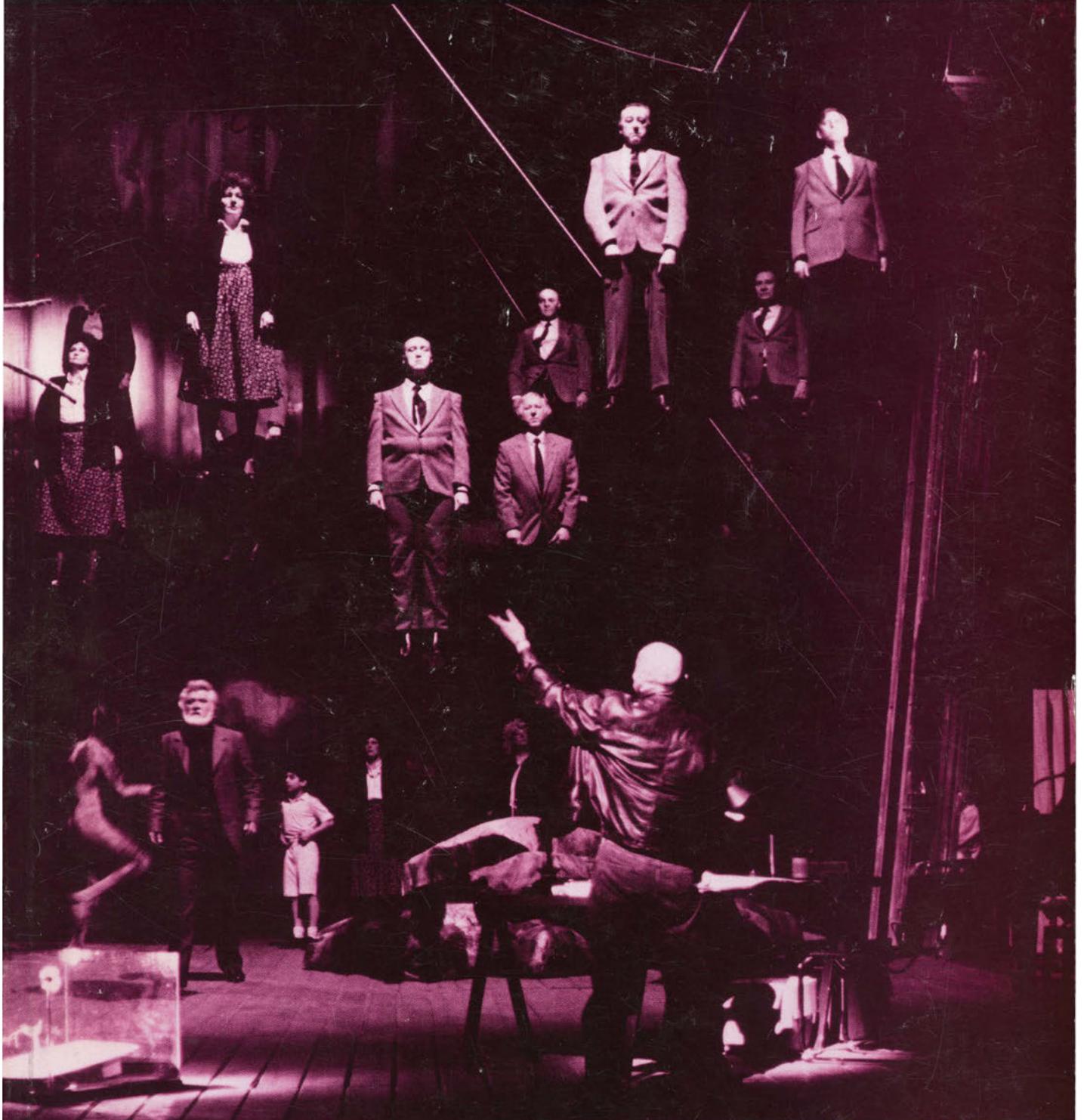


Performance

Winter 1989/90 No 59 £3.50



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PROJECTS UK 1990

NEW PERFORMANCE WORK:

KABIR HUSSEIN. A journey through Wales. Retracing the route taken, in 1188, by Giraldus Cambrensis, the Archdeacon of Brecon, in order to recruit for the crusades. First stage completed. Publication planned.

SUSAN TIMMINS & ROXANE PERMAR. New work in the Shetland Islands. A journey and the construction of temporary landmarks consisting of window installations in empty buildings together with photographs overlooking the landscape, evoking associations with abandonment and evacuation as a result of both natural processes and external forces, such as the current threat to the islands through the proposed dumping of nuclear waste.

STEFAN GEC. Bitter Waters (Cow Green). A journey along the border of Northumberland and Cumbria with particular focus on Cow Green Reservoir. By exposing wool in the contaminated waters of Cow Green he will be searching symbolically for evidence of Chernobyl.

CHRIS WAINWRIGHT & REUBEN KENCH. The Spirit of Cultivation. A journey through the rain forests of Venezuela and Brazil incorporating, in part, the production, presentation and documentation of ritual addressing particularly economic and ecological issues.

ALANNA O'KELLY. The Island Blooms A Garden — and a Graveyard. A journey through Ireland from north to south/urban to rural collecting images, stories, names, memories, songs, chants and sounds towards a new multi media performance work.

* * *

EDGE 90: THE NEW WORK. In collaboration with the Edge Biennale Trust we will be presenting new work in performance and installation, by artists from Europe, Mexico, Australia, Canada & USA, on and around Newcastle's Quayside between May 17th and 29th 1990. EDGE 90 will tour to Glasgow in June and Rotterdam in September.

FORCE 10: GLASGOW 1990 COMMISSION. Flags by artists. In collaboration with Glasgow's District Council Festivals Unit we will be commissioning flags designed by artists to be shown in Glasgow during 1990. The project is designed to address the civic, nationalistic and symbolic functions of the flag in contemporary society. Details from address below: Send SAE. Proposal deadline December 6th.

TWSA: FOUR CITIES. In collaboration with TWSA we will be commissioning and presenting throughout Tyne and Wear new site specific, temporary artworks in September 1990. Site details will be available from January 1990.

Further details from:

JON BEWLEY or SIMON HERBERT
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Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 1SG.
Tel: (091) 261 4527 Fax: (091) 221 0492

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INNOVATIVE ARTS AND MEDIA

Projects UK is supported by Northern Arts and Newcastle City Council

Contents

Performance

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© 1989

ISSN No. 0 144 5901

Editor Gray Watson

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Design Gabriella Le Grazie

Printing/Layout

Bookmag, Inverness

Publisher

Performance Magazine Ltd

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Performance gratefully
acknowledges financial
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Front Cover:

Graham Vick's production of
Luciana Berio's *Un re in ascolto*,
at Royal Opera House, Covent
Garden, London, 1989. Designer:
Chris Dyer. (photo Clive Barda)

Back Cover:

Carolee Schneemann, drawing
for *Fresh Blood — A Dream
Morphology* 1981.

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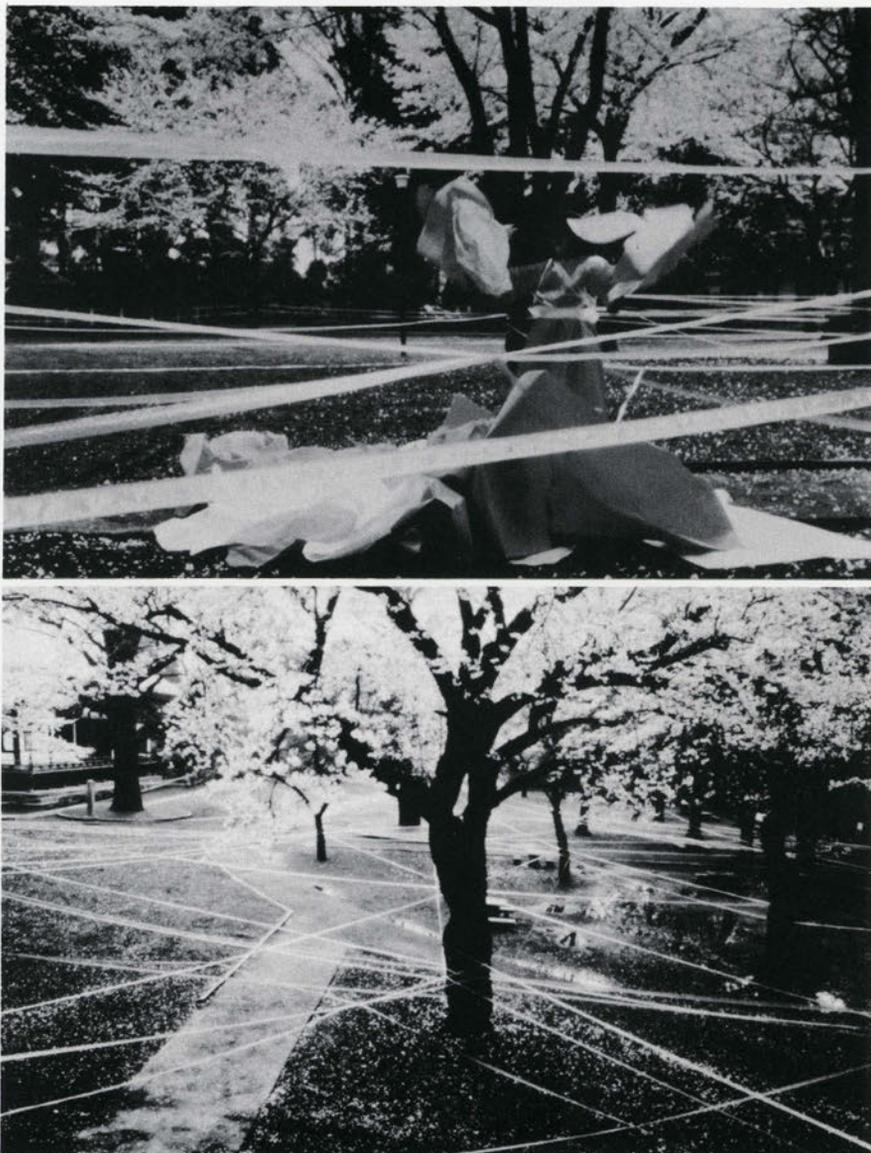
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Editorial

At the end of 1989 it is useful to look back, not just over the last decade, but over the last two hundred years.

We all have good reason by now to be fed up with the bicentennial celebration of the French Revolution. It has, however, been a valuable focus. It has given rise to some excellent work, from Station House Opera's *The Bastille Dances* to Ian Hamilton Finlay's proposed memorial at Versailles to the Declaration of the Rights of Man, commissioned and then outrageously banned by the French Government, and to such exhibitions as 'After 1789 — Ideas and Images of Revolution' held at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. It has also provided an appropriate context for the staging of plays as complex and provocative as Heiner Müller's *The Task*, as well as the re-staging of such classics as *Danton's Death* and the *Marat-Sade*. More generally, the events of 1789 are a convenient symbol not only for a major process of change within the specifically political arena but also of equally thoroughgoing changes taking place at that time in other areas, changes which may reasonably be said to herald the beginning of the 'modern' period.

Most notably, the French Revolution more or less coincided both with the Industrial Revolution and with a process of revolutionary change which occurred within the arts — both in terms of content and in terms of the artist's relationship with society.

In the visual arts, it was Goya who was the watershed. With one foot still in the *ancien régime* and the tradition of the Old Masters, he was also, in his depictions of the atrocities of war and in particular in his 'black paintings', beginning to explore in an entirely new way some of the most difficult and dangerous dimensions of the human condition. Horrors had been painted often enough before; but Bosch, for example, was working, for all his eccentricity, within a framework of culturally shared belief which by the end of the eighteenth century the Enlightenment had effectively swept away, at least as far as Europe's more adventurous minds were concerned. Deeply affected by the Enlightenment and sharing, if not its faith in human perfectibility, at least a real hope for human improvement, Goya nevertheless pointed to precisely those aspects of human experience and potentiality which, from an Enlightenment and 'progressive' standpoint, are the most problematical.

In his 'black paintings' and related work, Goya raised issues with which

contemporary thinking — including, particularly regrettably, political theory, whether influenced by post-structuralism or not — has still failed to come to adequate grips. That is why André Malraux was right to say that it was with that aspect of Goya's work that 'modern painting begins.' For it has been one of the principal features of modern (that is to say, Romantic and post-Romantic) art that it has proposed insights and ways of seeing the world which are in advance of, and often in radical opposition to, the conventional view of its time; and, by extension, the art which most successfully retains its modernity for us today is that whose implications are still hardest to subsume within our current terms of understanding.

This feature distinguishes modern art from the art of previous epochs. Even if, in relation to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance can be seen as already a step in that direction, what happened at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries marked a truly decisive turning-point. On the one hand, it led to an unprecedented degree of cultural marginalization; on the other, it is the source of modern and avant-garde art's greatest long-term potential.

This potential, in part at least, is cognitive. Clearly, in saying this one is not referring to a form of cognition which is concerned with the building up of a body of factual knowledge or the creation of the kind of theoretical frameworks which are appropriate in the sciences. Rather one is referring to an extended sense of cognition in which not only the intellectual but also the intuitive, emotional and sensuous faculties are integrally involved. It is true that, in certain circles, such an extension of the meaning of 'cognition' and 'cognitive' is philosophically contentious; but, without becoming side-tracked into a fruitless debate over terminology, it is important to insist on what has always been one of the central aspirations, rarely but sometimes achieved, of art in contradistinction to craft, decoration or entertainment: namely, to give form and hence expression to some of the most advanced and profound perceptions of its time. If this has always been the case, there is a sense in which, with much of the best art of the last two centuries, it has become so both to a much greater extent and — precisely because of its marginality and concomitant freedom — in a radically new way.

It is probably Marcel Duchamp, and later Joseph Beuys, who most

forcefully drew attention to the closeness of the relationship between art and thinking; but the work of Jenny Holzer, in that she uses words as her principal medium, provides a particularly striking example. The fact that its physical qualities as well as its location are also crucial to her work demonstrates that it properly belongs in the realm of visual art; while its openness to multiple interpretations, giving it at times something of the quality which the Surrealists admired in the 'metaphysical' paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, distinguishes it from the more propagandistic use of words in some 'art' to which it is sometimes compared. The cognitive component is, however, just as strong in the aesthetically more complex work of — to take a few especially good but still representative examples — Rebecca Horn, Pina Bausch, Anne and Patrick Poirier or, indeed, Andy Warhol.

One of the central cultural facts of the last two hundred years has been that, with the demise of the authority of traditional patterns of belief, a vacuum has been created in the area of values. Were it not for such a vacuum, it is unlikely that a set of values as trivial as the crass form of materialism widely promoted through advertising and the mass media would ever have taken hold. But it is also unlikely, were it not for such a vacuum, that the more intellectually respectable Marxist brand of materialism would so readily have been turned into a secular faith; in particular, it is almost certainly through an inability to face up to the full consequences of such a vacuum that all too many intellectuals, including most of the theorizers to date about the social role of avant-garde art, have used Marxism not as the valuable but partial analytical tool that it is, but as the delimiter of their horizon of interpretation.

With the breaking apart of the monolithic order imposed by Stalin on Eastern Europe, undoubtedly one of the most dramatic developments of this last year, the recognition has at last become more widespread that it is impossible intelligently to believe in Marxism, or any other one system of thought, having all the necessary answers. This provides avant-garde art with one of its greatest opportunities ever. Far from representing a collapse of the ambition for a radical transformation of consciousness and society, the long overdue discrediting of totalitarian Communism shows up, rather, the absurdity of thinking that such an ambition could be realized through dogmatism and force, and thus implicitly opens the door

to the kind of proposal which art has to offer.

By definition, art cannot impose its vision in the sense that politics can; and if there has at times been a totalitarian flavour to some avant-garde art, especially in the early years of this century, it had become evident, long before the concept of postmodernism was thought of, that in the arts there existed a plurality of avant-gardes with a plurality of visions. This is exactly what contemporary society needs most — and it will be able to profit from it to the extent that it is prepared, rather than masking the vacuum by desperately filling it, to work constructively with the freedom which it confers.

The signs are hopeful. But the degree of the avant-garde's marginalization is without doubt appallingly great. Nor can it really be claimed that the approach represented by Andy Warhol — massively popular though his art is, relative to that of most other avant-garde artists — points the way to a very satisfactory solution. It may be true, as Kynaston McShine writes in his excellent introductory essay to the catalogue of the recent retrospective, that Warhol 'quite simply changed how we all see the world'; but, if so, it remains mostly at a visual and stylistic level. Warhol was a truly great artist, arguably the greatest since the Second World War, in the traditional sense that he created an aesthetic superbly appropriate to the electronic, media-dominated, mass consumption culture in which we live, and had therefore much to contribute to an understanding of our historical situation. Yet this fact is largely obscured by too great a concentration on his interesting lifestyle or, worse, his financial success — a wasteful mis-reading which, it must be said, his own pronouncements did little to discourage.

It goes without saying that there are many different reasons for looking at art or seeing a performance. It is entirely right that some of these, for example, should have exclusively to do with aesthetic pleasure, while others might centre on an intense and immediate personal experience which precludes verbal analysis. Nevertheless, the potential value of avant-garde art's ability to help people to see and understand the world in fundamentally new ways, ways which often have implications in the sphere of values and hence ultimately of action, should not be underestimated. For this potential to be fulfilled, a form of interpretative criticism needs to be developed which brings out the art's latent cognitive

possibilities — not, as has often been the case in the past, in a reductive spirit but as part of an open-ended and wide-ranging enquiry. It is essential to this that the artist's perceptions, not the critic's preconceptions, set the agenda.

After two hundred years in which the degree of marginalization has progressively increased, it would be ridiculous to expect art now suddenly to be invited to take centre stage. But much has been discovered at the margins; and, as old certainties are seen to crumble, new explorations may begin to seem more worthy of non-specialist attention.

Gray Watson



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Three of the articles in this issue take us into the territory of the sacred and the forbidden: in a major interview, Carolee Schneemann talks of the inspiration she derives from dreams, as well as from Egyptian and Tantric mythology, in creating an art both erotic and ecstatic; Shaun Caton reports on the cathartic work, similar to his own, of the German artist Egon Schrick; and Nick Kaye re-examines important pieces by Joseph Beuys and by Marina Abramović and Ulay, in the context of a renewal of lost values through the use of ritual and the image of the shaman. In a very different spirit, David Hughes proposes a new theoretical framework in terms of which to understand the work of John Cage and Tadeusz Kantor. Ariane Koek sees in several recent opera productions a reinvigoration of that artform through its borrowings from performance art; while Mark Gaynor, after looking at a week of it in Southampton, sees divergent notions of what 'performance art' means.

ERRATUM

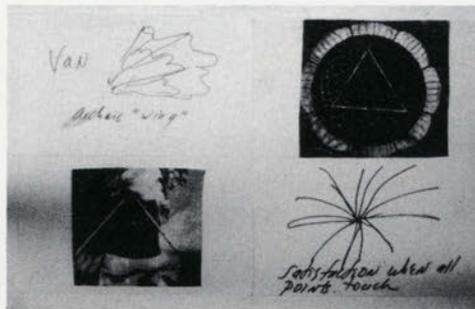
Contrary to what was stated in Sigmar Gassert's article 'Brilliance and Misery: The Multimedia Art of Marie-Jo Lafontaine' in Performance no. 58, the Tate Gallery does not possess Victoria, or indeed any other work by Lafontaine.



William Peterson

OF CATS, DREAMS AND INTERIOR KNOWLEDGE

An Interview with Carolee Schneemann



Carolee Schneemann, 'vocabulary' grid used as part of the projection in the performance *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology*, 1981, and subsequently as kodalith in the sculpture *Venus Vectors*, 1987.

fragment of painted limestone bas relief *Breath of Life from the Goddess in Lioness Form*, Egyptian, 4th Dynasty, Dakshur, (reproduced from Musaios, *The Lion Path*, Golden Sceptre Publishing, Berkeley, California, 1897). Compare Schneemann's *Infinity Kisses*.

Through her celebratory and taboo-breaking *Meat Joy* (1964), Carolee Schneemann became one of the principal pioneers of performance art; while, through her equally joyfully transgressive *Fuses* (1965-68), she also became a leading figure in the development of American underground film. Her work in performance and other media has continued to break new ground, often scandalizing not only conservative critics but also more puritanical feminists, along with other believers in a 'correct' form of radicalism. This interview was conducted in Austin, Texas, in April, 1989; parts of it have already been published in the Texas University magazine *Theater Insight*.

William Peterson: I thought we could start by talking about your current work. I know you did *Cat Scan* last summer in New York. Are you working on a new piece or is that piece still evolving?

