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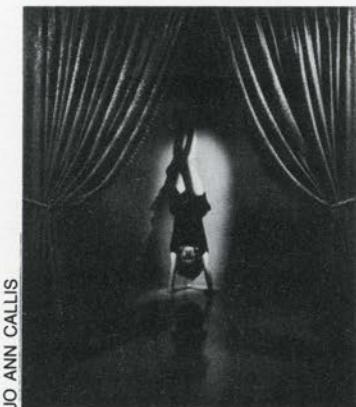
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A SHORT HISTORY OF PERFORMANCE

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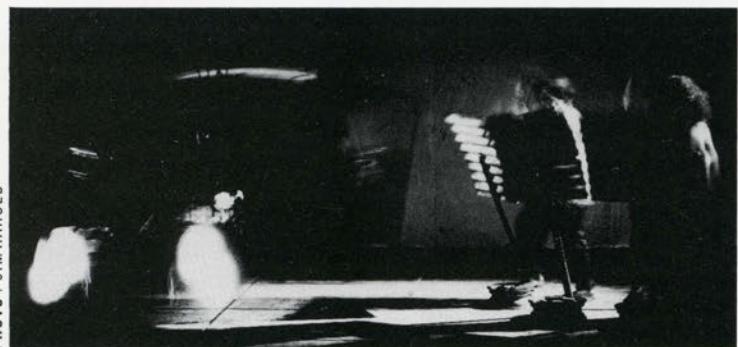
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RENAULT 4 in full flight over the
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Cover photo of Rose Finn-Kelcey by Richard Waite

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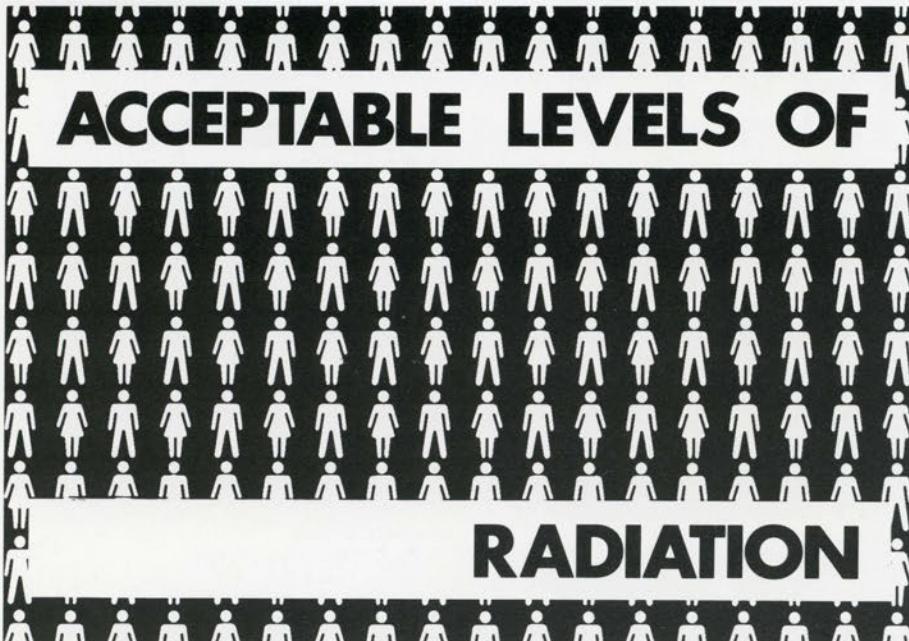
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PERF

PREVIEW



+ THE UNACCEPTABLE FACE OF ART As we go to press, a mystery outbreak of posters similar to the one pictured left is spreading across Greater Manchester, causing considerable public outrage, with their enigmatic but provocative messages, 'Acceptable Levels of Education, Starvation etc.' It is the result of a public art project commissioned by the Manchester Festival from the shadowy Artangel trust, who have brought the even more shadowy Contracts International, who describe themselves as a 'concept manipulation agency' into action to provide these 'versatile decorative designs' now appearing in the city. Attempts to trace the mystery organisation have proved fruitless, but we have been given a telephone number 061 236 0362 which delivers a recorded message inviting the caller to attend a public meeting at the conference room, Manchester Town Hall, September 20 at 2pm, entitled 'The Unacceptable Face of Art', and to be addressed by 'a spokesperson' for Contracts International. ●

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+ NOTTINGHAM'S NATIONAL REVIEW OF LIVE ART: A few months ago, at a well-attended press reception at the Arts Council HQ in London, the new Deputy Secretary General, Anthony Everitt, launched the National Review of Live Art with some carefully coded but enthusiastic words of encouragement for those behind the current 'revival' of performance art in this country. Indeed largely as the result of lobbying both within and outside the funding bodies, a large number of new venues across the country are bringing live art to places it would not have been dreamt of before. Performance festivals seem to be springing up in the most unlikely places these days, so it is an unfortunate irony that the organisation that has ploughed on continuously since the beginning of the decade, when performance was deeply unfashionable, the Midland Group-organisers of the National Review-is under attack from its own region for its far-reaching policies, (an independent inquiry commissioned by East Midland Arts is about to report, possibly critically, on the Group's performance policy within the context of its local requirements).

For those concerned with seeing the latest young artists entering the field, the Platform section provides an essential yearly fixture, while the ever increasing large scale commissions by experienced groups and artists add to the events importance as a national event and bring a unique form of spectacle to the citizenry of Nottingham as well as the many visitors from around the country. It seems unthinkable that the continuity of the festival, vital to the growing credibility of the work should be so threatened.

This year (October 8-12) looks equally as strong. Commissioned work from: **AKADEMIA RUCHU** from Poland, **CHARLIE HOOKER**, **THEATRE BABEL** and **PETER BAREN** from Holland, appearances by other artists include: **MARTY ST JAMES & ANNE WILSON**, **BOW GAMELAN ENSEMBLE**, **CALL OF THE WILD** and **PETER MCRAE**; Platform performances by: **STEVE PURCELL AND CO.** (*Preparatory Aeronauts*), **JOHN BYRNE** (*Friends*), **DAVID COXON** (*Taking the Veil*), **PHILIP HUGHES** (*The Human Blender*), **SARAH BENNET** (*Sinking Hearts*), **RALF RALF** (*The Hour*), **FOURTH WALL** (*Crush*), **PATRICK DINNEN** (*The Art of Self Defence*), **ANNIE GRIFFIN** (*Blackbeard the Pirate . . .*), See you there. ●

ROB LA FRENNAIS

*Annie Griffin in
Blackbeard the
Pirate: A
melodrama in
several parts*





Still from Glory

CLOSE TO THE HORNS

The artist Rose Finn-Kelcey has produced over a decade of highly perfected, carefully researched, performance pieces. Her most recent work concerns the aesthetics, ambiguities and traditions of the bullfight. Not a subject to be approached lightly, JENI WALWIN examines and places this controversial activity in the context of her recent work:

'Clearly the bullfight is an anachronism, which in an age adrift, like our own, between extremes of sophisticated squeamishness and subtle savagery, must spell anathema'.¹

Since she was a young girl Rose Finn-Kelcey has identified with the image of the gipsy. When she was only five years old she dressed up as a gipsy and produced many drawings of the travelling people. Since then gipsies have come to represent for her an image of freedom — but a particular sort of freedom which is accompanied by self-imposed restrictions. Flamenco dancing, and its associations with gipsies, operates for Rose in a similar way — it matches a rigorous discipline with the opportunity of free expression.

Not only do the images of flamenco in her current work arise naturally out of Rose's interest in gipsies but the specific requirements of the dance itself offer an opportunity for her to develop physically in a way that had not been possible before. In earlier performances physicality was in some cases reduced to a vignette within the piece. As for example, the image of the running track in *Mind the Gap*, 1981 where she was wanting to incorporate a physical aspect into the performance but chose to do so in symbolic form. On other occasions the physicality of the piece was essentially emotional, as for example in the performance presented at the Welsh Eisteddfod in 1977 when she lay on the ground and used her vocal chords to their absolute limit.

Now, for the first time, physical skills are perfected according to standards set outside the performance. This new focus on physical skills reflects trends in performance more generally. In the 1970's much

performance rejected notions of physicality as they related to recognised skills, and Rose's work at the time absorbed that thinking. In the 1980's, having made its reputation as an art form that is not based on traditional forms of entertainment, much performance work is now able to reintroduce an element of skill and a notion of doing things physically without being bound by the traditional expectation of such work.

For Rose, the physical aspect of the piece is now the starting point for the work. She acknowledges that the physical can now represent as valid an inspiration as the intellectual, the emotional, or the theoretical. Flamenco has opened many doors. Through her involvement with the dance she has become interested in its place in other cultures. She has subsequently undertaken much research, read many books, travelled to Seville, and collected a number of traditional clothes and photographs. By this route she has arrived finally at bullfighting.

Rose's identification with the bullfighter echoes her earlier ambivalent attitude to the character of the croupier who first appeared in *Glory*, 1984. During her current performances the croupier and bullfighter are interchangeable characters. They both control action which is played out as part of known ritual. The croupier is cool and detached, symbolised by metallic objects (a bowl, a shovel, and masses of money) whereas the matador is impassioned and finery, represented by a cape lined with bright orange.

There are cross-references between these characters which enhance both the visual drama of the piece and

PHOTO / RICHARD WAITE



The gloved hand of the croupier in Glory (right)

PHOTO / H WALTON





PHOTO / ROBIN KLAESNIK

CLOSE TO THE HORNS



subvert the literal interpretation of it. For example, the large cut-out hands hold bank notes as if they were castanets. The matador's costume is decorated with a croupier's belt weighed down by dollar notes. At the beginning of the performance Rose holds glistening coins in her hands, again as if they were castanets, and dances on bundles of banknotes. Both croupiers and bullfighters have common characteristics which in turn reflect wider issues. For example, the one gambles with money whilst the other gambles with life. Rose's identification with each is never immediate, but always detached by means of irony and symbol. She is thus one step removed from the characters she portrays. She does not associate with them as types but uses the conventions and rituals of their respective professions to create a drama of her own.

Within each character there are further ambiguities. In wearing a ring through her nose, she identifies both with matador and bull, seeing herself as the attacker and the attacked. As she paces out the dance of the matador she raises her arms in the shape of horns and at once becomes man and animal. There is further ambiguity in the interplay between male and female images. The bullring itself (traditionally a male encampment) is created in the shape of a fan which makes reference to Spanish dances where only the women hold fans.

The fan-shaped bullring is not only a dramatic symbol for the *Bulls Eye* performances but also a formal device which both contains and exposes the work. Rose can position herself in the semi-circle of the fan and become central to the action in the ring, often controlling it with the help of a large croupier's stick; yet she remains detached from the action by being physically removed from it. The real physical space of the performance is undermined in the same way as the characters.

The act of making and shaping the objects and the environment is an important part of the preparation for the event. The physical control, which



the artist has achieved in the making, adds to the new physicality of the work — the cut-outs are potential sculptures in their own right, as well as symbolic props for the stage. It is significant that the props are either made as recognisable images (the cape and the flames) or are found objects used as literal trappings (the costume and the porcelain bulls). These objects, although loaded with references in their performance context, rarely refer to the abstract or the conceptual as they may have done in earlier works. The literal and the allegorical now play a central role in establishing humour and a sense of entertainment that has not been sought before. Humour emerges when the literal meets the allegorical, as when the cape is thrown in a grand gesture across the bullring and as it is pulled away the bull's horns (real ones) pierce the floor of the bullring and appear to grow upwards.

Although humour is evident there is a typically serious side to this work and one in which known skills are important because they create the tension between the real and represented. The adaptation of these skills — the flamenco dancing and the matador's cape passes — executed proficiently and therefore taken seriously, are presented with Rose's usual overlay of irony so that they contribute to the humour of the work. By introducing a humorous element into the work the artist is commenting on the absurdity of the rituals she is portraying.

A new sense of theatre has emerged in Rose Finn-Kelcey's current work without reliance on script or written text. Sound has always been more important than words in her performances. At times when a spoken text was used, as in *The Boilermaker's*



Black and Blue
(above centre)

The grand gesture
(right)

ROSE FINN-KELCEY

PHOTO / RICHARD WAITE

Assistant, 1978, it became an aural backdrop to the visual action. An impossibly technical manual formed the basis of a text which was deposited around the room from four loudspeakers creating a sound tableau which evoked visual counterparts without reference to its content. Both *Glory* and *Bulls Eye* are wordless pieces, and in the current work the visual and tactile impact of the piece is overriding. The sound tape reflects the atmosphere of the work and the impact of specific actions — bulls charging, flamenco guitar, flamenco clapping and bulls bellowing.

Her approach to the use of sound is also reflected in her use of symbols, many of which are recurrent and refer to the work in which they first appeared, giving a sense of natural evolution to her working process. Although Rose never repeats a performance nor returns to an earlier project there is nevertheless a continuity of language, and a development of signs and symbols which are peculiarly hers.

Sometimes the connections make great leaps in time.

The gipsy image refers to her childhood obsessions and the cape-making relates to the flag works which she sited in this country and, most notably, in Switzerland, during the 1960's. The cape gave her a chance to combine her practical skills acquired in making large scale flags (the last piece was 40 feet in size) with something that is related to her body and which therefore enhances the new physicality in her work.

Likewise, colour as a symbol has developed from, and relates closely to, much earlier work. Silver was for many years Rose's favourite colour — its harsh metallic quality emphasizes the cut and thrust of the croupier's role. Silver is however, gradually engulfed by red during the course of the *Bulls Eye* performance. Red echoes the red gloved controller in *Glory*, where the colour indicated dirty work. Now the red cape is thrown over the bull's neck to symbolize its bleeding to death.

Just as the colours red, black, and silver develop from *Glory*, so do some of the images. The arrows in *Glory* become darts in *Bulls Eye*, representing the banderillas which pierce the bull's neck.

In every performance Rose creates a particular context for the audience. *Bulls Eye* is no exception. The





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CLOSE TO THE HORNS



PHOTO / H WALTON

spectators are drawn into the action firstly by the physical proximity of their seats to the ring and secondly by the throwing of notes and placing of flames immediately in front of individuals. These deliberate acts of involvement create an ambiguous response. Are the spectators persuaded to laugh at the drama of throwing money around (because for this she uses real notes) or do they worry about its real value and therefore attempt to grab some for themselves?

Clapping from the sound tape also interferes with the audience's assumed response. It is both an integral part of the sound effects, following the flamenco theme, as well as an implied contribution from the audience, marking each section of the performance.

It is the ambiguities in her relationship with the audience which give Rose's work a special poignancy. Having questioned her role as a live performer in previous works, she now accepts that it is essential to experience feedback, to 'pit myself against my own fear of performing' and 'to experience power... a power which is not experienced in day to day life because in performances I have the ability to control and shape what is around me'.²

Flamenco dancing has given Rose the opportunity to explore something within her which is based on physical control and which gives the opportunity for emotive expression. She can, through the reputation of the dance, provoke the audience, become daring and deliberately confrontational in a way that was only previously possible in an indirect and more discreetly suggestive manner.

Her work has often exposed conflict and, whilst this is again evident in *Bulls Eye*, the conflicts explored between man and animal, between artist and audience, between life and death are now viewed from a distance. The spectator's detachment from the conflict is made possible by placing the subject in a new context, using recognized skills with wit and humour, creating a sense of entertainment which softens the edge of the conflict, matching fear with visual strength. In

Glory — use of large cut-outs



these performances Rose is trying to achieve something close to the bullfight itself.

'Anyone who does not fear the bull is a lying fool. Without fear there can be no emotion. What is it that the crowd senses? It is the matador's fear and the ability to put that fear to good use through technique. The magnificence of the art lies in the fact that the matador makes the unnatural look natural; and by dominating instinctive fear forces the bull to change its instincts to the point where the two together, matador and bull, create in their confrontations certain moments of beauty that are as memorable as they are brief'.³

The work may be more theatrical, but it is in the end no closer to traditional theatre than it ever was. The dialogue between the physical and intellectual elements has been extended to a point where the presentation of physical skill becomes the intellectual starting point. The moment at which the literal meets the allegorical a tension is created. The references and images are often real and recognisable but they are continually re-ordered to provoke a critical and questioning response. The visual and tactile

qualities of the performance still outweigh the verbal and with no text, or even a hint that it should return, the sense of theatre is clearly achieved. In these respects Rose's work can be seen to reflect concerns in other current performance work, where a return to entertainment is not accompanied by recourse to traditional execution.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this new work, however, is that through an initially practical desire to learn a physical skill the research and development that followed has unwittingly exposed other levels in the performance. It questions both boldly and humorously that which other cultures may take for granted. By embracing ritual and tradition and offering a new context for their consideration, the audience can reflect upon much of the spectacle which is unquestioningly accepted when presented in other circumstances.●

1. From 'To the Bullfight' by John Marks
2. From a conversation with the artist, June 1986
3. From 'The Complete Aficionado', 1967 by John McCormick and Mario Sevilla Mascarenas.

