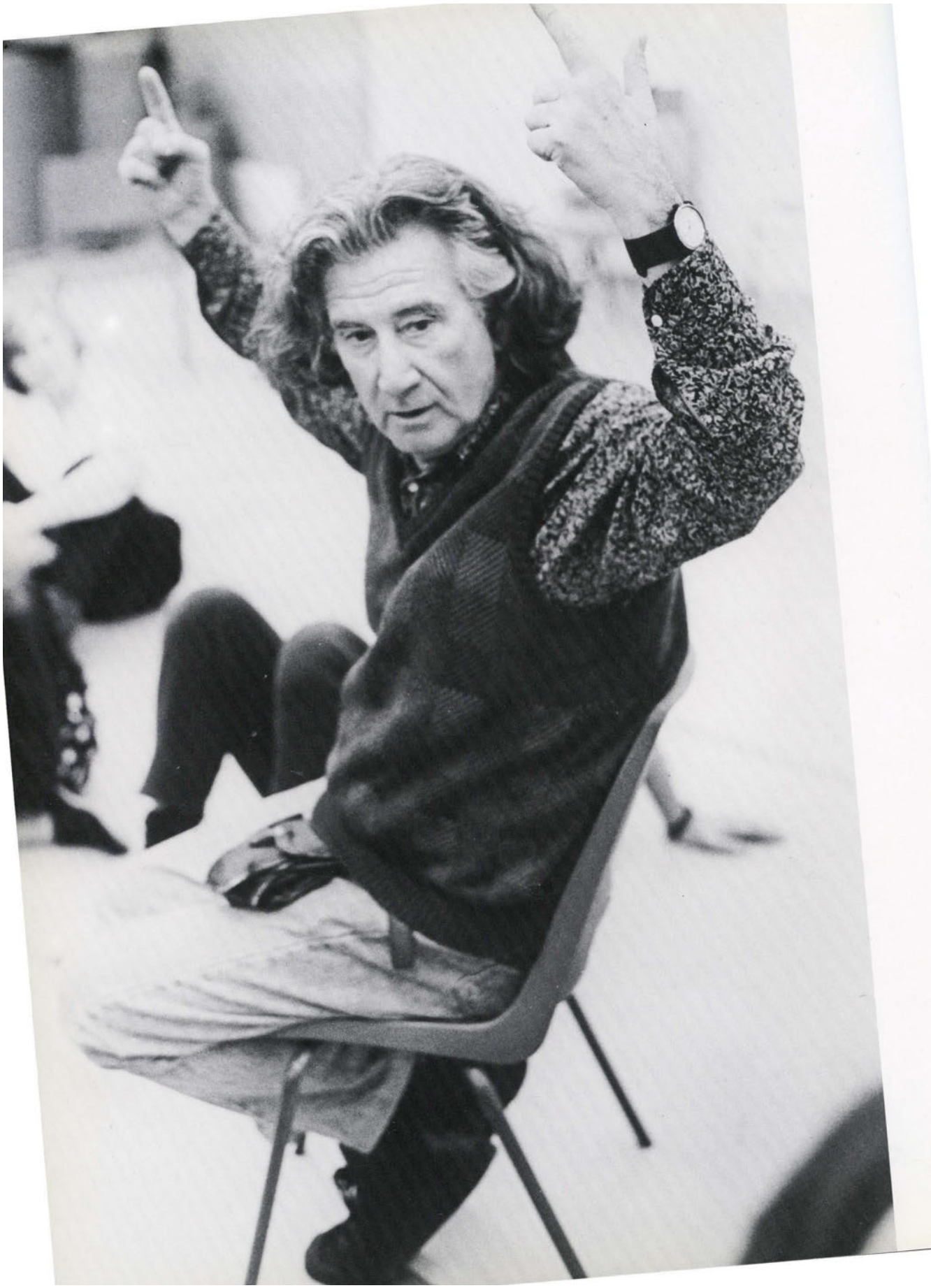
Sound is the factor which brings together the text and movement, and it is the sound of the 'poem' that is ultimately appealing or alienating. Whereas much of Cobbing's earlier work retains the familiar sounds of words - casting new light on them as either meaningful or meaningless by repetition, distortion, interruption, etc. - in his later work the sounds fall rather into the category of pre-verbal utterances. Through the articulation of these he could be seen as building up a language of the feelings which goes beyond the lexicon.

In doing this, Cobbing does not so much liberate the word as liberate the human voice itself from bondage either to discourse or to singing in any traditional sense. His central preoccupation is always the exploration of the fundamental relationship between sound and Being; and out of this exploration has come a body of work which convincingly demonstrates that a poet without words is far from mute.

NOTES

1. See, for example: Jonathan Raban, The Society of the Poem, London: Harrap, 1971; and Gerald Woods et al (Ed), Art without Boundaries 1950-1970, London: Thames and Hudson, 1972.
2. Nuttall communicates the atmosphere of this time in his book Bomb Culture, London: Paladin, 1968.
3. Primarily the voices of Hanna Aurbacher, Ewald Liska and Theophil Maier, with 'technician' Hans-Jürg Bauer.
4. Perhaps best known for his quasi-mystical compositions devised on a typewriter, known as 'typestracts'.
5. London: tapocketa press, 1977.
6. Cobbing's admiration for this same 'muscular' quality in the writing of Jack Kerouac can be sensed from his own compositions both on the page and in performance.

Bob Cobbing, from ***bob jubile,*** **1990.**



Barbara Norden

FORUM FOR FREEDOM

Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed

Facing page:
Augusto Boal at London Bubble, 1990.

As artistic director of the Arena Theatre in Sao Paulo, Brazil, between 1964 and 1971, Augusto Boal constantly faced the threat of paramilitary attacks on his company's performances. Boal, however, makes light of life under the military dictatorship, regaling his audiences with anecdotes as if it were high farce. One night a hand grenade was thrown against the stage. 'Luckily it was made in Brazil,' remembers Boal. 'Sometimes I ask myself, did it really happen?' Boal also tells a story of the state arts censor demanding to see the author of Sophocles' Antigone and offering his condolences to the would-be director when it was explained that the author was no longer available for interview.

In exile in Peru in 1973, Boal made use of a government literacy programme in order to put into practice his theory of theatre. Boal's quest for a 'poetics of the oppressed' reflected his opposition to the 'coercive indoctrination' of Aristotles's system of tragedy. He proposed instead a 'forum theatre' in which spectators are invited to challenge the role of the acting protagonist and themselves change the course of the story. In *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974) he wrote: 'We tried to show in practice how the theatre can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language, they can discover new concepts.'

In 1978 Boal moved to France, setting up his own theatre group in the following year. The French government now funds the Paris-based Centre du Théâtre de l'Oprimée from which fourteen actors now work. 'They help people to prepare "forum theatre" for themselves. They work with anti-racist groups, feminist groups, ecological groups - everything that has to do with fighting for a better life,' he says. Actors from the Centre are going to Calcutta to help a similar existing group develop further.

When he first arrived in France, Boal wondered for a while whether that his idea of a theatre of the oppressed might be redundant in the Western European context. People would come to him and say that they could relate to his work though they didn't have any obvious reason to feel oppressed. He was at first sceptical, but then, struck by the fact that there is a higher suicide rate in Europe than in Latin America, he began to develop a new approach to the idea of oppression: oppression without a visible adversary, the 'cop in the head'. Boal, however, is adamant that he has not abandoned one form of theatre in favour of another. 'It is not a transition, it is an enlargement. I still do political, extroverted, external work on the street. But there are other things beside that. In Europe many people have internalized oppression (in Brazil they have too). I use both methods in both places and I have not finished working them out yet.'

In November 1990 Boal visited Britain, at the invitation of the London Bubble Theatre Company, to teach 'forum theatre' and to work on his new and ever more complex techniques with a group of actors and theatre educators. A surprisingly unimposing figure in his flowered shirts and tanktops, he nevertheless had his

workshop participants eating out of his hand. He is a born teacher, forever showing rather than telling, and answering the most abstract questions in concrete terms so that the sophistication of his techniques takes the audience by surprise.