Carolee Schneemann: *Cat Scan* is still evolving and it's been an active year in which pieces came to some point of real development after working with them for two or three years. They came to development in places outside New York City, which means they exist without any critical regard and without any of the response of my closest contemporaries, people who know the work best or who potentially would know it. I've done all this work and it has to be resituated. And then I'm writing critical work I've come to do here in Austin. I've set myself certain tasks: one is to do a book that extracts relationships between archaic images, the body and subverted meanings that I can interpolate into inherited stereotypes. So it's a triple strand reassessing meanings that I position in an organic structure and then develop the morphology as a parallel recognition of forms with archaic artifacts and a range of organic forms, all returning to the body and then theory being built within those thresholds. I've been doing the research for a long time; there is a lot of imagery and I just want to get a mock-up, a layout.

WP: Has the book evolved out of your performance work or is it a combination of that and readings?

CS: The way I work there's always a research motive behind or around the performance or the film, but I understand it retrospectively. I understand that I couldn't have made *Fuses* [in 1965] if I hadn't been reading Wilhelm Reich, de Beauvoir and Artaud.

WP: So you read widely.

CS: I'm researching all the time — even, for instance, in relation to parts of *Cat Scan* that are received through dream imagery and are as uncalculated as possible. Paranormal elements that occurred to me in the middle of working, apparitions, very unexpected kinds of instructions from the cat in dreams and hallucinations have had — because of the nature of those instructions — certain implications which have to do with other sorts of research. Right at the beginning, there was this one received image in the dream of the paw in the book, the cat's arm. I opened the book and inside was a cat's arm which clearly belonged to Cluny, a very special cat of mine who was killed — and a paw, somewhat larger than life. And then the instructions in the dream-hallucination of how I was to move with this became a central motif out of which many other kinds of movements and relationships were built by myself and the other performers of *Cat Scan*, because I gave them this received gesture without saying anything about it at all . . . Did I ever tell you this?

WP: No.

CS: It's quite wonderful and it happened in Austin, when I was out here for my teaching interview last Spring. I had the dream when I slept at Deborah Hay's studio which is one of those big white, sort of Buddhist places . . . When I woke up the next morning, I was feeling just fine; it was a bright day and I bounced through the kitchen . . . then I looked out the window and there was a cat crossing the street and coming up on to Deborah's lawn and I said, 'I'll come help in a minute but first I'll go out and meet this cat.' So I went out on the lawn and reached down and petted the cat and all of a sudden the world just went [*makes sucking noise*] inside out! It all sort of tumbled around me and I realized that I had had a very intense message from Cluny and it was one of the overwhelming ones.

WP: The dream came back to you?

CS: The dream came back. When I touched this strange cat, suddenly the whole thing came flying back. In the dream I had my big red plastic notebook and it was slightly larger than normal, it had sleeves inside it with pockets; and in the dream I was in Austin getting ready for my interview and going to write some notes. I opened the book and there in the middle of it was Cluny's arm — paw up to the elbow — it was his fur and his shapes and his marks and everything but slightly larger than life size and I started to cry when I saw it and I said, 'Thank you. I'm so glad that you could show me something of yourself.' And he said, the way these ghostly things talk to you, 'This is all I can give you right now.' And I was stroking him and I said, 'It's wonderful, thank you,' and he said, 'It's for you to use.' I said 'use? How do you use it?' And he said, 'Sit down just like this [*she sits up with a straight back*] and lift it up and hold it in your hands. Now just close your eyes and let it go on your knee and then go up here.' [*raising her right arm, palm opened, from her knee, diagonally across her chest, placing her hand on her heart*] So I started to do that and my arm turned into his arm. I started to do that on the lawn, sitting there and then — I'm going to ask you to try it and see what you think. It produces the most incredible state of wholeness, it's extremely releasing, it opens these two axes — and who knows what's going on with the chakras. I gave this action to my performers when I went back to my rehearsal. I didn't say a word about it. I said just relax your arm and very slowly bring in your hand, very slowly let it come up and bring it against your chest, just concentrate.

WP: The right hand?

CS: Yes. So immediately after I had had this hallucination on the lawn here in Austin I ran back in to Deborah saying: 'I've got to get to an Egyptian bookstore. There's something Egyptian about this. I don't know what it means.' I drew the image looking like a rod or a sacred scepter but it had a paw on the end of it. We



had breakfast. Once these things happen you're just on a roll, you can't let go. We went immediately to an incredible bookstore which I haven't found since I've come back and I began research into Egyptian hieroglyphs. It wasn't the first time but it was like another stage of it that had to do with trying to find the rod, the scepter, the pole, the paw and the crossing of the body with that gesture. So a whole amazing section of *Cat Scan* developed when I got back to New York because I asked the performers to go and get books on Egypt and to find images that they wanted to enact — just a position like some frozen image — and they did very strange things. They knew the piece was called *Can Scat* but they thought that had to do with scientific measurement. It seemed that the cat began to possess all of us in a very intense, beneficial way, because of the first gesture that anyone did. John had taken a photograph from a book of Egyptian friezes, a gesture of a hand going to a mouth. When he enacted that — I can't do it exactly — he turned it into picking something up, carrying it up, lifting it and actually putting it to his mouth. I had them repeat it and repeat it so that they really began to draw on its interior rhythms and whatever that particular gesture would activate — in respect of the whole body — and then I asked him, 'If you could say what was in your hand that you were lifting to your mouth, what do you think it would be?' And he said, 'I think it's a small fish.' Then the English woman, Rosalind, had picked a complicated double-armed lateral gesture which had a scooping, lifting, forward motion. Then I asked her, 'If there is anything that was determining the weight and position of your hands, what could you imagine it would be?' And she said, 'Oh, two cartons of milk.' [Laughs] So you have to pay attention to the scale of information because — if you imagine that you're getting a gift from a cat, it's in the terms of what's important to a cat. All during these months of work there were feathers flying . . . feathers kept appearing in front of me all the time. I should probably mention that Cluny during his life was very obsessed with bringing me gifts and used to bring feathers — a blue jay feather, a blackbird feather, owl feathers . . . The feather has always been Cluny's way to talk to me. And in Egyptian symbology, the feather means truth; it's represented over and over as an attribute of the goddesses of truth. So that's some of the background to *Cat Scan*.

Carolee Schneemann, grid of
Infinity Kisses.

WP: Is that the way you usually work with your dreams? Do you usually just let them integrate themselves into the work or do you ever try anything more systematic with your dreams like keeping a journal?

CS: Well, the dreams use me. I'm not interested in dreams as such. I pay attention to them but most dreams sort nonsense and debris like an electrical system that has to keep clarifying its own informational charges. When the dream is really persistent, when the dream presents a lot of images, then I'd rather . . . It's a combination of being both eager and reluctant — I mean I would like to feel that

things are going on in a more rational, projective way; but then these dreams begin to settle in and occupy a territory between conscious and unconscious which is very full, very fixed. That's how most of my work comes. *Meat Joy* — starting way back then [in 1964] — that was a received dream initially: the whole sense of synergy, the initial images.

WP: Is there much difference in the way your static work evolves compared with your performance work as far as process is concerned?

CS: Some of the installations evolve from dream information or that area where the mind is very permeable and fluid so that a synesthetic motive or provocation begins to attract certain materials to me.

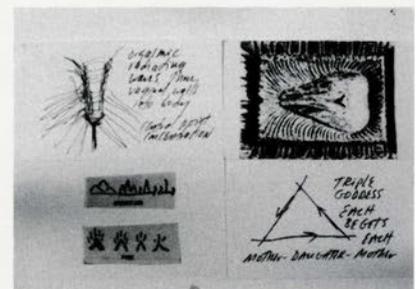
WP: William Burroughs has said that sometimes he uses dreams from beginning to end in his work. Do you ever do that?

CS: *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology*, for example. That completely follows a dream from beginning to end. It started first as a morphological research. In this case two persistent attributes, or two essential objects, remained from the dream: an umbrella with which I had accidentally pierced a man's thigh, inducing spurts of blood; and a bouquet of dried leaves that had little doll's heads tucked in it. Because I had started to menstruate, I woke up remembering the dream. It had a funny narrative. I had no money at the time. I was having trouble doing any work at all. I was so broke that I thought, 'I'll concentrate on this dream and perhaps it will lead to something.' As I started to draw the umbrella and the dried leaves, the dream composed a question: 'What do these two objects have in common?' As I drew them, I saw that what they both had in common was a V-shape. The umbrella formed a triangular V with its stem below, and the bouquet of leaves formed an inverted pyramid, also with stems below. I looked at this and thought, 'well that's a basic vulva shape.' V for 'vulva'. V for 'victory'. So I went to the dictionary and got all the words with 'V's out and put them all on cards: 'velocity', 'vortex', 'vector', 'virago' — just a whole 'vocabulary'! Then research began in science books on organic and natural forms, and I photographed sets of micro and macro branching patterns . . . At the same time I collated a vocabulary of sacred artifacts that had to do with mandalas, sacred 'V' forms, and even found a Tantric umbrella — a sacred Tantric tree, a pyramid shape with a stem on the end, crisscrossed with little squares that are cut into it and each square has a calligraphic stroke which is a part of a mantra which means 'sacred vulva', 'sacred vulva', 'sacred vulva', 'sacred vulva' . . . I organized this vector vocabulary with its morphological relays on to cards and formed them into four units so that each card combined four photographs. Four cards composed a page, including a unit 'V' from science/nature, one from sacred artifacts, one a drawing — say of figures demonstrating velocity — and another from a popular culture source (Bushy

Carolee Schneemann, *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology*, 1981, performance.



Berkeley, bicycles, tent). These pages, consisting of the four units of various vectors, were then photographed as a slide relay to accompany a relating of the dream and a feminist analysis of its themes. A few months later in 1981, I was preparing an installation at Real Artways in Connecticut of photographic works which all contained some aspect of language called 'Image/Text'. I went over the lecture idea and the gallery director, Joe Celli, said, 'You should do this as a talk but maybe you could perform in it.' All of a sudden another dream series started, in which I was a captive in red pajamas surrounded by my projections, reintegrating myself in constant variations, creating vector forms out of the body, combining myself with the projections, at all times holding a red umbrella. So that was how that performance *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology* evolved. As I was working on it, I started to have some annoying little dreams that presented an interference that 'has to be invited.' The first interference was a dream of a woman appearing in a big overcoat, a drunken grandmother. Then there was a dream of a nurse holding a stick which had bloody underpants on it and she said, 'I think you're responsible for this.' Then a dream of a woman who, purporting to be a judge, handed me a watering can saying, 'You've won the prize.' Then a woman who appeared as a Western Union messenger running around and around and around my table-stage saying, 'It all comes back in other forms.' So I had to invite her, to rebuild and restructure the piece to let the four interfering alter-egos in; and the dream informed me that she had to be a black woman, that all the reality figures that were going to break in the dream were women of colour and that they corresponded to some lost aspect of an essential femaleness that the dream was addressing . . . In the performance, she was to be situated in actual space, where the audience would be seated, in her own realm with a table and a mirror and a coat rack where all these different layers would be put on at once. The overcoat in which she first appeared was over the Western Union outfit which was over the nurse's uniform, which covered the judge who was dressed in identical red pajamas. In the final section, after she handed me the watering can filled with 'snow' (soap flakes) which poured out mixing with projected images, she came onto the table. Our bodies were then combined in all the vectoring actions. Then the performance was photographed and recorded on videotape. Gradually this imagery developed into a sculpture called *Venus Vectors*: a large, transparent star shape, nine feet in diameter, raised on a circular pedestal. Black mylar prints of the vector units are pressed between ten transparent acrylic panels. Within one unit, or vector, of the star shape are two small T.V. monitors on which an 'A' and a 'B' tape and *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology* is seen performed. The performance video was edited and then reshot to clarify the 'V' details in close-up for the 'B' tape, to reemphasize and reintegrate the details of the piece that are performed.



Carolee Schneemann, 'vocabulary' grid used as part of the projection in the performance *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology*, 1981, and subsequently as kodalith in the sculpture *Venus Vectors*, 1987.



Carolee Schneemann, *Fresh Blood — A Dream Morphology*, 1981, performance. Nurse with underpants.

WP: What about the static part of that work? Where is it now?

CS: *Venus Vectors* was exhibited at the Everson Museum's 'Sacred Spaces' in 1987 and at The Atlantic Center for the Arts, and in my solo exhibit at The Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, in 1988.

WP: I'd like to pursue the problem of spaces a little bit. Is finding a space where you can do the kind of work you want to do a problem?

CS: I don't look for spaces any more. Part of wanting to make works has to do with finding remarkable spaces, degraded spaces. The other problem right now is being exceeded by your own mythology. So that in London, where I did *Cat Scan* as part of the 'Edge '88' Festival, the space was a given. I had no choice about it, and it was the wrong shape and height for this piece. But I put it together, adapting it to this abandoned, empty, top of a warehouse which was too low and incredibly filthy. Then a problem arose as we had two hundred people who were turned away. The space was so jammed that people couldn't see what the piece entailed. I had forgotten that there would be this audience wanting to see my work, a tremendous audience. Then there was a technical foul-up in the middle of the piece and I had to stop and resituate myself; and they found that unforgivable.

WP: Who did? The audience?

CS: The audience, the critics, everybody. They just couldn't accept it. They wanted it to be a perfected event; it had to 'perform'. And because it wasn't totally improvised — it had a linear aspect to it — the audience expectation sealed the direction and meaning of this version of *Cat Scan*. I did the blindfold solo in Quebec in December in a very messy, profuse festival, 'Le Lieu', and it worked like a dream. Everything was just fine. I had a half an hour just to tell them what had to happen, to put it together, and at one point I didn't know my space at all. It's a wild dance that's done to 'invisible music'; I'm blindfolded, my motions absorbed into a continuous slide relay of *Infinity Kisses* and Egyptian cat images.

WP: So for artists having trouble with a space would your advice to them be: 'Find your own space'?

CS: Find your own space and evolve your own audience.

WP: Feminist critics used to sometimes criticize your work because of the way you use your body. Are you still getting that kind of criticism and, if so, how do you feel about it?

CS: Well, there's good news and bad news. One bit of good news is that a magazine called *Cinematograph* coming out of the San Francisco Art Institute has a brilliant semiotic analysis of *Fuses* in which its signification, indexing deconstructions, slippage of pleasure and desire are all analyzed in semiotics and it

comes out O.K.! David James begins his essay on the film: 'In *Fuses* a new copulation between the filmic and erotic is traced, one in which female sexuality is enacted in a practice of mutuality . . .' [in vol.#3 of the magazine, and in his recent book *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton University Press)] When I made that film I just knew I had to do it, I never thought it would be a 'classic' or the source of so much focus and contention. I just came back from the College Art Association where there was a panel on the issue of gender and content in twentieth century art. A wonderful little piece was done in the 'panel' that I was on — a relay among twenty-two artists — each of whom had five minutes to do whatever they were going to do. We had been informed of our subject: 'The Woman Question: Taking Positions/Taking Positions Apart'. Everyone who was to speak was passed a microphone among the hundreds of people in this ballroom beneath great crystal chandeliers. So everyone had five minutes. One couple, Blaise Tobias and Virginia Maksymowicz, did a semiotic presentation on the gaze, called *The Geezer's Gaze*. They described the problem of the "geezer's gaze": the geezer's gaze always deforms whatever it's looking at. But the panel that got me all riled up had to do with an analysis of feminist artists' presentations of their own bodies; and this art historian shot them all down, claiming that there was absolutely no available access to repositioning the female body without its internalizing all the problematics of male culture. I went up afterwards and said, 'I'm Carolee Schneemann' — because I thought, maybe she had never heard of me — and she said, 'Oh yes, I'm so happy to meet you.' I said, 'I was disturbed and interested by your presentation and I'd like to ask you' — and this just popped out before I could think what I was saying — 'Is there any aspect of your physical life or your own relationship to your own personal body that gives you a pleasure, a joy, an excitement that you could *manifest*?' She said, 'No.' And she said, 'That's probably why I can't deal with your work. I find your work very upsetting, it's repellent, I can't deal with it.' These confrontations are always important because they show how the sacred/erotic and the use of the body as a vehicle of its own positive sexuality, as a profound experience of the feminine — not just in relation to male determinants — gets repressed. That prudishness and puritanical fear of the erotic/ecstatic means that feminist critics can't recognize how the use of the body creates a particular and authentic female meaning. They're working only within the pejorative; it's always a defensive position.

WP: So it's still an issue.

CS: Yes, and it's a great issue too. Take *Interior Scroll*: people are just as confused and upset about it now as when I did it. When I did it, I felt that I definitely didn't *want* to do it. It was a dream image again. I woke up and had this old image of a figure — I drew it right away as I saw it in the dream — pulling a coil out of its vagina; and the message of the dream was the value of interior

Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll*, 1975, performance.



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knowledge, that everything I've ever done and everything I've ever known comes through my erotic self and this was absolutely to emphasize that and position it physically. So that was just a drawing and then I wrote about it and the writing about it is in my book *More than Meat Joy*. I think that's a really wonderful piece in which phallic space is diverted and inverted so that it posits a perceptual possibility of analyzing space in terms of vulvic space, so that everything becomes an impress of what the generative inside *is* rather than being sort of an absence, a hollow impression of phallic determination. I write about vulvic space as being the impress, the mold, the structure, the construction of form, and I take it in to all forms; I just invert the overtness of phalocentric analysis of objects and form. So the problem of this little drawing. I was asked to do something at a conference of women artists at a summer event in Easthampton. I said, 'Well, I'll read something, I'll paint something'; and there was like this monkey on my back saying, 'You have to enact the drawing.' 'Go away. Leave me alone. I'm here on vacation; I'm here to have fun.' And the next thing I knew I was folding up these little strips of paper, folding them into accordion shapes, and writing a message on them. So I said to my companion. 'You have to help me, you have to show me how this works. You have to help me stuff all this inside.' And it hurt, like all the edges were cutting, so we got out a lot of cold cream. We folded up the narrative — it was like a Japanese origami exercise — we folded it all up because in the drawing the strip was this long. [*indicating arm's length*] I said somehow I have to get something that long inside. And that was real hard; and not only that, I had written in ink so that when I pulled it out it all ran. And I knew that since I had that image I had to make it work and that it should be this wonderful kind of thread of knowledge that was going to be emerging. So I went to the typewriter and I could fit in six letters per line on the folding of the strip . . . People were just flabbergasted, stunned, horrified, ecstatic. A banker who was a close friend was deeply affected. Sex for him was very confused — mixed up with dominance, power, control — so that yielding, dissolving sensitivity and female erotic experience were tainted and destructive for him; he would lose power if he identified with that aspect of himself. He was in a bliss over this piece and exclaimed, 'I finally understand the ticker-tape! I finally understand the transparency of the direction of all my life!' It's the umbilicus, it's the rainbow, it's the ticker-tape, it's the unfolding, the secrets that should be revealed because then you get to real secrets rather than the degraded ones.

WP: Do you know Karen Finley's work?

CS: Yes, I admire her. I think it's wonderful.

WP: Have you talked with her about the way she uses her body in her work?

CS: We meet on the street corner by accident and we have a few words. Her work

is different and it has another strand that's very connected to mine but mine comes out of a lack of repression and hers comes out of this very Catholic, ferocious dynamic to assault and confront and break free. Mine often seems a little sloppy to repressed people, because it's coming out of something which I call my farm-girl background. 'Hey, you know, c'mon, look, this is real simple; this should be obvious; what's the problem?'

WP: You were talking earlier about some of your recent work happening in a sort of critical vacuum because the people you usually rely upon to see your work aren't there.

CS: Well, I'm not there where they are. But at the same time this whole body of work has a kind of dynamic that's outside of me; it has an amazing momentum so that even when I haven't been able to position the new work, somehow the meaning of what I stand for has its own velocity. As I said, I was at the College Art Association this week. I didn't have a badge, a proper badge, because I couldn't afford the money for the registration. So I got somebody's left-over plastic shell and I wrote my name in it and people would look at it and say, 'Are you Carolee Schneemann or are you just wearing the badge?' This little back-of-your-brain thing says, 'Tell them yes, say yes.' They'd say, 'You've really helped my work, I admire what you're doing.' It was wonderful. Of course other people would be turning away. This is one reason why I might lose a decent teaching job.

WP: What do you mean?

CS: Well, they think I'm going to run around naked, that I'll be sitting in my office doing something obscene when the students come in to consult about their projects. Oh, and the critic, the historian that did the panel on gender in which the body was totally obfuscated: she said, 'Yes, I understand that your project has been this work with the body.' 'Project, it's not a *project*, it's a life process!' So even the terminology just kills you; it drives you into the wrong garage. [laughter] 'Project!' I don't park there.



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Shaun Caton

A PROFILE OF EGON SCHRICK



**Egon Schrick, *Aktion*, Berlin,
1988.**

**Egon Schrick, *Aktion*, Mainz,
1982.**

It was during a visit to West Berlin in the winter of 1987 that I first encountered the remarkable performance work of the artist Egon Schrick, in the form of a lavishly illustrated catalogue which was for sale in a bookshop. Later, with the help of a German friend, I tracked down Schrick's Berlin address and we were subsequently invited to visit him at his home.