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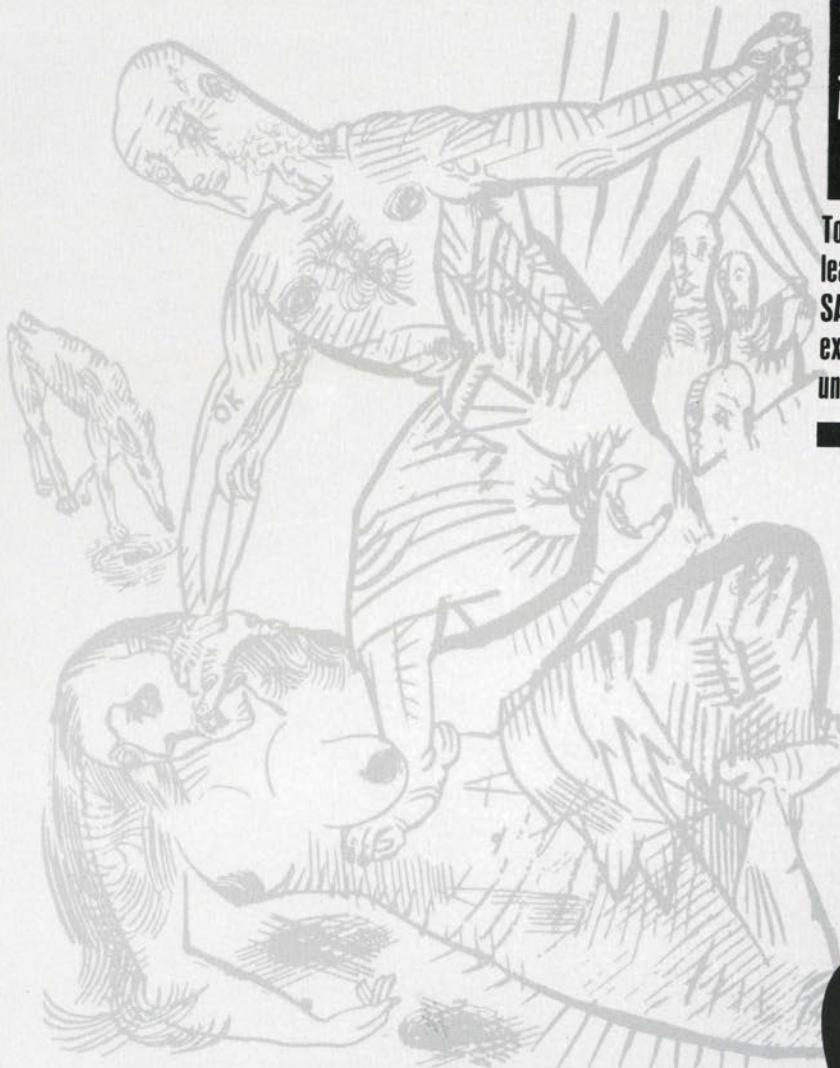
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NUMMER 20



Zeichnung von Oskar Kokoschka zu dem Drama
Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen

ARTISTS IN THE THEATRE

To what extent did artists work for the theatre lead up to the development of performance art? SARA SELWOOD describes a recent touring exhibition, *Artists in the Theatre*, and outlines a unique educational spin-off:

Histories of art revere Kandinsky as one of the heroes of Modernism — ‘the first abstract painter’. He was also one of the first visual artists to work in performance. Between 1908 and 1928 Kandinsky worked on no less than six ‘stage-plays’ the best known of which is *Yellow Sound*, written between 1909 and 1912.

Like many of his contemporaries Kandinsky encountered considerable problems in getting his stage-plays performed: three performances of *Yellow Sound* were scheduled during the artist’s lifetime but none actually took place. This was clearly not through lack of funding. Kandinsky was very wealthy in his own right and is known to have underwritten the cost of various organisations with which he was involved. Nor was it due to the technical demands of his highly sophisticated special effects. The Artists’ Theatre in Munich, where Kandinsky lived up until 1916, was one of the most technically advanced in Germany at the time and is believed to have had precisely the right kinds of equipment. His main difficulty then may well have been finding a sufficiently sympathetic or generous 



ARTISTS IN THE THEATRE



promotor. Artists with more modest requirements clearly encountered less problems in getting their work performed. They often promoted it themselves: Kokoschka, for example, got permission to stage *Murderer, Hope of Woman* in the garden theatre of the Vienna Kunstshau in 1909 having promised the relevant authorities it would not involve them in any costs. He presumably came to the same sort of arrangement with the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts where he had performed an earlier work, *Sphinx and Strawman*. Some of the most 'successful' performances were the cabarets organised by artists allied to Futurism and Dada. Those artists and performers appeared before relatively small audiences and prided themselves on their ability to generate particular responses, most notably — or so they claimed — 'violence and drunkenness'. The ultra conservative city of Zurich

where Dada flourished during the First World War, 'full of fat and uncomprehending Zurich philistines', provided the ideal context for this kind of performance.

However, some promoters did take up the cause of performances conceived on a grander scale. In the early 1920s Rolf de Maré commissioned artists including Léger, Cocteau and Picabia to conceive and produce stage works for his company, Ballets Suédois. Once such performances were arranged there seems to have been no difficulty in attracting audiences — at least not to start with. The performances of Ballets Suédois at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Paris were apparently well attended by both public and critics. Even the early performances of live 'colour music' attracted large crowds. When the painter, Wallace Rimington gave his first performances in London in 1895, his audience was well in excess

of 1,000. This figure so delighted his promoters that more performances were organised and colour music was hailed as the 'new art of the future'.

Something that many potential promoters may have been astute enough to realise was that artists' performances often offered little in the way of visual or dramatic excitement. *Yellow Sound*, for example, lacks a conventional narrative and very little actually happens throughout the duration of the piece. Its dramatic highlight comprises one yellow giant assuming the form of a crucifix. Other artists quite consciously sought to limit the range of action possible in performances. Some restricted the movements of their performers by dressing them in body-masks; others abandoned the element of live action, replacing human performers with puppets or inanimate architectural forms. By the mid-1920s when the novelty of such performances — of colour music in particular — had worn off, critical responses became notably less enthusiastic. The experience of continually 'monotonous' live art seemed to one critic at least to confirm his suspicion that 'all the art languages are fraught with infinite possibilities of boredom'. Lack of box-office may have contributed to the folding of Ballets Suédois.

Interestingly, at one point it seemed as though films made by artists might be more likely to capture the imagination of both public and critics. In some ways this was surprising. From the late 1890s film had been regarded as a lowly form of popular entertainment but in the 1910s the advent of longer, sometimes serialised, dramas and the introduction of up-market, specifically designed film-palaces changed all that. Intellectuals began to recognise the potential of film as an art medium — another 'art of the future'.

Although artists who turned to film were inevitably beset with difficulties, some were assisted by film companies who enabled them to contemplate and even complete projects which would otherwise have proved impossible. Possibly because of the enormous popular appeal of film, critics tended to be sympathetic towards artists' experimental work in that medium. Occasionally they even went to the trouble of giving their readers, who would have no chance of seeing the work themselves, a clear idea of these film-makers' intentions. Reading between the lines of their descriptions,

Kokoschka —
*Murderer, Hope
of Women*

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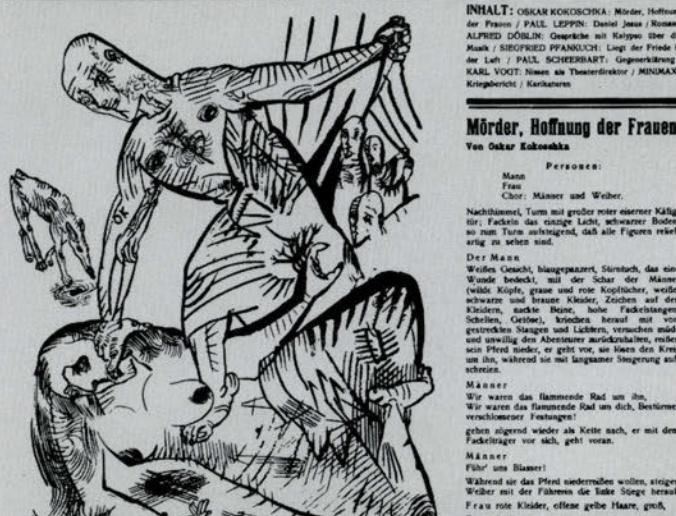
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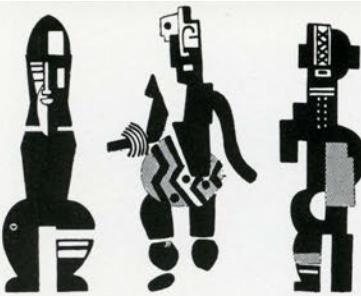
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one is lead to suspect that audiences might well have encountered some difficulties in comprehending these films and that had the films become more accessible, they might have received the same kind of reception as other time-based work of the period. If contemporary audiences found live performances boring, they also found them fairly incomprehensible. By the 1920s some critics claimed to find little or no 'significance' in live art; one writer described artists' justifications for their work as 'libellous'; another reported that 'to the first bewildered beneficiaries of the new art, it seemed still like a closed book'.

Perhaps it was to be expected. Nearly all the artists working, or at least proposing to work, in time-based media during the first quarter of the century had come to it through painting. Moreover, they had done so with the specific intention of hoping to realise ambitions unobtainable in their static work. As one film-maker put it 'I will animate my painting, I will give it movement . . .'. Artists turned to film and performance for the same reasons. In fact, several worked across both areas. Significantly, similar types of subject-matter were used in all the time-based work produced during this period. The kinds of images which predominated included those intended to depict no less than the creation of the world itself; the struggle between conflicting forces — male/female, material/spiritual and so on. Not only did the artists employ similar iconography. Their ultimate objectives were much the same. The majority were motivated by the same messianic zeal which had prompted Kandinsky to paint his pictures and write his theoretical tracts. Their intention, according to one of them, was 'to return art to its social function' by expressing what was referred to as 'the spiritual'. 'Everybody is concerned with the goal of making something heavenly on earth so that their earthly performance also has a spiritual meaning'. These very ambitions had inspired a type of painting which audiences found hard enough to comprehend. Presumably the combination of obtuse visual imagery and unfamiliar performing conventions confused them even more.

The recent exhibition, *Artists In The Theatre*, initiated by the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, included reconstructions of five stage-plays conceived and designed by early

twentieth-century artists. Two performances were also reconstructed: Léger's *Creation of the World* 1923 and Kandinsky's *Yellow Sound*. On the basis of several visits to the exhibition, three local schools (two middle schools and one comprehensive school) set to work on an extended project which, it was hoped, would stimulate the children to develop and produce their own performances.

They started work by drawing the reconstructions they saw in the gallery. They were taught virtually nothing about the history of performance or visual artists' involvement in it. The children were sufficiently astute to realise — perhaps because performances had been presented to them in a historical or academic way — that these works in the exhibition had little direct relevance to them. When they set about planning their own performances they did so bearing in mind that what they did needed to be both lively enough to sustain their own interests and pertinent to their own experience.

The three schools all developed work which took them in very different directions. One school ultimately abandoned the idea of performance altogether and ended up constructing an environment. The other two persisted with performances which involved use of special lighting and music or sounds which the children thought of as indicative of the content of the performance. In one case the music was painstakingly timed and edited to fit the action. One work was primarily conceived as choreographed movement. The other was very literary. The children all wrote a scenario out of which a narrative was derived. This was read out during the performance to describe the action, functioning in much the same way as a Greek chorus. Both performances employed images concerned with machinery which gave rise to repetitive movements and robotic gestures. The children's ability to move in any other way was hampered to some extent by the masks and body masks which they had constructed.

Their work might be said to be derivative of what they had seen in the exhibition but in many respects the children forced a relationship between those academic aspects of their work and their own experiences. For example, it was obvious that the dance movements of one performance derived not only from the types of

*Personages —
Léger designs for
idol and witch*

BALLET SUÉDOIS DE ROLF DE MARÉ
**LA CRÉATION
du monde**

BALLET DE MM.
BORLIX, CENDRARS, LÉGER, MILHAUD

LE SCÉNARIO

1. — Lever du rideau très lent sur la scène noire. On aperçoit au milieu de la scène un tas confus de corps entremêlés ; tohu-bohu avant la création. Trois déités géantes évoluent hâtivement. Ces déités sont MEDERE et N'KVA, les maîtres de la création. Ils tiennent conseil, tourment autour de la masse informe, font des incantations magiques.

2. — La masse centrale s'agit, a des soubresauts. Un arbre pousse petit à petit, grandit, grandit encore, se dresse, et quand une de ses graines tombe à terre, un nouveau arbre surgit. Quand une des feuilles de l'arbre tombe, le sol se dégrade, se gonfle, se gonfle, oscille, se mouve, et c'est un animal. Un éléphant qui reste suspendu en l'air, une tortue lente, un crabe malhabile, des singes qui glissent du plafond. La scène s'est éclairée petit à petit pendant la création et à chaque animal nouveau elle s'illumine violenement.

3. — Chaque créature est un danseur ou une danseuse jaillissant du centre, évolue individuellement, fait quelques pas, puis entre doucement dans la masse qui peu à peu se met en branle autour des trois déités du début. Lorsqu'il est temps, les trois déités font de nouvelles incantations et l'on voit la masse informe bouillonner. Tout s'agit, une jambe monstrueuse apparaît, des doigts tressaillent, une tête hirsute se montre, des bras se tendent. Deux bustes se dressent tout à coup, se collent : c'est l'homme, c'est la femme, ils se regardent debout. Ils se reconnaissent ; ils se dressent l'un en face de l'autre.

4. — Et pendant que le couple exécute la danse du désir, puis de l'acouplement, ce qui restait par terre d'êtres informes apparaît sournoisement et se mêle à la ronde et l'entraîne brénétiquement, jusqu'au vertige. Ce sont les N'GUILS, les imprécateurs males et femelles, les sorciers, les féticheurs.

5. — La ronde se calme, freine et ralentit et vient mourir très calme et paisible. La ronde se disperse par petits groupes. Le couple s'isole dans un baiser qui le porte comme une onde. C'est le printemps.



Design by LÉGER

BLAISE CENDRARS.

movements imposed on the performers of *Creation of the World* by Léger's highly restrictive costume design but also from break-dancing. Similarly the imagery, although in many respects formally derivative of the reconstructions in the exhibition, took on different meanings within the context of the children's work and clearly came from their own experiences and culture. In one piece the mechanical imagery directly referred to factory work; in another it functioned to represent an ideological opposition to other participants in the same work represented by what the children referred to as 'the primitives'. The narrative and the construction in this later performance probably owed as much, if not more, to the forces of good and evil represented in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* or Ridley Scott's *Legend* as they did to Kandinsky's notion of the forces of the spiritual and material and consequently proved more meaningful to both children and adult audience.●
Artists in the Theatre will be touring nationally until mid-1987.

ENTRANCED BY BUTTERFLIES

Lumiere and Son are now the longest lasting and most prolific visual theatre company in this country. They recently completed a massive spectacular, *Deadwood*, in Kew Gardens which attracted audiences of thousands. STEVE ROGERS examines the phenomenon and asks some hard questions:



Vulture Culture:
obsession with the
individual in a mass
society

IN CONTRAST TO the usual tradition of outdoor spectacles *Deadwood*, the most recent project of Lumiere & Son, was a triumph of technical and production brilliance. This was a massive operation involving more than 100 performers, a music group and choir, special effects, amplified sound, several beautifully-lit individual scene locations, and the management of an audience of well over 1000 people each night. As well as this technical mastery the show itself had some sublime moments and held the large audience enraptured for its duration. It was beautiful to look at, the music was stunning and it was as provocative as anything on this sort of scale could be without resorting to cliché or banality. But for all this, and I will acknowledge now that I felt very isolated in feeling this, the show had a major problem. It was a lie.

Deadwood was commissioned by Watermans Arts Centre. It took place in Kew Gardens and was supported and partially inspired by the environmental group 'Earthlife'. *Deadwood* presented us with the spectacle of the tropical rainforests of South America and the tragedy of their destruction through pollution and greed. A group of tropical-kitted guides led the audience on a trail of discovery through an exotic and densely planted corner of Kew which forms the natural habitat of a range of bizarre, beautiful and spectacular animal and insect life. We are allowed to wander and uncover for ourselves these extraordinary manifestations. Lions sleeping in a tree, a troop of insects perform some unfathomable militaristic ritual, brilliantly plumed birds squawk, monkeys play together, and many others. The costumes and lighting in each were ingenious, well observed and delightful. This extraordinary

environment is given an edge of threat by a repeated sound tape which juxtaposes jungle noises with human voices which don't seem to make any sense except that they sound hard and cynical. We are then led to a clearing where stands a house of glass — the temperate house, its colonial inhabitants are taking afternoon tea on the terrace.

Beautiful dancing butterflies entrance this languorous group and are lured away forever into the glass house. The music by Jeremy Peyton Jones, played against this exotic scene and the stunningly-lit temperate house, provided the real highlight of the whole evening. After which we are taken to another clearing where we witness the final death of the creatures we have admired earlier in the gardens. That is the scenario. A simple one made doubly effective by the quality of its presentation.

Why is this a lie? Because what *Deadwood* argues is that if the rainforests are consumed as raw materials they will no longer be available to be consumed as experience. As we were being guided around the gardens I was not made to feel that I might be in a rainforest but rather that I was in a zoo. A Victorian collection and classification of animal species for the education of the general visitor. A form of spectacle which firmly reinforces the spectator as the passive consumer of a spectacle over which we have no control. This is the very basis of capitalism and the end result is alienation. Maybe the end, the preservation of the rainforests, does justify the means, the utilisation of capitalist methods to attack capitalist methods, but it is a lie, a deception and it raises some very serious questions about the role of what we continue to label an 'experimental', even 'radical'

LUMIERE & SON

theatre group.