One of the techniques he developed in London was the 'circuit of rituals', a way of tackling the patterns of behaviour which determine the actions of individuals. A man improvises around five situations in which he seems to be a different person - with his wife, his mother, his son, as a teacher and as a performer. The people watching are asked to define the main characteristics of his behaviour in each situation. The man has to repeat the five improvisations, exaggerating whatever characteristics the audience has chosen. The two most extreme are chosen and the man repeats the five situations using each of these masks. In Boal's words: 'by doing this he feels that some rituals of our daily life impose upon us masks of behaviour that we don't want to have, but that sometimes we can change the mask and break the ritual.'

Boal has recently incorporated into his work in France the theatrical technique of 'l'image du non dit' (roughly equivalent to the visual but unspoken sub-text). The 'non dit' is the element that all the people involved know about but don't mention. Boal describes a session in which a man improvises a conversation with the woman he lives with. The audience tells him his behaviour is ridiculous, that she was being nice to him and he was provoking her. The scene was played again with the 'non dit' made apparent. 'He put another man beside her, caressing her, and he did the scene again. It was very moving because he looked at the woman and he could not help remembering the lover she had, and so, although the scene was apparently absurd, it was provoked by that "non dit". He could not tell her, "Look, I know you have a lover"; but it was present, it was poisoning their relationship.'

Both the 'circuit of rituals' and 'l'image du non dit' are related to the idea of the 'cop in the head' which is in itself an elaborate kind of 'forum theatre' taking place inside the head of the protagonist. The protagonist creates images of the real and imaginary people ('cops') who in everyday life force him/her to act against his/her will. As soon as someone in the audience recognizes one of the cops from their own life, they become that cop. The protagonist is freed to create a new image, up to a total of five. Then members of the audience are invited to invent further cops, which, if recognized by the protagonist, stay in action. The protagonist then battles with the cops. 'You have to start talking to each cop,' explains Boal. '"Do you remember when you did this or that?". And you have to finish by saying "That's why I hate you", or "That's why I left home", or "That's why I'm incapable of doing this."' Each cop then changes to fit the protagonist's image of it, but the actor playing the cop adds his or her own experience so that different lives overlap. The whole scene is then improvised again with the protagonist trying to do what he or she wants, arguing against the cops. There is then a 'lightning' forum; members of the audience replace the protagonist for up to thirty seconds each to offer many more possibilities.

The protagonist returns and tries out new strategies to eliminate the cops. The technique is further complicated by the introduction of an antibody to each cop. Each cop must improvise a debate with its own antibody, which in turn can be replaced by other members of the audience.

Though the 'cop in the head' uses the structures of forum theatre, the two techniques have a different application: 'Some problems, some conflicts are better developed if we use the cop in the head, because "forum theatre" is when we are already in agreement, we know what we want but we don't know how to get it. The "cop in the head" is when we know we want but we are afraid to do it, we cannot do it. Then other people can come and show that it's easy,' he says.

Boal was recently invited to present his therapeutic theatre techniques at an international congress of psychotherapists in Amsterdam; but he insists his work is completely different from psychodrama, both the 'talking cure' of analytical psychodrama and the less talkative Morenian techniques in which the protagonist and antagonist change places, but in a still basically realistic improvisation. 'The "cop in the head" is not just about using improvisation and then talking about it,' says Boal. 'It's using theatre all the time. The forums are non-realistic, using images to the highest degree. Also words, because words are part of the theatre, but you never forget you are doing theatre.' 'Screen image', the technique he presented to the psychotherapists, neatly illustrated this theatrical approach: two people who have a problem make an image of the other person as they see them and the two images have a conversation independently of the original people. 'We never really see the person we are talking to,' observes Boal. 'If I'm talking to you, you don't see me, you're seeing someone you project onto me, you make the image of that somebody.'

For Boal therapeutic work is itself political and the 'cop in the head' could refer equally to the neurosis besetting those who enjoy material wellbeing in the West or to the psychic manipulation of those who vote against their class interests in Brazil. 'Lulu [the trade unionist who lost the presidential election in 1989] said, "I feel hurt because most of the people who voted for the millionaire candidate are poor people like me." Of course, because of the cops in the head of those people, they vote for the master and not for themselves. Not,' he hastens to add, 'that the oppressed is an angel. It's not only that you discover yourself as a victim, you also discover things in you that are oppressive of others.'

Augusto Boal, *Stop: C'est Magique! 1980,* Cartoucherie de Vincennes.

Since his return to Brazil in the mid-1980s, after the eventual demise of the military governemnt, Boal has thrown himself into his country's political and cultural struggles. Though he and two friends owned the Arena Theatre before it was appropriated by the dictatorship in 1971, it has never been returned, and he works in Rio de Janeiro with a small group of actors without a building base or any financial support from the government. There has, however, been interest in Boal's work from unexpected quarters. 'The multinational companies can save money by funding culture,' he says. 'One of them offered to set up a centre for the theatre of the

oppressed with everything I needed - a rehearsal room, offices, they would mount a centre at no cost to me, give me money to run it for the whole year and in exchange they wanted me to use the theatre of the oppressed to help them select the best employees. I would do theatrical tests to help them choose the best cashier or manager or salesperson. And of course I couldn't accept that, it was the censorship of seduction. "You do that for us and we'll help you do what we want" - as though I could split my whole personality.'

While Boal lacks material support in Brazil, recent constitutional changes do at least guarantee freedom from direct censorship. The protection and political support of the left-wing mayor of Rio de Janeiro made possible a live expression of the theatre of the oppressed on 23 September 1990. Using 'forum theatre' and involving both actors and non-actors, the event illustrates how Boal's 'poor theatre' differs from that of Grotowski, whom he admires but only as a spectator. 'I don't share his idea of the sacred actor. I go in the other direction. I try to see the sacredness in every human being, not only in the specialized person.' The piece was a massive open air spectacle organized by twenty-eight actors, one from each of the cities of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and performed by eighteen groups of 'oppressed' people, including peasants without land, homeless children, teenage prostitutes and people with AIDS, along with a women's group, an anti-racist group and an anti-nuclear group.

'We had seven stages, each with a theme,' explains Boal. 'One theme for instance was the cosmic planet. So from 10am to 5pm those eighteen groups of people with eighteen human problems presented their plays and some of them were selected to be discussed in a forum. It was very beautiful because it was in the open air beside the beach and full of trees and we had three or four thousand people at a time seeing the play and participating, sometimes much more. Because it was passion, they were really interested.'

Alongside the staged performances were scenes of 'invisible theatre'. Forty people dressed in black and singing funeral songs dug graves on the beach in preparation for an accident at a dodgy nuclear plant which had been bought from the Germans by the military. Actors in bathing suits helped generate a discussion. Another actor set up as a street pedlar and started making speeches denouncing the government. Another was trying to sell himself as a slave, a reference to the Brazilian abolition laws which were supposed to expire after 100 years, and to a Unesco study which showed that in Brazil a worker today is less expensive to his boss than a slave was to his master 100 years ago.

Allowing only the unconscious participation of the onlooker, 'invisible theatre' is closer to propaganda than Boal's other techniques. Boal has treated propaganda as a form of communication with caution since, as a young man, touring with a play which exhorted peasants to fight for land, he was offered a gun by an enthusiastic member of the audience so that they could start fighting immediately. Boal's

Augusto Boal at London Bubble, 1990.

propaganda pieces today, which include 'invisible theatre', differ in two respects from his earlier work. They are designed to ask questions, not give answers. Moreover, if there is a risk involved, he is prepared to share it. 'I will never again tell other people to do things that I'm not prepared to do myself,' he says. The scope remains wide open.

London Bubble is setting up its own 'forum theatre' project. For further information contact Adrian Jackson on 071-237 4434.

Reviews

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

LONDON

Action Syndicate

A Few Small Nips

Oval House; ICA

Reviewed by Sophie Constanti

A Few Small Nips, devised by Rene Eyre and Jeremy Herbert for the five woman performance group Action Syndicate, is a turbulent, beautifully detailed homage to the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. The events of Kahlo's brief and traumatic life - two marriages (both to Diego Rivera), a longstanding affair with Trotsky, miscarriage and, of course, the trolley bus accident in which a handrail pierced through her abdomen, shattered her spine and exited through her vagina - have in recent years inspired biographical or narrative-based readings (both on stage and film) of the Kahlo story. Eyre, however, has chosen to explore Kahlo's persona, spirit and culture via the artist's paintings; and through these, with the help of Jeremy Herbert's set design, to reanimate visually Kahlo's symbolic world of mental and physical pain.