On arrival at his cluttered apartment, we found Schrick tall and lean with a thick shock of tangled grey hair and penetrating eyes beneath steel-rimmed spectacles. He greeted me with 'I speak not so very good English'; calling, therefore, on my friend's services as a translator, there followed intense discussions, as well as monologues from Schrick about the nature of his art and life. At 1.30 a.m. my friend departed, after which I communicated with Schrick by just nodding and emphasizing my deep-rooted interest in his cathartic ritual type of live performance work. At one stage he produced a video tape excerpt from a performance made in Wiesbaden; as I watched the flickering images of him undergoing painful and expressionistic movements, his breathing deepened until it seemed to fill the silence of the room. When the video ended I turned to him and thanked him for sharing his art with me for those few hours and tried to explain that I had to return to London the next morning — I was then led to his studio, where he gestured at the couch upon which I was to sleep.

Yet the night could not possibly be restful after having witnessed Schrick's disturbingly beautiful performances and equally bizarre paintings and drawings which were pinned up all around the studio walls. In a few hours' time I found myself on a plane heading for London and determined to promote this artist in England; the diversity and austerity of his work, coupled with his unselfish and unpretentious objectives, convinced me that I had just met one of the most powerful and original performance artists working. Despite the fact that he has worked consistently since the early 1970s, his work is virtually unknown outside West Germany, where he is responsible for more than eighty performances since 1976. Uninterested in publicity or personal success, he has worked in virtual isolation. His performances now are complex, psychologically traumatic and monumental.

Born in 1935 in Krefeld, Egon Schrick attended the Kunstakademie from 1955 to 1960, where he studied architecture. This was later to become his occupation; while an interest in Nazi architecture is a significant point of departure for his performance work. Since 1960 Schrick has also made hundreds of paintings and drawings, and has worked with sculptural installations both in conjunction with his own performance work and in collaborations with the artist Barbara Heinisch.

The main turning point occurs in 1976 when Schrick, who was then living in Worms, decided to work totally in performance. Many of his early actions incorporate earth and vineyard sticks, blueberry juice and paints as their principal materials. That he was working within the tradition of *Aktionismus* as defined by

the Viennese group of four, Brus, Muehl, Schwarzkogler and Nitsch — with the last of whom he has in fact collaborated — is an evident factor in the development of Schrick's early performance work. There is, however, a subtle and mysterious distinction between Schrick's work and theirs: his actions are related time and again with the fragile cycle of life, the broken order of being, tracing a line between life and death which could be considered akin to certain shamanic practices. In some of his performances Schrick poses as a scapegoat, naked and covered in mud, wearing a form of hat made from the inner lining of a cow's stomach, and with a large decomposing cow's skull painted red. Thus the actions are raw and unflinching, guttural and beserk explosions of the human condition, transformational chunks of time filled with vivid imagery and charged with emotional tension. The physical nature of Schrick's performances often leaves him bruised, stunned and exhausted; while, at the collective level, his pain is a form of release for the spectator's engagement in his activities. Schrick represents the perennial German spirit of *Angst* in art — indeed his performances are so extreme that he has been stopped by the police on a number of occasions.

The development of Schrick's focus in performance is formally grounded in a conceptual framework based on systems and structures which are unconsciously evocative of the bald severity of Nazi architecture; often employing structures such as geometric shapes or grid-like patterns in which to site his actions, he sometimes makes performances in the parts of Berlin designated for the building projects of Albert Speer. Complementing this, however, is a strongly organic and metamorphic quality in his work. His spatial arena can be anything from a clearly defined circle, with objects and materials symmetrically laid out and ready for use, to a line of grassy river bank flanking the Rhine.

Whilst Schrick seems perfectly capable of bringing the outside inside (filling many clinical gallery spaces with obsessive materials of his art/life: earth, bones, skulls, blood, water, milk, charcoal, powder pigments, urine, twigs, berries etc . . .), he can also work effectively in the solitary tranquillity of the natural landscape; and it is here that his actions become private rituals which are linked with his mystical views, where he is a microcosmic aspect of the universe, merging into the earth and attempting to harmonize the flow of oppositional forces in nature through durational acts linked to transcendental experiences.

It is hard to describe in words the impact of his live works or for that matter to offer a precis of an archetypal Schrick performance. Instead I can merely offer a general impression, which will inevitably reflect a point of view based in my own involvement with this area of live work.

Tenuously beginning from an ordered and minimal point of origin, Schrick embraces his materials with an almost religious sense of significance, slowly inching around the canvas-sheeted space, smoothing and rubbing his naked body against the walls and the floor. Sometimes his performances are accompanied by

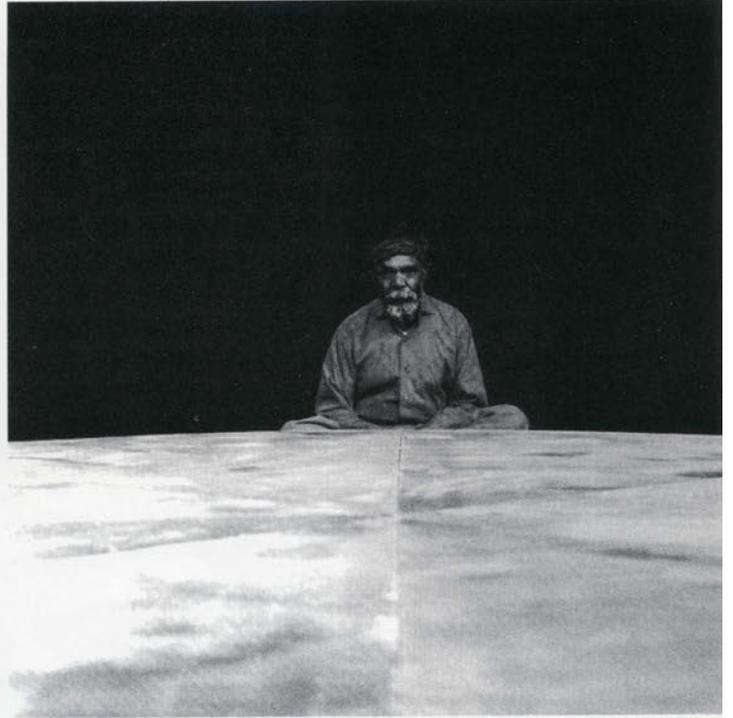
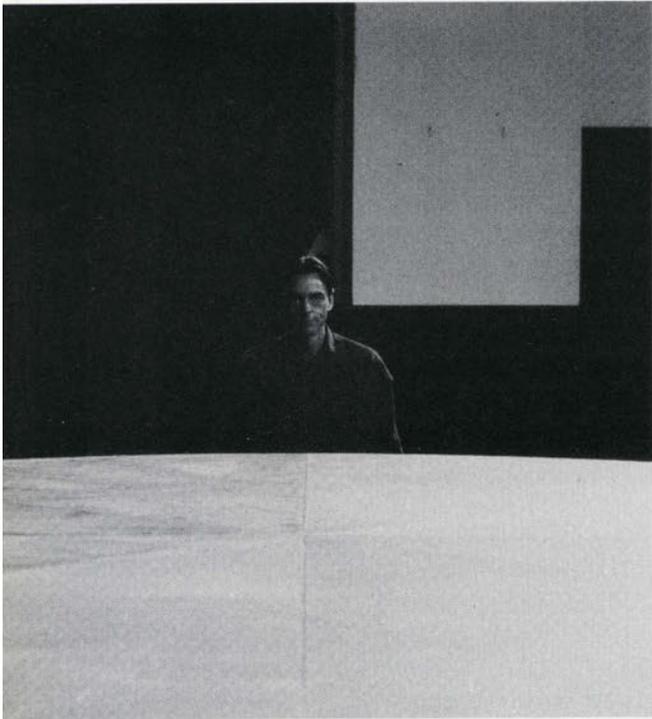
Messaien's organ music or by live percussion — but for the most part they are silent. Schrick begins to daub runny gobs of paint over his penis and head, gradually thickening the putrescent quality of the paint which has just been mixed, then he starts to paint with his head whilst giving birth to an extraordinary vocabulary of invented words and sounds, squeaking and chattering like some psychotic undergoing crisis. His intonation is inspired by the zestful squiggles and scratching trails of charcoal which begin to punctuate the surroundings of his paint-smear torso. Leaping and kicking at the walls, the ferocity of his contortions becomes fused with the density of marks made directly onto the surface of the canvas, which also tears and rips apart, revealing decomposing animal heads and fetid bones.

A huge splash of black is spattered with tiny dots of red paint and a giant bruise looms above Schrick's manic grimacing face. Poking his tongue out at members of the audience and displaying his naked arse dripping with paint and earth, he fumbles with brushes and begins to invent eccentric characters. Mutated figures emerge from the fleshy pores of the canvas; ghostly visitations from the nether world, skeletal pregnant women giving birth to gaping-mouthed foetuses. Vague and uncertain, these images clamour for attention as if contained in the moments of waking from an horrific dream. Schrick's world darkens under the frenzy of his interaction with the audience — he grabs certain individuals and hugs them or immerses them into the ritual paint action.

The performance has reached a point of no return: its climax. Schrick screams as he drags himself feverishly around the landscape he has created/destroyed. Fluids trickle from upturned paint pots like toxic waste spilling over a damp and decaying world. Scribbles on the walls mark the ferocity of Schrick's physicality, jagged charcoal lines seem to buzz with electric energy. The blackened figure of Schrick, heaving himself through all this carnage and promordial excess, sighs heavily; becoming softer and more plaintive he returns to his former self and regards the audience quizzically as if uncertain what else to do. Then the spectators break the silence with clapping and talking. The 90 minute performance has ended.

Egon Schrick, *Aktion*, 1980.





Nick Kaye

RITUALISM AND RENEWAL

Reconsidering the Image of the Shaman

Marina Abramović and Ulay,
Nightsea Crossing, performance
with Watuma Tarruru Tjungarrayi
and Ngawang Soepa Lueyar,
Sonesta, Amsterdam, 1983.

'[The] "ritual act" represents a cosmic happening, an event in the natural process. The word "represents", however, does not cover the exact meaning of the act . . . for here "representation" is really *identification* of the event. The rite produces the effect which is not so much *shown figuratively* as actually *reproduced* in the action' (Johan Huizinga).¹

Ritualism has been one of the most common and significant strategies of post-war performance art. Since the emergence of Happenings and Fluxus in the 1950s it has arisen across a wide variety of European and American work. To the formalists, using repetition, simultaneity or prescription, ritualism has offered a way of placing an action within a frame, of giving it a formal weight, without necessarily creating what Michael Kirby describes as an 'information structure', a field within which each element is subordinated to a representational end. To other, often European, artists, ritualism has gradually come to the fore in a fuller sense and in doing so has given rise to developments which have stood in opposition to an increasing sense of fragmentation. Here, ritual, and the cultural contexts that give ritual a legitimacy, have provided a model for a reassertion of values and perspectives that have seemed to many artists fundamental yet conspicuously absent from modern experience.

Following Huizinga's description of the ritual act, deeper connections between these various kinds of ritualism can be seen. Placing his work amongst that of Kenneth Dewey, Milan Knizak, Marta Minujin and Wolf Vostell, Allan Kaprow has observed the ritualism within his own work, pointing to the ways in which his Happenings allowed the participant to 'identify' the 'formats' of everyday life that are normally lost in the stream of experience.² More fundamentally, this work can be seen as drawing the participant into an awareness of ways of looking through a self-reflexive engagement with the work, an 'identification' within the formal context of the performance of a making of meaning. In a directly analogous way, performance which has incorporated a ritualistic use of symbol and drawn directly on traditional, often tribal, religious contexts has sought to provoke and identify ways of thinking that contemporary life seems to obscure.

Yet these latter developments have also given rise to performances which, especially recently, have been taken as a glorification of the artist, offering not so much an alternative vision as a demand for faith. Such responses, however, call for a more precise reading of this ritualistic performance and a more careful consideration of its approaches to the audience.

In the work of Joseph Beuys and of Marina Abramović and Ulay, a sense of ritual, of the artist as a shamanic figure, of the special properties of symbol and a desire to rediscover a sense of wholeness have been particularly strong. In many ways their performances have exemplified the aims and means of this kind of

work. Like many performance artists of the 1960s and 1970s, they sought to draw the spectator into a heightened participation. Yet within this frame, particularly through the use of symbol and the role adopted by the performer, these artists have attempted to provoke a different order of understanding and experience.

Joseph Beuys' various kinds of work are drawn together through complex and idiosyncratic symbolic systems. While any one of Beuys' pieces can be met in isolation, each of them also participates in a network of signs and symbols which find meaning through the many statements Beuys made about his life as well as his elaboration of philosophical and aesthetic ideas.

In this context a wide range of materials and images acquire special significance. Most commonly, the presence of fat and felt can be related to Beuys' account of his wartime experiences, which also informs the work as a whole. In 1943, while a Luftwaffe pilot, Beuys claimed, his Ju87 crashed in the Crimea. While his co-pilot was killed on impact, Beuys was thrown free of the plane to be found and rescued by Tartars:

' . . . it was they who discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. I was unconscious then and only came round completely after twelve days . . . They [the Tartars] covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep the warmth in.'³

Whether referring to an actual experience or simply standing as a metaphor, such imagery is unarguably central to an understanding of Beuys' vocabulary. Thus, while the work in general offers a sense of mystery and points toward processes of physical and spiritual change, the presence of fat and felt testify to Beuys' faith in the importance and efficacy of 'other kinds' of knowledge and to the possibility of renewal.

Such references inevitably place the image of Beuys himself at the centre of his work, drawing on and elaborating his construction of a personal history as a way of generating meanings. Without the literal presence of Beuys such languages may seem to lose clarity or point, yet in fact the vocabulary of this work is in many ways no more difficult or ambiguous than it has ever been. Beuys never offered any simple clarification of his work through his presentation of himself; rather, he employed 'autobiographical' references as one amongst a variety of ambiguous and often incomplete languages intended to provoke his audience. His projection of himself as a symbolic element should be read as a fragment, a resonant but ambivalent aspect of the work which, in context, serves to illuminate its central purposes.

Inevitably, Beuys' performances — or 'actions' — played an especially crucial role both in the construction of his image and in establishing the ways in which it

interacted with the other languages which he employed. It is no coincidence that it was alongside some of his earliest performance work — at the Festival of New Art at Aachen in 1964 — that he first published his *Life Course Work Course* (subsequently to be updated several times), which offers deliberately ambiguous yet suggestive links between an account of his life and the imagery in his art.

Beuys' first performance in America, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, particularly overtly combined his personal and idiosyncratic vocabulary with images drawn from the context into which he entered. In doing so, the piece reveals perhaps more clearly than any other the nature and effect of Beuys' creations; and, because of the precise manner in which he presented himself in it, it demonstrates with exemplary clarity the importance of his presence to the generation and centering of meaning.

For the opening of the René Block Gallery, New York, in 1974, Beuys, as is well known, shared a gallery space with a coyote for three days and nights, from the 23rd to the 25th of May 1974. Caroline Tisdall, who provides a detailed documentation of the piece in her book *Joseph Beuys: Coyote*, writes:

'At Kennedy Airport he was wrapped from head to foot in felt . . . He was loaded into an ambulance . . . and driven straight to the place which he was to share with the coyote. The action ended a week later when, once more insulated in felt, he was carried back to the ambulance on the first stage of his journey back to Europe.'⁴

Once in the gallery, Beuys and coyote were confined behind a steel mesh barrier reaching almost to the ceiling, which created a cage for them out of the majority of the gallery-loft space. Here Beuys introduced 'objects and elements from his world' to the animal, and repeated a cycle of actions around it while swathed in felt and proffering a shepherd's crook. Spectators came and went while the event continued and while watching the performance were confined to a small area between the entrance and the mesh.

John Perrault, reviewing the piece for *The Village Voice*, saw a predominance of traditional Christian imagery: the shepherd and his crook; the picture of Beuys and animal resting in the hay piled in one corner of the space; the 'cross', found on the ambulance which heralded Beuys arrival; the relationship between man and animal.⁵ Yet in Beuys' work such systems are rarely allowed to remain unambiguous and here he specifically sets Christian and non-Christian imagery against each other. In a later interview he observed that:

'When I do an action like the one I did with the coyote, I wasn't interested in giving some kind of zoological lecture or anything, I was trying to show people that there is a realm that exists below the human realm and which is a kind of precursor to human evolution, an autonomous animal realm. I took a creature out of this realm and

brought it into contact with human beings, and people felt provoked — in the end it provoked them to asking themselves whether there might not be other realms that exist “above” the human realm.⁶

Part of this provocation is to do with the presence and actions of Beuys himself. Surrounded with Christian imagery and communing with the animal, Beuys’ presence speaks of his own affinity with these ‘other realms’. Arguably the performance even points beyond its own imagery and toward Beuys’ personality and life as a key to the questions raised by the work. Yet trying to respond to such implications proves frustrating. Even the most obvious sources, such as the *Life Course Work Course*, offer no direct answers to the questions such presentations provoke. Far from any straightforward history, the *Life Course Work Course* is not only a deliberately ambiguous and obscured account of events, but also one which is incomplete and inaccurate. Like so many of Beuys’ accounts of his experiences, the *Life Course Work Course* does not so much clarify meanings and associations as bring ideas and images into collision as if it were an extension of the work as a whole.

A more detailed consideration of *Coyote* reveals the kind of invitation these deliberate ambiguities are intended to make. While the performance evokes a sense of mystery and ritual, it also offers objects and images that participate in Beuys’ complicated language of signs.

Speaking of his initial ‘meeting’ with the coyote, Beuys defines the nature of his relationship with the animal through the symbolisms of the objects he presents:

‘First of all there was the felt that I brought in. Then there was the coyote’s straw. These elements were immediately exchanged between us: he’d lie in my area and I in his. He used the felt and I used the straw.’⁷

The gloves, which are given to the coyote, are similarly significant, and they also introduce a more general symbolism:

‘The brown gloves represent my hands, and the freedom of movement that human beings possess with their hands . . . So the throwing of my gloves to Little John meant giving him my hands to play with.’⁸

In Beuys’ account, each object or sound had its own specific properties; and each was related to the coyote in some specific way. While the *Wall Street Journal* might have ‘belonged to’ America just as the straw ‘belonged to’ the coyote and the felt to Beuys, so:

‘The flashlight was an image of energy. First there was the storing of accumulated energy, and its gradual fading away during the course of the day until the batteries had to be changed. And here a curious cross-current developed. The coyote’s energy pattern ran in a different direction; he was more lively in the evening when the torch and daylight



Joseph Beuys, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974, performance, René Block Gallery, New York.



Joseph Beuys, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974, performance, René Block Gallery, New York.

were fading, the light growing weaker and the shadows longer.⁹

'The triangle was intended as an impulse of consciousness directed towards the coyote — it helped to restore his harmonized movements.'¹⁰

'The confused roar of the turbine engine had to do with the idea of undetermined energy. It could be seen as directly related to the use of fat in my sculpture and actions — the point at which fat appears in a chaotic condition . . . also the echo of dominating technology: unapplied energy. This is the energy that drowns all discussion of energy in the wider sense, and in doing so has a chaotic and destructive effect.'¹¹

'The stick became an extension of my head, a head bent before the coyote in a kind of devotion. I kept him constantly in view, stayed in line with his every movement. And so the idea of a spiritual clock emerged, and it's important to say that. At all times my actions, all of them, were dependent on the actions of the coyote. When he came near to me I bowed in devotion. When he lay down, I knelt. And when he fell asleep I fell over. Then when he sprang up again, I threw off the felt and jumped up too. That was how the cycle went.'¹²

Rather than draw his signs and symbolisms around any particular focus, Beuys points in all kinds of directions at once: America (*Wall Street Journal*, Beuys' visit); the 'aboriginal' (coyote, 'Red Man'); 'sculpture' (hands, moulding); 'energy' (the torch, the sun, coyote); Beuys himself (fat, felt); and beyond (Christian imagery, the 'spiritual clock', the 'shepherd', etc.).