Lumiere & Son was founded by director Hilary Westlake and writer David Gale, who have in various combinations with composers, designers, performers and ace administrator, producer Adrian Evans, remained at the centre of the company. They started out by making short spectacular entertainments to be seen alongside rock bands. They needed and wanted to be both popular and original and so they turned to traditional forms of popular entertainment like pantomime, drag, standup comedy, magic and circus, and from that developed a highly distinctive visual and performance style combined with broadly 'left of centre' politics. They became one of the most technically accomplished, prolific and successful of the alternative companies, despite the general lack of support. They were also set apart from most other experimental companies in that they retained text as a vital and integral element of their work through a period when the text was the enemy of radical performance. This now leaves Lumiere in an isolated position, since they have not made any significant new development in their approach to performance, whilst their peers from their same background have moved on. Lumiere and Son now feel rather old fashioned and conservative but it is not simply because they retained a commitment to the text, they have consciously rejected the recent development of performance theatre towards a more pure, formal, abstract theatre. As recently as July 1985 David Gale wrote in an article called 'Against Slowness,' Performance 22, 'We (the theatrical avant garde) are enclaved, ghettoised, few are excited by us, few are assembling in the wings to follow us or supplant us.' All he sees is 'an evolutionary dead-end.' He wrote this at a time when Jan Fabre, Falso Movimento, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Pina Bausch and half a dozen lesser American artists were filling opera houses around the globe. Even Britain, in the form of Impact Theatre's *The Carrier Frequency*, had produced one major contribution to theatrical progress in the 1980s. Yet these are probably precisely the artists that David Gale so articulately and entertainingly lambasts, without naming them, in 'Against Slowness'. He refers to such authorities as Artaud and Freud to mount his attack on those exponents of slowness and repetition the practice of which he sees as the



Deadwood: a triumph of technical and production brilliance



PHOTOS / PAUL DERRICK

ENTRANCED BY BUTTERFLIES



death of experimental theatre. The theatre that David Gale espouses here and is given form, extremely articulate form at that, in the recent projects of Lumiere & Son is an anarchic and 'dangerous' theatre which deals with a central problem 'Our culture marginalises every single person in it — it is our responsibility to articulate our sense of loss, not succumb to it.' What we have here is, I believe, the basis of the Lumiere philosophy and their failure. *Senseless* was a parable of the individual forced into a private madness to escape the madness of the world, *Brightside* followed an artist as she fought against her betrayal by those around her, *Vulture Culture* was a spectacle of an alien being, an outsider, a misfit, trampled and bullied as it is caught between the warring groups in society, *Tip Top Collection* is a satirical look at the idea that in 'difference' and 'non-conformity' there is a threat to the majority, and most recently *Entertaining Strangers* was a black humoured attack on the notions of national and racial identity. What all these scenarios reveal is an obsession with the individual in a mass society. Lumiere want to restore the individual to a position at the centre of the revolving globe and not somewhere on the edge to be exploited in the never ending repetition of capitalist consumerism. This idea of the individual and especially the outsider,

the alien, the artist, is essentially a mythological hero that was central to the humanistic, libertarian ideal of the 60's and 70's, but which the 80's have shown to be non-existent and that humanism is dead. The myth of the hero is vital to free market capitalism. The individual who, despite all odds, can make it to the top is the hero of the American dream from the pioneering days of the wild west to the free market monetarism of Reagan and Thatcher.

It was always claimed that Nijinsky could actually pause at the apex of a jump and hover there before descending to the ground. This is the kind of daring and magic that Lumiere attempt. Edouard Locke, director of Canadian dance company La, La, La, has explained that what he is interested in is not the leap but the fall. You can leap all alone but to fall there must be someone there to catch you. This must be the greatest anathema to David Gale — the succumbing to the marginalisation of the individual. What this idea of the fall represents is an idea of co-operation, trust, interdependence within a group which is, simplistically, the basis of recent socialist politics. It is completely opposed to the old fashioned, romantic, heroic ideal of the individual and individual freedoms and it is against this which David Gale rails in '*Against Slowness*'.

The experimental theatre of the 1980s

is a theatre which recognises the end of humanism, the death of those old libertarian myths, and the impossibility of making, in a world of atom bombs, environmental holocausts and financial empires which can change the lives of whole nations at a time, a theatre of danger which doesn't simply reinforce our alienation from the events which govern our lives. The really original, powerful new theatre is non-spectacular, non-heroic, usually made by a non-hierarchical group or in a collaboration between artists and audience. At its best it becomes a 'totally' autobiographical performance in that what takes place on the stage is real, actual and true and is not a representation of something else. It is pure and often abstract and it takes place in real time and not theatre time. It is not so much a representation of some thing but rather it is something. Something which can be experienced directly and not through the alienating processes of representation, concealment and revelation, imitation, spectacle and metaphor, all the things beloved of Lumiere.

Lumiere, at their best, do achieve a sense of loss as David Gale describes it in '*Against Slowness*', but the real experiment in the theatre of the 80's is not one which makes a theatre which expresses loss at the passing of the heroic individual, who never actually existed, but which offers us an opportunity of a direct experience over the meaning of which we have control.

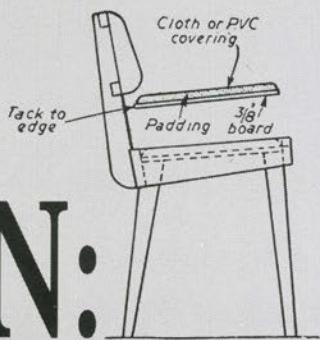
Lumiere are a group out of time and space. They are like middle-aged radicals who suddenly discover that the cause to which they have devoted their life's work is no longer important or relevant. They are lost in an alien world with an invaluable store of experience and skill which they can turn to the creation of more spectacles like *Deadwood* which are no more than bourgeois entertainments, they can turn to teaching; or they can face this crisis of ideology head-on and maybe they too can come up with a solution to the real challenge of the 1980s as brilliantly articulated by Claire MacDonald of Impact Theatre 'How do you have an art which is humane, which is rooted in social and political issues, but which is not about them. An art which is not "for" something but which "is" something?' How indeed.●

Senseless



PHOTO / PAUL DERRICK

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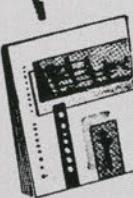


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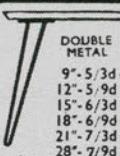
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How does furniture affect our performance in everyday life?
DAVID BRIERS strips back the veneer:

'Would you like to select an exhibition of new furniture?' the director of the arts centre asked me. 'Well', I hedged, reluctant to turn down any offer of employment. 'I'm not sure. I don't really know much about new furniture.' That didn't seem to put him off. 'In fact, when I think about it, I really hate most of the stuff that turns up in exhibitions of designer-craftsperson furniture'. That decided him. 'Go ahead and select an exhibition', he told me and disappeared (directors of arts centres are very busy).

Where do you start looking for new furniture, and how do you decide what you really feel about it? We grow up with three-piece suites and wardrobes and pianolas which (I almost said who) established their presence in our memories as vividly as do our mothers and fathers. When we leave home, we encounter the shock of suddenly having to live with someone else's furniture, and eventually gather around us what we try to convince ourselves is 'our' furniture. Whatever that may be, it will almost certainly be everything that the furniture you grew up with wasn't. However, nothing is more certain than that you will eventually be caught up and overtaken by the furniture you grew up with becoming fashionable again in certain quarters. In my case, that 50's lino, three times removed from School of Paris abstract painting, has, after several decades of disengagement and abandonment, made a comeback, and is probably even now being 'rescued' from suburban houses in the Midlands. But it has been freed from its original milieu, and no longer possesses, for its new appreciators, the ineradicable associations with homework and *The*

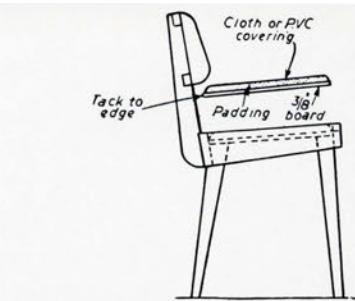




Grove Family that it possesses for me. But no amount of wallowing psychoanalytically in the nostalgia of furniture, or reading the chapter on 'Drawers, Chests and Wardrobes' in Gaston Bachelard's 'Poetics of Space' was going to help. 'Does there exist a single dreamer of words', said Bachelard, 'who does not respond to the word wardrobe?' Well I dare say, but this was not going to get an exhibition selected.

I decided to start serious research instead. I went to the Crafts Council to look in their slide index, and it was quite a shock. Instead of loosening my prejudices, it served only to reinforce them, for what I seem to have referred to in my notes made at the time as the school of 'queasy neo-rustic clubfooted monsters' here held sway: wooden furniture, crafted with immense skill, which most people seem to love and revere, but which uncover in me an almost violent antipathy. I can say this in *Performance* magazine, but I wouldn't say it in *Crafts* magazine — I'd just keep quiet about it. I searched my deepest responses for ages to try and find an epithet to encapsulate my antipathy to this sort of thing, but one never turned up — until Danny Lane summed it up for me. They are, he said, like 'contortionists without sex appeal'. He said it.

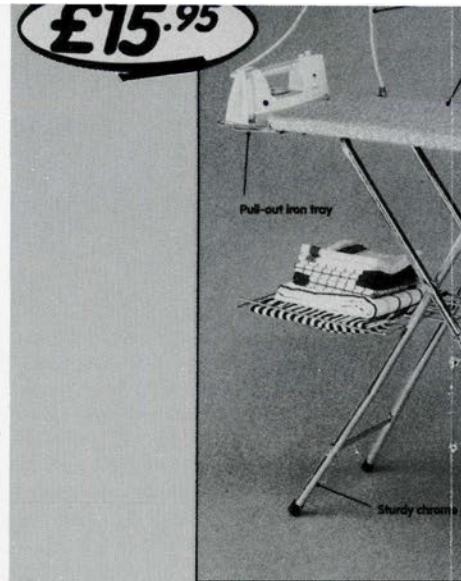
End of serious research. I decided to look in magazines instead. I don't know if Reyner Banham invented the word 'furniturisation', but whether he did or not I have been undergoing it recently. Reyner Banham coined this word in an article published in *New Society* in 1967, using it to describe how 'previously, unconscious and virtually invisible domestic items suddenly become great, monumental objects which demand attention, dusting and illustration in colour supplements.' If that was true in 1967, it is even more true twenty years on, when if you surround yourself on a Sunday morning after a trawl at the newsagents with the colour supplements, *House and Garden*, *Interiors*, *Country Homes, In Store*, *Harpers, Company, Crafts*, and (if you live near Covent Garden) *Maison Francaise*, then you have provided yourself with enough up-to-date source material to select an exhibition of new furniture. The glossies are full of it, and (unlike the Crafts Council's Index of Selected Makers) a trip to the newsagents soon reveals that there are as many different sorts of new



furniture as there are new painting and sculpture, and like painting and sculpture, just as responsive to the breezes of fashion. I began to come across things that I found genuinely exciting, but it was all rather confusing, like shopping for hi-fi. Perhaps I needed a solid historical base upon which to form a judgement.

So I sat down (!) and tried to think which pieces of furniture I'd take to a desert island. Well, a piece of Shaker furniture, no doubt about it. And something of the Cotswolds Arts and Crafts type, like the Barnsleys and Gilmsons at Cheltenham Art Gallery. And perhaps the minimal Japanese furnishings of the Edo period. And a 1923 Frank Lloyd Wright lamp standard — who could design anything better than that? But selecting an exhibition of new furniture in direct relation to the entire history of furniture is as silly as relating an exhibition of young British artists to the entire history of world art — it is not going to get you very far. On the one hand, contemplating a bright yellow couch with purple cushions by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, say, or the chairs of Marcel Breuer or Josef Hoffman (you can still buy them in facsimile editions) you may begin to wonder why anyone makes new 'new' furniture at all. Secondly, you may begin to wonder why certain artefacts are or aren't called *furniture* — what could ever be more sculptural than a bee-hive, and why is there now a significant market for ham racks and blacksmiths bellows to put in your living room, and why don't you ever see cassette racks and hi-fi enclosures in Crafts Council exhibitions of furniture?

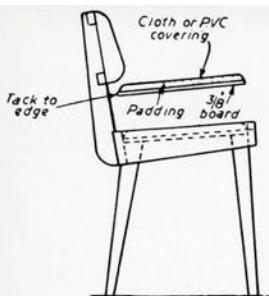
All of which leads back to the world in which most furniture lives, which is quite different to the one in which design magazines and slide indexes live. This is the world of traditional walnut veneer 'Electronic Data Support Furniture', of Limited Edition Domesday Chairs, and in which the concrete and wood seat at the bus-stop at the end of my road has been almost entirely dismantled by vandals and yet its remaining concrete side supports still read clearly as 'seat', even though you can't sit on it. An ironing board in a mail order catalogue can have all the elegance of a piece of sculpture, with that currently sought after fifties graphic design look — all thin rules and serifs, plus a touch of Rowland Emmett. In comparison, the barbecue with motorised spit advertised in the



TV Times is like a shiny 60s Philip King sculpture. On top of all this piles the Italian New Wave (if only Jacques Tati were still alive to remake 'Mon Oncle' in a house full of Memphis furniture), the sculptural furniture of David Nash and Madalena Jetelova, the much less evocative American phenomenon of 'artist-furniture' (whereby Don Judd paints one of his aluminium boxes red, takes one side off, and calls it *Armchair*), Robert Wilson's *Einstein's Chair*, Rose English's *Plato's Chair*, Patrick Lichfield photography in Alliberti's plastic garden furniture catalogue, and the pile of copies of 1950s *Practical Householder* I came across in a secondhand magazine shop, where Scandinavian interior meets Italian coffee bar in a blaze of Fablon, and the room-dividers look like UFOs — or like post-modern furniture thirty years on. 'Convert spare wood into elegant tables with these easy-to-fit legs.' Now is that from *Practical Householder*, 1957, or from *Do-it-Yourself Designer Furniture*, just published in 1986?

So in the end did I manage not to succumb to 'furniturisation' and still select an exhibition? Yes, just about. I just stopped worrying about it and chose the things I liked best for an exhibition, and whether or not I would let them into my own home and sit on them didn't seem to come into it. Meeting four or five of the people I selected had a particularly strong effect on me, quite apart from the exhibition. They have all been given the 'furniturisation' treatment in the glossies and colour supplements of late, and at least one of them was voted a member of the 'Class of 85' by *The Face*, but somehow manages to survive such treatment. That was Ron Arad, who runs the One Off shop/gallery in Neal Street.

For all I know, his shop may not be deeply fashionable any more, but I like Ron Arad's One Off because it reminds me of another quasi-gallery I used to haunt in Neal Street years ago, before



it became a sort of re-conditioning corridor for those entering or leaving Covent Garden. That was Sigi Krauss's gallery. Whatever happened to him? *Harpers* has called Ron Arad 'a purposeful and enigmatic man who creates an eclectic, almost hippy atmosphere around him'. You could have said the same about Sigi Krauss, and had he stayed on into the new age of Neal Street I could well imagine Sigi providing a showplace for Andre Dubreuil's chairs or Danny Lane's tables, without worrying about their currency in Cork Street or Bell Street terms. Many people don't reply to letters, but I don't think Ron Arad reads them either. He carries on designing as he talks to you, without looking at you. But he does talk to you, he's there, it's his place. When I was there he also had to talk to a man who wanted to write him up for a freebie magazine, and to two young men who rushed in, disparaged the shop for being so trendy, flung down four pounds each for copies of an extremely trendy new design magazine, and rushed off.

I love the sonic staircase to the basement of One Off. The fire officer recently ruled that it should have a bannister, so sculptor Jon Mills made a massive metal cornucopia which now curls up from the basement alongside the staircase, and amplifies the sounds you set off as you descend or ascend. I suppose it could just about be construed as a 'bannister', but in Ron's terms it's an 'architectural intervention'. 'Was it difficult to build?' asked the man from the freebie. 'I don't think in terms of difficult'. Ron's designs have been called 'post-holocaust', 'distressed chic', 'Arad Anarchy', and even 'the new rusticity'. If you felt so inclined, you could see in the artfully 'cracked' interior of his shop, with its lath-revealing half-rendering, the delayed impact of arte povera on interior design. But that would be wrong, for Ron's designs have as scant regard for recent art

history as they do for post-modern architectural propriety. I still think his hi-fi system is wonderful, embedded in slabs of rough concrete, like some proto-soundsystem discovered by Erich von Daniken in an obscure museum in Baghdad. But more recently Ron has been designing 'critical' bookshelves, which ought to be used by people like myself who accumulate too much printed matter. The ideal bookshelf, according to Ron, takes four books. Add a fifth, and it slides off into a shredding machine. He's really designed it, and it's in his shop.

You are likely to have seen Andre Dubreuil's sinuous steel-rod neoclassical furniture in any number of magazines. What the magazines don't tell you is that he welds them all in his first-floor flat near Ladbroke Grove, which can't endear him to the people underneath. Everything he makes — chandeliers, tables, screens — has to be able to leave through the door of his flat. He is a bird-like Frenchman — an intense and highly exotic sparrow — who has lived here since 1969, and used to deal in antiques and make *trompe l'oeil* paintings. Suddenly, it seems, he decided he could and would make his own particular sort of furniture, and so he did.

Danny Lane came to the UK from Baltimore ten years ago. His designs form the basic activity at Glassworks, an enterprise operating from an operating theatre in a disused hospital in Dalston, where huge sheets of glass are moved around on hospital trolleys. It's all there — design, making, several filing cabinets and a business manager — he feels, he says, as good as Henry Moore with his own foundry. He gets commissions — a bar for the Moscow club, for example — and he is an artist. The glossies love what he makes because it is dramatically photogenic, but its real presence is even stronger and more vital. He specialises in juxtaposing decoratively etched sheets of thick glass with apparently shattered edges, and twisted steel, and his enthusiasm is contagious and in spiriting and we really need it. He likes to quote one of his former mentors, the painter and mystic Cecil Collins: 'We are primitives of the new age.'

Thomas Eisl is a quiet Austrian cyclist who lives in Wandsworth. Lit by one bare lightbulb, his workshop is thickly populated on one side by useful looking tools, while over the other side stands a gaunt forest of lights, contemplating their makers. Most of

them are tall and spindly with interesting ends and fascinating details, down to the triangular floor-switches which he designed himself and which switch themselves off when you knock them over with your foot. Eisl despises DIY. Some time ago he broke the lid on his Woolworths teapot, and put a saucer on top instead while looking for a replacement lid. Eventually he made his own lid. With a workshop full of tools, why did it take him so long, he wondered. In his hallway, a little electric train with a light on it, mounted on the wall at eye-level, switches itself on as you pass, and accompanies you into the kitchen, lighting the way there and back. The worst thing you could do is compare what Thomas Eisl does with sculpture. He makes lights.