André Breton's description of Kahlo's work as 'a ribbon tied around a bomb' is acknowledged most pertinently in Eyre's opening scene, with its arterial network of red ribbon trapping four dancers who are already restricted by the plaster casts encasing their torsos. The movements of the quartet - Eyre, as centrepiece, securely bound into an upstanding coffin-like box - are jerky and obsessive, and are executed with a curiously unnatural patience, hinting perhaps at Kahlo's own frustration in coping with her slow and incomplete recovery.

Yet most of this show's collectively organized choreography seems to lack the incisiveness and fine timing with which Eyre manipulates her visual conceptions. The sequence where five Kahlo figures, equipped with divining pendants, shuffle amongst a pile of bones - an effective, if literal, metaphor for the artist's broken body - is just one of many strong, logical ideas weakened by a rambling choreographical structure. But Eyre certainly knows how to position her dancers to maximum theatrical effect. As a result, the visceral intensity of this work is harboured not in its dance phrases, but in its more static images within the movement of the set's fire, blood and water.

While Eyre's introductory picture recalls the alternate solemnity and screaming agony of Kahlo's 'hospital bed' paintings, subsequent episodes extend further the themes of birth, death and religion, so

fundamental to her artistic output and to Mexican culture in general. Thus Eyre transposed the besuited Kahlo of *Self Portrait With Cropped Hair* and the hidden skeletons of *The Birth Of Moses* to a Mexican style Day of Death frolic, the masked participants convulsing with laughter in response to Kahlo's (Eyre's) lifeless body.

Eyre creates a shrine for Kahlo in which the spirit of the artist's epigrammatic compositions - icons of macabre surrealism often expressed in carnival colours - is tapped and galavanized. As the performers, drenched and exhausted, leave the stage, Kahlo's ghost seems to linger and the sound of street noises interspersed with that of a trambell allows us both to relive and to contemplate the almost unimaginable horror of her accident.

Laurie Anderson
Empty Places
Dominion Theatre

Reviewed by Tony White

With rather less hype than has accompanied previous visits to the UK, Laurie Anderson performed her new work *Empty Places* to a packed Dominion Theatre on two nights in late November.

On her last visit, in 1986, Laurie Anderson had performed a hybrid work entitled *Natural History* which seemed at least partly concerned with promoting her *Home of the Brave* concert film. I had the sense then that

Anderson hadn't quite lived down her widely acclaimed 7-hour epic, *United States I-IV*: throughout *Natural History* whole sections of *United States...* kept reappearing, and taken out of its original context the material lost a great deal. Unlike *United States...*, *Natural History* (though visually thrilling) was never quite greater than the sum of the parts.

Empty Places, by conrast, was a completely new work built around a series of photographs, taken by Anderson herself, of deserted areas of New York City at night. This time there was no rock band and Anderson was alone on the stage, talking, singing, playing the midi-keyboards or cueing the sophisticated projection system with a wave of her hand or a violin bow. As with previous works, *Empty Places* was a flux of music, word and image. Stories ranged from the cute ('I dreamed I died and all my possessions had been arranged into some kind of theme park') to the almost maudlin (a scientist who communicates telepathically with a whale in an aquarium and the whale keeps asking 'Do all oceans have walls?'). Recurring film and slide motifs included erased blackboards, slow moving traffic, Japanese commuters walking in an endless file past the camera and a flashlight spinning in the dark like a satellite in space.

There were still, perhaps inevitably and possibly intentionally, dim echoes of *United States I-IV*. At one point a map of the U.S.A. was projected behind Anderson. But unlike the more metaphysical map at the core of *United States...*, showing America divided into four time zones, this map was divided according to what portion of the national debt the taxes of each region would pay off. It would be an exaggeration to say that this is representative of a general movement in Anderson's work from the metaphorical to the prosaic, but in Empty Places Anderson does establish a position for herself from which she is able to comment very directly on contemporary political issues. This position was announced quite overtly: 'Tonight's topics', we were informed by the familiar, deep, vocoder-processed voice, 'are politics and music'.

One issue singled out for particular attention was the Helms Amendment, and a monologue on this subject opened the second half of the performance. To the theme tune from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Anderson talked at some length about Senator Jesse Helms

and the exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs which had become one of the many targets for his - and much of the fundamentalist right's - ire. There was no need for metaphor here. Anderson made clear her contempt for the Helms Amendment; whereat the audience, perhaps not surprisingly, signalled their approval with the loudest incidental applause of the evening.

As well as addressing specific political issues, *Empty Places* can also be seen as a more general attack on the American new right. One interviewer quotes her as saying that she wants, with this piece, to 'show the effects of conservative thinking on people in the US for the past ten years.' Notions of history have been recurring themes in much of Anderson's work (including, most recently, her paraphrasing on the *Strange Angels* album of Walter Benjamin's reverie: 'History is an angel being blown backwards into the future...'); and with Empty Places Anderson is taking a position directly counter to Fukuyama's much quoted assertion that (because US liberal democracy is the perfect system) history is now over.

A politicized reading is also reinforced by Anderson's dedication of the performance to activist Abbie Hoffman, late veteran of the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention riots and author of *Steal This Book*, the man who, as Laurie Anderson puts it, 'walked into a crowded fire and shouted "Theater!" '

Laurie Anderson's work now unquestionably operates at a certain distance from the New York art scene and gone are the jokes and stories about galleries in SoHo: in Anderson's lexicon an 'oil painting' is now the good looking respondent to a lonely hearts ad. But, in spite of the fact that the performance included a couple of 'songs' and in spite of the slightly 'adult-oriented rock' audience, *Empty Places* was still, thank goodness, a very long way fron being a mainstream rock event.

Interviewed in the early '80s just prior to performing *United States I-IV*, Anderson said that one of her aims was to produce 'a performance in which you're not sure if you saw that or heard it'. With *Empty Places* not only did she achieve that once again but, more importantly, the combination of multiple image, music and text produced a rich, poetic whole which was, at times, sublime.

Michael Petry

Flight from Technology: The Sexuality of the Universe part two

Museum of Installation

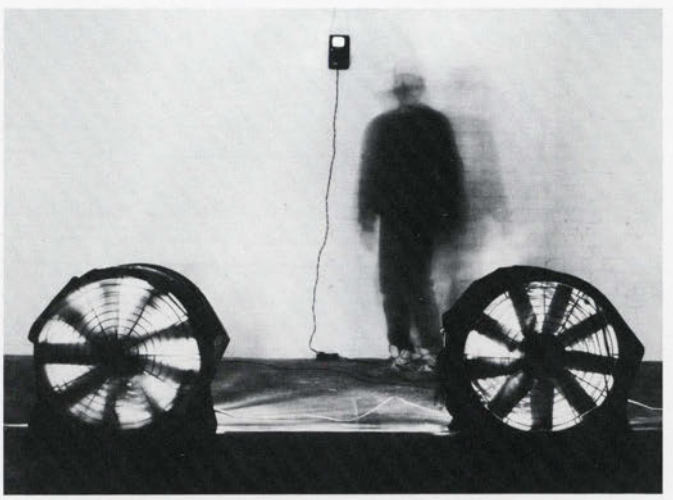
Reviewed by Tony White

London's new Museum of Installation opened in November with a new work from Michael Petry, an artist who has worked closely with the museum's directors, Nicky Oxley and Nico D'Oliveira, in recent years. The museum continues a tradition started at the Unit 7 Gallery, where Oxley and D'Oliveira gained something of a reputation for an uncompromising attitude towards the showing of installation: works are not for sale, rather the M.O.I. aims to build up a documentation archive.

Petry's installation, *Flight from Technology: The Sexuality of the Universe part two*, transformed the museum's large, open basement space into three smaller rooms through which a linear progress was prescribed.