Yet such descriptions as these only echo what was Beuys' understanding of his work as a whole. For him, work was most successful when it offered clues to meaning while at the same time remaining obscure. Where the work seems baffling, only partly coherent,

'what remains is a provocative statement, and this should not be underestimated; it addresses all spontaneous forces in the spectator that can lead to the irritating question, "What is all this about?" — to the centre of the today, often suppressed feeling, to the soul or whatever one wants to call this subconscious focal point.'¹³

Coyote, then, operates in two complementary ways. First of all it is a direct provocation, a 'ritual' intended to meet a sense of crisis. As Beuys said:

'I believe I made contact with the psychological trauma point of the United States energy constellation: the whole American trauma with the Indian, the Red Man . . . You could say that a reckoning had to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted.'¹⁴

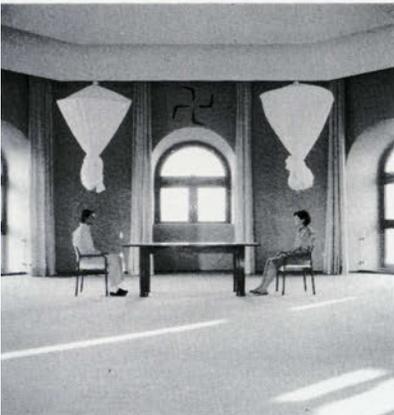
At the same time, Beuys sought to draw the viewer into a heightened participation through which he might actively rediscover essential ways of thinking and perceiving. Indeed, it was this that was the central purpose within Beuys' work. Both the imagery he offered and the relationship he sought between the spectator and the work served in his mind to restore aspects of our intuitive and creative selves which, despite their fundamental importance, had become marginalized.

While Marina Abramović and Ulay's last work together, their walk along the Great Wall of China, involves a rich and complex use of symbol, it is their earlier work, especially the multi-partite *Nightsea Crossing* (1981-85), which provides the most elegant and sustained examples of ritualistic performances which the spectator meets directly. Completed over a four year period, *Nightsea Crossing* places an act of endurance at the centre of a network of symbolic objects and associations in a piece intended to stimulate unfamiliar kinds of awarenesses.

At its centre *Nightsea Crossing* consists of a simple but intense 'tableau vivant' sustained over a prolonged period of time. Surrounded by various objects, Abramović and Ulay sit facing each other across a table. Each part of the piece lasts one day, or seven hours, and the piece as a whole is made up of ninety such performances. The critic Richard Flood described the performance of *Nightsea Crossing* at 'Documenta 7', Kassel, in June, August and September 1982:

'At Documenta . . . they occupied the cupola of the Orangerie, a lovely high-ceilinged octagon punctuated by French windows with views of the manicured lawn and blue skies. Centred in the room, they sat at each end of a long polished table at some remove from the spectators, who watched from behind a delicate rope cordon. On the spectator's side of the cordon was a water cooler in which floated a sediment of gold leaf. A note invited us to drink because of the gold "if taken, purifies the body." Just beyond the corner on the left, stood a bound sheaf of gold rods. In the distance, at the table, Marina Abramović and Ulay sat impassive and transfixed, facing each other for a day (for a succession of days).'¹⁵

As Flood describes it, the gold leaf suggests alchemical associations, while the sheaf of rods, the 'fasces', is an ancient Roman symbol of the magistrates' power, adopted as an emblem by the Italian Fascist Party. In their own documentation, Abramović and Ulay show another object at Kassel, an inverted 'swastika' made up of four boomerangs arranged on the rear wall. These references to modern appropriations of ancient symbol fall into the broader pattern of the piece as a whole. At the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1981 the objects surrounding their action included a gold-leafed boomerang with a live snake coiled around it and gold nuggets found by the artists in their journey through the desert. In



Marina Abramović and Ulay,
Nightsea Crossing, performance,
21 days, Documenta 7, Orangerie,
Kassel, 1982.

Amsterdam in 1983 the meeting between ancient and modern culture was taken one step farther. The brochure announced:

'For the very first time in history an Aboriginal and a Tibetan Lama will meet . . . In this performance a situation will be created in which, both formally and emotionally, a bridge will be built between the present and a remote past: between two very conspicuous cultures and the western culture of today.'¹⁶

These images relate to the sources of the piece, which lie in the artists' contact with 'native' cultures. In particular, the first sections of *Nightsea Crossing*, which were performed in Australia, followed a six month period in which they wandered in the outback, living in the desert in contact with various Aboriginal tribes. It is from these experiences, too, that they draw their shared action. Abramović emphasizes how this experience transformed their performances which up until this point had focused on the body:

' . . . the change in our life came when we went to Australia and [lived] in [the] desert. Because there physically we could not move. The heat was enormous, like fifty, fifty-five degrees celsius, so it was in such circumstances that actually only our minds start functioning [*sic*]. And then we completely open[ed up] another world for us . . . it's almost physical, the mind . . . and many performances had been taken to the point where they could go no further with the body and now we had this whole other part to do with the mind.'¹⁷

For Abramović and Ulay, following this experience, it is the function and effect of their act, rather than the presence of the symbols, which is the most important aspect of the piece. Ulay notes that:

' . . . the main interest is in the process of being motionless, sitting motionless, over . . . a long period of time . . . the actual sitting after an hour, after two or three it starts being interesting and you get . . . beside yourself, actually . . .'¹⁸

In presenting *Nightsea Crossing* in a gallery among other art-works which are objects, the artists establish a context within which the work may acquire at once the character of an object and a performance. As a tableau, as a thing in which there is no movement, the piece is like an object that makes no specific demand upon the viewer's time. Yet *Nightsea Crossing* presents an act of stillness amongst a collection of objects, and *as an act* the piece calls for the viewer to attend to it over the period of its duration. Through such a framework it seems to establish at once a freedom by which the viewer may attend or leave the piece, yet offer a compelling invitation to remain and attend so long as the act continues and the

'performance' remains unfinished.

According to Abramović it is on this specific ground that the viewer may find an engagement which meets that of the performers and so a contact with the core of the piece:

'... when you come to see [a] performance you always expect [that] something will happen... So people always waited for something to happen, but when they find, they come to the point, they don't wait, and they realize that that's the reality of the thing, then they actually start having contact with the piece itself.'¹⁸

This 'reality' is simply the fact of the audience's unself-conscious observation of the performers' self-conscious observation of each other. The viewer's 'contact with the piece', then, is the point at which, realizing that the performers are simply mirroring his own act, he becomes self-conscious, and where, just like the performers, he turns his attention toward the fact of his presence and the fact of his observation. Here, according to Ulay:

'... In that moment you have direct contact with us, because [you are] ... taking the reality as it is without any different projections.'¹⁸

In certain parts of *Nightsea Crossing* the importance of the individual's act of viewing over time is made even more explicit by the introduction of an 'observer' placed between the artists and their audience. In Abramović and Ulay's book *Modus Vivendi* (Eindhoven 1985) the artist Rémy Zaugg relates his experiences as an 'observer' to that part of *Nightsea Crossing* presented at Middelburg in Holland. In his account he describes his gradual reflection upon his own act of looking, and the transformation of his observation into a meditation upon his act and an acute awareness of his own presence. In the first place, it seems, Zaugg is surprised by the effect of the work, his realization that Abramović and Ulay's presentation

'... is not a dead life but a still life... The work... has a consciousness, a consciousness similar to that of the observer. That consciousness, unusual and unexpected in a work of art, surprises. It constrains. The consciousness of the observer clashes with the consciousness of the work. It is reflected in it.'¹⁹

For Zaugg, this awareness is amplified by the presence of the audience behind him:

'The observer sees in the consciousness of the work not only a reflection of his own consciousness but also the reflection of the consciousness of the spectators present behind him, whom he hears and whom he knows are observing what he, the exposed observer, is observing. Consciousness



Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Nightsea Crossing 'The Observer'* with Rémy Zaugg, 1 day, Forum, Middelburg, 1984.

surrounds him, exposing him.²⁰

Caught between these elements, he becomes doubly aware of himself, his own act:

'Seated, the observer imagines his double standing behind him busy observing . . . he observes himself being observed. Privately, he observes himself being observed.'²¹

Nor is the circumstance of the observer far removed from the individual viewer's. The viewer finds himself similarly surrounded by 'observers', and his coming to reflect upon his own looking, his consciousness of himself, may be heightened through his awareness of his 'participation' with the group. Such a sensation seems to be reflected in Richard Flood's description of his awareness of the 'collective respiration' of the audience at Kassel. For Abramović and Ulay this shared action is a key not only to contact between themselves and the viewer but also to a heightening of the intensity and resonance of the performance itself. In *Nightsea Crossing*, Abramović suggests,

'After ten or twenty days . . . [the] energy in the space becomes so dense from the repetition of the same thing that the people get really affected. If you just compare on one day the first two or three hours, it's not so strong as the last three or four hours at the end [*sic*]. Something [has] changed. And what's changed . . . does not belong to the material world.'²²

It is in this context that their use of symbol has to be considered. For in this performance, not only do the objects the artists present refer to 'native' cultures, but the way in which they present them acts as an allusion also. Ulay points out that in such cultures,

'the symbols natives use, are all symbols which have a very practical function, they are very functional. I think the symbols; the material, the colour, the shape, the placement of the symbol, and the approach (to) the symbol; it has to be perfect. Then the symbol will be . . . able to generate powers. But only if it is perfect. And then [if] it is placed, in the right time, in the right spot, and if it is approached with certain meanings and rituals, and the symbol itself consists of certain kinds of material and shape and form and colour, etc., etc., then it can work.'²³

This care is plainly apparent in *Nightsea Crossing*, and in fact extends beyond their presentation of objects. In so far as Abramović and Ulay take on the 'appearance' of the objects they are surrounded with, in so far as they 'place' themselves through their motionlessness with the same care as they 'place' these objects, then they treat themselves as 'symbols' in this ritualized manner.

Clearly implied in such a performance is the idea that this kind of presentation might go farther than simply alluding to cultural practices now lost to Western society. On the one hand the references to alchemy, the swastika of boomerangs and sheaf of golden rods present an audience with relics and understandings from ancient European traditions; here archaic symbols of the spirit, of peace and justice are offered, which in the modern world have become signs of materialism and fascism. At the same time, in Abramović and Ulay's minds, the presence of symbols, and particularly of the Lama and Aboriginal in person, might do more than 'recall' that which has been lost. For them these elements seem to acquire a fully realised 'ritual purpose,' offering the possibility of an actual transformative effect upon the viewer. In their description of their 'sound performance' *Positive Zero* of 1983, in which aspects of Aboriginal and Tibetan cultures are brought together again, the artists suggested that,

'Exposure to members of these cultures and their unique sound productions may offer a link with the primordial matter of mankind. This bridge through time and space might activate faculties which are buried deep within us.'²⁴

The full form of *Nightsea Crossing* operates on two levels. The piece is both an intellectual and symbolic debate upon the relationship between modern and ancient culture and, through its various ritualisms, a stimulus to an understanding of the world no longer a part of the modern perspective. Binding these two aspects together is the way the piece addresses the experiences of the individual viewer, leading him toward a particular kind of engagement. In this context, these meanings and forms are presented to him in the belief that they may have some resonance for him, perhaps provoking the same kind of realization that the artists plainly believe they have found through their contact with these ancient cultures.

Clearly, though, this discussion would be incomplete without a more specific consideration of Beuys' and Abramović and Ulay's reference to the shaman. Not only does this image clarify and draw together the nature and purposes of their performances, but it also brings to a head any consideration of the role and status this work might lend the artist. In Beuys' performances, of course, the allusion is immediately recognizable and he readily admits its importance, suggesting to Tisdall that,

'When I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances.'²⁵

The shaman is a 'magical' figure whose knowledge of the divine is fundamental to the community's cultural, political and spiritual life. He is the guardian of the

sacred, responsible for the centering of the various needs and activities of the tribe around the basic truths, essential to the well-being of the individual and the continuity of the group. Most importantly of all, Dr Joan Halifax observes in her book *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives*:

‘The shaman’s work entails maintaining balance in the human community as well as in the relationships between the community and the gods or divine forces that direct the life of the culture. When these various domains of existence are out of balance, it is the shaman’s responsibility to restore the lost harmony.’²⁶

Both Beuys’ account of his life and symbolism as well as the sources and form of *Nightsea Crossing* make reference to shamanic experience and purpose. Many of the aspects of Beuys’ life that he refers to in the work can be related to the initiation of the shaman. First of all, according to Halifax, the shaman is one who is initiated through the experience of ‘death’. Initiates, she notes, are invariably those who have

‘experienced the ordeal of entering the realm of death. Those who have nearly died, through an accident or severe illness, or who have suffered a psychological or spiritual trauma of such proportions that they are catapulted into the territory of death . . .’²⁷

Abramović’s and Ulay’s experiences in the desert suggest a different kind of initiation. For the shaman, Halifax suggests, experiences in the wilderness may also act as a catalyst for a fundamental change, a ‘reconstitution’ and so ‘initiation’.

‘Nature’s wilderness is the locus for the elicitation of the individual’s inner wilderness, “the great plain in the spirit”, and it is only here that the inner voices awaken into song.’²⁸

Nightsea Crossing makes a further specific reference: Abramović and Ulay compare the purposes and effect of their prolonged stillness with the use of masks in ‘native’ ritual. Here, the ‘anonymity’ of their motionlessness is intended to give the impression that they are ‘elements’, ‘symbols’, rather than ‘individuals’. The aim of their ‘act’ and its presentation, Abramović argues, is

‘not to be the “I” or his “I,” but just to actually be a part of the natural principle . . . that’s actually what it’s about . . .’²⁹

It is a ‘depersonalization’, she suggests, that they have drawn from native ritual, noting that

‘. . . that’s why they use masks, so they leave the person behind and they become *the* element itself.’³⁰

Through this process the artists see their presentation of themselves as coming to take on the qualities of the symbolic objects they surround themselves with, referring in particular through their shared action to a balance and a unity between male and female 'principles'. Abramović notes that,

'I feel the perfect human being is hermaphrodite, because it's half-man, half-woman, yet it's a complete universe . . . We're a man-and-woman.'³¹

This presentation of a 'wholeness' through a shared action has a special correspondence to shamanic rite and tradition where androgyny acts as a physicalization of the spiritual unity the shaman 'remembers'. Halifax tells us that:

'The neophyte ultimately embraces the mystery of the totality that existed in "illo tempore," becoming that totality, a process of profound recollection. The occasional androgyny of the Shaman is one inflection of paradise, where the two become one.'³²

Yet importantly these artists maintain a careful distance from the shaman who remains a powerful allusion rather than a dominant figure. Like such images as the plane crash, the image of the shaman in Beuys' work remains an ambiguous construction, a reference and provocation informing a reading of the work rather than a direct and literal source of meaning. So Beuys notes that,

'When I do something shamanistic, I make use of the shamanistic element — admittedly a thing of the past — in order to express something about a future possibility . . . I take primitive elements in order to provoke people's consciousness. But not to say, we have to go back to the past.'³³

Yet the readings that these shamanistic elements stimulate do act as a clarification of purpose, of intention, underlying the work as a whole. For Abramović and Ulay, allusions to shamanic experience make clear their notion of the sources and effects of their performances, and so far as the image is present in *Nightsea Crossing* it acts as a particularly resonant allusion around which their symbolic objects are placed. More fundamentally, in drawing on the image they too come to clarify the central aims of their work. The shaman, Halifax notes, seeks first of all

'to bring back to an original state that which was in primordial times whole and is now broken and dismembered . . .'³⁴

It is precisely this 'wholeness', a unity embracing polarities, bringing 'man' and the 'flow of nature' together, that Abramović and Ulay suggest modern man has lost and which they find in 'native' culture. Abramović tells us that

' . . . the natives are completely connected with the earth's energy and the

flow of nature and from that they generate the whole thing and — we are just disconnected . . .³⁵

Beuys seeks to reintroduce his audience to a similar sense of 'wholeness'. In an interview with Umberto Allemandi he tells us that:

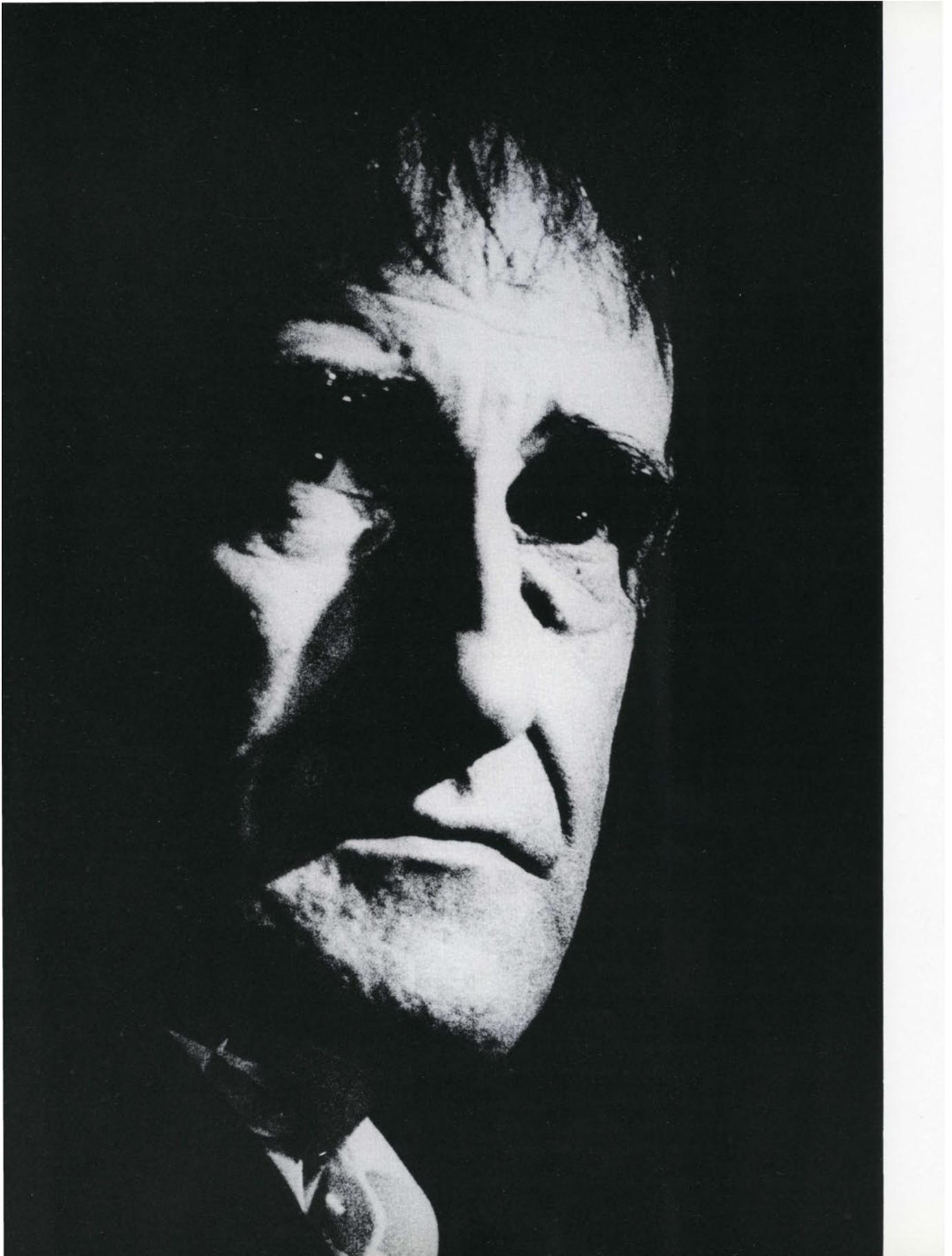
'In the art field only mysterious paintings should be created so that all focal points in men would be involved: the intellect which works according to an analytic scheme, the senses, sensibility, etc. Then and only then will it become evident that that phenomenon, as it was, had a justification of its own, its own *raison d'être*, and that its specific form was a correct answer to the problems of this time.'³⁶

In defining the position of this work so clearly, these references also reveal its relationship to the contemporary art and context through which it defines itself. At its heart, this work is clearly a reaction against the very lack of centre, the very fragmentation and loss of definite meaning that much, particularly American, performance has declared and celebrated. At the same time, though, these references to the shaman do not call for a 'unity' in any simple way, but implicitly acknowledge and incorporate this sense of loss. For in looking to the shaman such work does not look toward a defined and available 'wholeness', but to a figure who engages in a profound recollection of that which is now gone. The shaman is himself a nostalgic philosopher, who through a ritual 'identification' of that which he remembers hopes to provoke a vision of fundamental unities.

This position describes rather well the ambiguities inherent within this work. In making such allusions these artists do not simply refer to a specific past, but to a contemporary loss of meaning. Through their ritualistic performances they attempt to create work through which this sense of loss might be met. So the viewer finds himself placed within a framework which sets images and objects from other cultures, from other possibilities, and the unities that ritual forms inevitably imply against references to a profound loss. Through such means the work seeks to provoke a confrontation between the viewer and this contemporary sense of fragmentation and to stimulate explorations of experiences and qualities that question the inevitability of this condition. Far from imposing themselves in any simple way upon the viewer, these performances attempt to create frameworks and languages through which these kinds of experiences can be found, and within which the image of the shaman clarifies the work's relationship to the contemporary context and speaks of a faith in the possibility of renewal.