You can add another 'furniturist', the 'performance welder' and ex-bass guitarist of Funkapolitan, Tommy Dixon and Daniel Weil, who I haven't met, but who makes clocks out of 100 forks, 2 spoons, and a circuit board. And why not add the Bow Gamelan Ensemble while we are about it. These people may or may not be on the Crafts Council's Index of Selected Makers, but either way they don't worry about it. They do not exactly flaunt their c.v.'s at you, and in most cases they are very cagey about their provenance, having perhaps curtailed or misused their 'professional' education, if they had one at all. All of a sudden, c.v.'s seem less than unimportant. When was the last time you opened an art magazine or visited an artist's studio and got really excited? Were you excited by Scott Burton's basalt settees at the Tate gallery last year? Danny Lane's tables and screens are quite unlike Scott Burton's marginal art-historically related 'abstract chairs' — they are real tables and screens, and they are apparently dangerous and really exciting. I last used words like that when I reviewed Impact Theatre's *Carrier Frequency*. And you can add something the equivalently exciting potter and artist Sandy Brown said to me recently: 'The best work that is going on always seems to be that which makes you feel that what you are doing yourself has become inhibited.'

(*The exhibition New Furniture: High Tech, Low Tech, and No Tech, can be seen at Aberystwyth Arts Centre, 4 October-15 November.*)

CARNIVAL LOGIC

22 / PERFORMANCE

There is a difficult dialogue involved in carnival. Is it a true overturning of authority (as in playing 'Mas') is it mere bread and circuses, or is it, as Guyanan-born poet and novelist WILSON HARRIS asks, the releasing of a mystical 'absent body' with far-reaching cultural and political implications?

Carnival is often associated with a day or a night of jollification — indeed in some quarters it has been seen as an extension of the Roman injunction to make bread (or the lack of it) palatable to the creatures of the masquerade or the creatures of a political, social and economic circus.

This is a cynical view, needless to say, of the depth and the potential of carnival but even here, in such caricature and bleak jest, the linking of 'bread and circuses' sustains a stress upon necessities built into carnival and the lurking shadow of both ecstasy and insurrection that lies suppressed in the carnival theatre.

We cannot but be aware therefore — at many levels — of energies in carnival that may illuminate a counterpoint between the ruler and the ruled, the exploiter and the exploited, between order and abandonment, between overt mask and hidden motivation. Perhaps here — in the field of the overt performances and the hidden motivations of a civilisation — one may step back into some of the uncertainties that possess, I believe, a fruitful bearing on carnival.

I came to carnival as an imaginative strategy in fiction (a fiction that invokes mask, dance, birth, death, life, etc.) through a medium of uncertainty about the origins and the demise of cultures in the pre-Columbian and the post-Columbian Americas. We speak of the *West Indies* (a term that derives from a navigational error by Christopher Columbus) and in the same breath sometimes of the *Caribbean*. Who were the Caribs or 'cannibals' whose name we link with the great sea upon which Columbus sailed into a network of cultures of which he was totally ignorant?

The so-called cannibals or Caribs resisted the Spanish conquistadores — who came in the wake of Columbus — tooth and nail and as a consequence earned a bad name for themselves in the history books of Europe. In due course the tide of ignorance that disfigured their reputation and culture began to subside in favour of degrees of genuine scholarship. The change of mood or mind across generations affects Michael Swan in his 'The Marches Of El Dorado' (published by

Jonathan Cape 1958). He quotes a source that suggests the Caribs may have been expelled from Florida into the sea that now bears their name. He also directs our attention to an area of Carib myth that Walter Roth — an Australian anthropologist who travelled in British Guiana in the early twentieth century — identified as ancient Mexican in origin.

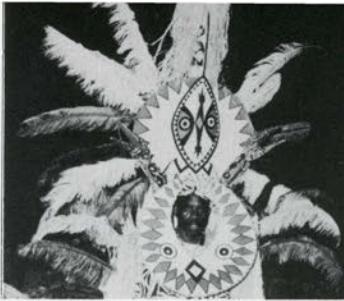
This is of great fascination to me in regard to the antecedents of the Caribs. Needless to say one cannot be sure.

The myth to which I am referring is embodied in the legend of the bush baby *Yurokon*. Yurokon, according to Roth, is the fourth member upon an arch in a body of archetypal and associative myth extending from ancient Mexico into the ancient Guianas. That arch begins with Quetzalcoatl and moves through Kukulcan and Huracan into Yurokon. Yurokon in essence repudiates the charges of cannibalism that had been heaped upon the Caribs by the Spanish historians. Indeed the historical evidence now affirms that 'the Spaniards excused their enslavement of the island Indians by convincing Europe that anthropophagy was the common custom there . . . The royal edict gave the colonizers liberty to do as they pleased with Indians who, without any doubt, were not cannibalistic.' (Michael Swan, 'The Marches Of El Dorado').

It is true that the Caribs consumed a morsel of flesh that they extracted from the bone of an enemy. That bone was converted into a flute. The spirit of the bone flute was born from insights gained from Yurokon and when one contemplates it one feels sometimes one is peering into mysteries associated with the birth of music and theatre and into 'transubstantiation in reverse' themes in that the Caribs sought to converse with secrets in the mind of the alien invader who sought to enslave them yet to claim their souls in the name of Christ.

It would take too long here to examine all the stresses and imaginations that lie within the metaphorical arch to which I have referred that runs from ancient Mexico into the Guianas. Suffice it to say that that arch sustains

PHOTO / CARL GABRIEL



Quetzalcoatl (the evolutionary marriage of bird and serpent, heaven and earth), takes the shock of the hurricane (Huracan) even as it receives the secret music in the bone-flute of the Yurokon Caribs. The mystery of the flute lies within the redemptive edge (the edge of dialogue with the enemy, a dialogue hedged around by the lust of conquest) it appears to offer within the fury or chaos of the world.

This is a far-reaching philosophical and cultural issue. I raise it simply in order to suggest that it possesses a profound bearing upon carnival. First of all the bone-flute (as music's frail heart or child of the ancestral past) bears upon the ramifications of carnival dialogue as an imaginative necessity and strategy that engages word, mask, dance and space within the cross-cultural mind of our age. We need to take the shock of the encounter — the distortions, the complexity of the encounter — between the so-called savage mind of the Caribs and the so-called civilised mind of Europe. We need to assess and learn from the confrontations between the Caribs and the Arawaks in the generations preceding the Spanish Conquest in the sixteenth century. We need to perceive the limbo dances and the travail of the Africans through the Middle Passage. And in the late twentieth century we need to come abreast of the rise of diverse cultures — in the Caribbean, in the South, Central and North Americas — with roots in Europe, Africa and Asia.

All this endorses the necessity for carnival dialogue of which I have spoken. The bone-flute or skeleton spirit arching through many generations may evoke conflicting faces intent on devouring one another but equally it is the root of a renaissance of the arts within which the wheel has begun to turn away from self-destructive feud into an intricate capacity to consume or dislodge in some degree inner and formidable bias, inner fury, and to create thresholds into real, outer change. The link between complex creativity and discoveries in the field of science is there for all to see who have studied the rise of alchemy in Europe and elsewhere and such a strategy or strategies should be no



stranger to carnival fiction and theatre.

The Caribs have vanished but the challenge of the Yurokon bone-flute remains and bears, I think, in a crucial way upon the body of the carnival arts. The Caribs had virtually disappeared by the middle of the nineteenth century but the nature of their sudden demise in British Guiana was as different to establish as the stages by which they came into the West Indies (or what existed as the West Indies — by what name the islands were called — before Columbus came).

The uncertainties that mark the life and death of the cultures in the region are by no means a unique phenomenon. One may trace a similar pattern in Teotihuacan (an open city complex in ancient America), in the Olmec civilisation (with its enigmatic sculptures resembling African heads), and in many temples and palaces of the Central and South Americas whose origins are obscure. All this is endorsed at a private level, so to speak, in expeditions into South America of whose fate we have little or no record.

It is from within such parameters affecting ancient as well as modern cultures that I would like to venture into the dream-logic of carnival. Such a dream-logic assists us, I think, to visualise the masks and the dances of carnival as extensions of an absent body into which a present humanity descends. Save that the absent body, in this context, is ceaselessly unfinished, ceaselessly veiling and unveiling itself, ceaselessly alive to proportions of intuitive conscience. The intuitive life of the 'absent body' resides in part in the 'mask' as the mask reflects outer space and inner space, proportions, extremities, extensions and convertibilities of image. I can best illustrate the matter of convertibility of image and sensation by saying a brief word about my own novel 'Carnival'.

At a certain level in the novel the 'mask' absorbs what is called 'the blind collision of cultures'. Those 'collisions' begin to reverberate in the mask until cautionary voices are heard. The 'contours' of the mask that are normally seen by a spectator now appear to speak and are heard as if to subvert a canon of spectatorial detachment. One aspect of the subversive potential of carnival lies in the way so-called normal expectations — conventional expectations — are complexly breached or overturned. It is in this context that the novel

ventures into ground wherein 'spectral voices' are born of 'contours of oblivion sprung from the blind collision of cultures . . . heard rather than seen in the voice of the mask, the conscience of the mask'.

Looking back to the counterpoint we have glimpsed between 'absent body' (that incorporates mask, unsuspected voice, archetypal and creative conscience) and presence or present humanity within the play and spaces of carnival. The life of the 'absent body' lies, in its ceaselessly unfinished texture and its capacity to arouse within the present mind of an age profoundly intuitive insights that bear on the convertibility of image and sensation. Since no absolute climax exists in the marriage of mask and person to establish the genesis of creativity there is need for accumulative insights into the life of value and spirit in all institutions that rule a society. But such accumulation needs also to visualise an instability within itself, an instability that becomes the nexus of unravelled being. Thereby authoritarian investitures that may tend at times to gain ascendancy are checked and overturned. This, I think, is a kind of carnival logic.

The inner direction of such accumulative yet unravelled attire is redemptive in force. There is a redemptive edge, so to speak, a redemptive passion that touches, I believe, upon the ruling myths of a civilisation tormented for centuries by tragic encounter and 'the blind collision(s) of cultures'.

This is a far-reaching issue. It implies, I think, a capacity in an afflicted or exploited Mankind to revise or re-play the innermost resources of a civilisation in which the exploited or ruled now possess a creative stake that is as real and pertinent to that civilisation as any the exploiters or rulers may have claimed for themselves (and still claim for themselves). What is the nature of essential value? What is the nature of essential freedom? The response to such questions needs to be visualised from the other side of establishment fixtures, from within apparently ruled and eclipsed faculties in the post-colonial imagination.

The concept of allegory has been a ruling design in the moral character of our civilisation. By and large allegory appears to be closed, it appears to reflect a closure not only in itself but in many savage archetypes that tend to

be regarded as merely 'allegoric'. The derogatory approach to 'myth' that is apparent in historical analysis today stems, from the museum configuration that has been built into the ruling concept of allegory.

Allegory however may surprisingly become a subversive stratagem when it is visualised in a complex rehearsal with carnival 'absent bodies'. It becomes an 'absent body' within a series of profound masks in which the life of the intuitive imagination is nourished in new and striking ways. We are touching here, I think, upon a capacity to convert the unique polarisations which alas tend to be the structure of tradition. Such unique polarisation tends to be a form of gratification in many cultures which are addicted to binding themselves in within special territories or ghetto-formations. The gratification may endure until the seed of a latent fascism becomes visible and the terrible consequences that may flow from this.

Without pursuing the matter in fine detail I would say that the arousal of creativity from within an apparent seal or closure of a tradition must address once again the promise or hope for an unshackled mind through diverse and convertible imagineries and sensations of the life of being.

In pointing to allegory I have touched on one ruling concept in a civilisational fabric that may be revised or re-written anew from the other side, from a post-colonial edge in a cross-cultural imagination. The point at issue is that carnival is a medium of the multi-voiced or multi-textual spirit. Unless this is truly perceived carnival degenerates into entertainment-for-the-sake-of-entertainment. And its intuitive strategy to break the polarisations of tradition is forfeited in favour of an illiteracy of the imagination. It is necessary to bear this in mind in a mass-media age.

Carnival is both a theatre of creativity and a warning of the perils and addictions of the soul. ●

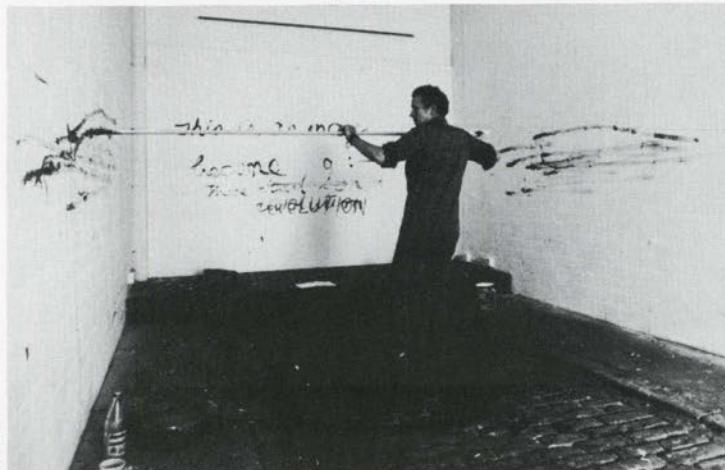
This is a shortened version of an article commissioned by, and used with the permission of the Arts Council of Great Britain. The full version will appear in the catalogue for the forthcoming exhibition: 'Masqueradin'. The Art of the Notting Hill Carnival, touring during '86 and '87.

A SPECULATION ON

PHOTO / COURTESY THIRD EYE

A SPECULATION ON MEMORY

Along with an exhibition marking a significant stage in his career, Stuart Brisley recently undertook a rare live performance lasting three days in Glasgow. ROB LA FRENAIS describes his progress from memory to reality:



Transmission: the walled in road to revolution



Brisley, the
traditional
storyteller

The notion is simple. Take a single, evocative moment from a certain place at a certain time and 'play it back' using all the resources at the artist's disposal in another place at another time. For Stuart Brisley, whose work *Red Army* 2 in Glasgow recently marked his return to live art after a period of five years, this moment was standing on a ferry grinding through the ice between the harbour in Helsinki to the island of Sveaborg, watching the ice reform to solidity behind the boat, as a Finnish friend quietly remarks that the Red Army, whose headquarters were near the Uspensky Cathedral on the mainland, had been imprisoned in 1919 on the island towards which they were travelling.

For Brisley this was the trigger for a whole train of images which he strove to convey to a small audience across a period of three days at Transmission Gallery, the 'unofficial' space of Glasgow. At the same time, the final phase of Brisley's five year project, *The Georgiana Collection* was appearing in the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow's 'official' art space. Notions of 'official' and 'unofficial' seem to emerge here because the events in the cramped, minimal space of Transmission seemed at time to resemble those unauthorised art events in Eastern Europe during the seventies, several of which are included in the Brisley/McMullen film *Being and Doing*.

There is as much of Brisley's work, a kind of ironic symmetry here. The materials for the Third Eye show come from what Brisley has described as the Fourth World, in this case from discards by the derelict population who live on waste ground close by Georgiana Street in Camden Town, itself a place of many social contradictions at the 'bottom of the hill' from Hampstead. In the first phase of the Collection, at the ICA in 1981 (*Leaching out at and from the intersection*) the detritus collected and painstakingly transferred to the ICA's pristine Nash terrace was raw, rotting, unmediated by the artist. The trestle tables upon which the stuff was laid, the symbols of temporary order in this chaos were themselves then subverted by being hoisted from the ground, spilling the contents. The idea of invasion was there, as the gallery, a petrol bomb's throw from Buckingham Palace, overflowed with the effluvium of Camden Town. (The process was apparent from the

other end too — I lived in that area and kept noticing things that had been there for a whole year disappearing — only to reappear at the ICA).

In Glasgow the process has been reversed. There is containment, an imposition of order. The clothes collected are washed and neatly folded, placed within large wedge-like structures, painted dull black, repositories even, for the collection, to be preserved in case of disaster. A disaster which could already have happened, as we find out during the performance. Brisley has recently spoken a lot about the absence of the artist — here the artist is as absent as the builders of Stonehenge. The collection is captured from cradle (in another room, photographs of discarded objects, slumbering vagrants captured for the camera coolly and mercilessly) to the grave — audio messages recreating experiences long gone. At the Third Eye I saw stern citizens in tweed pacing around this area glaring at the photographs — more evidence of the decadent underbelly of the south. In a horrible irony many of the subjects are possibly their celtic countrymen, having failed to make it beyond the square mile behind Euston and St Pancras, returned, as Brisley has ventured, to their nomadic antecedents.

Where is the absent artist? This time, not hidden away in a flat in the city as in 1988 *Helmsley Road* making a performance for none but those who might reside afterwards, (the sounds and noises of the day being encapsulated in tape and photographs, to be replayed as part of the recent exhibition 'New Work Newcastle') but making himself very present in a quiet street off Trongate, on a Monday afternoon. I arrive to hear the sound of a glass bottle being smashed against a wall echoing from a narrow shopfront sandwiched between a tropical fish shop and a launderette. Twenty people are jammed into a space, which has been created by literally walling in a narrow road, with cobbles and pavement. The smashed bottle provides material for Brisley, now a rather tentative, schoolmasterly figure, to attempt to recreate the memory of the voyage between the harbour and the island. The words 'This is or may become a—' are inked across the white wall. Underneath 'There had been a revolution ...' He reads from notes made at the time. The image of the ship grinding back and forth through the ice, the ice reforming behind it, the appearance of the Uspensky Cathedral, the poles in the ice, red flags, is underlined again and again. A manhole cover is lifted from the road. Brisley, now less the schoolmaster, more the seventies performance artist, sticks his head down it. Someone, accidentally, flushed the toilet below. Bathos ensues. There is laughter. This is an informal gathering, none of the high drama of shamanistic performance. Brisley yells down the hole, testing the space, testing in a way the 'switching on and off' of the performance process. More words, more recreation of the memory. Another bottle is smashed — more ice. Brisley (in deference to another memory?) carefully lies down on the broken glass. Day

One ends in darkness, pain.