In the first room one wall was covered in computer-generated hard copy. These brightly coloured images were apparently taken from pornographic magazines, though the information was so heavily processed that it didn't really matter much what each configuration of magnified pixels was meant to signify.

Progress through the work became more interesting on stepping through a green door at the far end of this first chamber. A small room beyond the door was lined with a horizontal band of mirror, above which were a large number of spotlights. Almost infinite multiples of one's own reflection disappeared into the bright white distance of the reflected rooms. Not that this was quite as dramatic as it sounds; rather the effect was like stepping into an empty dressing room. From time to time, people would leave this mirrored room through a red door, form which they would return some minutes later looking, as someone said, as if they were 'coming out of the toilet'.



The final part of the installation was, in fact, a long dark chamber illuminated only by the light from a tiny LCD television screen on the far wall. A brief flash of light before the door closed behind one heightened the slight sense of danger - it illuminated two very large fans, stationed on either side of the monitor, which generated a powerful wind and a great deal of noise. One's instinct was to walk towards the miniature video screen, which was positioned well above eye level, and on which a trashy assemblage of video footage included inane shots from the passenger seat of a car driving through US cities and clips from that most epic of all narratives, the Apollo space programme. But one very quickly realized that the video was not going to provide any kind of hermeneutic key to Petry's work. This absence of resolution was confirmed by shots of the Challenger explosion, that contemporary emblem of disrupted narrative, and a voice on the soundtrack which asked, 'Is the reward just a crick in the neck?'.

What I found pleasing about Petry's installation was the way it played with the old conceptualist paradigm of viewer as performer. This notion was hinted at by the mirrored 'dressing room' and then confirmed at the moment when, realizing that narrative closure was not forthcoming, one simultaneously noticed one's own absurd enactment of the mock-epic: in order to see the screen, one had to stand in an 'heroic' pose, with head raised, while the wind blew in one's hair.

Though *Flight from Technology...* was, in many ways, predictable (lack of narrative resolution is hardly surprising), the final moment of anti-climax was superbly orchestrated.

Alvin Boyarsky Memorial Exhibition

Architectural Association

Reviewed by Daniel Abramson

'Not since Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus has there been the moment in an institution such as the time of Alvin Boyarsky and [sic] the Architectural Association... Alvin Boyarsky is a staggering, stunning figure acting upon the quality of the culture of our time.'

So said the New York-based academician and theorist John Hejduk in a letter to the editor of Building Design written last year before Boyarsky's untimely death, and recently exhibited in a large display of AA student projects and Boyarsky memorabilia mounted by the Bedford Square school to commemorate its Canadian chairman of nineteen years. The show, 'Alvin Boyarsky Memorial Exhibition: Student Work, 1972-9' may not quite have born out Hejduk's hyperbolic praise, but its approximately fifty projects did manage to give a picture of the trajectory of avant-garde architecture during the last two decades, highlighting past obsessions and present directions.

The early projects installed in the ground floor Exhibition Gallery showed that during the first years of Boyarsky's tenure the AA students remained gripped by modernism, with its belief that the urban environment could only be seen as one massive totality, in need of radical

remodelling. The grandiose ambitions of this type of project showed clearly the then avant-garde's dissatisfaction with the limited roles allowed to architecture by its patrons. Coming near the end of these 1970s large-scale fantasies, John Ryba's megalomaniac walls of changing rooms lining the banks of the Thames - rendered as a collage of text, maps, photos and drawings - seemed, if only by virtue of its extremity, to usher in a welcome hint of self-parody.

There was certainly a marked change in the students' urban projects in the 1980s, hung both in the Exhibition Gallery and in the Members' Room and Bar upstairs. These showed a concerted effort to reconstitute small-scale, communal, localized gathering places along traditional lines. The various projects for Kentish Town, Brixton and Edinburgh featured markets, shopping malls, gardens, theatres, libraries, research institutions and agora-like plazas, often sited in derelict, so-called 'negative' spaces.

While these projects were still consonant with modernism's doctrine of social amelioration, they also marked a turn towards the adoption of the traditional vocabulary of classicism, continuity with the pre-existing urban context, and a revival of the more traditional representational conventions of plan, section, elevation, and perspective. In addition, these projects represented a rapprochment with the demands of the market to develop and capitalize on centrally located but undervalued properties.

A common concern of many projects from the mid-1970s on has been the analysis of architecture as a linguistic system. One of the best-known practitioners and theorists of architectural deconstruction, Bernard Tschumi of Columbia University, has been closely associated with the AA: one of his teaching units there tried to synthesize James Joyce's literary experiments with the students' subjective experience of the area around Covent Garden.

For me there were two works in the AA show which were exceptional both in their high visual quality and in terms of their critical stances. The earlier one was Zaha Hadid's *Museum of the Nineteenth Century* (1978), presented in a series of highly polished plans and elevations. One axis of the museum incorporated an old railway bridge, crossed at a deliberately odd angle by a second, newly built wing of thin, perforated screen walls containing nine square rooms, each a completely self-contained exhibit of mysterious content: a football pitch, swimming pools, railway tracks. Here Hadid addressed the compartmentalization, institutionalization and commodification of history and culture as a leisure activity, by means of an architecture at once found and invented, fragmentary and ordered, permanent and impermanent, clarified and amiguous.

The second piece which stood out for me was Sand Helsel's early 1980s *Powerscourt: The Bog Pavilion*, rendered in three monochrome pencil and graphite drawings. 'The requirements', we were informed, 'were to convert a burnt-out stately home in Ireland from a private house into a redefined cultural context. From questioning the relationship between artifact and context, it seemed appropriate to let the house decay, and to intervene in the egalitarian context of the bogs.' The ruined house, faintly drawn in a site plan, was shown as literally being engulfed by the surrounding bog, represented as an exquisitely textured, grey surface over the whole of the sheet. Helsel's project was exceptional not only for its visual impact and humour, but also because the work was the only one seriously to consider the relationship between willed, ordered architecture and the chance contingencies of nature.

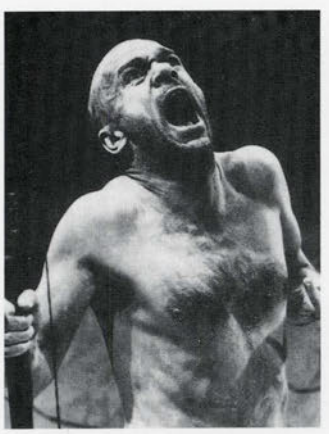
In the past two decades, it is clear from the AA show, Alvin Boyarsky was able to lead the school from the hot, polemical engagements of the late 1960s and early 1970s to the cooler, critical detachment of the 1980s avant-garde. And to his credit Boyarsky was no Gropius: the kindlier, gentler Canadian tried to teach his students to teach themselves.

Field Day Theatre Company

The Cure at Troy

Tricycle Theatre

Reviewed by John Honderich



The strength and formal beauty of the single scene of *The Cure at Troy*, abstracted out from the fabulous complexity of linked stories comprising the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, performed in real time with just three main actors and a chorus, demonstrates very well why the Greeks thought dramatic Unities were a good idea in the first place; nothing's wasted or facetious, nothing distracts from the purity of the drama.

Master archer Philoctetes, inheritor of Hercules' bow, is bitten on the foot by a sanke on his way to the siege of Troy. The other Greeks, led by Odysseus, are so appalled by the stench of the poisoned wound and by Philoctetes' screams of pain, that they abandon him alone on a desert island, 'nothing there but the beat of the waves and the beat of my raw wound.'

Ten years of siege warfare later, a soothsayer prophesies Troy will never be taken without Philoctetes' help. Odysseus is sent back to the island to fetch the wounded archer but Philoctetes, understandably, sees things differently. He wants to kill Odysseus. Deadlocked, the play opens with Odysseus persuading his honourable young companion Neoptolemus to try to trick Philoctetes into boarding ship.

Two and a half millennia after Sophocles, Seamus Heaney and the cross-border Irish company Field Day's new version brings home the great sense of suffering and pride in *Philoctetes;* but differently, with new poetry supplied for a female chorus, a new northern Irish focus implied by every word spoken, more of a sense of historical purpose than of Fate, and a better ending, in which the appearance of Heracles the *deus ex machina* is not merely a dramatic expedient but gives final full expression to psychological forces present throughout.