NOTES

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3. C. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (London 1979), p. 16.
4. C. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: Coyote* (Munich 1980), p. 20.
5. J. Perrault, 'Beuys & Coyote: An Eerie Duet', *The Village Voice*, June 6th 1974, pp. 41-44.
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8. *Id.*, pp. 29-30.
9. *Id.*, p. 28.
10. *Id.*, p. 29.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
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14. C. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (London 1979), p. 24.
15. R. Flood, 'Marina Abramović/Ulay, Ulay/Marina Abramović', *Artforum*, October 1982, p. 85.
16. Brochure to the performance of *Nightsea Crossing* at the Sonesta Koepetzaal, Amsterdam, April 1983 (Museum Fodor, Amsterdam 1983).
17. N. Kaye, unpublished interview with Marina Abramović and Ulay, Amsterdam, December 1983.
18. *Ibid.*
19. R. Zaugg, 'The Observer', in M. Abramović and Ulay, *Modus Vivendi* (Eindhoven 1985), pp. 49-51. Quote p. 50.
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22. N. Kaye, *op.cit.*
23. *Ibid.*
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26. J. Halifax, *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (New York 1979), pp. 3-4.
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30. *Ibid.*
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33. H. Bastian, *op.cit.*, p. 92.
34. J. Halifax, *op.cit.*, p. 22.
35. N. Kaye, *op.cit.*
36. U. Allemandi, *Joseph Beuys, Superstar*. Interview with Beuys published in English translation in the form of a press release by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc. (New York 1974).



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David Hughes

WINDOW ON PERFORMANCE

The Poetics of Space



Tadeusz Kantor and Cricot 2, *The Dead Class* 1975.

Tadeusz Kantor.

What informs the frame I want to draw around some disparate aspects of literary and performance history is the notion that they all have a 'theoretical' connection: I see them as contributing to a 'poetics of space', an impulse to move from the logic of the line, the sentence, from the order of the flat plane into 'space', where traditional forms and comforting reference points cease to exist, a place of silence, nonsense, madness and death.

This 'poetics of space' has both a conceptual and literal manifestation; and I want to cast widely, from its appearance in *Black Mountain* at the Summer Schools set up by Charles Olson, through its emergence in the work and writings of John Cage and Tadeusz Kantor, to its theoretical dimension as it appears in some post-structuralist writings.

Charles Olson was one of Cage's collaborators in the 1952 event at Black Mountain College which is now thought of as one of the seminal moments of 'performance'. A poet, and rector of the College, he read his poems from ladders with MC Richards, and his first book opens with these words:

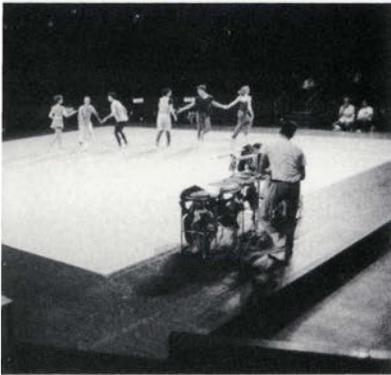
'I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America . . . I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy.

It is geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning. That made the first American story . . . : exploration.

Some men ride on such space, others have to fasten themselves like a tent stake to survive. As I see it Poe dug in and Melville mounted. They are the alternatives.'¹

A work of literary criticism on Melville's *Moby Dick*, it kicks right off with 'geography', 'and that was clearly anti-literary'.² His concern with space has certain implications. The world is one of objects, man simply another object, 'no hierarchies', and in 1950 Olson published an essay, 'Projective Verse',³ where he proposed a kind of poem which did not follow the rules of tradition or readily available formal patterns. It conceived of a poem which emerged from the conditions and place of its making, the result of the interactions of maker and made, not a closed organization which the New Criticism (the dominant mode of the time) took a poem to be, but verse considered as an 'open field'. The making of a poem is an act of exploration of the 'space' of the poem, a space which the poet shares. Both exist in a field larger than both, an 'open field': not only are poet and poem forces which, in the magnetic sense, exert influence on each other; but each is also under the influence of forces beyond the literary.

Olson's scientific basis for his ideas was found in Reimann's 19th century model of 'reality'. Reimann distinguished between two manifolds: the discrete and the continuous. 'Quantity becomes the striking character of the external world,'⁴ in the new model of the continuous manifold. In this atomic model man becomes a



John Cage, *Roaratorio: An Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake*, 1987, Royal Albert Hall, London. (photo James Barrington)

thing among other things, having 'being' within a continuum, continuous with nature and subject to the same laws. Man is a particle within a wave, acting and acted upon. This interaction of fields is evidence of 'inertial structure' which is 'a real thing which not only exerts effects upon matter, but in turn suffers such effects.'⁵

Olson is interested in the tensions that obtain between things; and this notion of inertial structure projects the attention towards the spaces between things, the arenas of their interaction. Space is not empty, but is filled with particles and waves.

'Light is not only a wave but a corpuscle . . . an electron is not only a corpuscle but a wave . . .'⁶

Which is why there are 'no hierarchies' for Olson. Space is full of waves and particles in which 'man' as a privileged being dissolves.

Pollock, at the same time, was talking of being 'in my painting . . . the painting has a life of its own . . .' and characterized the event of painting as 'a free-play of mutual concessions', while Cage introduced chance factors and 'reconsidered the whole context of a melodic modality in music.'⁷ Creeley, concluding that 'formal order, taken as a *sine qua non*, could no longer be assumed as a necessary virtue,' hints that 'similar circumstances were very clear in the sciences as well.'⁸

Olson, in his notion of 'open field', followed Ezra Pound whose *Cantos* contain graphic elements, foreign languages (particularly Chinese ideograms and characters) and typographic devices. There is no sense in which they can be read sequentially; rather each page is to be taken as a separate field, related to the other fields/pages of the book and forming a continuum with them but also having its own infinite set of possible relations between the elements contained. So whilst it is possible to pin down a terrain of images, references, metaphors, the connections *between* remain infinite; whilst we can identify meanings, an overall meaning escapes us. Each page is a field, holding its own relations, but also holds relations with other pages, and those in turn with the book as a whole, the book holding relations to the extra-literary and to other literary works and history. Meaning, then, the product of relations, is constantly deferred, displaced from one field, or set of relations, to wider and other fields.

Jacques Derrida remarks on Pound's 'irreducibly graphic poetics' which disrupt the apparent linearity of traditional verse. Further, he claims that the linear model has never been adequate, that 'we are beginning to write, to write differently . . . (and so) we must read differently', advancing to a 'pluri-dimensionality and to a delinearized temporality.'⁹

His relation to the work of Olson, Cage and others becomes clear in his *Positions*.

'Difference is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing (espacement) by which elements relate to one another. This

spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive . . . of intervals without which the "full" terms could not signify, could not function . . .'¹⁰

Within this view of language there are no full terms which can mean anything in isolation. Each term functions by virtue of the relations between it and other/opposite terms. Terms function, then, by virtue of being spaced apart, by the differences which separate them. 'Meaning' is produced by an oscillation between possible meanings within that space and can never be stable. This is not a linear separation. Each unit of language is caught up in further plays of association, phonetic and conceptual: a play which radiates out in all directions. This spacing is 'volumetric', not linear. Our focus shifts, then, to the intervals, the spaces between, the relations, the play, not linear syntax and a transparent leap forward from word to meaning.

The significance of Derrida's work for my framing of performance is his interest in the relation between 'line' and 'space'. It is his contention that science and philosophy conceive of themselves through the metaphor of the line, as having beginnings, origins, continuation, development and an unitary identity. What such a myth can ignore is the extent to which quite other disciplines or forms of knowledge and discourse can have been grafted in, such that the line is heavily stratified, fissured and broken. One of Derrida's uses of spatialization is to show up those strata, those fissures that have been papered over: that is, he shows the points of grafting of disparate and various 'others'. The model of writing — the sentence, the line with its logical progression, beginning, middle, end — legitimises man as thinking, speaking subject, and the cohesion of systems of knowledge. In short, he connects the linearity of time, history, science and writing. Linearity, he suggests, is the suppression of a pluri-dimensionality instated through grafting, amongst other things. This new myth, of a 'writing without the line', is a re-reading of 'past writing according to a different organization of space'.¹¹ Deconstruction, then, could be seen as a method of reading and writing attuned to a non-linear writing of 'pluri-dimensionality and a de-linearized temporality'.

The 'graphic poetics' of Pound is just such a non-linear writing, in which sequential syntax and the 'transcendental authority and dominant category of . . . being' is abandoned in favour of a spatial organization within which counters circulate. Essentially, Derrida's work is an attack on the bundle of concepts which come along with 'linearity': '[an] elevating and interiorizing accumulation of meaning, a certain type of traditionality, a certain concept of continuity, of truth . . .'¹² It is this bundle of concepts which authenticate notions of ultimate readings, of transcendental truth, of 'meaning'. Some of the work central to 'performance', such as the happening, clearly mounted its own challenge to this attitude to 'truth'.

CAGE: THE PULVERIZATION OF LANGUAGE

One of the most sustained attacks against the tyranny of the line — the line that divides art from life and the line that connects words in sentences — was that launched by John Cage.

His work with Cunningham starts from the premise that music and dance are not to be built together in one mutually supportive structure (an information structure), they are to have their own spaces, so that the possibility of interaction is kept open, so that at once each element maintains its own integrity, whilst being modified in the viewer's perception by being in the field of the other. As James Klosty points out, music and dance 'can be advantageously freed of one another's syntax.'¹³ Again there is a remove from the order imposed by traditional form, so that dance and music can discover their own syntaxes, their own logics. But in both Cunningham's work and Cage's, this syntax ceases to be of the formal, received kind that takes the contiguity of the sentence, with its implied logical underpinning, as model.

Cunningham's piece *Walkaround Time* has a set by Jasper Johns which consists of elements from Duchamp's *Large Glass* transcribed onto vinyl boxes. Johns writes that for him one of the most important things about the Duchamp is that the ambient space of the gallery is always part of the work; the work therefore is never finished, is both a two dimensional work and a volumetric work.

The score by Pauline Oliveros for Cunningham's dance *Cranfield* takes the notion of inertial structure and the resonance of space to a logical extreme. The resonating frequency of the building in which the dance is taking place is measured, and sound-generating electronics reproduce this frequency so that the whole space begins to resonate. If a performance were to be continued for long enough, the building would collapse, of course.

Cage further contributes to 'the poetics of space' through his work on the 'demilitarization of language'. He writes:

'Syntax, according to Norman O. Brown, is the arrangement of the army. As we move away from it we demilitarize language. This demilitarization is conducted in many ways: a single language is pulverized; the boundaries between two or more languages are crossed; elements not strictly linguistic (graphic, musical) are introduced; etc. Nonsense and silence are produced . . .'¹⁴

The demilitarization of language is made thinkable by the notion of the continuous manifold of reality: language is reduced to its smallest constituent parts and the boundaries between the discrete are crossed. In this 'open field' of wave and particle the graphic, musical and linguistic disrupt each other. Each thing may 'resonate where it will' to quote Olson.

Cage sometimes talks of the points of interaction as 'centres', centres which proliferate to the effective negation of the notion of centre. Of the 1952 event at

Black Mountain College, Cage remarks that each member of the audience was the centre of his/her own performance, the unique point of a particular mix of the elements which surrounded them. Michael Kirby notes of Cage's work:

'Not only did he separate sound and silence so that long passages of silence were integral parts of his compositions, but he pointed out that absolute silence does not exist . . . if sound is ever-present, so are the other senses, and Cage has gone so far as to deny the existence of music itself, if music is considered as hearing isolated from sight, touch, smell, etc.'¹⁵

In an increasing theatricality after 1952 Cage introduced an increasingly performative element for musicians — pouring water, working inside the piano, etc. — whilst in *Theatre Piece*, an actor is given time brackets in which to perform whatever actions he chooses, and in *Variations* (1959) the 'musical' performers work out where to locate sounds in space, not just in time. In *Variations 111* he sets out to show that there is no space between one thing and the next, just as there is no silence. To illustrate this a performer is asked to count his visible and invisible ('passive') actions, such as 'noticing a noise in the environment'.¹⁶ In this model, the inner 'spaces' of the body — senses, thoughts, perception, viscera — are continuous with the space outside the body in which it stands and acts. The shell of the body ceases to become a defining limit (en)closing the self: rather it is the point of exchange, a crossed boundary, just as the 'boundary' of the body, for Leonardo, was not an enclosure but part of the boundary of what is next to the body. Cage, quoting Woolf, puts the following formulation of this position in *Silence*:

'THERE IS NO CONCERN WITH TIME AS A MEASURE OF DISTANCE FROM A POINT IN THE PAST TO A POINT IN THE FUTURE, WITH LINEAR CONTINUITY ALONE. IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF GETTING ANYWHERE, OF MAKING PROGRESS, OR HAVING COME FROM ANYWHERE IN PARTICULAR, OF TRADITION OR FUTURISM . . . BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS ARE NOT POINTS ON A LINE BUT LIMITS OF A PIECE'S MATERIAL . . . NOT . . . MOMENTS OF TIME WHICH MARK A SUCCESSION, BUT AS MARGINS OF A SPATIAL PROJECTION OF THE TOTAL SOUND STRUCTURE.'¹⁷

If Cage's use of 'silence' introduces a disruptive force to the syntax of formal music, then his pulverizing of language effectively disrupts grammatical syntax in his writings and lectures — though he might not make a significant distinction between them: everything is music. Indeed, he declares himself to be waiting for 'something else than syntax'.¹⁸ He uses language as a 'sound source that can be transformed into gibberish': by subjecting existing texts to chance operations he has produced such semantically indeterminate works as 'Empty Words', 'Mesostics for Merce Cunningham', 'Mureau' and 'Song'. Perhaps it is to increase the possibility of resonance that he makes these works and I take the word 'resonance'

Tadeusz Kantor and Cricot 2, *The Dead Class*, 1975.

to mean both physical vibration (sound), and associations (sense). He certainly celebrates Japanese for being 'without syntax, each word/polymorphic'.¹⁹ So a poem by Basho, he maintains, 'floats in space', any translation of it merely being a 'snapshot' of a process. If the militarization of language — syntax — militates against semantic polymorphicity then alternative syntaxes, or non-syntaxes, must be employed to reintroduce the kind of jabber that information overkill produces. To return to a pre-linguistic state of childhood, before language-through-syntax and the social constraints embodied in the law of language have straitjacketed the mind, is to return to the potentially open mind that Cage sees as the great possibility of the happening. The happening is a recreation of the information bombardment of the busy down-town street, but in a special chamber where we can concentrate on it in a way that we cannot in the street. Ultimately political, he sees 'syntax' in a larger sense as depriving us of our ability to make individual acts; it structures thought and perception and lays its primary emphasis on the logical and rational. The desired result of the happening is to release the mind from its fixed focus, its logical orientation, to make the possibility of new action. The mind must become spatialized, itself:

'the mind, actually being in space, no longer can function as ABC.'²⁰

KANTOR: THE CLASHING OF SYMBOLS

Cage writes:

'Admitting that . . . one thing follows another . . . that there's no space between activities, one asserts that this isn't two-dimensional linear-fact (or multiplicity of such facts interrelated) but unbeginning, interminable field-fact. Space, miracle, then arises where there was none.'²¹

Tadeusz Kantor also realises that one thing has a predisposition to follow another, but he too, like Cage, wants to create miracle. He wants to break from the logical structure of language and the syntagmatic order imposed onto the stage event when it merely serves the purpose of conveying the literary text. Theatre must be 'autonomous' for him, having its own logics, which it cannot be if it is structured according to the linguistic model. In his search for a pure theatre, he believes he must attend to all the arts, not just the literary. Throughout his working life he has used the texts of Witkiewicz as the literary ingredients of his 'plays', and these texts themselves offer a method for disrupting the tyranny of logic, of grammatical syntax. In Witkiewicz, language attempts to be another object in the material of the play. Its referential function must therefore be stripped away from it, much in the way that Kantor feels objects can only be used in 'art' when their functions or surfaces have been stripped from them, when they are 'degraded reality'. This stripping of the referential is attempted in a number of



ways in the plays of Witkiewicz:

'a) disjunctive . . . which disjoins the utterance from the immediate action . . . b) absurdifying . . . inappropriate or absurd [utterances] . . . c) asemantic . . . using terms non-existent in the language . . . d) logically unacceptable recitations that cut across the rhythm of the dialogue, the paralogical utterance . . .'²²

The literary element, then, instead of being part of an information structure, where each piece of the stage event is designed to be mutually supportive of an unified 'vision', is part of a deformation structure, where data are assembled such that they throw each other into confusion or absurd juxtapositions. We might understand a third structure, the formation structure, as one where information is brushed against information, offering infinite associational possibilities.

Kantor is aware that the theatre will semiotize anything that passes across it, tending to fix stable meaning to it, and so it is to free the object and the action from a simple referentiality — a meaning or a narrative — that he develops his idea of elements 'clashing' against each other. His answer to 'the problem of symbols' is to set different actualities against each other to frustrate interpretation and break the linear, narrative, sequential flow, so that the show is jointed along its length, like the piece of string which is measured in the first sequence of the Cricotage, *Where Are Last Year's Snows*. Thus, 'a wedding immediately becomes a funeral.' The action of measuring a piece of string can either be full of associations or empty — nothing more than what it is, that action — and these two extremes are contained within the action.

Beuys, in his 1971 exhibition *I Want to See My Mountains*, foregrounds this same quality of the object as sign. It is both what it is and what it is not. He wrote the names of the objects exhibited on them, and stuck on photographs of their usual use — they were bits of furniture from his home. The show's title forced on them metaphoric meanings — thus, wardrobes = mountains etc. — whilst the photographs indicated the meanings they had for Beuys, their functions. They had many potential meanings and uses within them. They were both what they were and other. Similarly, Kantor writes of the elements in his plays:

'Characters, situations, rudiments of the plot
are not symbols.
They are *loads*
that lead to *clashes* . . .
Despite their obvious references to life
meanings
They do not in the least satisfy the expectations
for a solution likely to obey the logic
of life.'²³

Aware of a 'contaminating' and structuring force in literature, he develops the

Tadeusz Kantor and Cricot 2, *The Dead Class*, 1975. Galeria Krzysztofory, Crakow, Poland.



scenic sphere of the show before letting in the textual element. The scenic sphere is influenced by what is going on in art, so Kantor's *Cricot 2* has produced Happening Theatre, Informal Theatre, Embellage Theatre and so on. The levels of ingredients in his plays, then, are spaced out, to attempt an associational and counterlogical possibility.

Having condemned the textual in his plays, there proliferates an excess of accompanying texts, manifestoes which are set alongside the works of theatre; but so suggestive and obscure are they that they constitute another level of 'poetical' material rather than providing an explanatory system for the plays. The same was true of Duchamp's *The Green Box* (Paris 1934) which contained notes, photographs and drawings apparently to explain his *Large Glass*. The box, rather than stopping the possible resonances of the larger piece, set off resonances of its own.

What I hope has emerged from this discussion is the notion of interactive spaces; not of discrete poles, not of clearly defined insides and outsides, but a space of the passing between. Derrida calls this 'invagination', a space of folding about which 'deconstructs', or calls into question, a system of values based on privileged terms in opposition to less privileged terms; a system in which, amongst other things, intention, reference and meaning (as signs of the handiwork of intending man) are privileged over indeterminacy and chance.

We find in Kantor's work a recurring image, the window, which seems to dramatize this play, this spacing, this erosion of the polar opposites. It is a limit which is not an enclosure but a point of entry and exit, of enfolding and invagination. Held by The Woman Behind the Window in *The Dead Class* it is both within the classroom and yet, by virtue of being a window, outside it. Kantor looks through the window at the Woman — actually a man dressed as a woman — and thus it offers Kantor a reflection of himself, split in two, as it were. It reflects images from the history of art (*Large Glass*, Rauschenberg's *Oracle*, etc.) and forms a bridge to another of Kantor's plays in which it appears, *Wielopole, Wielopole*; thus it accumulates a 'volumetric' incrustation of associations.

We take Kantor at the footlights to be one of us, the audience, as we enter and see him standing looking at us — a reflection of us. Kantor has become window/mirror for us: he is both a reflection and we see the play through him. His presence on stage confuses the line between rehearsal and performance, between the unfinished and the finished, the open and closed; whilst the window stands as a space where a plenum of associations cross. Neither are points of enclosure, marking off discrete areas, but rather are spaces of interaction in the continuous manifold (many folds) of the open field.

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Ariane Koek

HARPO'S CHALLENGE

Performance Art and the Reinvigoration of Opera



Harpo Marx in the film *A Night at the Opera*, 1935. (photo National Film Archive, London)

Harry Kupfer's production of Strauss' *Elektra* for Welsh National Opera, 1979. (photo Julian Sheppard)

When Harpo demolished the set of *Il Trovatore* in the Marx Brothers' film *A Night at the Opera*, he was thumbing his nose at the whole operatic tradition and pressing for change in an art form which had long been associated with wealth, prestige and the aristocracy.