On Day Two the nature of the reality of the experience is discussed. 'Someone was there ... There is a record, a pattern of brain-waves. Was it 'the journalistic truth'. Flash back to the Third Eye show. Tattered newspapers on a railing. The words 'the press' hammered insistently across the image. Back at Transmission Brisley is asking 'If I save a child from drowning in the canal, when I turn the corner will it have happened?' ... We all know *this* (smashes bottle) will happen. Reading again from notes, we are back in the frozen sea, looking across at the dull red and green of the golden-domed Uspensky Cathedral. The silence is as if the future has been cancelled, as in a sense it has, Brisley points out, for the nomadic tribes of the north since the Chernobyl disaster. It is the end of a thousands-year long era for those such as the Finnish *Sami*, reindeer-herding tribes whose life-patterns will be inextricably altered by the swathe of radioactivity of which Finland received a viciously unfair share.

When the original 'moment' occurred that Brisley repeatedly describes — standing on the ferry between the harbour and the island on the frozen sea in view of the Uspensky Cathedral and the place where the Red Army was imprisoned — the core of the Chernobyl reactor had not yet melted down. It was about to happen, and the image of the slowly melting frozen sea (across which buses and lorries travelled in the winter) was an appropriate metaphor for the insubstantiality of experience, — personal experience and the experience of the world. In the end, perhaps all an artist is able to do is record, tomorrow it may all be gone, or at least going.

On the third day, Brisley introduced what he referred to as 'magic'. Closing the doors, shutting off the light, he released a chemical fire extinguisher, which indeed had the mundane effect of modern magic, i.e. it got cold. Before subjecting the gathering to this artificial experience he had summed up the dualities of the 'speculation' as he called it, in memory, using a long drawing-stick. Brisley the didactic schoolmaster again ... On one side the dock, on the other the island. On one side the headquarters of the Red Army, on the other the place of imprisonment. The Revolution — The revolution in demise, frozen as a notion. The red flags under the ice. (It is not clear here whether he is referring to actual or imagined memory). The lights go off 'all revolutionary activity takes place in the dark'. A hammer is needed for the revolution to take place — the release of the red fire extinguisher in the dark. Revolution is mocked and revered simultaneously. The doors are flung open. The sound of Glasgow seabirds, corresponding to Brisley's Finland memory fragment are heard loudly. The Sami way of life has been 'revolutionised' (in the words of a recent press cutting) by Chernobyl. But our attention is drawn to the statement in graffiti in the basement below, made by a famous Scottish communist 'There now exists the possibility to make Glasgow a revolutionary centre second to none' — John Maclean 1911.

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The performance ends here, but continues in a sense in the basement, where, under the flicker of a faulty neon light shining on his face by the graffiti, Brisley is interviewed by the Transmission team, Malcolm Dickson and others. After some questions about the performance, the show at the Third Eye is broached — specifically the piles of discarded clothes. What about the people whose they were? They would never see them in this gallery context. Brisley is quick to hold his ground. His work provides pointers — not reflecting back propaganda. 'This work has fuck-all to do with education!' Still, he points out his preference for working out of the gallery context, in the bare space of Transmission, where he can reuse the simple materials of the space — the walled in road, the daylight, the drain, the seagulls. 'I don't want to pollute the world with art! The economics of performance. What about the young artist wanting to enter performance work now, in the mid-eighties? It was easier when there was no choice whether to take up live work or not. When he started, among others in the late sixties, the way was uncharted, on these islands at least. But there was always the problem of the 'mystical leap between being a not-known to a known artist'.

Stuart Brisley, along with many other more conventional members of the 'war baby' generation is a 'known Artist'. Caught in the trap of having to 'represent' British performance art on the Biennale circuit, he has, for the past five years, avoided that role. Now, stimulated perhaps by enthusiastic 'underground' activity of the Transmission collective in Glasgow, he has returned to live work as the traditional storyteller, the passer-on of oral tradition, dealing with the creation of myth on the fringes of society. He will have to go on mounting major exhibitions of the type seen at the Third Eye to continue as a 'known artist', perhaps. But one senses his heart is no longer in that. The three-day experiment at Transmission, though seen by only about sixty people, perhaps only ten across the three days, will hopefully continue.

The experiment betrayed revealing glimpses into the persona of the artist. Although Brisley claims to be, in his own words 'anti-theatrical' he is a consummate performer. His words, as Mike Archer admits in the catalogue essay, 'seems almost with us before they are uttered'. He is at some points hectoring and authoritarian in his demeanor, at other times tentative and exploratory. A less mature artist undertaking such a 'speculation in memory' would seem self indulgent, finicky, precious. Brisley pulls it off because he communicates with, not ignores the audience — at the same time half threatening them with his strength of feeling for his subject. Some people might call this 'theatre'. But then, some people might call nuclear reactors 'safe'. ●

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ROUNDUP

Performance festivals are booming on mainland Europe this year, and five writers cast a critical eye over them and their history.



Rosita in '*Belle Blanche*' at *Cafe de la Danse see Polyphonix article p 33*

PHOTO / SIMON HERBERT / PROJECTS UK

Le Belluard de Fribourg — a 15th century military fort, built into the old city walls of Fribourg, a somewhat typical Swiss town which lies between Geneva and Zurich. A historical and precious building, open cobbled-stone courtyard, tiered, beamed balconies, constructed in a semi circle focusing on the yard and stage area. 'IMAGINEZ', the catalogue invitingly suggests. Anything can happen, and certainly something did happen here, beginning in 1983, the first 'Belluard Bollwerk' Festival of the arts. Music, theatre, dance, film, performance and more combined in a six week programme. Within this format of a mainly traditional European Arts festival, two days were reserved for one Michel Ritter to organise performance events. A local artist who saw more potential in performance and experimental art than anybody else around at that time, he had organised Fri-Art in 1981, a six week event in an ancient seminary near Fribourg, including installations, paintings, sculpture, and performance. As well as showing Swiss artists, Anne Bean and Steve Cripps appeared together, vintage stuff. I have never seen this first space as it was pulled down by the Cantonale of Fribourg, (council). But this was the beginning of something very special and different for the Swiss, mostly dominated by the artworld of Klee, Giacometti, Hodler and Tinguely. An element of risk was beginning to integrate into Swiss art and Michel Ritter was there giving enough rope for something to happen. After this first major event, the then six organisers had a window front, in the middle of town, changing every two weeks, with installations and some performance. Ritter, having travelled widely in Asia, Australia and America, began to look for new international names to bring to Switzerland. The first of these connections came from one of his visits to New York's Franklin Furnace, where he met and saw André Stitt, Nigel Rolfe and Alistair MacLennan, whom he duly invited to attend the first 'Belluard'. So in July '83 the line up for performance was André Stitt/Tara Babel, John Armleder, Ian Anull, Dress Up Animal, and Kristof Wiesbrod/Erich Busslinger (two Swiss Video artists). It also featured a music/performance Group then known as the Red Catholic Orthodox Jewish Chorus (now known as Suonatori). These two days of performance at the end of what was quite a conservative arts festival certainly had a strong impression on the public and injected a new excitement of diverse and alternative ideas on art, for Fribourg. Later in the year with the recommendation of André Stitt, Alistair MacLennan appeared at a nearby venue with his

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IMAGINEZ . . .

piece *Healing Wounds*. The first long and profound piece yet to be seen there, there could not have been anyone better to give the Swiss audience a true sense of a very personal and intense performance, allowing them an open and individual interpretation helped by his strong images.

At the second festival in 1984 Michel Ritter invited Roberta Graham who showed her tape-slide piece *L'Ange Dechu*, (fallen angel) partly autobiographical and partly about Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*. Also from Britain Catherine Seely and Jon Davies' work was very well received, utilising the space of the old fort to their advantage and creating an atmospheric and poetic visual performance.

In 1985 Ritter did not take part in the Festival, but instead with a partner Paul Jacquat organised a major festival of Swiss artists in New York, held at The Clocktower, Franklin Furnace, The Kitchen etc. entitled *FRI ART, Made in Switzerland*. I will quote from the catalogue 'To reduce and abolish the distance that generally separates artists from organisers, to smash customary ideas, to break down the barriers in which artists are confined, to prevent politics playing a principal role, to suppress the personal interests which channel art into a direction which is not its own, are the goals that FRI ART has established for itself, goals that FRI ART hopes to reach one day.' (The organisers.) Amongst a varied selection of Swiss artists, Zurich artist Ian Annul's statement as with his work is short, sharp and effective — 'Full with history. Hot with art. Bought with money and given to you . . .' One of his works *MMM (Money-Maker-Mystery)*, (1984), consists of 3 attaché cases 1=earth, 2=three dimensional dollars, and 3=locked in secret. These three cases I think sum up nicely a lot of Swiss attitudes. He plays tricks on the art world, but also has a strong social concern. Michel Ritter's work presented in the New York show included his *Postcard to Berlin* a wooden scale model of the viewing platform overlooking the Berlin Wall, alongside it a photograph on canvas of the real thing. Ruedi Schill performed at Franklin Furnace as part of the show, born in Lucerne 1941 remains one of Switzerland's most prolific performance artists. Some of his pieces include *Passing Stranger* (1980/81), *My Imagination*, and *I would like to Dance with you* (1984).

Without Ritter in 1985 the Festival at Belluard was a financial disaster, so he was appointed director on a voluntary basis, in other words, no pay. He was again responsible for the performances and the exhibition this year. The first

TARA BABEL has watched elements of risk integrate themselves into an originally conventional festival at Fribourg, Switzerland. She outlines the history and describes the latest event:



Edy Marconi of the 'Red Catholic Orthodox Jewish Chorus'.

IMAGINEZ . . .



performance was by a group of artists from East Germany, Poland, Russia and Switzerland, organised by Boris Nielsony and Zygmut Piotrowski. Eight people make up this group, *BLACK MARKET, Changing Scenes Amongst the Public*, a series of simultaneous actions spaced throughout the Belluard, upstairs and in the courtyard, in corners and the pits used in the old days to fire guns out of slits in the wall. They used microphones, videos, a 'Blackboard lecture' on art, mimed scenes, explosives and various objects. It looked very effective in the space, but with strong uses of 'performance clichés', flour, water, explosives and I think an obvious Beuysian influence. 'The mind structure is the breath. The members in the project will realise some short pieces in sequence, changing positions. The public will stand and move. In timing, changing concentrated situations, looks like breathing'. *BLACK MARKET, Belluard '86.*

One of the things I saw here for the first time was the British duo Phil Minton and Roger Turner, Phil Minton's incredible vocals really surprised me. Unearthly sounds exuding from his mouth, then crooning in a deep soulful style, interspersed with Donald Duck type laughter. Total vocal virtuosity, accompanied by the creative percussion of Roger Turner. Both these performers have a strong history in experimental theatre, eg Welfare State, IOU, and the Mike Figgis Company, also free form jazz, Turner having worked with Lol Coxhill, and Annette Peacock, and Minton being one of the founders of the vocal group Voice. They held the attention of the audience throughout their long piece, and ended to a vigorous applause. Following this and quite fitting with the night's entertainment was Bow Gamelan, with their usual spectacularly visual and rowdy show. Needless to say the crowd loved this extravaganza, and the final gimmick of exploding fireworks from Bow Gamelan's firemen's helmets sent the observers into raptures of 'OHHS' and 'AHHS' and 'MAGNIFIQUES'. The Gamelans' ended quaintly with their lighted helmets spelling out the word BOW, when they stood to attention while the crowd roared. After this, the Bow G's made a quick exit to the long road back to Bow!

The Soirée Surprise at the Cinéma Capitole, was something again quite different for the festival, organised solely by Michel Ritter, being an all-night event of music, film performance jazz, tango animation etc etc. This old twenties style cinema, about to be knocked down was to go out in a blaze of glory with this evening. A truly atmospheric old place with Latin writing above the stage, large chrome 'saucer' ashtrays on stands, original tiling and circular bar. The evening got off to a late start. The all night bar was raking in the francs, as well as the young and trendy of Fribourg. The first performance I saw from behind the stage curtains, was a young local artist, Yves Vonlanthen, who made his performance especially for the evening. It consisted of some vague slides projected on the large screen, but more impressively the performer spinning around and around in front of the audience for at least twenty minutes, reminiscent of a whirling dervish. Quite an achievement. At 3.30 in the morning Anne Seagrave went on to a somewhat drunk and stoned audience. Her intro in well rehearsed French seemed to placate the audience, but moving on to her ramblings in English invited much heckling and jibing. As controlled and well executed her piece was, she told me afterwards that that was the hardest audience she had ever worked with. Not much consolation to myself and André who were on next. So we appeared to an even more drunk and raucous audience at 4.30 in the morning, not too much in control ourselves! There then followed a full scale blitz and battle between performers and audience, who basically wanted to see unattached entertainment, and couldn't cope with the madness on stage, going to prove that art and alcohol never mix. Finally the evening (or night) ended with a traditional tango band, who had waited patiently all night in the dressing rooms amidst pieces of dead chicken, talcum powder, ketchup, and fluorescent paint from our performance, where they sat quite unaffected tuning their fiddles or fiddling with their tuners, full tuxedos and all. There could have not been a better thing to round off this bizarre evening than this professional tango band, and to add that extra touch the Rocky Horror Picture Show was shown in silence (French subtitles) behind them. One could have sworn that certain scenes from the film had been meant for the tango band. The audience loved it, and the band loved it, perhaps not having such a youthful and energetic audience for a long time, all helped along with images of Tim Curry and entourage in drag!

And so ended another European celebration of the contemporary arts, different in its many ways, co-ordinated by the committed and realistic Ritter, who, with the help of his American/Swiss wife Arlene created events and performances to an extent that allows new and live art to survive and breathe without the established confines of an elitist artworld. Produced with a courage and enthusiasm, by people who want to see progression and realisation of a living expression inextricably interlocked with the power of performance/action and mixed media.●

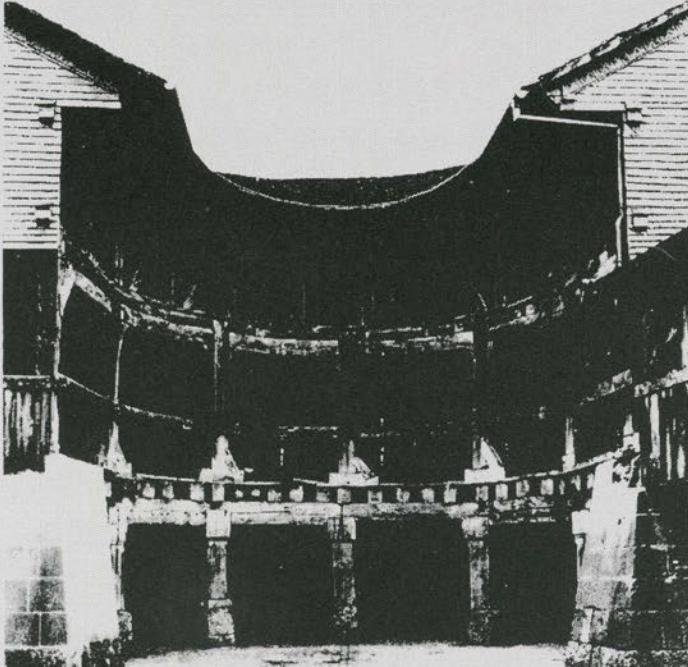


PHOTO / JAQUES SIDLER

The venue and the instigator — Michel Ritter

imaginez...

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ROUNDUP

Chrissie Iles at
the Venice Biennale



Like Christmas, Easter and birthdays, the Venice Biennale comes but once a year (or two), a reassuring and familiar marking of time, point of collective reflection and information and gossip exchange on an international scale. Much fuss is always made of the selected artists in the respective international pavilions, whose sitings, design, relative positionings, size and status reflects in microcosm the international cultural and political status quo, with England still way ahead, the French and Germans close behind and the Italians themselves in a chaotic, disorganised league of their own. But what is most extraordinary is the complete concentration on this core prestige elite and subsequent overshadowing and ignorance of a body of work scattered throughout the Biennale all over Venice, officially or unofficially, which is at least if not far more interesting and of consequence. Not the least to blame for this myopic view of things is the majority of the media and press, sad but predictable to report the British art press in particular, whose astonishing inability to stir beyond the deep peace of the plastic cup of wine at the British Pavilion and that favourite restaurant ensures that not even the outstanding artists in Aperto get discussed or even mentioned, let alone work outside the chipboard and emulsion sanctuary of the Giardini.

Mention the name Eulisse to the average Venetian for example, and their hands will rise from the table in recognition of the deeds this controversial Venetian artist now based in Urbino has committed in the name of art and politics in Italy over the years. Eulisse is famous throughout Italy, but few of the foreign art press either know or are interested in finding out about his work. Yet two minutes from the Giardini in the Via Garibaldi he has created the *South African Pavilion* in an old butchers shop. On a small white marble counter blood and offal drips and various butchers knives hang suspended from the ceiling against blood-spattered walls. A simple statement, yet powerfully made and

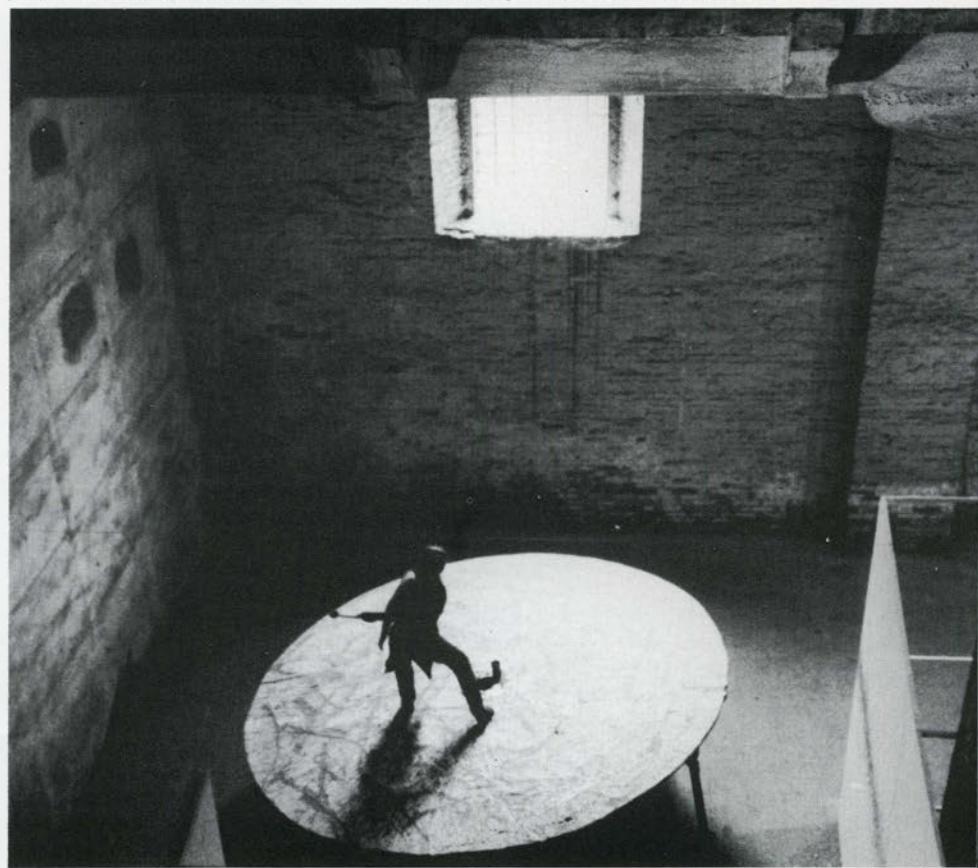
SUSPENDED ANIMATION

quite shocking in the context of both the busy local market street in which it has been placed and the veneer of the Biennale.