In contrast to the characters represented, actors' performances are remarkable for a lack of egotism. Des McAleer as Philoctetes has most to do, at times coming as close as any actor should dare to to real cries of pain; maybe his best message for Belfast is that when you get hurt you get hard, that this can lead to a cussed pride addicted to its own pain, sustained by its own suffering. Differently, Ian McElhinney's guileful Odysseus is as plausible and presentable as the best modern politician, saying things like 'my aim has always been to get things done by being adaptable'.

The set design is striking and the staging all works well, especially the chorus's syncopated delivery, but best of all is Heaney's disarmingly plain modern English verse. Even clichés work for him: suddenly you remember what every TV pundit's favourite steal from Shakespeare, 'sea change', means (a change of weather at sea, as when winds shift or a storm comes over). The direct speech complements Sophocles' conceptual clarity, much of which remains perfectly apt: 'Since when did the use of reason rule out truth?'

Lingering doubts, mistrust and different kinds of falsehood are precisely handled, particularly with respect to Neoptolemus. There is no glib easy optimism, love is identified in poetry as the 'half-true rhyme', but by the end the play has earned a right to be positive and affirmative, in a realistic, valuable, compromised way.

CARDIFF

Odin Teatret

Talabot

Chapter Arts Centre

Reviewed by Nigel Stewart

Let me come directly to the point: *Talabot* is a masterpiece. For once performance achieves the 'ecstasy of montage' of which Eisenstein spoke with regard to film.

Talabot is the tenth major indoor ensemble work of Odin Teatret, 26 years in existence, whose international reputation has, strangely, gone largely unnoticed in the UK. The work is apparently located in the field research and autobiography of Kristen Hastrup, a real life Danish anthropologist. A central incident of her story concerns her time in Iceland. Shrouded in mist, holding a ewe on a mountain ledge, she encountered the *huldufólk*, the 'hidden people' of Icelandic legend. Subsequently she suffered a mental breakdown. Controversially Hastrup counts these mystical and psychological events as anthropological data.

Talabot, though, had other starting points as well. One is the story of the six-year-old Minik, one of five Eskimos taken in 1897 by the founding fathers of anthropology to New York. He was the only one to survive the change of climate. The anthropologists faked the funeral of Minik's father, substituting a log for his body. At the age of 16, Minik saw the skeleton of his father as a museum exhibit. And Talabot is the name of a ship - the first which Eugenio Barba (b.1936), the show's director, sailed on when he was an engine boy.

From these sources the show's performance environment is derived. Tiers of seats are arranged in an oval, with an entrance at each pole, leaving the spectators in two halves facing each other. Music plays behind this seating, water bubbles within, meticulously patterned physical and vocal action occurs between. The idea of an excavated long-boat, of the type used for ritualistic burial, is invoked. Feathers, leaves, logs, shells, sand, string, scarves: these are some of the many mobile objects which are transformed through the performance into multistable figures - images, that is, which shift and flicker between several possible meanings.

In Odin's performance, Hastrup's autobiography is constantly shattered and displaced by the intrusion of analogical figures who are associated with these objects. A key figure is Minik, a skeleton constructed from sea shells with a fur covering, a kind of totemic representation of many other events and figures, not least the *huldufólk*. And there is Trickster (Iben Nagel Rasmussen) - a kind of ironic political chorus. In one early scene, Kirsten (Julia Varley) speaks of the birth of three of her children in India. As she does so, a Scandinavian baptismal song is sung from behind the spectators. As each child is 'born', Kirsten pulls a coloured feather from her hair - an allusion to the birth of Athene from Zeus' head. There is a blackout. As the song swells, Trickster steps into the darkness, pulling a planed log, on which there are three flaming pools of oil. It (for Trickster can only be seen as neuter) stops to place three dead leaves into the flames: one each, it says, for three individuals who committed suicide by fire as a protest against the Vietnam war.

These symbols of birth and death are subsequently displaced. In another sequence we see Kirsten held by Ernesto ('Che')Guevara (Torgeir Wethal). Behind Guevara appears an Indian (Isabel Ubeda Puccini), who removes three herb leaves from her mouth and gives them to Guevara. He takes these leaves, and places one on each of Kirsten's eyes and one on her mouth. The same Indian appears at the other pole to which Guevara is gently leading the 'deaf' and 'mute' Kirsten. But the Indian is surrounded by male *Commedia dell'Arte* figures and capes - and is then revealed, standing on the balls of her feet, hat pulled down over her eyes, hands crossed above her head and interlinking with the branches of a small tree which hangs down to her ankles; an image suggesting crucifixion. Guevara narrates how he found his nanny, who had been in a wood collecting herbs to treat his asthma, tied to a tree - raped and murdered by local bandits - a seminal event in Guevara's political education. Guevara is then picked up by one of the *Commedia* figures (Richard

Fowler) in front of the 'crucified' Indian and is allowed to slip towards the ground, forming a Pietá. 'I'm sorry', mocks the *Commedia* figure, 'there's no such thing as revolution, only revolutionaries - and they are very easy to get rid of.'

Another sequence picking up the theme of revolt and opposition is based on Hastrup's student days. Kirsten appears at one pole; through a megaphone she proclaims, 'occupy the university and take to the streets'. She raises her fist. Her coloured scarf flutters down, like Antigone's handful of dust in the face of Creon's edict.

Towards the end, Trickster makes another appearence. It is seated and holds a fake baby, to which it proffers its false breast. As Trickster begins to suckle the baby, sand pours out from the breast, over the baby and onto the floor. Trickster moves to the centre, where it pulls a red string, attached to the baby like an umbilical cord, causing the insides of the baby to fall out. All that remains of the baby is its covering; it has been gutted.

Finally the Trickster appears on the platform at one pole, holding Minik. Trickster then makes its most ironic comment: that human beings thought they were the most important creatures in the world. Fade to blackout. The central light suddenly fizzes. A charge has been set off. Its white globe-shaped Chinese-style paper lampshade begins to burn, until only the spiral white frame remains. The frame collapses and falls below onto the small tree. A crown of thorns.

Talabot is partly a complex meditation on the polyvalency of reality, a deconstruction of the notion of identity. The tension which normally exists between the guises which the performer assumes and the performer herself is made explicit in the gap between Kirsten Hastrup, whose presence as a spectator is always implied, and Kirsten, the character played by Julia Varley, who is both 'not her' and 'not-not her'. This replicates Hastrup's condition as anthropologist. Hastrup has made herself into her own data. She has to translate from one reality to another. She feels herself as both the subject of her experience of field work and the object of an experience to be analysed. So the two Kirstens face each other, as we hear voices saying, 'I am not not me'. And then they embrace. Following this the re-integrated Kirsten, now divorced from her husband, enters another relationship. Her new partner wipes away the death mask of herbs.

However, the greatest ambiguity between destruction and transformation lies in a small move. When the baby has lost its inside, it becomes clear that its outside is nothing other than Kirsten's lost coloured scarf. Trickster returns the scarf to Kirsten, as Kirsten has returned to herself. Decomposition has led to recomposition. The rite of passage is over.