By overturning convention — smashing a grand piano and seizing its framework only to make a harp, or by literally deconstructing the opera set themselves — the Marx Brothers beckoned towards a world of new subversive operatic stagings and productions.

This year there has been more debate than ever before about what some critics see as the 'latest disease' to hit that most hallowed of art forms known as opera. The name of the so-called disease has been coined by the American critic Henry Pleasants: 'produceritis'.¹ What it refers to is a move towards concept-based productions, which allow an opera to be staged as a piece of live theatre or performance rather than as a reproduction of what the composer might have had in mind.

The iconoclastic opera directors of this type of production are such people as Peter Stein, Patrice Chéreau, David Pountney, Harry Kupfer and Peter Sellars, all of whom have shaken the cosiness of the operatic tradition by what, for the opera world, are radical stagings. Take for example Harry Kupfer's production of Strauss' *Elektra* for the Welsh National Opera in 1979. It was set in a high-tech slaughterhouse, strewn with carcasses, blood and entrails, drawing directly on such performance works as Hermann Nitsch's *48th Action*, presented at the Munich Modernes Theater in 1974, or Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy*, performed in New York and Paris in 1964.

There is no doubt about it: performance is now one of the most influential, if unacknowledged, art forms in opera staging. But what does this mean — not only for opera, but also for the performance world? And can the two art forms work together?

This August, Harry Kupfer brought his celebrated production of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* with his East German opera company Komische Oper to the Royal Opera House in London. He is respected as one of the most radical directors in opera today, a director of the sub-text, who wants to produce 'characters in living situations which are very extreme, and then leave the audience to find their own meanings.'²

Kupfer's production of *Orpheus* starts with a direct challenge to the whole tradition of opera. The audience is faced with a curtain of mirrors which allows it to gaze narcissistically back at itself. 'After all, what do you come to the opera to see?' Kupfer and his designer Hans Schavernoeh seem to be saying. 'Do you come to see the opera, or is it to see yourselves in all your glory?' And immediately the staging ironically recalls the origins of opera, as a princely pageant and show of wealth and status, invented at the courts of Northern Italy in the early seventeenth



Production by Komische Oper, East Berlin, of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, at Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 1989. (photo Catherine Ashmore)



Production by Komische Oper, East Berlin, of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, at Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 1989. Producer: Harry Kupfer. Scenery: Hans Schavernoeh. (photo Christiane Oertel)

century.³

Then the overture begins and the mirrors revolve and split, becoming screens upon which stills are shown which set up the opera's starting point — Eurydice's death — by showing an ambulance at the scene of an accident. And all the while, Orpheus and Eurydice sit siffly off-centre on stage right, as if waiting to begin a formal recital, whilst listening to the overture with the audience.

Throughout the opera, the mirrors revolve becoming sometimes screens and sometimes windows through which the audience glimpses the nightmare world of Orpheus' mind, depicted as a mental asylum. It is here that Orpheus seeks Eurydice as the ever-changing set throws layers of images out to the audience: first tangled railway tracks leading nowhere; then empty syringes; then a howling mental patient; then Eurydice's accusing eyes.

The single narrative thread of Orpheus' search for Eurydice becomes resonant with a multiplicity of meanings, as the images and settings constantly change. How far is Orpheus' quest for Eurydice a search for himself? — the mirroring set highlights Orpheus' constant allusions in the libretto to Eurydice being the echo of his voice. Where are the barriers between outside and inside? How far can the opera staging be taken as a comment on contemporary East/West politics? For Orpheus takes out a Federal German passport which gives him access to the Underworld/West, depicted as a drug-crazed asylum. And when at last Orpheus leaves the Underworld, clutching a television which shows the image of Eurydice on its screen, where does fantasy begin and reality end? These are but a few of the questions which the production raises.

For the performance art world Komische Oper's staging is nothing new. At the heart of almost any performance piece is this challenging of narrative thread, of structure, setting, social order and any one meaning. In some ways, Komische Oper's staging directly recalls the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor's famous use of frames as mirrors, windows and screens in the 1970s. A performance art audience is seeing nothing startling; but for a typical opera audience such staging is radical and unsettling. And when in the final act of the opera Orpheus and Eurydice are reunited, Kupfer suggests that the happy ending which the audience is expecting may be too pat — for, as at the beginning of the opera, the lovers assume frozen concert platform manners and sing mechanically. There is no cosiness here, but instead an endless playfulness which questions the resolution proclaimed in Gluck's triumphant musical finale.

Ironically, the seeds of subversive opera productions can be found not only in performance art but also in the history of opera itself. Whilst today opera is associated with wealth, exclusivity and a certain cachet, it does not have the aristocratic foundations one might at first think. For the courts of Northern Italy which founded this spectacle were sustained by commerce, by an oligarchy which was essentially nouveau riche. And ironically, the plots of opera frequently subvert

the notion of an inherited social hierarchy, as shown for example in *Orpheus and Eurydice* by Orpheus' ability to break through traditional barriers thought to be in the control of the gods — those of life and death. In doing this, he is showing his right to be considered a demi-god.

As the American scholar Susan McClary points out, opera was the means by which the nouveau riche or bourgeoisie showed what they considered to be 'the rightful emergence of the vital, superior middle-class individual in defiance of the established class system.'⁴ It also revealed 'a deep-seated desire on the part of the bourgeoisie to emulate the nobility, to traipse about in pseudo-aristocratic drag,'⁵ and has been since its inception one of the means by which the new ruling class has disseminated its moral codes and values. Part of the traditional opera-goer's shock at the radical restaging of such classic operas as *Orpheus* is on account not only of its irreverence towards the operatic tradition of staging but also of its exposure of opera's subversive core and 'vulgar' origins.

In the writing of new operas, every bit as much as in the staging of old ones, there has also been a radical reworking of traditional structures. One has only to look for example at Luciano Berio's *Un re in ascolto*, with a libretto by Italo Calvino, first performed at the Salzburg Festival in 1984 and shown in Britain earlier this year. Berio wastes no time in making it clear that *Un re in ascolto*, which takes Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as its kicking-off point, is a meta-opera which defies operatic convention:

'There's no *ante factum*, there's no intrigue and no train of events or affections expressed by the characters who, through singing, pose moral dilemmas. There is however the analysis of a dramatic-musical situation and the representation of a farewell . . . I began my farewell to opera a long time ago. Like the real Prospero, I will say that on the operatic stage, "our revels now are ended." But it is a long goodbye.'

In terms of plot, however tenuous, *Un re in ascolto* is about a director auditioning and then rehearsing actors and singers for a staging of *The Tempest* which is constantly delayed. And when the rehearsal ends, the life of the Director/Prospero ends as does the performance.

The character of the Director is the only central reference point in a libretto which refuses to put forward a single narrative and which can be read as a meditation on Barthes' untitled essay on listening, published in *The Responsibility of Forms*.⁷ As Berio says, his production is closer to being a musical drama which is in the process of being constantly reworked, replayed and reheard, just as the part of the Protagonista in the Director's opera is constantly being rehearsed and adjusted, than it is to being an opera in the traditional sense. In fact, *Un re in ascolto* ends just when it could *become* an opera, when the producer's dream of his production is closest to its first performance; and Berio's music reflects this, coyly alluding to more acceptably harmonious latter-day operatic scores. As the opera's

title suggests, both music and text are concerned above all else with the process of listening as such.

If Berio's music and Calvino's libretto reflect performance art's destabilising of given norms of theatrical expectation, so does the opera's staging. The Director's room is shown in Graham Vick's production for the Royal Opera House to be limitless. What at first appears to be a wall becomes a see-through screen, through which the audience can see the rehearsals and auditions taking place in a circus arena, with flying acrobats and tumbling clowns, and which itself contains a parched landscape with a withered tree. Yet this setting is also a concert platform in which two women audition for the part of the Protagonista, the opera's diva. Worlds are contained within worlds, yet the libretto refuses to link them other than as part of a process of production.

But why has opera turned to performance art in order to revitalise itself?

One of the answers, however paradoxical and regrettable this may seem, lies no doubt in the desire on the part of certain opera producers to win back for opera a certain exclusivity. With the rise in the number of films of operas in the 1970s and 1980s — Francesco Rosi's *Carmen* and Franco Zeffirelli's *La Traviata*, to name but two — opera has been disseminated to a far wider audience than ever before, who could for the first time afford opera's excesses. Film has undermined opera's cultic status and democratised it, at the same time removing much of the purpose of going to the opera house itself. Some opera houses have therefore, one suspects, turned to performance art-type staging as a way of reasserting a new mystique, saying in effect, 'Look, opera is complex and only for the educated,' whilst paying lip-service, with sub-titles which translate only some of the libretto, to a popularising of opera. For them, the new staging is a means of creating a new élite, who can understand or at least nod in the right places when they pick up their programmes from English National Opera, for example, full of long passages from post-structuralists such as Foucault, Derrida and Kristeva. Performance art, which is seen by some as itself exclusive and élitist, is being used by opera partly for those very qualities.

Much more importantly, however, performance art is being used as an effective weapon in a fight to reinvigorate an art form which, as Berio and Philip Glass have rightly complained, has been relentlessly resistant to change.⁸ There are only so many times you can go and see a production of an opera which purports (but almost inevitably fails) to be an accurate reflection of what the composer intended, complete with period costume and detail. It is not without reason that some opera critics, such as *The Guardian's* Tom Sutcliffe, have positively welcomed the cacophony of catcalls and applause with which challenging productions have been greeted. It is probably the best evidence we could hope for that opera is alive and kicking, rather than buried in the past.

The latest opera to receive this mixed reception, in Britain at least, is the English

National Opera's *A Masked Ball* by Verdi, which even hit the front page of *The Independent* (Saturday, 16 September 1989) under the headline 'Cheers vs boos as opera rowdies have a ball.' Arts correspondent David Lister speaks of the opera's split reception as 'one of the most riotous scenes ever witnessed at the ENO' and describes how the divided audience almost came to blows afterwards in the foyer over the ENO production by the New York director David Alden and designer David Fielding.

Whereas *The Independent*'s Michael John White describes the production as 'a tragedy', with a staging which in his opinion 'crudely and sensationally absorbs everyone into the hype of its main propositions,' Tom Sutcliffe describes it as 'startlingly original', adding a breadth of meanings to the opera which have never been brought out before. Their remarkably different reviews show the antagonisms at play within the assessment of challenging new 'conceptual' opera stagings. For the critic and audience steeped in operatic tradition, such stagings may seem to overpower what up until recently has been seen as the central ingredient of any great opera, to the virtual exclusion of everything else — the music, and in particular the singing.

In practice, the aural and the visual elements can work together on a more equal footing, to genuine mutual benefit. In the case of ENO's *A Masked Ball*, the stage is dominated by the golgotha of skulls built into the proscenium arch and by a galloping horseman of the apocalypse hanging above the stage, a Daliseque clock trampled beneath his horse's hoof. Such a surreal setting, with a landscape awash with skulls and bones, is very different from the traditional staging of Verdi's opera with its more comforting setting of a lavish ball, full of the glitter of jewels and rich costumes. Yet, as David Alden's staging implies by comparison, this traditional staging is a gloss on what are disturbing sub-texts embedded in the opera — for example that Verdi was forced to shift the time and the place of the opera from eighteenth century Stockholm, to seventeenth century Pomerania, then Boston. Alden's production makes it explicit that Verdi was as much a victim of the censorship of his time as his characters are. The reign of the leading character, King Gustav (Arthur Davies), is doomed in this world dominated by time, and his gestures of confidence are shown to be empty gestures of bravado. When he is assassinated at the end of the opera, there is no sense, as in the traditional staging, that somehow there will always be another ball, another reassuring production which will wash away the drama of the final scene. Instead, the audience is left with the horror of the dance of time and death.

What the influence of performance art on opera principally shows is a push for a more pluralistic art form, which cuts not only across the traditional type of operatic production with its central emphasis on music, but also across the conception of opera as a separate art form in itself. It points, rather, to opera's far more exciting potential as the common ground on which a large number of



Production by English National Opera of Verdi's *A Masked Ball*, at the London Coliseum, 1989.
(photo Laurie Lewis)



Production by English National Opera of Verdi's *A Masked Ball*, at the London Coliseum, 1989.
(photo Laurie Lewis)

different art forms can fruitfully meet and interact; much as, indeed, Wagner had envisaged in his celebrated notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Almost certainly, this is the main reason for the long-standing fascination which many performance artists, for their part, have felt for opera, a fascination which has been well documented.¹⁰ That opera is capable of fulfilling this potential in practice is shown, for example, by Martinu's 1929 opera *The Three Wishes*, which already included film in its production, or by the multi-media works of Philip Glass and Robert Ashley.

Nor is there any reason why this cross-fertilization of different art forms should exclude the popular arts. Significantly, it is precisely in this move towards 'composition', a putting together of all the arts, that the critic Jacques Attali sees the most effective potential means of challenging existing ideology. In his text *Noise*, he proposes that it is only when art forms become democratised and fused together that society itself will change in a more democratic direction. Perhaps, by borrowing constructively from performance art, opera has the chance to fulfil not only Wagner's but also Attali's dream.

A radical rethinking of the way opera is presented is long overdue. It is to be hoped that we do not need to wait much longer for Philip Glass' prediction, that 'the world of repertory opera will eventually be dragged — possibly screaming — into the twenty-first century with the rest of us,' to become true. There is no doubt that Harpo, the most silent of the Marx Brothers but also the noisiest, would have nodded his head in approval. It is up to opera to take up the challenge with which it has been presented.

NOTES

1. Henry Pleasants, *Opera in Crisis*, London: Thames and Hudson, September 1989.
2. Nicholas Kenyon interviewing Harry Kupfer in *The Observer*, 30 July 1989, p. 41.
3. See Jacques Attali, *Noise*, Manchester University Press, 1989, p. 17.
4. Susan McClary, 'Afterword — The Politics of Silence and Sound', in *Noise* op. cit., p. 155.
5. 'The Undoing of Opera', in Catherine Clement, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, London: Virago, 1989, p. xii.
6. Luciano Berio, 'Dialogue between you and me' in Royal Opera House, London, programme for *Un re in ascolto*, February 1989.
7. Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms — Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1985.
8. Philip Glass, *Opera on the Beach*, London: Faber, 1989, p. 87.
9. see Tom Sutcliffe, 'Underworld of the Mind' in *The Guardian*, 8 August 1989, p. 27.
10. Performance artists' fascination with opera has often been written about — Robert Wilson, Robert Ashley, Station House Opera etc. But this article has been concerned to look at three recent productions performed by established opera houses, to draw attention to performance's hitherto unacknowledged influence on opera's new staging and to monitor its reception in the opera world, rather than to look at the way performance artists have shaped opera within their own work. (cf Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, London: Thames and Hudson 1988; various issues of *Wire* and *Performance* Magazines; *Opera on the Beach*, etc.)



Mark Gaynor

DISPLAY TEAMS IN SOUTHAMPTON

Divergent Definitions of Performance

**Duncan Roy, *Bad Baby*,
performance, Southampton, 1989.**

An interesting little debate could be overheard along the prom at Ocean Village, Southampton, on Sunday 25th June. It concerned the work of one Steve Poleskie, American professor of art and aerobatic pilot. Steve takes to the air in a bi-plane and draws in white smoke against the vast blue canvas of the sky above cities all over the world. Was it 'art'? Wasn't it just 'loop the loop' and hadn't the Red Arrows done it before — and much better? Well yes, the effect of a single bi-plane is somewhat feeble in comparison to a dozen speeding jets and wasn't helped by strong winds dispersing the smoke almost as soon as it had appeared. But is it fair or even relevant to compare an artist and amateur pilot to a professional display team? This inability to compete in the spectacle stakes would appear to override any concept of an alternative practise or even the sheer audacity of it. Only once did I hear: 'But this is one man, free, up there, just . . . doing it!' In actual fact, this debate was restricted to the few who had turned up specially or those who had been given a handout explaining the event. The vast majority took it all in the nature of a summer afternoon stroll by the sea.

As ever, theoretical debate is a matter that really only concerns or interests a minority, but once you make a point of designating something an artwork everybody becomes a critic. And this particular occasion has broader connotations when taken in context — the context being Southampton Performance Art Week. The media pack, courtesy of the Hansard Gallery, claims: 'Poleskie's compositions are nearer to dance than they are to painting, sculpture or conceptual art.' Is this dance connection, then, the proper justification for inclusion in a festival of performance art? I think not. I believe Poleskie's move into the great blue void to be more akin to Robert Smithson's concept of Non-site or Richard Long's walks; i.e. human presence/intervention in the natural landscape. This allows one to historicise the artflyer within a particular area of artistic activity which, when combined with witnessing the transitory gestures of the artist, marks these 'compositions' as performance/live art. Dance or Land Art being furthest from most peoples minds at the time, the Red Arrows make a welcome alternative to compare performance to.

This comparison with 'display teams' cropped up time and again during the week, though not usually in terms of skill, spectacle or entertainment, which were generally of the highest order. The organizers must be congratulated on being able to assemble such an array of talent in a region that has little history of supporting such work. Accordingly, a sizeable portion of the audience for each event was made up of the local performing fraternity, eager for a chance to see a range of work they had only read about. (The majority, as at Ocean Village and in keeping with the project's objectives, were people who came simply to enjoy the show.) I spent a good deal of time before and after each piece sitting in the bar area of the Gantry, the main venue, eavesdropping on the conversations around me: with a few exceptions, the speakers seemed to be bemused. It was a bit like the Red

Arrows turning out to see Steve Poleskie. Witnessing 'display teams' exhibiting skills they were themselves well versed in was not what they had expected.

That is not to say that all was light entertainment with no difficult or controversial work to deal with. Perhaps the most disturbing was Duncan Roy's commissioned piece *Bad Baby* dealing with, amongst other things, child abuse. Try as I might, I have not been able to shake the uncomfortable impression caused by the juxtaposition of child abuse with homosexuality. In the midst of a set consisting of a '50s fridge and a convertible bath/bed/table, the 'child' is beaten and abused by his 'step-father' and then later the 'child grown up' is caressed and beaten by his 'lover'. This, albeit subconsciously, has the potential to bolster certain beliefs that homosexuality is the product of abnormal experiences in childhood. A grotesque 'torch song' sequence strengthens the masochistic obsession with suffering in the name of love.

In contrast to this highly stylized symbolism, we find Etheldreda and Jacob Marely. Jacob Marely's dance group provide us with an entertainment around the trials and tribulations of Gloria, as her pushy mother tries to get her into dance school. It was one of those rare occasions when one would welcome, but didn't get, a virtuoso solo spot. The dancing eyes and wicked smile, reminiscent of an elegant Lindsay Kemp, make Marely a delight to watch in contrast to so many other po-faced dancers. The re-vamped space at the Gantry lent itself ideally to the visual punning of Etheldreda's *La Dolce Vita*. It was some time, however, before I could enjoy 'the thinking woman's Morecambe and Wise' for what they are: an exuberant comic duo not to be mistaken politically or stylistically for the likes of Sensible Footwear.

My biggest surprise was with Steve Shill. After following the exploits of Impact Theatre, I was quite excited about the prospect of getting my first view of Shill's new work — and he wasn't even there. *Empire* is a highly accomplished piece of intimate theatre with excellent performances by the three women; but 'Double bill features Steve Shill' has a subtly different meaning to 'written and directed by . . .' What about the art of the three women performers or does international recognition take precedence?

Two presentations with a great deal in common were by the Glee Club and Dogs in Honey, with the latter's extra few years experience showing through in the end. This was most evident in the Glee Club's lack of editing, which makes the show over-long. It might seem easy to say so now, in retrospect, but having seen their previous show in Glasgow and this one, *Yessir I Can Boogie*, at the ICA, I have always felt uncomfortable about the woman's role alongside the two posturing men. I was not too surprised then to discover that she had dropped out by the time they arrived in Southampton; and intrigued to find that she had been replaced by another male without seriously altering the performance. The effect was to emphasize the 'boys' culture' side of the Glee Club which had previously

seemed unconscious. If they can dig deeper into this without relegating the woman to a supporting role we can expect something special. Boys' culture also forms the basis for *Sons of Bitumen*, which sounds like a paraphrase of *Boys from the Black Stuff*. This time the female member of the group directs *Dogs in Honey* in a piece in which women never get a mention. 'This is about men and it is about theatre,' reads the promo. The theatrical setting, of a gents' public lavatory after the bomb, becomes a symbolic point of contemporary crisis; four men open up and let us see inside. The constant jump back and forth between acting and personal address creates a confusion of identity that highlights the improbability of ever being oneself or being anyone else in such an artificial situation, and yet it goes beyond the simple exploiting and then exposing of theatrical technique. The two halves, of men and theatre, are brought together in the fulfilment of the demand for entertainment in a version of the Floaters' *Float On* — '70s pop music being another connection with the Glee Club.