The placing of work inside the city environment amongst the local community outside the official traditional Biennale spaces is much more than an "alternative" gesture. It is almost a political act. The Venice Biennale is not a place

for the Venetians themselves, who regard it with the same ambivalence afforded to the rest of the tourist industry in Venice, down 80% this summer. Posters throughout the city protest at the detrimental effect of tourism on housing and the whole fabric of Venetian society, now forced to exist largely on an economy based on the city's status as a living museum. The local community

*Richard Wilson —
work in progress/
performance Halo*





are dependent upon the income received from the influx of visitors, but deeply resent its negative and isolating effects.

Krysztóf Wodiczko, brought to Venice by the Canadian Pavilion as one of the two official Canadian representatives has taken up this issue in his projections onto various city landmarks, including the Campanile in St Mark's Square. Entitled *Tourism and Terrorism*, the pieces address the effects of tourism on the city and of terrorism on the industry on which the Venetians rely so heavily. A tourist camera, hand grenade and a military tank are projected onto the Campanile, the tank providing a visual base from which the tower could be driven away and destroyed. For Krysztóf the whole point of the public projections is to reach an audience contemptuous or indifferent to the Biennale itself and to deal with issues which concern the indigenous general public in his work, however broadly, as well as to address tourists who would not dream of visiting the Giardini.

A few bridges away, in Campo Morosini, San Stefano, the Artangel Trust presented nightly during the opening week of the Biennale Station House Opera, staging their excellent *A Split Second of Paradise*.

The elongated open-air performance space was framed by a spectacular Baroque Venetian building, which provided both a backdrop for the piece and a dialogue between the historical, real space and the physical and metaphysical spaces being created by the five performers, using several hundred white building blocks and the Station House dynamic which, at its best, produces an extraordinary visual and sculptural dialogue with high-on-perfect timing. In a series of tableaux the building blocks were used to build and dismantle walls, towers, and other constructions in which the performers were enclosed, trapped or framed, and from and around which they engaged in a dialogue of movement and occasional speech to create 'an analogy of materialism, of human endeavour, ambition, achievement and collapse'. The piece went down extremely well with the large nightly audiences of cogniscenti, tourists and locals alike, and could have been made for the opulent Venetian space, to whose dynamic this sharp, essentially English piece contrasted so well.

Back inside the official Biennale, at the Arsenale, the majestic ancient military garrison of Venice, Richard Wilson stole the show in Aperto with *Halo*, a specially commissioned sculpture created through a performance by which the artist literally spun molten lead into silver onto a raised circular platform papered with heat sensitive paper, onto the wooden platform itself and onto the surrounding walls. The heat sensitive paper registered each moment of action by a blue mark, to which pieces of the glistening metal also attached themselves. The paper halo was placed on the wall, so that a contrast between the idea of gravity, horizontal and vertical, liquid and fire, physical and ethereal emerged.

The performance through which the piece was made was the major ingredient of Wilson's

SUSPENDED ANIMATION

working method as a sculptor rather than a public display. The performance took place as a process, in which the furnace, fire, molten metal, the artist moving around the tilted platform as though on stage and the sight of the liquid lead being thrown and the sound as it hit the walls all combined to form a sense of drama, spectacle and event. In fact it is far more important and rewarding to discover the action and working process through tracing the marks on the finished piece, whose shimmering blue and silver halos have caught the action and frozen it, each splash and movement suspended and held, in much the same way as Venice has frozen its past and held it in suspended animation.

This metamorphosis of action into object, liquid into solid, dark and heavy into light and shimmering, treats more eloquently than almost any other piece in the Biennale both the theme of art and alchemy running through this year's show, and the atmosphere and spirit of Venice itself. Wilson's work has always been concerned with transformation; here lead, the densest, base metal, heavy and dark, is made molten in the fire and transformed by the artist into something as light and delicate as gold leaf or a butterfly wing, with the appearance of a beautiful, precious metal. This conversion of a base metal into silver and of the white paper and bare wood into a halo of shimmering light through Wilson's action with fire and liquid has a real sense of alchemical change, particularly since the markings, made by liquid, are almost beyond the control of the artist, and the marking of the movement of the metal across the paper appears slowly, as if by magic, as the heat affects the paper, by which time the metal has already reached the wall beyond, cooled, and in itself become transformed.

Wilson's piece, an ephemeral installation made specifically for Venice and capturing its intense Adriatic blue light, splendour, richness and sense of nobility and glitter as well as evoking echoes of a deeper Catholic religious aesthetic, defied the deadening effect of the regulated Aperto space by exposing the stone walls behind and using the dynamics of the pillar and window, allowing light to pour in and light up the haloes in much the same way as in a church.

If the chipboard and emulsion spaces of the main Biennale lent a dangerous anonymity to

de Chiricos and Bainbridge alike, a show tucked away at the other end of the Grand Canal positively overwhelmed the visitor with its atmosphere. In the content, presence and presentation of the paintings one can find, as in Wilson's work, more about art and alchemy at its core than in the official academic analysis of the subject in the Main Pavilion.

The four walls of an old Venetian studio were covered from floor to ceiling with three-dimensional paintings with dark, heavy frames, hung, frames touching, so that virtually none of the wall was visible. Defying the Modernist aesthetic in presentation, yet relying upon its historical and theoretical language to express their position, the impact of these fifty pictures is quite extraordinary. The show was a complete installation in itself. The work is from two series by the Slovene painting group IRWIN, *Was Ist Kunst* and *Red Districts*. As you walk round the studio, much as you would walk round a church, the works, rich, dark and shrine-like, show, on closer inspection, imagery and substances which have been revered, but for very different, disturbing, political reasons. These are coupled with images and techniques from the history of art and from the artists native Slovenia, a tiny state in Eastern Europe which has also produced the band Laibach, to whom these artists are aligned, and whose music surrounds the room and compounds the ambiguous atmosphere.

Onto painted canvas, glass and paper various substances are introduced, such as wheat, steel, granite, honey, tar, blood, wax, gold and bitumen, sometimes moulding reliefs sometimes echoing a point made by the image. There is no evidence of individual personal expression. Looking into them, you are confronted by a collection of images and techniques juxtaposed to make strong statements about the state of the art and its relationship to ideology, whilst also registering an emotional impact which the pictures create, not through borrowing the potency of past imagery, but through the physical and aesthetic richness and tactility of the picture itself, and the awareness of reading a language which is essentially Western European in structure, but Eastern European in content, expression and interpretation. This was IRWIN's first exhibition outside Eastern Europe. Influenced strongly by the conceptualist performance groups of Yugoslavia in the sixties, their work epitomises the eighties aesthetic. Perhaps it takes artists from an environment influenced by Western European culture but removed from its art market and world to make such a strong and succinct statement about post modern developments in the art of the West.

Such were the opportunities for seeing work which offered more than a confirmation of the international status quo. A significant number of people saw it; but such a selection of art, live and static, really does deserve far more attention and serious thought from an art world and media simply too complacent, disinterested and lazy by half. ●

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ROUNDUP

Inteatro Polverigi: an international theatre market blessed with sun and a nearby beach, decent food and the indulgence of two shows a night. That's the theory and the festival works hard to live up to it. It's a pity, then, that I left feeling highly irritated that my first year on the European circuit (I'm 'younger generation') had been dominated by arrogant Northerners showing their wares to other Northerners and getting booked for tours — in the North.

Holland, apparently, is undergoing a cultural explosion, sparked off by generous public subsidy (it always comes down to money) and the influence of numerous British and US touring groups. The Low Countries backlash continues. Last year they brought us the Belgians. Next year it's the Dutch. But I found their work dull and overbearing. The emotions on display were as subtle as a sledgehammer and their technically expert presentation didn't make up for the vapidity underneath.

Studio Hinderik in *Glas* set out to explore, well . . . glass. It was full of clever two way mirrors, reflections and refraction in a technician's fantasy choreographed set, decorated but not inhibited by the presence of the actors. But take away the form and what was left was a few disturbing actions that stick in the mind: a woman smashing a pane of glass with her breasts, another cowering in a barbed wire cage whilst a man in the same position searches his way out. More women trapped like insects under the glass platform or, when they were above it, ganging up together to prevent the solitary man from climbing up as well. That adds up to the same old story: women are nasty, men caring, soft and enterprising.

In their second show *Stoeprand*, there weren't any women unless I count the one with a plastic penis dressed up as a young boy. I think this show was about non-communication between different generations of men, about letting youth grow up. But I can't be sure because as usual it was the set that was really on display. This time it needed two 'manipulators' (puppeteers in my book) to keep it going. But it had everything: collapsing dustbins and drains, cracking paving stones and streetlighting that grew, even puddles that worked as two way mirrors. Hinderik, creator and guru of the group has a knack with objects, but he doesn't seem to be able to tell the difference between polystyrene and flesh.

Harry de Wit was equally engrossed in form but the fact that he didn't make such clumsy attempts to supersede it meant that his three person music theatre piece was simple good fun. They deal in orchestrated noise created by any available bit of their wired up bodies with voice and some movement thrown in for entertainment's sake. Frenetic and provocative, the music set screams and screeches against loud thuds, the effect was almost frightening. Unpredictable sound, uncluttered by forced emotions, makes a satisfying piece.

In *Allegro, Vivace mais pas Trop* Adriana

HONEY SALVADORI goes to Inteatro in Polverigi, Italy, and casts a baleful eye over Northern European cultural chauvinism:

Borriello provided a bridge between North and South, or more specifically the Low Countries and Italy. After training in Italy Borriello went to Belgium where she worked with Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker — she of the systems music and hard edged dance. The influence shows. Borriello's first foray into choreography, backed by the Polverigi team, was a kind of Italianised version of what can only be called Systems

piece was tightly structured around the Kodaly Cello Sonata accompaniment and the choreography similarly formalised around each dancer's basic movement phrase. But rather than let that framework assume central importance, as with de Keersmaeker, Borriello kept it firmly under control allowing the dancers' soft individuality to shine through: Borriello herself is small and expressive, Nouchka Ovtchinnikoff is flighty and quick and newcomer Clelia Moretti, with her wonderful sad expression, is a moody and moving dancer.

Allegro is the Italian work that is likely to come North, acceptable for its familiar framework as much as for its Latin charm. But the work that you're not likely to see is quintessentially Italian, but not in the least bit charming is the kitchen sink pretensions of Raffaello Sanzio. Their show *Santa Sofia* is a post-anarchist, post-psychadelia, post-Pol Pot look at murder and religion. It seems based on that crass old adage The urge to destroy is a creative urge. It offends widely in Italy as well as among the Northern 'experts', who wrote it off as 'masturbation'. But I loved it, probably for the wrong reasons. The group themselves are deadly serious. They see their examination of the Khmer Rouge experiment and the parallels they draw with Christian mysticism and Italian tradition as the 'final moment in recreating the world'. I saw it as a splash of exciting chaos among so much work that tied itself up in knots to be taken as newly defined tradition, with all the formality that the work implies. Raffaello Sanzio are a bunch of self-styled intellectual terrorists who don't give a shit whether the audience like them or not. They just want to spit out their ideas and don't have time to waste on rehearsals and structure. Italy may not be in the throes of a government sponsored theatrical revival but it's youth seem to have found an energy that us boring Northerners have lost.

Another Italian group that may have trouble coming North are Sosta Palmizi. Again taken under the Inteatro wings, they premiered their new show *Tu/o*. In some ways they stay very close to dance traditions — in Italy classical dance is as all-pervasive as here — making their scenario a fable land full of gnomes and sprites that kept reminding me of Giselle's nasty little Wilis. But their movement was a breakthrough — highly complex and original, involving knees and elbows, bizarre lifts and staccato little jumps.

Last on my list are the French who don't really fit into my North v South theory, but the best ideas have holes. A bit like their show *Zoopsie Comedy* that seemed to be all gaps and no thought. The mega-group Beau Geste-Lolita, formed from two dance collectives, set out, they say, to present a review. The result is a serious of vacuous vignettes taken from French magazines and movies, as they waddle on and off the stage in fabulous costumes. Nice clothes-hangers, shame about the dance. ●

NORTH V. SOUTH

choreography. Although it was a distinct improvement on de Keersmaeker's original. The



Studio Hinderik —
the Low Countries
backlash continues

*Diamanda Galas —
in the grand manner*

That technology has had a history of impact not only on the culture that bears it but also on its (generally) attendant art forms is well documented. Various art media, to varying degrees, have evolved in direct response to new technologies. In the late Twentieth Century we live in what is often called the information society; a culture constituted of signals rather than artefacts — or perhaps a new family of artefacts.

That a festival such as Ars Electronica has evolved to deal with the relationship between art and technology would seem to imply that a need exists for such a forum. However, in our world the laws of cause and effect, desire and gratification are not always as straight forward as they once were. The information is scrambled by conflicting signals and ever present noise.

Ars Electronica was first held in 1979 and then bi-annually. It has developed from a small event organised by the artists involved to a quite large, government-run show. This has allowed for greater funding, and all the benefits this will bring — however one ponders the political undertones of this support. Why a festival of this kind in what is not a country town then a small regional centre? Why should such a small centre spend many thousands of pounds on art work of a highly experimental nature that is not only isolated from an art context but even more so from its potential audience?

At this year's event a certain incipient German nationalism was definitely in the air. Problems arose for the audience with the Germans and Eastern Europeans failing to comprehend the Western European and American contributions and vice versa. This led to total confusion at certain events.

For example, the central event, titled *Attersee And His Friends* was completely incomprehensible to the non-Germanic part of the audience. The Germans certainly loved it, but the rest walked out in frustration. A who's who of German/Austrian art (ie — A.R. Penck, Markus Lupertz, Herman Nitsch, Dieter Roth and Arnulf Rainer to name a few) came and went in what appeared to be a 'roll out the barrel' amateur hour with Fluxus overtones — not to mention New Right nationalist undertones.

Strangely, this event, the most publicised and well attended of Ars Electronica, involved no technology (beyond a few microphones and a P.A.) and did not seek to engage that context. Attersee — whose main reason for being there seemed to be because he is Linz's most famous artist — stated that he wished to show the human behind the machine by focusing on the individual artist. That he succeeded in his subversive intent — calling into question the whole rationale for Ars Electronica — is probable, however if the work he and his friends presented is an alternative then bring on the machines.

In marked contrast to this example of Australian self-indulgence was the performance of Cabaret Voltaire (UK). Their slice-of-life experimental rock presentation — dealing with certain things English (the class structure, urban collapse, identity crisis) and some Ger-



PHOTO / SHAFFLER FOTO-DESIGN

ARS ELECTRONICA

Unscrambling the information signals from this art and technology festival at Linz, SIMON BIGGS uncovers a paradox:

man (Adolf Hitler, control, etc) — was received in virtual silence and received polite applause. I personally found their work highly charged but it most strange to see an audience remain unmoved through such a spectacle.

An artist with certain things in common with Cabaret Voltaire is Diamanda Galas (USA). Her dark, confronting and mysterious work was initially remarkable for its Faustian/phallic symbolism and its ear-shattering volume. Somewhere between Wagners 'Ring' and Status Quo (via Spinal Tap), in the end it went on for too long. Perhaps a development of the theme, rather than a constant re-iteration, would have helped. However, if this work was flawed at least it was in the grand manner.

From a completely different tack came the work of Richard Teitelbaum (USA). This work was a real high point, the technology being used in an integrated and transcendent manner. This concert featured works for three pianos — one under direct control of the composer+performer and the others under that of a computer. Aside from the complex and evocative music this work sought to problematize the whole nature of performance — the status of the performer, their tools and the audience. This set of fundamental relationships, well set in most cases, became fluid and indeterminate suggesting manifold realignments of the vectors of communication and meaning that constitute art.

Similarly, the work by Felix Hess (Holland) *Chirping And Silence* called into question these same basic issues. This piece consisted of a network of small machines capable of 'talking' or 'singing' to one another and the audience. Perhaps more a sound sculpture than a performance — although presented here in concert conditions — this work involved no human performer but rather the machines suggesting many small creatures exhibiting their intelligence and intent thus displacing and deconstructing the roles of reader and writer, performer and audience. Although here the technology was highly visible the result was subtle and

completely natural. An elegant moment amongst a great deal of noise.

Amongst all the performances the visual arts made an occasional and attendant appearance. The main exhibition, titled *Terminal Kunst*, showed a complete lack of curatorial intent or cohesion. The works were without exception very badly displayed and located relative to one another.

The work of Italian video artists Giovanatti, Mondani and Meccanici was very clever and witty amongst a lot of serious, and seriously lacking, art. Using basic low quality computer generated video they produced a series of small vignettes around the adventures of Futurist theorist Marinetti. They confronted him with the eventual products of his unrealised labours in a nicely stylised, tongue-in-cheek pop idiom.