COVENTRY

Roland Miller

The Other

Lanchester Gallery

Reviewed by Fiona Becket

The Other was an installation /performance, part of several exhibitions and events collectively entitled 'Freedom in Imagination' which culminated in an auction of art works for Amnesty International. The installation consisted of a cage of fourteen white ribbons hanging from the gallery ceiling to almost touch the floor. The cage 'bars' defined a space approximately 4' x 4' which became the initial performance area. Within this space, suspended at eye level, hung a wooden painted figure which presumably represented Miller's alter ego. In the course of the performance two other square areas were created to the left and right of the 'cage', marked out respectively in small coloured squares of felt and in

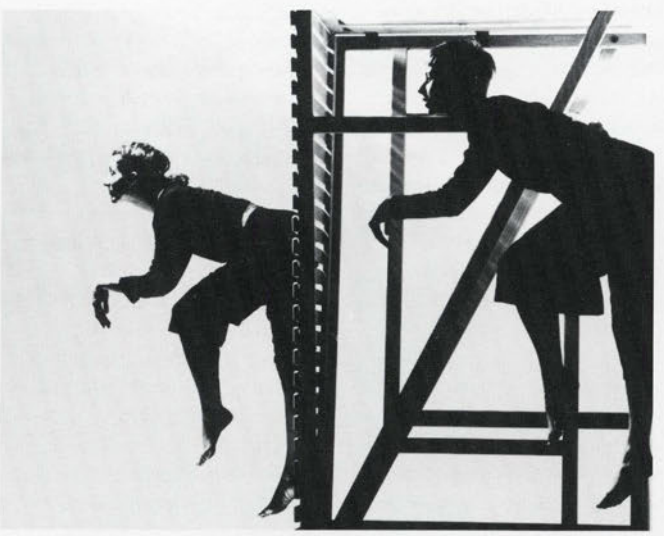
torn patches and strips of white cotton. Miller wore a white hat, white shirt and white gloves. Gloves figured prominently elsewhere too: one black, five white, one paint-spattered, being ritually moved between the cage and squares. Fourteen jagged shards of mirror determined Miller's careful movements, as these brittle props were re-arranged systematically with the soft coloured felt and white 'bandage' strips.

The performance, which was entirely improvised, lasted for several hours with a natural break after the fourth walkabout. Within this time span the performance evolved in several palpable stages: the bringing of the props to the 'cage', the arranging of them in relation to the cage 'bars', and the marking out of the other squares; the journeying, for which the wooden figure became a starting and also a finishing point, since the break occurred once this had been re-hung in the centre of what inevitably came to be seen as its prison; and, finally, the dismantling of the squares of cloth.

The four journeys were in some sense voyages of discovery for the wooden figure. This was first carried aloft along the causeway and low walls in the polytechnic's front yard. Attempts were made to jump across and over the architectural features which presented themselves and involved the occasional balancing act, although the level of physical risk was negligible, with the artist at all times protected and confined by the walls and railings. For the second walkabout Miller tied the figure closely around his neck, strapped an 8" length of mirror to his wrist and palm, and proceeded backwards along the same route finding his way by the reflections in the mirror. This was repeated with two pieces of mirror, and finally Miller (without mirrors) retraced his steps, marking his journeys - which varied slightly each time - with strips of white cloth.

Frames featured prominently in this performance with the 'cage', the squares, the mirrors and the performer's negotiation of on-site structural features such as doors. Some of these frames were fixed - the 'cage' - whilst others, like the mirrors, were mobile. More interesting, however, than any of these were two framing activities over which Miller had little control. The first was provided by an unknown painter who, on Miller's arrival at the venue, demanded to know what was happening and proceeded loudly to slate performers and performance. Miller allowed himself to be implicated as a sympathetic bystander until his critic cottoned on. For me this altercation marked the real beginning of *The Other* with its stated theme of alienation. The second frame was more subtle. The performance was the last event before the auction of art-works the same evening. Consequently as Miller performed, two dedicated festival organizers quietly dismantled the week's exhibition, moving the canvases, prints and drawings around, according to a very private logic. This movement was confined to the margins of the gallery while Miller kept to the centre space. Both performances were entirely soundless, each autonomous but subtly interrelated. Breaking the invisible boundaries of both activities, a small boy with impaired hearing (the most absorbed spectator by far), made occasional forays near to Miller and to the 'cage', unobtrusively attending to the props and especially the mirrors, intently watching the arcane rituals of tearing cloth and rearranging gloves. This offered a far more positive perspective on private worlds than the wooden figure in the cage.

It is difficult to see how Miller's actions in themselves related to the supposed theme: in the catalogue provided, he is quoted as saying that it is the imagination which dismantles prejudice, 'a capacity to be reconciled to "the Other", to accept into our lives people who are different, and to be willing to enter into other people's cultures.' In practice, 'the other' was interpreted both so literally and so privately that it was very difficult to expand it to address either different cultures or the countless alienated groups within our own culture to which it might usefully apply. Such difference and otherness as there was came from outside the cage, while Miller remained curiously self-absorbed and self-sufficient throughout.



LEICESTER

Leicester International Dance Theatre: Motionhouse Dance Theatre, Shobana Jeyasingh

Phoenix Arts

Reviewed by David Hughes

Louise Richards and Kevin Finnan of Motionhouse are well versed in Contact Improvisation and have gained a reputation for themselves as teachers of that form. In their choreography they use Contact in a visually arresting and dynamic way; rolls, leaps, holds and catches become metaphors for a wide range of relationships.

Amongst the most succesful parts of their latest show, *House of Bones,* are such highly theatrical images as a singer walking a plank of wood which is passed over the tops of rolling bodies signifying the sea, a Constructivist set becoming the walls of a city under siege, and the prow and bridge of a ship. These are images which have a poetic resonance and beauty; and whilst metaphoric, they are grounded in a specific and palpable reality. Other images, of a more generalized type, are less successful.

Motionhouse's work always sits uneasily between stools. It is perpetually cutting between two levels: the abstract, Contact-inspired dance; and the image, be that literal or poetically suggestive. An unfortunate practical consequence of this method is that the ostensible theme of the work - the need to find a scapegoat for society's ills - constantly gets lost amongst the other effects. AIDS is at the back of their minds, but is never referred to directly. Historical situations in which plagues have raged and scapegoats have been punished, in an attempt to heal society's ills, provide the images: the Plagues of Egypt give rise to some sinister Locust/frog choreography, and the Ship of Fools, as referred to by Foucault, generates imagery of the sea.

A major force in this production is the music, developed by Paul Newnham, which is mainly for voice, although the singers also play a number of both primitive and electronic instruments. The music carries the piece rhythmically and evokes period and location atmospheres, transporting us from ancient Egypt to the present.

With Motionhouse, the power under the surface can always be felt, the questing intellects and the search for a theatrical form which can accomodate all their interests. They have not quite found it yet; but when they do, they will be a powerful and influential force within dance theatre.

Shabana Jeyasingh's work also sits uneasily between two stools; largely, in her case, because she engages with the East/West dichotomy. Her dance form is the classical Indian Bharatha Natyam, but the music she dances with (there isn't a strict mapping of choreography to music) is Western post-Romantic, mathematically strict systems or serial music. In *Correspondences,* a dance opera on the life of the Indian mathematician Ramanujan, she works with the music of Kevin Volans, while the libretto is taken from Ramanujan's letters, a Sanskrit treatise and mathematical formulae. Slides and voice-over take us through the stages of Ramanujan's life: his discovery as a powerful mathematical mind whilst a poor

clerk, the invitation to study at Cambridge, his physical decline into T.B., and his death back in India.

Jeyasingh's choreography is abstract and concrete by turns; and sometimes highly rhythmic, as though Ramanujan's mathematical theorems are being physicaly manifested by the dancers' spatial expression. At other times the narrative is perhaps a little too naâve, as in the simple scenes of domestic life in India and Cambridge. For me the work has its greatest power when it is most rhythmic - when movement, music and percussion are syncopating one with the other - when, indeed, it is most mathematical.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

Earshot

Newcastle Arts Centre

Reviewed by Jeremy Bonner

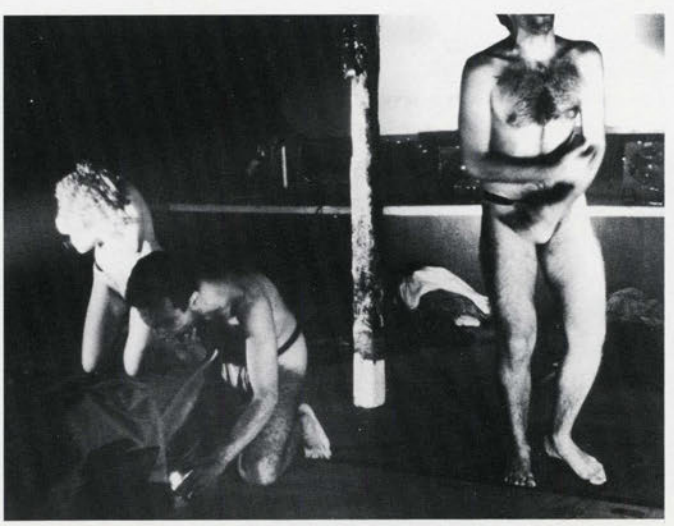
Two years in the making, *Earshot* almost failed at the last minute in its attempt to present a diverse range of experimental music works/actions, when Newcastle-based organizers Projects UK lost their original venue only 24 hours before the first group were due to appear. A disused cinema had been donated as the venue by the local council; however, an ownership dispute meant that the large empty auditorium which was to show-case large-scale multi-media projections and walls of noise by the likes of Test Department, had to be abandoned in favour of the smaller space of Newcastle Arts Centre.