Three performers clearly not about theatre were Sylvia Ziraneck, Sally Dawson and Bobby Baker. Sylvia uses all her years of experience to make her audience as comfortable as if they were in her own dining room, spending most of her hour sitting reading from her book *Very Food*. My ears have never been able to work as fast as Sylvia's mouth, so I for one found her self-interruptions most enlightening (even if she has been advised not to do it): though speech is essentially that which is emitted, understanding language depends as much on that which is received and so footnotes can help to unscramble sometimes unintelligible dialogue. Sally Dawson on the other hand failed to connect at all. For an apparently aware woman I found *She Wears Sea Shells* surprisingly thin. Aren't there double standards in operation when a white British woman performs an ethnic dance routine as part of a piece about cultural exploitation and isn't the whole issue somewhat more complex than modern fashion? The only time during the week that the audience did not require a prompt that a conclusion had been reached was for Bobby Baker's *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* which received spontaneous and rapturous applause. Exuding a personal confidence to rival the experience of Sylvia Ziraneck, Baker simply shares experiences of motherhood which even the most unlikely of parents would appreciate. An instantly recognizable, unpretentious human being going about business in the most appropriate way she knows: what more can you ask?

So 'what is performance art?' as the media pack asks on page one. Well, this is certainly a very broad interpretation, stretching from the street theatre of Emergency Exit Arts and Natural Theatre to Christine Lorimar's installation *Votive Breath* — two Super-8 film loops of clouds projected onto free-standing, wrapped bouquets of dead twigs arranged across the floor of a medieval basement. What we can see here are two schools of thought, reflecting the concerns of the two main programmers. These are also two sides of the current British

performance scene: on the one hand, mature performers tending to have a visual background; and on the other, a younger generation from the comparatively recently established Performing/Expressive/Creative Arts courses. The art of performance has been recognized as distinct for as long as drama has been a part of educational activities — public presentation as opposed to class work. Now that it is possible to study performance at a higher level without recourse to drama school, we have a new breed of performer who is not reliant on the traditional play as a vehicle. This can lead to a confusion of terms. I recently addressed a group of teachers who were quite adamant that they understood ‘performance art’ but who were horrified at the sight of Alastair MacLennan’s 64-hour marathon on the *British Art Show Tapes* (Projects UK, 1985). Discretion being the better part of valour, I decided not to show Stuart Brisley’s *Being and Doing*; although, despite its content of nudity and implied violence, it is probably a more pertinent introduction to performance art.

Given the broad interpretation of performance in education it is hardly surprising to see the confusion evident at the ICA selection platform for the National Review of Live Art. The most extreme example being a young man standing at a microphone playing guitar and singing songs. Perfectly competent, appreciated by the audience but completely out of place. What, then, if he is a student of one of these new courses fulfilling the requirements set down by the likes of BTEch? Do we tell him to try again — with a fish on his head, running on the spot, project a few slides and keep referring to how artificial it all is? It may well be more entertaining but is it any nearer the point? And if not why is mime, dance or acting/directing any more valid than the writing and performing of pop songs? There is plenty of truth in the notion that it is the promoters in any medium that shape the kind of work that gets produced. It is up to the programmers and teachers to take up the challenge and responsibility of truthfully reflecting and encouraging the whole breadth and depth of possibilities. The alternative is for ‘serious’ critical activities to be swamped by a sea of technical expertise from highly professional ‘display teams’.

Reviews

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

London

Station House Opera

The Bastille Dances

LIFT

Reviewed by Tim Etchells

Station House Opera's *The Bastille Dances* is something like an architectural folly set in motion. A structure that appears to be built entirely from breeze blocks some 40 feet high sits outside the National Theatre by the Thames.

On this structure a group of twenty or so performers labour night and day for 96 hours using the blocks to build pillars, walls, staircases, arches and rooms. Despite the number of performers it is the structure itself that is the protagonist of the piece, the humans merely functionaries in its drama of changing architectural and social configurations. Indeed, as the piece develops it is the abandoned sections of the structure that provide some of the most resonant sights: empty spaces, piles of fallen blocks and now discarded forms.

For me the placing of the set was something of a dilemma in my reading of the work. Compared to their previous piece, *Cuckoo*, where a small group of performers build and explore on a stage covered in domestic furniture, *The Bastille Dances* places little value on the actions and inventiveness of individuals, showing a world in which no character or performer has lasting power or influence. The bulk of this feeling comes from scale; participants are

dwarfed by the structure they build and demolish and no matter how impressive their creations, they always tumble or mutate, swallowed up in a continuum of change. Next to the breeze blocks that are thrown, dropped, piled and smashed, the soft tones of the performers' skin seem especially vulnerable and weak. Human detail and motive all but disappear, since high on the three-levelled structure people are visible only in terms of their labour and the structures that they build.

In this context I can see my reservations about the piece as products both of political and theatrical conservatism, but I'm tempted to say that they are more than this. Like other Station House work that I have seen *The Bastille Dances* mixes performance modes fairly freely; some people moving in a distant and stylised way set against others working in a kind of eccentric naturalism. These diverse performance qualities seemed uncomfortable here, since the possibility of reading them fictionally, as character difference, was reduced by both the dramatic and physical structure of the piece.

The Bastille Dances is based on the imagery of the production line, of human bodies consumed in work. For me this valorisation of mass production forces, of a world where individual effort counts for little and not for long, made it, if not bleak, then at least hard to engage with on a human scale.

Despite this there was a real energy in the scope of the actions and changes effected on the breeze block building site, and in the celebration of inventiveness, plurality, eccentricity. As a challenge to theatrical and performance form I admired the lack of characters, and the insistence on a performance world in which the audience was obliged not only to choose or move between viewing positions, but also to place its own system of emphases on a plethora of simultaneous actions presented 'without value'. This formal challenge seemed to suit the piece's engagement with ideas of historical and cultural revolution, portrayed not in terms of great men or meta-narratives, but in terms of complex and contradictory realities, where the efforts and wills of individuals are drowned by the workings of the world. When a man appears to act as the human keystone of a massive arch smashed open by performers below, it's a brilliant comic and bathetic feat, but it's over very soon. It is not that there are no character narrative acts in *The Bastille Dances* but that they are not dwelt on for long.

There was a further question for me in the titling of the piece. On the one hand, a few of its most powerful images were pulled straight from previous Station House breeze block shows, (*A Split Second of Paradise* and *Piranesi in New York*), and benefited very little from their new politicised context. There was a temptation



to subject poignant and ambiguous images to a reductive inquiry about their bearing on the French Revolution. On the other hand, there were sections of the work that had perhaps grown directly from the stated theme, and these achieved a powerful and resonant effect. Here, in the distance, were the fragments of narrative that drew me in. Best of all was trying to follow the progress of the King, whose early breeze block throne is dismantled even as it is built, to fuel the endeavours of the workers down below. By the end, after a spell on a second broken rubble throne, he's wandering with a single breeze block under his arm, the only possession he has left in the world.

Each evening *The Bastille Dances* had a special concentrated performance, lasting two hours without a break. As it worked itself out, with the breeze block structure beautifully mutated and changed, there was

a sense of a marathon ending, shared between audience and performers. In the final images, a performer as Liberty brings a burning block from the heights of a fairy-tale tower. I'm sure that the joy of the closing sections arose from a growing sense of the contrast between the hard physical labour of performers and the fanciful non-work nature of their true project; a piece of art made on the banks of the Thames. This seemed to be a satisfying subversion of the work ethic that had alienated me at times, turning a hymn to mass functionalism into a celebration of collective creation and all that is fictional and strange. Perhaps that's what revolution should be like.

Fiona Templeton

You, The City

LIFT

Reviewed by Vicki Jung

If YOU missed this, then you missed one of the most exciting theatrical experiences to hit THE CITY last Summer. This concept of participatory theatre departs from the usual model in which members of the public are picked out and made the butt of the performer's humour, creating instead a new balance between performer and spectator that is essential for the event to take place. The show is performed to an audience of one, with the spectator referred to as the 'client', based on the idea of a deal made between two people. This is not a spectacle that you

are separate from: as one of the characters informs you, 'this isn't pointing at you, you're in it.' The client is given an appointment to meet at an office of chartered accountants in the City, and on arrival is asked to complete a questionnaire. This contains such questions as 'Are you now, or have you ever been?', introducing the surrealist flavour of things to come, and 'Do you believe you can act?', thus prefiguring the choice, which throughout the course of the piece it becomes increasingly apparent that the client must make, whether to take an active or a passive role.

The clients, who then set off at ten-minute intervals, are accompanied by a series of characters along a route that encompasses a cross-section of business, commercial and residential areas. The journey, which takes two hours, covers a deceptively short distance, as it winds in and out of the streets around Brick Lane and Spitalfields Market, and a parallel social route is marked out with the juxtaposition of wealth in the City and the poverty of a largely Bengali-populated council estate. The constantly shifting landscape acts as a natural backdrop to the performance and provides a cinematic feel to the experience in which one is both observer and centre-stage. The daily patterns of street-life thus become incorporated into the piece and take on a surrealist nature when placed under scrutiny.

The use of non-naturalistic



language at first produces an alienating effect, and left me mouthing wordlessly into the air when asked: 'What is this making of you?'. However, gradually the poetry starts to wash over you, creating a dream-like atmosphere that enhances your perception of the surroundings, while certain passages of the text leap out as if personally directed at you. The characters, who are constructed as archetypes, act as mouthpieces for the text, in which the

frequently repeated use of the word 'you' is aimed at the general human condition. But those of a more nervous disposition may feel the finger of persecution is being pointed at them. This is not a show for paranoiacs.

The necessity for participation occurs at the most basic level: if you look away, the piece ceases to exist. The choice to participate more actively leads to the gradual empowerment of the 'client', as the symmetrical structure of the play creates a repetition of a scene where the more advanced client participates in a cross-over in a playground with a less advanced client. The first time the scene occurs, the client assumes that the character they are approaching is a performer; the second time, the more advanced client has a choice to share this knowledge with the approaching client, or to remain complicit in their assumption. The surge of power that is experienced at this point is unavoidable. This theme of shifting role from innocent observer to complicit 'actor' is repeated when you are invited to make a phone-call to a client who is participating in an interior scene in which you yourself have participated earlier, thus bringing your experience full circle.

The concept of camouflage recurs throughout, and began for me with the discovery that the other people in reception furiously filling in forms, whom I assumed to be fellow clients, were in the process of applying for jobs with the company and

were oblivious to the fact that a theatrical event was occurring in their midst. The continuing journey through the streets, in which one at first feels highly conspicuous, receives a noticeable absence of attention from the public. Conversely the experience of being involved in the play, without knowing who will be present at your next assignation, causes all passers-by to be viewed with suspicion.

This is a disorienting experience that breaks down the usual conventions of theatre, whereby artifice is constructed as a representation of reality. Here, reality on the streets replaces the proscenium arch and makes everything seem strange and unreal.

Rosemary Butcher

in collaboration with
Zaha Hadid

d.1.

Royal Festival Hall Ballroom

Reviewed by David Hughes

The Parc de la Villette in Paris has been something of a *cause célèbre*. It has been hailed as a paradigm of deconstructionist architecture, in that Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman — two architects thought to embody this new trend — collaborated with Jacques Derrida, the guru of deconstruction, in its making. It was conceived as a structure where successive grids are overlaid; and it suggests itself as an apt reference point for this collaboration between the

architect Zaha Hadid and the choreographer Rosemary Butcher: not only did Hadid submit a competition entry for La Villette, in which mobile elevated platforms were to move across the terrain, but the product of her work with Butcher is itself structured in layers, both in its overall design and within each of its three parts.

The project sets out to examine 'the relationship between ourselves and the urban environment of the city — its space, its form and its vertical power.' Titled *d.1.*, this first performance, which marks out a space within, and on, which to build, will ultimately become one level of the triptych *3.d.* in Glasgow in 1990, where Hadid will construct a monumental installation — a temporary city. This evolution echoes her usual work process; *d.1.*, the monochrome sketch, becoming gradually overlaid with information and colour until it reaches its ultimate form, a 3-d construction.

For this first event, a ground plan had been marked out on the ballroom floor by a group of architects, in Hadid's absence. Derived from an original sketch for her current project in Hamburg's docklands, the configuration of lines suggests a conflation of plans for both urban and domestic spaces, such that the 'streets' can also be read as corridors and the 'open spaces' as entrance halls, while occasional zig-zag lines bring to mind both doorways and

electrical switches. At the same time, all the lines are lines of force and stress, meeting and emanating from various non-centred points, reflecting those non-literal marks which invade Hadid's sketches and plans, and which 'register' the energy and movements of the prospective users or occupants of her buildings.

This play between the metaphoric levels of the floor markings is extended by the play across the floor of the dancers' bodies. The linear grid created by these is superimposed on the ground plan, with hardly any direct reference to it. Indeed, the dancers constantly fragment and cut across the logic of Hadid's lines. The music is yet another autonomous layer of information, built up of layers of pedestrian tempi set against those of traffic.

Rosemary Butcher was living and working in New York in the '60s when the Judson Dance Group was making a kind of democratic, non-technical dance, and Rauschenberg was using those same dancers in his happenings. These concerns with the 'pedestrian', with physical structures and with the interface of the visual and the performing arts have characterised her work ever since. Here, she has created a dance of a familiar, minimalist kind: arrangements of a basic vocabulary — swinging and skipping — the arms occasionally becoming funnels for energy into and out of the body, the hands forging channels for changes in body direction, and an extremely

elegant duet which bore some of the hallmarks of Contact improvisation — itself a development, by Steve Paxton, of the Judson Group's work. With this basic material the dancers trace the thoroughfares of their imaginary urban landscape. Only once do they include a too literal vehicle/pedestrian image, spoiling their pleasingly abstract and clean lines; as soon as they work mimetically, they diminish the possible resonance of the work.

At the level of pure movement the momentum of the swinging arms propels the bodies forward, backward and, at the very end of the piece, into the air. This upward movement possibly provides the physical link to the next phase of this ten month project, when it moves from the ground, and the temporary city starts to assume actual, vertical and physical existence.

Shifting Focus

Serpentine Gallery

Reviewed by Ruth Barter

The photographic work which is brought together in this show represents a broad spectrum of the ideas and strategies women artists have used during the past decade. Developing from structuralist and post-structuralist theory, the impulse has been to subvert those dominant patterns of representation that have served to maintain and reinforce expectations and assumptions, particularly those concerning identity and gender. While not

attempting a comprehensive overview, the show — more interestingly — characterises several clearly emergent trends and presents them as possible arguments or positions which are relevant to a broader cultural debate than that primarily concerned with sexual equality.

The work generally demands a complex, critical engagement and reading from the viewer rather than the mere consumption of self-contained objects. In much of the work, the place and status of the 'one who looks' is implicitly interrogated. Susan Trangmar persistently and teasingly refuses the viewer's gaze by turning her back; she looks, but obscures what she sees. We see her meaning made — consecutively, differently — by each environment in which she is portrayed and defined. Yve Lomax' use of juxtaposition reveals the fiction of the idea of the photograph as a 'window on reality', exposing the narrative constructions that are invited and that in turn construct.

Empty spaces, particular places, interiors or architectural environments are presented in the work of Lynne Cohen and Candida Hofer, for the viewer to dream themselves into and to experience — like the people who might inhabit these spaces — the pre-existent scripts and imperatives which are inscribed there. Laurie Simmons draws a parallel between the relation of the small army of plastic women she photographs to a simulated culture that is reduced to a tourist playground package, and

the spectator's passive consumption of, and exclusion from, what is presented to them in a photograph.

A sequence of 'film still' images plays across explicit issues of racism and social positioning in Mitra Tabrizian's work, towards a subtle exploration of that permeable membrane between people, conveying a sense of identity hovering between profecion and introjection, and between the shifting pressures of inner contradiction and external structure.

Thus blurring of the boundaries of identity is an insistent and recurring theme. Anne Ferran, Astrid Klein and Shelagh Alexander have each in different ways subverted photographic technique, displacing the singular, unitary perspective view, which confirms the viewer's own sense of wholeness, with dreamlike compilations and condensations where distinctions become lost within the tactile surface. The resultant images produce a sense of unease and disturbance but also of seduction. The exploration of this edgeless state, together with the lines of approach proposed by the other works, suggests multiple ways of subverting and questioning the power relations which are inherent in deeply embedded, culturally dominant practices of representation and which contribute to an assymetry in sexual relationships. The work further contributes, perhaps, to an understanding of the way

structured power relations operate more generally, and proposes strategies for shifts in position within those processes.

Art in Ruins

Vampire Value; Domestic Arrangement

The Showroom; Marlene Eleini Gallery

Reviewed by Andrew Wilson

In these two complementary installations, Art in Ruins confront a number of convergent issues from the banality of domesticity and the strategies of consumerism to the latent ethnocentricity of Western art values. Joining these notions together is their understanding of architecture as the field through which the overwhelming technology of power is mediated. Architecture does not just provide an image of power — it is also its agent, where the functional use of space becomes fixed within the domain of the construction of power.

Colour Bar, exhibited at the Showroom, mingles black-on-black images of the South African embassy in London and black-on-black images of African sculpture together with kitsch nostalgic images of the black Other in the forms of plates, lampstands and the like. The intention is to show how, when presented in a trite and commonplace manner, the status of the Other can be dissolved out of sight, analogously to the way in which the policy of apartheid operates by spatially excluding

the black population from whites-only areas. Art in Ruins summon up this correlation by their use of the repressive and dominating image of South Africa House.

Sellafield Plage Blanc and *Buying Time* operate in a similar manner. The latter's iconic image of the Lloyds Building leaning against the wall, juxtaposed with the logo of Next (once a market leader in the field of consumption), highlights the connection between the financial underwriting of business and the field of subsequent consumption in such a way as to bring to mind Michel Leiris' notion of the 'sacred in everyday life' as 'something heterogeneous and ambiguous with which we are in collusion.'

What is realised from these images is that the power that resides in architectural constructs is not site-specific in its function but is of a global nature. It is not for nothing that the image of James Stirling's Stuttgart Staatsgalerie — *On Line* — is festooned with a line of day-glo rucksacks wherefrom one is 'compelled . . . to identify with the global network, crossing both time and space (as Modernism and Internationalism demanded)'. And yet it is not so much an 'identifying' with the network as a becoming subservient to it (one is 'compelled' after all) that is the final message of this; architecture not only lays out the space to regulate what is seen, but also controls our gaze in the manner in which we look.

Cambridge

Richard Layzell

The Revolution — You're In It!

Cambridge Festival

Reviewed and photographed by Ivan Gaskell

Few successful businessmen court publicity which they cannot control. Neither do they need to proselytize. However, as the recent launch of Sir James Goldsmith's bid for BATs reminded us, they do know how to turn big business into show business when it suits their ends. Recently, though, Bailey Savage, Chairman and Chief Executive of Savage International Plc, being so impressed by his own swift rise to incalculable wealth, cast reticence aside and for nine exhausting days brought the message of the economic revolution of the last decade to Cambridge.

Cambridge, one might think, would hardly need informing, for it is no longer the academic bolt-hole of a few Keynesian economists, rather the site of the Cambridge Phenomenon — biotechnology, Silicon Fen — a 1980s boom town. Cambridge inhabitants are thoroughly accustomed to the sight of other people's success at close quarters. Mr Savage, though, has our welfare at heart. He really wants us to succeed too. He would very much like us to be like him. So he distributed leaflets in the street informing us how to do it. He summed it up in two words: 'Be Savage!'. He talked to shoppers. He broadcast an account of his progress each day



on Radio Cambridge. He was at once the entrepreneur, politician, evangelist and advertiser — the people who have become in so many ways indistinguishable from one another as living icons of insincerity. He was also the artist — the performance artist Richard Layzell.

This interventionist art work, commissioned by Hilary Gresty as part of the Kettle's Yard Cambridge Festival exhibition, 'After 1789: Ideas and Images of Revolution', depended for its success on the apprehension of the ambiguity inherent in the performance by at least a fair proportion of those who saw Savage/Layzell and his suave assistants, Trevor (Trevor Cromie) and Cassandra (Ellen Marwood). Layzell realised that if everyone accepted Savage at face value he would simply be dismissed as yet another mild eccentric whom the British are brought up neither to stare at nor to mock. At most a few might argue with him, taking his views in earnest. This actually happened during the first few

days of his public appearances. In consequence Layzell became concerned that Savage might indeed be taken too seriously, for he fully appreciated the need to foster ambiguity and had taken this into account when planning the whole performance.

In order to signal that something extraordinary was going on, rather than a straightforward exposition of contemporary business ethics, Bailey Savage's eccentricity became progressively more marked during the course of the performance period. He took to appearing not only in his customary neatly pressed dark blue suit, striped shirt and tie, but also in a hat: a shiny blue and red hat in irregularly quilted satin of vaguely Tibetan appearance. Towards the end, Mr Savage's occasional nervous twitch degenerated into a ranting chorea as he expounded the benefits of the trickle-down effect outside the public library.