Klang Labour, by Peter Vogel, was a sound sculpture activated by the viewers shadow, creating myriad possibilities in sound and space. Where the sign of both absence and presence, the shadow, was the performance ingredient — the real content/negative-content of the piece.

This paradoxical metaphor was really at work in Ars Electronica as a whole. The problem here is as follows: artists working in a similar and experimental nature need to get together to develop their work and for mutual support. On the other hand this can lead to a marginalisation or ghetto mentality that ultimately isolates the artist and their work from the broader artistic and social context they should be seeking to engage.

Perhaps it is that Linz is the wrong place for an event of this kind, or maybe the fault is with the curators/administrators (who were generally notable in their absence from the proceedings). All up the event failed to engage (beyond a small number of works) and if the stated intention of Ars Electronica — to explore the relationships between the arts, technology and society — is to be achieved a major re-think is required. ●

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ROUNDUP

THE STRUCTURE of Polyphonix, as described by its chairman, Jean-Jacques Lebel, is essentially 'nomadic', likened by him to the six-monthly meetings of Arabic tribes to exchange goods. The 'barter' in this case is the work of a wide range of artists, covering disciplines in poetry, video and performance.

Projects UK spent a fortnight in Paris, gathering audio and visual documentation of the work of over fifty artists. Given the extended scope of the festival, it was disappointing to find that the selection concentrated mainly on poetry. Whilst neither organiser nor audience wished to categorise mediums, preferring to perceive all live activities within the same melting-pot. I had hoped to see more 'pure' performance, in the belief that the 'act' has the greatest potential to unite an eclectic audience by the power of its expression outside of the spoken word — the communication of substance which words later approximate.

Chinese artist Ma Deshong's first performance consisted of a poetry reading. Entering on crutches, Deshong gave an immaculate reading in Chinese. I doubt if many people understood the words — myself included — but Deshong's words were delivered flowingly, rising and ebbing in tempo, sometimes anguished mono-syllables, sometimes whispered and silent, a sonorous phonetic display that captivated the audience. Deshong's second performance was a display of Chinese calligraphy — aided by two assistants who handed materials to him at the proper moments. Deshong gazed intently at a blank sheet of paper for minutes on end, then swiftly attacked it with his brush, producing a visual parallel to his earlier vocal presentation, which was paraded to an appreciative audience by a smiling assistant.

The second performance, by Rosita, was in marked contrast, stemming from her stage-craft developed from working the Parisian nightclub circuit as a comedienne. *Belle Blanche* was a twenty minute monologue examining notions of the erotic. Aided by a long leopard-skin rug and a ghetto blaster which occasionally blurted out a male voice defining pornography and love, Rosita talked in theatrical isolation, sometimes to herself, sometimes to her imaginary lover. I found the work to be essentially simplistic and didactic, Rosita cheerfully feigning despair and happiness with equal relish on the pitfalls of love. Although she attempted through self-mockery — crawling languorously across the rug, curling up like a sex-kitten, eventually taking off her top — to portray the absurdity of both male and female conceptions of the erotic, Rosita failed to induce an emotive response equal to her message. The end-result was an ideologically right-on piece of titillation.

Barbara Duyfes and Lisa Marcus presented *Wet Features*, the first part of a planned trilogy inspired by American photographer Diane Arbus. Duyfes and Marcus entered in darkness, except for two spots which fell on two pans of water boiling on gas-burners at the front of the space. Dressed identically, both moved in unison, first taking off an ice mask and hanging

SIMON HERBERT in Paris for this sound-based extravaganza:



POLYPHONIX

it over the pan, then taking off another mask, this time a rubber one. They stood together facing the audience, preening themselves compulsively, tugging their sleeves and collars into place, then moving sporadically up and down the space, realising with a start that the other existed. It gradually dawned on me that they were simulacra of an image of twin girls from an Arbus photograph; ingeniously, photographic subject became intertwined with photographer, schizophrenic ghosts that represented Arbus' own duality between Jewish princess and artist. Whilst one tickled the other, simultaneously laughing hysterically and pleading for the passive one to stop, there were echoes of Arbus' own neurotic and obsessive pursuit of happiness which she never found, leading, perhaps, to her eventual suicide.

B. Mendonca's performance again took place in low light, beginning with a spot-lit descent on a rope from the rafters above. Dressed in a white boiler suit and wearing a papier-mâché 'faceless' mask, Mendonca approached the audience and produced four stacks of lettered ceramic tiles from a rucksack. Pogo-ing with presumed excitement he spread the tiles around the floor, spelling out the words 'MODULE, OUVERT, MOBILE, MUSCLE'. He then attached the tiles to his suit with pegs and string, and dragged behind him as he walked around the space. The tiles were then smashed with a hammer, and marked with red ink from a printer's pad. The marking process was then repeated on his own body, now half-divested of the boiler suit. Lying down, Mendonca tied the rucksack over his head and then walked away, leaving the detritus strewn about the floor. I found the piece obscure, any sense of real action was distanced by an inane backing track of low-key electronic musical blips.

The final performance was reserved for the great French favourite and founder of 'Nouveau Mixage' Joel Hubaut. Hubaut's piece was conceived and performed in conjunction with the philosopher Felix Guattari, illustrating a concept dear to the Polyphonix organisers of instigating artistic cross-fertilisation with 'non-artists'.



Rosita: *Belle Blanche*

Guattari began the piece, seated alone on a chair mumbling from notes produced from his briefcase. Hubaut entered, pulling wind-up children's toys and a vibrator from his suitcase, which Guattari comically anointed with an ornate bottle of cologne. In true Mixage style, Hubaut then took centre-stage, growling innocently and apologetically into a microphone to the strains of a backing-track of his rhythmic, collaged music. Whenever the music stopped he ran over to Guattari to try and talk to him, but quickly ran back when the music started again. Eventually, lit by a flickering strobe, and to the occasional riff of Zero Mostel singing 'Springtime for Hitler', Hubaut frantically attempted to construct shapes from long wooden planks, finally rejecting hammer and nails in favour of using his own body as a focus of Herculean poses with the planks. Whilst regarding this particular brand of 'surreal anarchy' with an uneasy scepticism, I must confess to be a sucker for manic spectacle, which was heightened by the constant presence of a small girl skipping around the edge of the space, trailing a pan attached to her by a piece of string.

The organisers would argue that the work in Polyphonix is political merely within the context of a multi-national festival devoted to experience. After spending a fortnight submerged in the energy of Polyphonix, it is difficult to argue against this — even so, things would have been even better with the inclusion of some truly radical and visionary work. ●

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

NICK HOUGHTON trudges round the best of London's student summer shows, and finds an ominously defined future:

Between the white wine and private view chit-chat of artschool Degree shows lies indications of an eclectic and accessible new culture at work as videos flicker, films tick across screens and installation pieces engage the viewer.

Down at the Metro, for example, St. Martins were coming across with work which ranged from the explicitly political to the downright comicbook. In the latter instance Gareth Matthews was taking us on a switchback ride through an anarchic toyshop landscape occupied by gimmicks, teddy bears and loud pop music. This epic video, *Orthofujicompscratch*, is a blatantly funny and fastmoving sprawl of a work swinging from college humour-pisstakes of his contemporaries — through pop video to cartoon crazed fantasy. Fast-cut and frantic it's something to giggle about but when the smiles gone there's really not much to think about. Similarly Marco Cecere's two video pieces, one a fairly cliche ridden pop promo for Liverpools Pink Industry, the other an effects riddled contemporary fairy story called *Beauty and the Beast*, left this viewer with an impression of pretty pictures — well handled but little else.

Questions arise too over Yolande Brenner's curiously jumpcut video *Insight* where schizophrenia is under scrutiny in a mix of documentary video effects and 'staged' interrogation. It's a rough-edged piece with some faults but it's good to see the documentary form twisted a little.

Away from the Metro and down to the East End for North East London Polytechnic's film/video show. Here the bar prices were cheaper, the video work sparser and, largely, more low-key. *Sons and Fathers*, from Chris Fouracre, for example, an 8 minute piece, puts family relationships under painful analysis through a b&w snapshot of father and child. It's a slow piece, overstated to some extent by the use of sinister soundtrack, but edgy and disconcerting nonetheless. Jan Hallett's work, by comparison, affects that peculiar brand of suburban surrealism which is alternately rambling and irritating or comically engaging. Playfully sly or childish?

I was still considering the question when I found myself sipping white wine and chewing my way through French bread at the Royal College press reception. Expensively produced, the catalogue looked like a yuppies wet-dream of chop graphic style. Sited in the coolly professional environs of the RCA itself this show, surrounded by trumpetblowing brouhaha, signifies the determinedly go-getting emphasis of the RCA's Environmental Media Course.

The politics of this cutback are perhaps too complex to go into here but the impression is that in the newly dynamic money hungry RCA experimentation and innovation, as represented by the broadbased Environmental Media department, are subservient to the slickly professional intentions of the institutions. It's almost as if the EM dept were a bit too messy to be contained in the RCA's design conscious hierarchy. It's telling that the Media show, the final show ever to come out of this now extinct department, was located in the somewhat tattier confines of an adjacent building. Here a student told me that the loss of the Media dept was 'to do with internal politics' and added 'We've spent a lot of time trying to get support for the course but no-one in the Royal seems to want to know'. Despite this lack of support and the RCA's self-evident abandonment of the department the last show haphazardly illustrated why the department is important. None of the media conscious razzmatazz but plenty of substantial work.

Paticularly appealing was Julia Lancaster's intimate installation, *Taking Liberties*, complete with a film loop of Lancaster herself drumming. Scattered with domestic motifs the space acted as container to the simple yet effective tapes on view. Undramatic but lively the experience was a bit like having a long chat with an old pal. Upstairs, meanwhile, Simon Robertshaw's complex hardware jammed installation was still churning out reams of computer print out. A pre-programmed computer played music and various monitors ticked out text and images from the cityscape around the RCA itself. 'What is it?', asked an exciteable five year old. I thought it might be about information technology, history and ways-of-seeing but the five year old didn't seem interested. 'Come and see the spooky room', he insisted. I trotted along to Graham Ellards gloomily lit two roomed space. Wide eyed the kindergarten art critic made tentative steps into the space. A counterbalanced weight attached to some sort of complex clockwork mechanism hung mournfully in one corner, torn texts and images outlined a route into the space. The mood is sinister, starkly nightmarish. The five year old loved it.

Finally perhaps the last word should go to the now defunct Environmental Media department: 'We oppose confinement and restriction — if such moves are not to be resisted then the future looks ominously designed' (RCA Catalogue). With the whole of the present Fine Art system under threat it's something we should all think about.●

THE BOW GAMBELAN ensemble appear to have more or less sold out every night of their recent 10 day run at the ICA. They have had good critical reports, and even the most cynical of the glittering circles of informed opinion, those that stretch and curl lazily and sometimes viciously in the close vicinity of the ICA bar, have nothing but good to say of them. Is everything now all right in the universe?

Interestingly, John Ashford, former Theatre Director of the ICA, occasional writer for this magazine, and now a member of the organisation in fact promoting the Bow Gamelan, recently went public during a series of talks organised by this magazine with the Air Gallery, and explained why, during his tenure at the ICA, he never booked performance art. Not only had he felt that, even given the wide brief of a multi-arts centre such as the ICA, what should go in theatres was theatre, and what should go in galleries was art, and each space defined thereof of the activity within it, but also that none of it was interesting enough. Now, allowing Ashford the latitude of a St Paul on the road to Damascus one wondered aloud where he was, say during the X6 events, at the heyday of the Acme gallery, even in the early days of the Midland Group performance platform or the South Hill park performance festivals. Standing on the sidelines making notes on the 'unsuitability' for the ICA space? (that many of these events had been site-specific was another excuse).

I remember seeing the Kipper Kids pack 'em out at the ICA in the early seventies and I wonder how it is that it's taken over ten years to get back to square one. Firstly, I have to point at the determination of Paul Burwell, Anne Bean and Richard Wilson (the ensemble) in making the ICA space work for them, not the other way round. After seeing some highly successful early shows, at the Diorama, in the Regents canal etc, I had also seen them being shoe-horned into some really unsuitable spaces, including, I may add, one of those one-night agglomeration events that the ICA seem to put on when they've run out of ideas.

This time, the Gamelan have got in there and worked at it. Perhaps it helped, perhaps it didn't, that the ICA's administration's attention seemed to be on the La Fura Dels Baus mega-event in docklands. Whatever, from beginning to end, *In C and Air* never failed to satisfy. Starting with a literal deconstruction of the stage (it being hoisted up and down in clacking segments, culminating in a thundering, marching rhythm) the appearance of the gnarled sound-

IN SEA

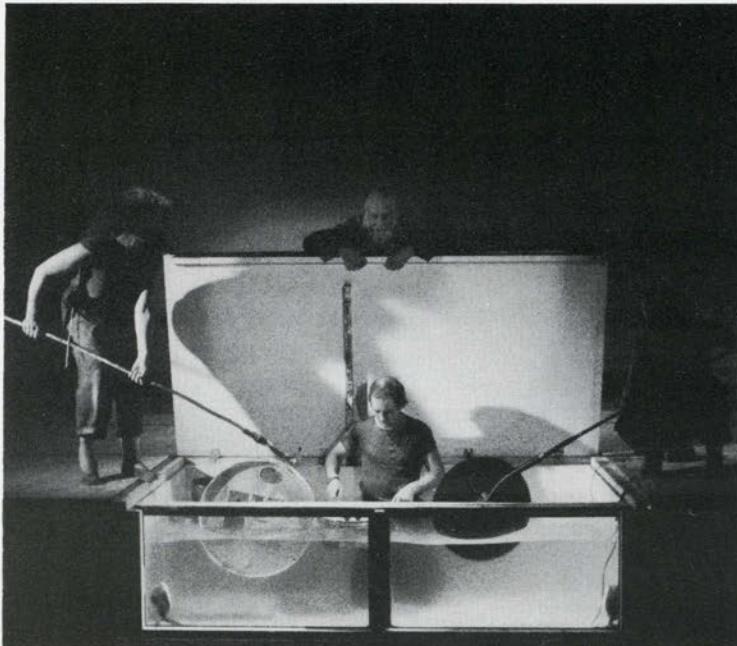


PHOTO / JIM HAROLD

Bow Gamelan Ensemble have devised a completely new show for the ICA. ROB LA FRENAIS gives his opinion:

poet Bob Cobbing on a preaching-bicycle, introduced the marine section of the piece with a 'good honest and painful sermon' in Moby Dick style. The fully clothed Burwell entered a large lit tank, fully clothed and proceeded to play the drums underwater, Anne Bean appeared with her kettles hissing and steaming away and Richard Wilson, most spectacularly of all activated an entire Renault 4, flapping the hatch, doors and bonnet electrically, the lights flashing, and horns hooting as it flitted back and forth across the stage, like an albatross. Finally the stage lurched open climactically to half-reveal furious netherworld arc-welding procedures snapping and crackling away, ejecting ghostly filaments in the dark.

The fact was though, I mused as I was being shown the complex and ingenious 'engine room' under the stage after the show, that these people have been doing this sort of thing, individually and now as a group, albeit with fewer resources, for over a decade. They're not a young group being given a first chance. I know

that they have had the experience and have developed the stubbornness to bully promoters into giving them what they want. This time they finally got it, from what, it has to be said is the most heavily funded arts centre in Britain. The sad thing is that I have not seen a similar effort from a British group (with the possible exception of Impact Theatre) for literally years in that space. Why not? Note this success well, ICA.

Finally, it should be said that the Gamelan progress best with... progress. Attached as they may be to their old bagpipes, car horns and alarm bells (and it was a nice ironic moment, as well as a shock when the entire backdrop spectacularly collapsed to reveal the original Gamelan), we now know what those instruments sound like. Burwell, Bean and Wilson are in danger of getting caught up in their own myths and tradition, as they continue their industrial anthropology. 'It's the old Gamelan' shrug. Bean with affection. 'We can't just let it sit there.' Thus speaks the post-modern impulse. I just wouldn't want to load it in the van every time. ●

DAYLIGHT

This new afternoon performance club starts a new season. BILL MILLIS describes the first day:

It's refreshing to have a genuine regular Performance venue in London, instead of the demeaning sight of performance artists hanging onto the shirt tails of alternative cabaret and its unappreciative environment of value-entertainment. So the fortnightly club is an oasis or a mirage depending on your viewpoint. This is mine. I was delighted to see The Cleona B. Falcon Fan Club in action fronted by the charismatic Hermine, who did a swinging cajun set that was well received by the audience. There was an interesting sound sculpture that could have had a more visual impact with some lighting effects, and possibly been allowed to run a bit longer. A high point of the afternoon was the non-materialisation of Carlyle Reedy! I have been to several of Carlyle's non-appearances in the past and Carlyle didn't let us down this time, she again didn't appear. Instead Sef Townsend did an improvised set. Sef tends towards the narcissistic and one feels a sense of voyeurism when watching him. But his performance with a tape of himself (of course) and bog paper was both self-engrossing and dynamic. The Harland Miller performance of action painting with a backdrop of gangster films and sound tracks kept the atmosphere at a high level and the end result was a stimulating canvas that the audience should have been encouraged to examine as an exhibit. Which brings me appropriately to the gallery exhibition staged in conjunction with the performances. Bol Marjoram's painting/collages were a clever mix of insight and humour. Joanna Jones' sculptures are described as 'soft' and they were pink to the point of yuk — not unlike the set from a recent performance of Silvia C. Ziranek. Perhaps this is the avant-gaudy! Sorry, but it's a personal stomach turn. My reservations on the Daylight were that the performances on the whole tended towards the viewer/doer relationship and very little effort was made by performers to bridge that gap. To the point that there was an excess of video viewing that threatens to turn us all into alternative T.V.s. One performance artist in the audience observed that there were many acts but precious little interaction. Let's hope that the tea and cakes bohemia of this performance oasis will be more intoxicating in future. Otherwise the mirage is complete. ●



CHARTING TIME AND EYE MUSIC

Eye Music is a major touring exhibition exploring the visual aspects of music and its notation. PETER McRAE sees some performances in and around the exhibition, while NICK HOUGHTON views an interlinked film and video show, also concerned with notation, Charting Time:

The ten year drought has broken at the Serpentine (the Gallery, that is) in Kensington Gardens. For the month of August a creditable total of nine performance events will have been recorded. These events, plus live music, film and video, are being held in conjunction with a stimulating Arts Council exhibition entitled EYE MUSIC 'the graphic art of new musical notation'.