The artists who did appear over the three nights of the festival cut their work to a more intimate cloth. This did not seem to bother their audience, many of whom seemed thrilled enough to see the groups in a live context, being already familiar with recordings of their work.

Whilst all the groups who appeared claimed to be part of a counter-cultural infrastructure, it was no surprise that the work presented varied vastly in terms of living up to such rhetoric. In the case of Italian band Sigillum-S's set, fantastic high energy music apart, their back-projected hour long video of all too familiar atrocity image-bites (Belsen, the Vietnamese napalm girl, swastikas) merely illustrated that there is nothing so old as a young artist. Dutch group THU-20 narrowly missed falling into the same trap, as their collaboration with Italian dance group La Familia Sfuggita trolleyed out a damnation scenario, with the three dance members ending up alone, condemned for eating raw flesh off a totemic pole. However, the proficiency of both groups raised an emotional response beyond the potentially disastrous subject matter.

Nocturnal Emissions' reputation as the 'band who played on whilst the Brixton riots happened' seemed blunted to me by their collaboration with New York dancer Poppo, an exercise in imported exoticism rather than specific commentary. Far more interesting were the French group Etant DonnÇs, two brothers who employed tooth-shaking walls of anthemic noise as an aural back-drop to their (homo-erotic, narcissictic?) struggles with each other on a large bed of straw and sand.

The highlight of the festival was a 45 minute set by German artist Caspar, a bald, quietly



imposing man who sat facing away from the audience for the first 20 minutes. During this time he sat hunched over a piece of equipment which warped the simple sounds he made by rocking and patting his wooden chair. The chair was miked up, and the great walls of industrial noise he produced from such a simple and passive domestic item brought to mind the image of the mysterious gear controller in David Lynch's Eraserhead.

Perhaps the most lasting impression of *Earshot,* however, was provided by the seminal English group Soviet France as, virtually invisible behind their equipment, they took us on a journey into pure sound.

Illustration: La Familia Sfuggita

SHEFFIELD

Alan McLean and Tony Mustoe

My Body Did Everything I Asked It

St Vincent's Catholic Men's Society

Reviewed by Tim Etchells

Alan McLean is a Sheffield-based artist who, in works like *The Ratman* and *Ratman In The Rain,* has created a persona and form in which to explore the interplay between individual masculine identity and language, mixing down-market stand-up rhetoric, stream of consciousness ravings, fragments from television and hook lines from once-popular songs.

These elements are all present in his latest piece which employs a form that is part chaotic wrestling match and part chucking-out-time sing-a-long. Set in a wrestling ring alive with coloured balloons, it takes on not the solitary, idiosyncratic interiors of *The Ratman* but the clumsy and prescribed attempts at social interaction by two men, isolated from each other, and themselves, by virtue of class, biology and culture.

In its reference to trash or popular performance forms (slapstick, sentimental songs, snapshots and wrestling), *My Body...* is constantly opening the divide between a cultural slickness (or ease) and the unkempt passions of the heart. In appearance the work is a big mess, its technology temperamental or inefficient, its structure in danger of collapse. In contrast to McLean's previous work its control of our attention and of its own performance elements is slack and sporadic. What we see is not the careful, sculpted appearance of chaos, but something approaching chaos itself.

McLean and Mustoe yell brashly to each other and to the audience, then converse in a series of desperate asides, and then break off their conversation to remedy some fault of the microphones or to stop the record player from running out of control. In this vibrant shambles images only half appear, visible through a thick soup of deliberate deconstructions, accidents and confusions. It is however a significant paradox that here, as in many other contemporary performances, our pleasure is very much bound up with the failures of the piece, with its struggle to achieve.

The fascination with failure shows a healthy distrust of glib or over-confident effects. Performance language has become self-conscious, self-doubting, hesitant. Nothing can be effortless now, and even if one does see something simple or perfect or whole (the hyper-real sets for Steve Shill's solo theatre pieces), or a moment that attempts a perfect narrative closure (I'm thinking of a tiny image towards the end of The Wooster Group's *St Anthony*), then these things automatically, and quite deliberately, problematize themselves. Put perfection in a performance arena in our current climate and it hangs there, suspended in quotation marks, an impossible thing.

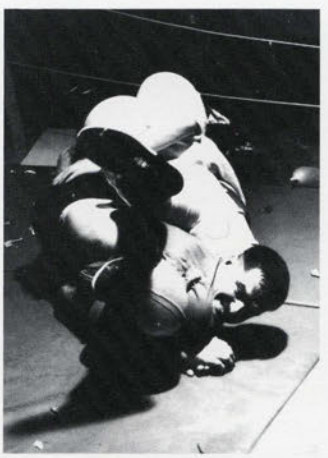
In *My Body...* no moment is whole, every second must be worked for and fought with, and in recognition of this it insists that if we are to have the pleasure of those moments we must also have the heartache, and the boredom, of the work. It's both infuriating and charming to watch, a piece that judders and jolts along, allowing infinite space for us to renew and revise our readings of its world. The essential dynamic in this process is a twist: the twist that takes place as indifference or irritation in the audience suddenly give way to emotion or laughter. As often as not the triggers for these

moments appear uncontrolled, flowing from the rhythm of the work; unrepeatable, unformed, half-conscious, comic, pathetic and entropic. Perhaps something will come of nothing.

The politics of all this struggle find echoes both in and all around the piece. Mustoe, McLean's collaborator, has slight cerebral palsy and often it is his inherently ambivalent relationship to the icons and structures of terrace culture that are brought to the fore. At its most compelling the fight here is with language, with a system of languages that lies always outside the two men, forever just out of reach. Mustoe's speech is often slurred and inaudible, just beyond hearing, and it is well set off by McLean's scrambled, rhetorical yells: 'Yer think yer've got me do yer? Yer think yer've got me for half an hour. My it's hot in here. My bedroom's like a bonfire..'

Of course there are some fine contradictions in the piece. A collaboration between a working-class man with cerebral palsy and a liberal, middle-class artist automatically engenders a discussion about exploitation and voyerism. It doesn't take a Foucault to realize that by listing Mustoe's disability in the programme/invitation and at the same time ommitting to mention McLean's own dyslexia which has continually informed and enriched his work, a hierarchy of naming, and consequently of power, has been set up.

At times the power relationship between the two



men seems fraught, uneven, patronizing. The use of slides of Mustoe's family and a rambling autobiographical text by him, without a balancing or counterpointing personal narrative or images from McLean, allows an unevenness of emotional investment from the two to creep in. This is a minefield of a piece, but what makes it work, I think, is the fact that the two are willing here to work through the power games and the boundaries of class and languages, often in a knowing and mock-antagonistic way, if not in a belief that there's a resolution, then at least in a determination to get on with the job.

GRONIGEN
Second International Symposium on Electronic Art (SISEA)

De Oosterpoort

Reviewed by Richard Wright

'The body is obsolete...It is no longer of any advantage to either remain "human" or to evolve as a species...Evolution ends when technology invades the body.' Was this stark pronouncement by Stelarc, reprinted in the programme, to be the rallying cry for the Second International Symposium on Electronic Art which took place in Holland last November? Well, not quite. Although a considerable improvement on the First International Symposium held two years previously, this follow-up event did not always live up to such polemical potential. Like its predecessor, SISEA attempted to cover the whole landscape of technology-based media from sophisticated interactive installation to shoot-from-the-hip computer graphics, thereby threatening to spread itself too thinly for an in-depth analysis of any individual subject. But it was able to highlight and articulate some important issues amongst the galaxy of different digital media, techniques, cultural and social concerns.