Wherever he went Mr Savage was the epicentre of discreet curiosity and barely suppressed

apprehension. While visiting a large suburban supermarket his party became aware of men in grey suits watching from a distance. While ordinary onlookers dealt with their bewilderment individually by simply ignoring Mr Savage, staring or laughing furtively, the supermarket staff were having to cope institutionally. After all, they had their customers and their business to protect. For all they knew, this man might run amok at any moment. Layzell, knowing exactly how to modulate his performance, skilfully saw to it that bewilderment should not turn to indignation. He approached no-one unknown to him, yet when he was recognized by people who had seen him earlier in the week, he returned their greeting, elaborated his credo and gave his card. I was the target of the manager's eventual enquiry as Mr Savage completed the conspicuously accomplished purchase of strawberry tartlets at the patisserie counter. 'Who is he? Is this a survey? Do we know about this?' he asked. A performance such as this is not relinquished lightly and even a critic is drawn into its web. I explained Mr Savage's great importance in the world of international commerce. I suggested that my interlocutor might perhaps have seen Mr Savage's photograph in the local press or heard him on the wireless. (He hadn't.) Finally, I stressed that this was a private visit simply to enable Mr Savage to do a little shopping, which he

finds relaxing, pointing to the pink socks, black rubber gloves, Irish whiskey and cat litter in Mr Savage's trolley. 'So long as he's making purchases, then,' the man in the grey suit responded. The security ring slackened, though the party was secretly observed until it left.

The supermarket visit was just one of many events, each of which made different demands on the artists. Savage gave a keynote address on business sponsorship and the arts at the spectacular opening of the Cambridge Darkroom's exhibition of contemporary French art, 'Shadow of a Dream'. Here, as one might expect, many amongst his audience were in the know. But when it came to a tree planting ceremony in a pub garden, performance art — let alone Joseph Beuys — understandably will have sprung to the minds of few of the lunchtime customers. In the city centre, when not being photographed and video-recorded, Mr Savage sometimes had to struggle for attention: buskers and exhibitionists are two a penny there on a Saturday afternoon. But when he described the details of his wardrobe outside a men's outfitters while the indomitable Trevor and Cassandra deftly drew his portrait several times life-size (including the hat) in coloured chalks on the pavement, the effect was electrifying and a large crowd gathered.

The very indistinguishability of Bailey Savage from those whom he parodies exposes the pastiche

character of the real prophets of media-hyped consumerism, of commerce, religion and politics as show business. Savage's calculatedly exaggerated behaviour, a mixture of slow-motion self-congratulatory preening and bombast which looks absurd in the flesh, appears alarmingly natural on the video screen. The media glow bathes all subjected to it indiscriminately, causing viewers to become accustomed to new conventions of artifice in which sincerity is the first victim. Richard Layzell's performance demonstrated Fredric Jameson's observation about postmodernism and consumer society, that pastiche — post-industrial society's dominant mode — is blank parody. Layzell had to lurch even further than he had anticipated into the absurd, using all the mastery for which he is so highly regarded, before the pastiche original and his parody of it could be told apart, and even then not by everyone. As I was photographing Bailey Savage's beribboned car — its speakers blaring *Land of Hope and Glory* — drawing away slowly from the centre of the city for the last time, the great man waving at passing admirers through the open window, a youth in a T-shirt asked me who this person was. 'That's Bailey Savage,' I replied, 'an extremely successful businessman and entrepreneur.' My eye was still at the viewfinder. 'Well,' the young man said with feeling, 'I think he's a fucking spastic!'

Cardiff

Magdalena Project

International Festival of Voice

Reviewed by Penny Simpson

The objective of the Cardiff-based Magdalena Project is to provide opportunities for the creation of experimental theatre that speaks for women. Each project is set up to answer to demands that arise in festivals held throughout Europe by a growing network of women performers, all united by their search for a new theatrical form which will express more fully women's desires and experiences. The latest of these projects, an International Festival of Voice, was organised by Jill Greenhalgh and voice consultant Helen Chadwick at the Chapter Arts Centre.

The major difficulty in assessing a festival of this kind lies in its celebration of a method of working rather than a finished product. It can more usefully be seen as a week-long voyage of discovery that could not be hooked directly onto any one staged event.

There was a loose structure for the day-to-day running of the festival. In the mornings, workshops were hosted by invited tutors from across the world, followed in the afternoons by workshops for the tutors alone. Early evening sessions devoted to different singing techniques and approaches to composition were also arranged, along with concerts with invited guests, while tutors presented work in a

mixture of languages and drawn from very different backgrounds.

What Magdalena provides is an 'enabling' atmosphere for women to collaborate together.

Sometimes, in this festival, this simply meant opening up rehearsal spaces for *ad hoc* groups of women who wanted to pursue their own ideas which originated in the morning workshops. What is still needed, however, is some kind of access for the public to view workshops or demonstrations exploring this 'enabling' process which is not easy to define in terms familiar to many theatre-goers.

By watching some of these



workshops you can get a glimpse of this shared ideal and of what it is that gives such a unique flavour to Magdalena projects, a sharing of a process which is absent from the one type of event that is open to the public to date — the concert.

Magdalena never simply builds up to a grand finale that incorporates aspects from each workshop; often things come

together in isolated moments in workshops, intuitive reactions and improvisations which do not necessarily translate well onto a stage but are still a valuable method of exchange between performer and spectator.

Primarily, Magdalena is for theatre people making theatre. But the end results will eventually filter down into new performance work by individual participants, directed at new audiences. So surely now is the time to address these potential audiences as an integral part of the process being developed?

Edinburgh

Steve Shill Leicester Company

Ode to St. Cecilia

Assembly Rooms

Reviewed by Helen Davidson

Ode to St. Cecilia takes its title, although not perhaps its character, from the splendidly lofty and cheering work by Henry Purcell, *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*; and it is to this Baroque piece of music that the play owes much of its success. For writer Steve Shill has created a drama crucially dependent on atmosphere and nuance — a play so entirely composed of suggestion and barely stated presences that he relies on the waves of music which punctuate the performance to give it shape and force.

The action, or what passes for action, is negligible. An orchestra — tatty, dissolute and despairing — arrive in the country to play

in a small festival at the local big house. As they enter the house, a flurry of leaves accompanies them and thus a tone of decay is established which pervades their fruitless stay. They are never called upon to play, but instead devote their time to endless drinking (of the melancholy, aggressive kind) and reminiscing.

The country house setting, coupled with an almost unbearable sense of wasted lives, means that the play inevitably bears a certain resemblance to Chekhovian explorations of the human psyche facing restrictions and suffering frustration. However it never achieves the tautness and sharpness of insight which characterize *Uncle Vanya* or *The Cherry Orchard*, though it does share a tendency to



staleness which is the flipside of Chekhovian drama. The play comes close to asserting itself when the refined, genteel harp player begins to carp about her irritation at finding herself playing in an orchestra which never practises, never plays, never does anything much. Yet even her outburst is a shade too predictable; and it, like all other

speeches in the play, tails off lamely. This halting half-heartedness may be a part of the play's 'total statement' but it does not make for good drama.

Shill, who directed as well as wrote *Ode to St. Cecilia*, assembled a large cast of thirteen to play the orchestra; and in their venue at the Assembly Ballrooms in Edinburgh they had a suitably large stage, which made for an effect of elegant spaciousness. The long windows of the set, with billowing white curtains, accorded well with the resounding harmonies of Purcell. Nevertheless, it's hard to repress a suspicion that there is only one element of the production which is undoubtedly deserving of praise — the original piece of music which inspired the play. It far transcends the strutting banalities of the orchestra, to dwarf even the splendours of a full-scale Regency ballroom.

Armando

Resonances of the Past

Fruitmarket Gallery

Reviewed by Halla Beloff

Armando — to take a name like that when you are not a clown must mean something. In fact, 'Armando' is the gerund ablative of the Latin verb 'armare', meaning to arm; and this could be seen as the motto of his artistic programme. The fact that he claims to have forgotten his actual name is evidence of another kind — namely, of his essentially surrealistic vision.

During this year's festival, the Edinburgh Fruitmarket introduced him to the UK, although his reputation on the continent is high as a painter, draughtsman and performance artist. The clear white space of the Gallery showed the huge, ominous black and white canvases to fine advantage. The viewer is confronted with three great, dead, open-mouthed heads, black on some snowy ground, which seem to stand for all the suffering in all the wars in the world; and a set of flags, again black on white, fluttering in a cold wind, which seem to stand for all the nationalisms that have ever torn ordinary people apart. These recent paintings came together with an earlier *Espace Criminelle* canvas combining black barbed wire with an all-over, rough, black, painterly surface, which in turn could be seen as being in fundamental opposition to all the colour fields one has ever seen. The effect of the installation was to induce a fierce fear, thereby providing the opportunity, if one has the moral strength, for profound contemplation.

Whereas others pass by the evil cast of creation, Armando has had to show it in the halls of an art world which all too often turns its back on moral issues. There is in fact a specific biographical reason for this: born in Holland in 1929, he experienced the German occupation at a critical stage of his youth. Thus the forests provided not romantic vistas, but the possibilities of horror. And



the forest series joins the heads and the flags in a world view whose peculiar power comes surely from a combination of ambiguity (nothing is happening, but something terrible did or might) and the great richness of the painting. The thick textures and the fineness of the black-grey-white chromatic give a sensuality that is fought by the forms and their meaning.

It is as an art-guerrilla blowing away our lazy preconceptions that Armando will be remembered from this show. He presents, for example, *The Unknown Soldier*, whom we all believe to be a pathetic victim, as a menacing infantryman with his gun at the ready. The enigma, however, in Edinburgh was the relation of this work to the performance art that we were able to sample. This was exhibited in three 1976 surrealistic films made for Dutch television, which were shown without sub-titles. They

concerned two men in funny clothes, a male transvestite diva and a pram, on some dunes. The language barrier coupled, one suspects, with the difficult distance of thirteen years, unfortunately turned these into little more than charming exercises in the Higher Silliness.

Better to read some of Armando's scripts and essays on *die unschöne Schönheit* (the unbeautiful beauty), in the three booklets that form the generous catalogue.

Leeds

Invisible Cities

City Art Gallery

Reviewed by Robert Hamilton

For well over a hundred years the city has occupied the minds of 'modern' artists. From the Impressionists with their depiction of new emerging forms of urban pleasure, the city has been at the heart of modernism. This exhibition, intelligently curated by Nigel Walsh, attempts to map out the various relationships between art and the city in the age of postmodernism. The title of the show 'Invisible Cities' comes from a book by Italo Calvino in which he states '... each man bears in his mind a city made only of differences, a city without figures and without form . . .'. In other words, an ideological city, a city of the imagination in which our physical relationship to the occupied territories of concrete

and glass are given meanings in order to carry out our daily negotiations with the geography of the postmodern city.

As if to emphasise Calvino's city of differences, the show consists of eight diverse artists working in a variety of media but each in their own way dealing with the theme of fragmented urbanity. Walsh has also taken care over the installation of the exhibition which reflects his curatorial concern to present the work, in totality, as a topographical metaphor for the multiplicity of city signifiers, that does not present a coherent single 'truth' but rather a 'maze of tangled paths, a few among many provisional constructions of the city', as he states in his catalogue introduction.

The show includes the stark black and white cityshapes of Tokyo and Paris by Thomas Struth. The images appear to represent the city as a solid, imposing presence signified in

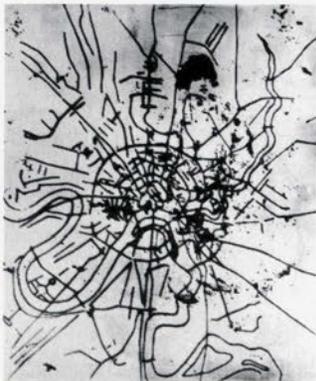
bricks, metal and mortar; but they also undercut the familiarity of such imagery by its unpopulated architecture reminiscent of the eerie, empty streets of an urban dawn.

Literal overviews of the city are taken up by the two painters in the show, Glenys Johnson and Eleanor Bond. Bond paints colourful, realistic views of imaginary Canadian real estate developments as if taken from odd aerial perspectives. In *VI. Developing a Fishing Village as a Honeymoon Resort*, Bond shows the geographical effect on a coastline of the postmodern shift from factory to service industries that mark these utilitarian changes. Johnson, on the other hand, depicts the city as a map as if pictured by a spy satellite superimposed with the single image of the unknown traveller. Johnson's paintings of Moscow, Derry and Peking represent 'placeness' as a Foucauldian nightmare where the bustle and function of cities, wherever they



be, is reduced to control and surveillance through vision — what Foucault called ‘the eye of power’.

‘Invisible Cities’ does not claim for itself the closure of meaning to the notion of art and the postmodern city but rather seeks to show Virilio’s view of the city as an ‘infinity of openings’.



Illustrations: Steve Willats and Glenys Johnson

Paris

Share-Out '89: Liberté, Héritage, Fraternité

Espace Donguy

Reviewed by Nick Le Quesne



In peculiar contrast to its Parisian surroundings, *Share-Out '89* exuded a pervasive sense of Englishness. An overwhelmingly Brit audience guzzled supermarket booze and puffed on Old Holborn with merry abandon. The performers, give or take a few exceptional moments, themselves seemed imbued with a tendency to shy away from confrontation. That quaint old English reserve, coupled with the proceedings’ ramshackle disorganization, created at best a jokey complicity between artists and spectators and at worst straight non-communication.

Christine and Jennifer Binnie of the Neo-Naturist Cabaret hopped and skipped through the white-washed Espace Donguy, their bodies painted in the tartan

of, I guess, their antecedents. They even — daring move, this — scampered through the area where their onlookers were sitting. *Frigging in the Rigging* was sung from a gallery in the tones of naughty schoolgirls. If an anxious bourgeoisie is beginning to worry for the hearts and minds of its offspring, I should allay its fears right now. The Binnies are about as subversive as Joyce Grenfell with no clothes on. Someone should put them on children’s TV.

In an enclosed area littered with props Carlyle Reedy presented a view of inheritance intimately related to death. As she performed acts of mourning, a death mask was taken from a prostrate body; and Kumiko Shimizu, her assistant, swept up the wreckage with a final, elusive piece of detritus tied by a string to her ankle. There were themes here but somehow they never crystallized. We accepted the candles she offered us and dutifully shook her small rice-filled envelopes. It was difficult to know what else to do.

Interval. As the audience got down to the serious business of consuming enough alcohol to get them through the second half, Hermine Demoriane presented the fruits of a recent re-reading of Engels’ writings on the origin of the family as part of an exploration of the theme of Mother Right from Aeschylus to the Comtesse de Ségur. Instructive stuff, rapidly followed by the most successful performance of the evening, courtesy of Ian Hinchliffe.

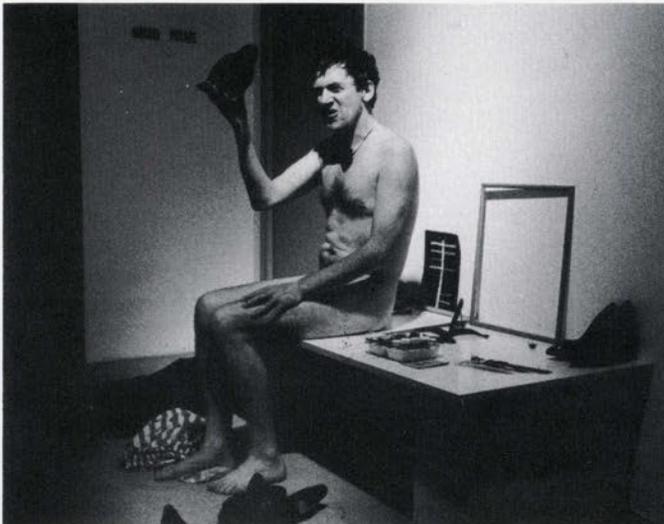
Hinchliffe's method is to push the vaudeville tradition to the far boundaries of the grotesque. In exploiting the tried and tested persona of the stand-up comic, he faced up to the necessity for performer to engage with spectator that every other artist performing that night neglected. Naked and smeared with paint, Hinchliffe's body commanded one's attention with all the urgency the Neo-Naturists lacked.

His technicolour excess was succeeded by the intricacies of David Medalla. Medalla's was in many ways the most frustrating performance of the evening, in that for a few all-too-brief minutes he achieved a rare analytic coherence. A collage of words and images depicted war, death and the enslavement of the Third World as by-products of the West's profit motive. And then, as if an illuminating candle had been snuffed out, the

coherence vanished and Medalla flailed away into obscurity.

Medalla's performance echoed the general sense of frustration produced by *Share-Out '89*. The basic aims of performance — to rescue art from bourgeois commodification, to reestablish art as a dynamic communication between individuals — remain vital. At the Espace Donguy, the performers often appeared to neglect the construction of a dynamic relationship with their spectators. The result was an unfortunate pastiche of the traditional cosy separation of audience and spectacle. To paraphrase De Sade's exhortation after the events of 1789, 'Artistes, encore un effort!'

Illustrations: Hermine Demorlane and Ian Hinchcliffe



Viborg/Malmö

Mob Shop IV

PERFORMANCE language
THEATRE

Hald Hovedgaard; Viborg
Theatre; Malmö Konsthall

*Reviewed by Torben
Codanssen*

Mob Shop, the Mobile Summer Workshop, was first held in Iceland in the summer of 1981. It was a gathering of visual and performance artists, along with musicians, inspired and organized by Magnús Pálsson. Mob Shop IV is the most recent manifestation of Pálsson's catalytic vision of the excitement of creative interaction.

Pálsson's own output includes sculpture, written text, performance, video and, most recently, theatre. His influence both as an artist and as a teacher is well established in Europe and in particular the Nordic countries. When this time he sounded the clarion to the eighteenth century manor house of Hald Hovedgaard, near Viborg, Denmark, thirty-seven artists came from Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Holland and England.

What took place in the three weeks at Hald was unpredictable. Rather than a conference or discussion between the well-trampled border areas of performance art and theatre, it produced a working dynamic from them both: a greenhouse energy which fused different professional skills to produce a

flexible, 'hands on' questioning of the forms, while using them in creative productions. The participants worked in close collaboration, often exchanging areas of specialization: sculptors directed, actors produced, theatre directors became actors. It was part of the original agreement that all were open and receptive to this realignment of their normal work processes.

There was an in-house programme of individual presentations which both stabilized and inspired the atmosphere of cross-fertilization. The production of finished works to be presented on the stage of the Viborg Theatre and at the Konsthall in Malmö, Sweden, was the target which made the central momentum. However, in many ways it became secondary in that it could not absorb the diverse and ever-expanding areas of performance that were occurring within the workshop. To concentrate on reviewing pieces staged would, therefore, be to miss the point of the exercise; but it is nevertheless necessary to mention a few of the more extraordinary productions.

The three separate works presented by three artists who worked in close collaboration — Ásta Ólafsdóttir, Kjetil Skøien and Gary Stevens — alarmingly questioned identity and highlighted our fallible means to pierce it. This triad used humour to profile alienation and the breakdown of explanation.

Clare Carswell's monumental performance *Clock* was

constructed with twelve low identical tables, each given intimate life by the action of twelve women of different nationalities, their ages ranging from 18 to 60. The circle of tables was activated by each woman in turn singing a lullaby in her native tongue, building a woven sound. While the clock was deconstructed, the sternness of the structure made the highly charged emotional content all the more powerful.

Pálsson's own play, directed by Maria Kristjánsdóttir, used the ornate, beautifully eccentric body of the Viborg Theatre to its fullest extent. The blue-skinned protagonists were locked in monologue, their charm and fear illuminating the space between the audience and the word. A violently poetic maze.

The contrast between different pieces was sometimes very high, the audience being alternately beguiled from their seats and compressed into them. Alice Creischer's *Feindsliebchen* placed the audience in a cold trench, where they were showered with finely-tuned poetics, scratched onto blackboards and chanted into microphones. *Die Tödliche Doris*, working with eight other actors, sang inside a cabaret format that was in opposition to their delicately structured system of certainties.

Brian Catling wrote and directed *Ugler I Mosen*, a fusion of contemporary theatre techniques brutally vitalized by the physicality of performance art. Gary Stevens and Kristbörg Kjeld dominated and controlled

the atmosphere and tension inside the work. The finale of the Viborg evenings was Kári Halldór's production of Steinar Sigurjónsson's *Children of Lir*, a re-worked folk tale epically told. Halldór and the group of local Danish actors created a mesmeric energy which gave the play a potent and disturbing presence.

Mob Shop IV was not a think-tank or a market of bartered talents but more like a bringing together of shards which had previously been splintered by extraneous academic critical needs. The fact that a discussion session to explain the artists' various positions was never necessary indicated that their directional bonding was a natural and expansive process.

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April *19 Apr-5 May* **International Festival of Modern Dance and Movement**
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