The exhibition examines mostly the period 1950 to 1975 in which rapid changes in music-making required equally radical changes in notation. Most of the composers exhibited had reverted to more conventional notation by 1975 but the legacy of the period is a greater freedom for performer and audience.

The three performances to date have involved a score. Scores are not restricted to music: sound poetry and 'labanotation' in dance. No keys are provided with the scores on exhibit and so the more visual scores are open to being read as scores for performance in any medium.

Richard Layzell constructed his score on the Gallery lawn: the lawn had been mown to specification to produce various straight-sided shapes (the mowing would have been a performance in itself — the score being the specification by arrangements of string). On the lawn were clusters of flags, various wave shapes (sharks to some people) and arrangements of plastic strips.

Mike Adcock issued colour coded, written instructions, wrapped around a flute with gas filled balloons attached. His *Air on a Shoe-String* was for up to 99 bamboo flutes.

Max Eastley had arranged a score on the grid provided by the flag stones in the West Gallery. There were multi-coloured rods, pieces of cloth and various objects and instruments for the making of sounds.

In all performances, the surroundings were conspicuously and advantageously part of the score. Even for Eastley's indoors performance, the French windows to the Gallery allowed activity immediately outside to be influential. The conditions imposed by the outdoors are such as to make any live music event a performance event. In conducting his piece for twelve trombones around the River Amstel in Amster-

dam, for instance, the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer was required to sit in a boat in midstream and operate colour coded flags.

All three performance scores were dynamic, providing additional interest to the static scores on exhibition.

One of Layzell's flag clusters was particularly pleasing as the heavily laden fibre glass rods swung, well bowed, in ideal breeze. This and also Adcock's cue balloons, bouncing around among trees and clouds, were instances where music made in the imagination was enough.

Layzell was very much a part of the dynamic of his score. He was simultaneously as animator an element in the score and performing to the score. He romped about: in his words, 'in celebration of the space'. Four musicians improvised to his animation and occasionally to the score alone. When he threw cross-shaped frisbees, he elicited a predictable but apt musical response.

For a time, score, performers and the weather combined to produce an admirable evocation of a good summer. The level of interest did lapse, largely due to lack of working experience between the musicians and the animator or to their not exploring the score sufficiently, or both. Towards the conclusion, the visual and the musical combined well to the score of falling blossoms from a vigorously shaken tree. While indoors, the exhibition was conceding that the pursuit of visual beauty within musical composition is bound to be an endeavour of limited range.

There was a certain amount of (self confessed) anarchy and controlled chaos in Adcock's performance. The score consisted of five instructions in five languages. Instruction No four was 'Play anything you like', in the best tradition of ways of avoiding instruction. The composer conducted, *Messiah* like, from the roof of the West Gallery by releasing various numbers of coloured gas filled balloons, corresponding with the score.

Unexpected variations came to take effect: there was a significant shortage of some colours in the bulk lot of balloons and many balloons burst before their functions were fulfilled. The sound was vigorous. The participants were eager. Directly through the French window, in-

side the Gallery, Dick Higgins' score, *Clouds for Piano* 1974, was visible and well complemented by the action outside.

The exhibition suggests that musical seriousness is no guarantee of visual interest (or vice versa?). Before the audience knew how seriously Eastley was to be taken, he was extrapolating with some enthusiasm, his interest in the dynamic range of listening: 'What do you hear at the end of listening?' He quoted from a tape composer credited with having made 20,000 clean tape recordings (that is, with no microphone or other input) of voices and played one of these, the voices, by a quick process of elimination, being attributed to the dead.

Meanwhile, outside the French window, a man who had been lying prostrate on the grass arose to investigate the performance. He remained at the window for some time, briefly noted by the artist. A woman passing by, stopped to peer through thick glasses, through the window, at the artist. Another woman ran up and down desperately looking for the entrance.

In the course of chalking out an additional score on the flag stones and then making percussion on it, Eastley showed that he was not above self parody. However, this and subsequent improvisation with the main score were not fully engaging, partly because there were few surprises and because of too much fragmentation. When he returned to playing the single stringed 'Nordic ski' instrument, something like a combination of steel guitar and musical saw, a wonderful richness was produced. It would have been even more satisfying, in the context of this season, if there had been a score apparent for this particular music.

Alistair Snow gave a nice angle to 'EYE MUSIC' by placing his trumpeter, courtesy of PTP Aerial Platforms, up in the quite high tree tops with a bird's-eye view of his lawn score: the conventional five-line stave, in sports ground lime, notated for a time with a score of solid black ironing boards. The effect of distancing performer vertically from a score was conveyed, although the music played was in fact not the lawn score but 'Pictures at an Exhibition'. When Snow and trumpeter did improvise briefly on the score, at ground level, the result was lost in the hubbub and vast scale of the overall operation and the players wisely moved on.

Like Eastley, Snow chose to parody the exhibition and by more obscure means in staging a highland games complete with pipe band and Queen Victoria: the high point of which was the very stern pipers, 'The Pin Striped Highlanders', being visibly disturbed by the irreverence of the ladies' 'sword dance' which was shockingly executed on sets of ironing boards in lieu of swords. (P McR)

Richard Layzell



ROBIN MORLEY pedals off to Cambridge at a single command to become a spoke in the wheel of Charlie Hooker's latest mass-performance:

'Charting Time' describes itself as 'An Exhibition of artist's drawings, notes and diagrams for film and video... An important feature of the exhibition is that the completed videos and films are being shown continuously next to these traces of their origins...' (Catalogue notes by joint selectors Steve Hawley/Dave Curtis).

But if all this sounds like a promising premise for collating 12 artists' film/video works and background paperwork then the reality is less engaging than might be suggested. Informationally the collected diagrams, graphs, jottings and scrawls are partly of interest in explaining working methods — Mineo Ayamaguchi's highly structured annotations for the criss-cross abstraction of *Beyond Colour* and Patrick Keiller's complex documentation for *The End* both illustrate a point — but, largely, there's little evidence of the 'vitality of mark' claimed by the selectors. The claim that these assembled scribbles, murky photos and notebooks 'stand as art-works in their own right' seems particularly spurious here, investing worknotes and cut-ups with the preciousness of 'art object' as if the act of an artist putting pen to paper was somehow, of itself, magical. Mostly it's not.

What this leaves then is the film/video works themselves — all work, incidentally, is here shown continuously on videotape, although all filmwork will be screened at the gallery. Here the exhibition becomes more interesting as its broad base allows for an eclectic mix of experimental styles and methods that ranges from the kinetic formalism of Liz Rhodes strobing *Light Music* through to the manic cartoonery of Jeff Keens' *Blatzom*, a jumpcut collision with trash culture animated by Keen's Rolf-Harrison-on-acid comic technique. More serious is Jayne Parker's *Cat*. Parker has here created a simple nightmarish piece with a series of drawings of childlike barbarity. There's something terrifying and primal here which is underlined by the crayoned text which recurs throughout the film ('you think everything is alright and then a fish bites a bird and it all turns red'), reads the narrative at one point; the image of fish as carnivorous human backbone is one which will stay with me for some time to come).

Where *Cat* is partly informed by the direct strength of its text then *Blurt*, Anna Thew, is challenging in its refusal of language. The 'uselessness of words' (Thew's notes) is under attack here as flashframed texts and still images are frantically cut to the artists talking head speech patterns. Its a frenzied and questioning piece driven by an emotive frustration with the inability of language. With Marty St. James/Anne Wilson, however, it isn't so much the world of words which is of interest but the cheesecake escapism of Mills-and-Boons romance. *True Life Romance*, looking something like a highly stylised videotricked moving photo-story, here parodies the clichés of the 'true love' genre but to what end I'm not sure. It's funny, of course, in a fairly softedged sort of way, but I'm uncertain about what's going on here beyond the obvious jokingness of the tape.

I remain uncertain too about Judith God-

The creator of Britain's first multi-storey car park performance, Charlie Hooker, in collaboration with the Kettle's Yard Art Centre as part of the Cambridge Arts festival has just completed a major outdoor performance work using 60 amateur cyclists and an elaborate sound and movement system on Parker's Piece, a flat grassed Cambridge park in the town centre.

Two years ago Charlie Hooker constructed a performance work using a Gateshead concrete multi-storey car park, four CB motorists and four walking performers.

Coming back to this way of working in public spaces Hooker wanted to work with a large orchestrated group of performers. 'I wanted to do a piece which people could just turn up to and take part, unrehearsed'.

The performance started with the groups converging slowly on the central light, the sound increasing in tempo as cyclists in single file moved towards the pedestrian audience standing around the lamp, with Hooker conducting the performers from a battery of darkroom stopclocks, tape machines and signal torches.

Night in Bike City was a series of elegant movements across the parkways lasting half an hour, the file of cycloperforms interlinking and meshing their movements over the large space. Dramatic moments occurred when sixty cyclists converged together from all points on the centre only to flash past each other and the standing public at arms length before disappearing off again into the night.

The sound drifted across Parker's Piece from the main speaker source, while the individual moving tape players speeding by gave snatches of a sound reflection either in or out of sync, depending on the position and movement. Similar to syncro swimming or an aerial display the fast moving cyclists performed an atmospheric dance through the space.

'It's site specific' said Hooker. One participant commented afterwards 'I was very wary of taking part, I had this ghastly vision of lots of cyclists and mayhem. But when I saw the site, I

thought this looks alright and I enjoyed it.'

Another, a Cambridge teenager, added 'I was just cycling past and asked if I could take part, I don't have any lights but they let me anyway.'

Charlie Hooker describes a year ago while working at Kettle's Yard he witnessed the chaos of cycling Cambridge 'You don't get mugged in Cambridge, you get run over. There is a code of getting around the city by cycle, it's self-policed, but you have to learn the code. I wanted to take this potential craziness and direct it to one point for half an hour. To make it run smoothly. The idea came when I saw six cyclists at night in the distance in a Cambridge street coming towards me singing and talking with their lights on. I then saw Parker's Piece and it was perfect.'

He compares the piece with the Gateshead multi-storey car park performance, with which, despite its success, he felt unhappy about due to the lack of preparation time. In Cambridge he felt he had succeeded in working on a large scale and in bringing the public into taking an active part in his work. 'I was impressed on how much concentration people put into taking part, it showed on their faces as they passed by me during the performance. I liked the collective responsibility that the piece created.' The six month preparation and week's collaborative work on site with Kettle's Yard staff had paid off.

Asked if he had not felt like a crossroads traffic cop in orchestrating the performers, he said 'I felt like an air traffic controller with all those runways of lights. Over the last few years my work has involved people taking part. Here I took a risk in saying they have to take part, if they don't it won't happen. I feel I have learnt a lot from this piece.'

Despite problems of the audience being unable to see the entire performance over its 360 degree sweep, Hooker had succeeded not only in bringing together the public to take part creating an abstract and structuralist performance work but also in enjoying the experience. 'Cambridge ran smoothly for half an hour' said the creator of *Night in Bike City*.

dard's 'Celestial Light/Monstrous Races'. The mutant forms — a man with his face on his torso, a head with one huge eye — that Goddard has created through video impositions are startling and original in themselves but the context of blurry faces, sunlit vegetation and skyward jump edits against which this sequence is cut left me puzzled rather than intrigued. For Peter Gidal though problems are what it's all about, 'the problem of problematizing of filmic representation'. Slowmoving, wholly abstract and highly theoretical in concept, his *Close Up* fares badly as a tele-cine work in this context. It's a film which needs to be watched in the dark and on a screen.

If Gidal's work can be labelled 'heavyweight' then Derek Jarman's contribution must surely be lightweight. *Art of Mirrors*, an 8mm film, comprises a few lads, bare bums and some rather coy larking about. Its in black-and-white, slow-motioned and, frankly, a bit dodgy. Home movies are home movies really and, while I

have some admiration for Jarman's approach to film making, in the end there's nothing intrinsically more interesting about Dez's Super-8 larabouts than my Aunty Rita's beach epics. (I wasn't the only viewer who seemed to think this. Whilst I was standing close by a man looking at *Mirrors* rather curiously changed channels on the monitor apparently preferring the midday news transmission to Jarman's film).

However, before I'm driven from the page with howls of 'Heretic' quick mention to Mike Leggetts intriguing *Vistasound* and Tim Cawkwell's schematic *Sforzinda*. And a thought too, perhaps, for a selection procedure which seems to have bypassed the work of new artists. Most of the work seen here has been screened before, the makers in their own way 'established' in the area of independent film/video, and while this doesn't undercut the necessity to exhibit the work, it might have been a slightly less cosy affair with the inclusion of two 'outsiders'. Still, it's nothin' serious, I'm only blurtin.

Judith Goddard



PERFORMANCE ART TALKS

A eclectic group of artists, critics and administrators got together recently to discuss publicly issues relating to performance, in particular its exposure in the media. JANE JACKSON gives a personal impression:

The series, chaired by Rob La Frenais, editor of this magazine looked at performance — art and related topics, their exposure in press, television, galleries, theatre and street; and at its artists as gurus, scapegoats, frontier explorers, therapists, entertainers, masochists and political activists.

I should say at the outset that this is not a shot at giving a balanced, impartial, factual report on the lectures, but the view of one who bucketed between a feeling of warm family partisanship and that of an extremely irritated Scottish nanny with an overriding desire to give most people present a bracing cold bath and a nice set of account books.

At these large family gatherings, all the old stories were retold, the old grievances aired, gossip exchanged; but the familiar ground was not just gone over, it was opened up and made fertile by generous contributions from both the invited speakers and the floor.

The material which most activated my own thoughts and feelings, seemed to focus on two areas which were returned to and rediscussed from many angles. Both these areas were to do with values.

The first subject entangling and disentangling the threads of personal experience, idealism and theory expressed by the speakers was: is my art valuable? Here there seemed to be a constant confusing of value in the sense of the art having an innate human value, being life-enhancing, consciousness-widening, having meaning for the person experiencing it; and value in the financially rewarded sense that money will be offered in exchange for receiving the experience.

This was referred to in a wide range of aspects in terms of financial, cultural, political, social, historical, commercial, therapeutic, and emotional values. The confusion over values seems to be intensified because for many artists the question about art having value runs seemlessly into the often panic-inducing question, 'am I of value?' Listening to the discussions I

wondered if a great deal of the frustration, rage and despair expressed by artists about their lot, comes from the holding together of the conviction of ones own value — because of the quality of work done — whilst at the same time, experiencing a complete negation of that value in terms of financial reward and social status. It seemed to me that if we as artists could acknowledge the diversity of values which may be given to our art/selves, we could then amend this question to: In what particular area is my work/am I valuable?

This would have the benefit of assuming value and also of assuming the power to direct that value into one or more defined channels — though in my opinion each aspect needs to be approached separately. The vague belief that all aspects of value, financial, cultural etc. are connected by semi-permeable membranes through which worth in one as aspect will flow uninterruptedly into another seems to preclude artists from accepting that they need to pursue at least two paths towards functioning adequately as artists. That as well as carrying out the practice of our art we need to provide a professional structure within which we may practise. All other professions have to do this. Doctors, for example, do not dash about hither and yon demanding the right to practise on us because they have a skill we need. They have set up huge professional institutions which protect their interests, assure their status and keep their fees at the right level.

This lack of being able to work together in a helpful way was commented on despairingly more than once from the floor.

The second subject around which many of the exchanges gathered, and also concerning values, was to do with the double bind which we seem to find ourselves in about working in a new way. Because language dies and forms become empty, our function is to provide other languages/forms so that meaning can be carried anew. Artists

value their work because it goes beyond recognised boundaries, everyday definitions, but then complain bitterly that the value of their work is not recognised immediately.

This dilemma was expressed wonderfully by a speaker from the floor who stated that, 'New content obscures form'. This led me to understand that new content explodes violently and form is not found until the explosion stops and energy reaches its own limits — these limits/boundaries define the form.

Although it would not be possible, and destructive if possible, to explain work produced in whatever medium, many of the points raised, particularly by Stuart Brisley, gave me to think that some kind of access should be provided by the artist for the audience, viewer, consumer; that it is impolite on one level and grossly negligent on another not to do so.

Putting piles of washing machines for example in a public place, without a poster (for which incidentally there was a good site) with a few sentences about the intention of the artist seems to me to be provoking local residents in an unproductive way, likely to confirm any prejudices about art and artists that they may have. If (as in some Artangel projects), for example, provocation is an aim in itself then the responses need to be collected and produced (as they do in book form) so that the whole process of action and reaction can be seen together and evaluated.

Very small amounts of information can enable people who are not practising artists themselves, to enjoy performance work. It was the reluctance to undertake this aspect of our work, together with the reluctance to network and provide professional frameworks that brought me frighteningly close to a conversion to Thatcherism and the strong desire to extend the cold bath/account book treatment mentioned earlier. It would be extremely ungrateful of me though if I did not say that these irritations were more than compensated for by the excitement and stimulation generated by the sharing of so much wide ranging personal experience. These lectures drove me crazy, but I enjoyed them.●

● Taking part in the talks at the Air Gallery, co-organised by Performance Magazine with Air, were: Steven Taylor Woodrow (artist), Jeni Walwin (Arts Council), Richard Cork (The Listener), Silvia Ziranek (artist), Stuart Brisley (Artist), Kathy Acker (artist/writer), Gray Watson (critic), Kenneth Rea (The Guardian), Claire MacDonald (Impact Theatre), Rose English (artist), John Ashford (critic), John Carson (Artangel), Rose Garrard (artist), Pete Moser (musician), Neil Spencer (Red Wedge).

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(Working title)

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