The first two days of the week-long conference eased one into the routine gently enough with a number of workshops based around the considerable electronic media facilities at Groningen Polytechnic and its

associated institutions the Academie Minerva art school and SCAN, the National Institute for Computer Animation. The main event, however, was the symposium held at the Groningen Cultural Centre De Oosterpoort which featured a vast number of speakers, from crusty old pioneers in computer animation like John Whitney Snr. and Edward Zajac to complete unknowns on the international stage.

Over seventy people gave talks, usually three simultaneously, and it was often a case of taking potluck to decide which session to attend. Fortunately this year the accent was on a discussion in artistic and cultural terms rather than the overemphasis on descriptions of technological tools which dragged down the last symposium. Titles of talks now ranged from 'Searching Pictorial Databases by Means of Depiction' to the more catchy 'The Intelligent Machine as Antichrist'. The usual wildly optimistic statements on the possibilities of telecommunications art, interactivity and virtual reality were counterbalanced by more critical contributions by younger speakers, particularly from members of the very active Australian contingent including Simon Penny and Sally Pryor, perhaps chastened by their proximity to the Japanese love affair with media technology.

SISEA also included a tangible contribution to electronic culture in the form of performances, a film and video show and an exhibition. The film show suffered from a ridiculously eclectic selection which included advertisements, show reels and research work as well as artists' tapes, all in rapid succession.

The evening of performances included various 'hyper-instrument' computer music concerts, now quite commonplace at electronic arts festivals, where one musician shows how an innocuous looking box can be prodded and poked into generating sounds ranging from the quirky to the not-so-quirky. More to the point seemed to be David Rokeby's *Very Nervous System,* an interactive installation in the main conference exhibition space. A video camera observed and recorded the body movements and girations of visitors so that they could be reinterpreted and used to generate musical sounds. The subtlety of Rokeby's system lay in the fact that it was not based simply on analysing signals and actions and ascribing musical notes to them but on a reading of context-dependent motions and gestures too complex to be consciously disentangled into signs.

Coming from a very different direction, Stelarc's eagerly awaited performance *Event for Amplified Body, Automatic Arm and Third Hand* demonstrated the latest stage in his quest to reinvent or transcend the functions of the human body by turning his person into a junction point for various technological extensions, including a prosthetic limb and cybernetic control systems. The result was a cacophony of searing lights and jarring sounds as Stelarc's body twitched and jerked under the stimulus of muscular electric shocks, which were then fed back into the light and sound system by means of respiratory, cardiac and muscular sensors attached to his skin. Just as in the late '70's when Stelarc's body was literally shackled to its surroundings by being suspended from metal hooks inserted directly into his flesh, the artist continues his physicalist exploration of the roles that the body can play as meat or machine. The contrast between Stelarc's and Rokeby's proposals for a new technological space for the human form provides an interesting basis for exploring ways in which the human species can evolve and confront its new environment in the information age.

And what of TISEA, The Third International Symposium on Electronic Art? That's scheduled for 1992 in Australia, with tentative plans for the fourth to be held in Milan, so it looks like ISEA will now form a regular if mobile addition to the already tough Autumn festival trail. See you down under.

LOS ANGELES

Black Men in America: Changing Reality?

L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions

Reviewed by Susan Wiggins

A compilation of videos by artists recently presented at LACE seeks to address the current American racial climate, particularly as it affects the most threatened and feared member of American society - the black male. The series of eight diverse works challenge media-induced stereotypes and expose black frustration.

Divided into two programs, the first selection of shorts included remarkable work by three artists, Gary Glassman, Marlon Riggs and Carole Walker. Gary Glassman's *Big I, Little You* (1988), completed after working with Californian prison inmates, presents two brothers, one jailed and the other free. Portrayed by one actor, the characters' monologue/dialogue is composed of self-pitying statements by the convict, followed by the banal retorts of his patronizing sibling. The viewer gradually comes to realize how difficult it is to determine who is the real loser.

Affirmations (1990) by Marlon Riggs presents, in a clean, documentary style, a young man's often amusing account of his passage into homosexuality. He describes an unexpected initiation and his awe of those experiences where fear, trust, pain and pleasure are powerfully intermingled. Upon telling a close girl friend in church the following day, he is faced with her horror and dismay. First he is ostracized by the white community for being black, then by the black community for being gay. The piece's final message however is positive, showing footage of a 'Liberation Day' parade in New York, with a group of gay, black men defiantly calling for an end to fear and silence.

Carole Walker's *A Crime Quiz* (1991) takes a closer look into the ironies behind Lee Atwater's successful management of George Bush's 1988 presidential campaign. Walker combines segments from D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and shots of Atwater playing blues guitar with B.B. King and, believe it or not, Bush himself. This piece shows Atwater as a man to whom the blues are a passion, a glorious obsession, but who cannot find the humanity in those who created the artform.

The finest piece in this presentation was *Fade to Black* (1990) by Tony Cokes and Donald Trammel. This is an encyclopaedic montage of film clips, rap music, scripted voice-overs and speeches by Malcolm X. It is an attack on Hollywood's manipulation of false images, and it is also a challenge to artists who erase the reality which surrounds them whilst supposedly attempting to portray it.

Throughout the film Cokes and Trammel employ evocative images with voice-overs of men discussing the ridiculous but hurtful banalities of racism: the fearful glances of solitary women in elevators and their rushed clutching of their handbags; or the sound of automatic car-door locks in action. Film clips, including a surprising musical number by the young Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland tap dancing, strumming and singing in black-face, also shock us. On the right of the screen arises a list of Hollywood films, with titles such as *Coon Town Suffragettes* and *Ten Pickaninnies*, beginning in 1903 and thirty-five minutes later only reaching 1935. Here is an example of agit-prop of tremendous precision, where the anger is tightly wound and never wasted.

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1991		
June	*12-17 Jun*	**Basle Art Fair** Basle, Switzerland tel (41) 61-686 2020
	21-23 Jun	**The Last Weekend** Alston, England tel c/o Edge 091-232 0862
July	*1-21 Jul*	**London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT)** London, England tel 071-836 7433
	13-28 Jul	**Cambridge Festival** Cambridge, England tel 0223-463363
	18 Jul-20 Aug	**Salzburg Festival** Salzburg, Austria tel (43) 662-842623
August	*9-13 Aug*	**Edinburgh Festival** Edinburgh, Scotland tel 031-226 5992
September	*4-8 Sep*	**European Media Art Festival** Osnabrück, Germany tel (49) 541-21658
	10-13 Sep	**Ars Electronica** Linz, Austria tel (43) 732-275225
	12-28 Sep	**Melbourne International Festival of Arts** Melbourne, Australia tel (61) 3-614 4484 or c/o Victoria Ho 071-836 2656
		Blue Skies: Artists and Technology Newcastle upon Tyne, England tel c/o Edge 232 0862
		Sao Paulo Bienal Sao Paulo, Brazil tel c/o British Council 071-389 3031

October	*4-13 Oct*	**Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain (FIAC)** Paris, France tel (33) 1-4562 8458
	6-16 Nov	**Dance Umbrella** Newcastle upon Tyne, England tel 081-741 4040
	19 Oct-15 Feb	**Carnegie International** Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. tel (1) 412-622 1975
November	*12-16 Nov*	**Contemporary Archives** Nottingham, England tel 0602-483504
	14-20 Nov	**Cologne Art Fair** Cologne, Germany tel (49) 221-237295
	16-23 Nov	**Internationaal Audio Visueel Experimenteel (AVE)** Arnhem, Netherlands tel (31) 85-420571
	20-24 Nov	**Art LA '91** Los Angeles, U.S.A. tel (1) 213-938 2400
1992		
April	*7-14 Apr*	**World Wide Video Festival 1992** The Hague, Netherlands tel (31) 70-364 4805
May	*18 May-14 Jun*	**Edge '92** London, England tel 091-232 0862
		Arco '92 Madrid, Spain tel(34) 1-470 1014

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16+ Andre Stitt / Video Libraries / Circus Lumiere / Forkbeard Fantasy

17+ Geraldine Pilgrim / Hesitate & Demonstrate / Irish Performance / Women & Jazz

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