

Performance

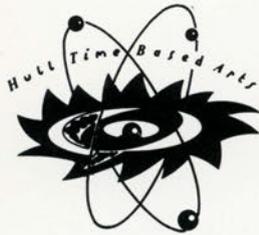
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Richard Foreman Jeff Koons Goat Island

Erotic Films by Women Ecstasy

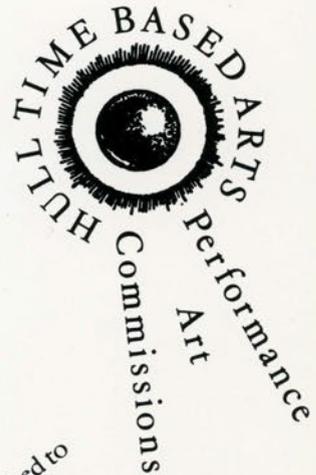
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Editor Gray Watson
Administrator Tonny Grey
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Front Cover:
**Cleo Uebelmann, *Mano Destra*,
1985, 16mm b/w 53 min.**

Back Cover:
**Goat Island Performance
Company, *We Got a Date*, 1990.
Matthew Goulish. (photo Robert
C.V. Leiberman)**

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Editorial

Two items appeared in the post a couple of months or so ago, which showed remarkably divergent estimations of performance art's significance. The first was Henry M. Sayre's book *The Object of Performance: the American Avant-Garde since 1970*. In this flawed but exciting, intelligent and well-informed work, Sayre advances the thesis that all the most worthwhile art of the last two decades — he is writing only about America but the argument would apply equally well to Europe — has shared an antiformalist and experience-oriented sensibility and needs to be seen, in a crucially important sense, in terms of performance. Performance is placed, as it were, at the very centre of contemporary art activity. The other item was a leaflet advertising the Paddington Performance Festival, at which it promised the appearance of 'clowns, performance artists, stiltwalkers, unicyclists, trapeze artistes' and other similar attractions.

It is clear which of these two estimations is the more flattering; although no doubt a Dadaistically perverse case could be made out for preferring the second — on the grounds, for example, of the *invisibility* it lends the performance artist, thereby enhancing the opportunities for subversion, or just as an antidote to grandiosity. But whichever of the two one prefers, what is certain is that the degree of divergence between them is a forceful reminder of the widespread confusion as to what the terms 'performance' and, more specifically, 'performance art' mean.

That this confusion is a source of strength as well as weakness is well known; and it is no surprise that, in his book, Sayre cites the ability to move between 'high' and 'low' culture, and to use a vernacular language, as one of the virtues of the kind of art with which he is concerned. To the extent that this indefinability genuinely prevents performance art from being pigeon-holed and thereby helps to maintain its freedom and mobility, that is indeed excellent — but one may reasonably wonder whether ending up being sandwiched between clowns and stiltwalkers does constitute an evasion of pigeon-holing. What is at stake here is not only intellectual credibility but also the whole problem of categorization.

Excessive categorization, it could be claimed, is one of the principal banes of modern society. Granted the enormous advantages which specialization and the division of labour have made possible, there are

more and more indications, in many areas of life, that over-rigid demarcations between disciplines need to be broken down, and that synthesis — or at least a recognition of the far greater degree of inter-relatedness between things than has hitherto been supposed — is what is now most necessary.

In the case of the arts, excessive categorization has been one of the principal means by which the suggested new forms of perception and understanding which the avant-garde has had to offer to modern society as a whole — suggestions of the sort which society is badly in need of — have been prevented from getting through. The very fact that it seems to most people somewhat eccentric to believe that art has anything to offer of much relevance to real life is itself largely the legacy of the firm dividing off, at least since the eighteenth century, of the aesthetic realm from the practical and cognitive. The result of this separation has been a waste of cultural effort on an incalculable scale.

The damage has been compounded by what is in effect a continuation of the same attitude: the maintenance of increasingly inappropriate divisions *within* the arts, between different art 'forms'. This can be seen especially clearly in the way that the arts sections of national newspapers are organized. Again and again, important work is not written about because it falls between the responsibilities of different critics. The art critic will not touch it because it seems too 'theatrical', while the theatre critic will not touch it because it seems too 'arty'. Independent films can fare particularly badly, since it is taken for granted that they should be dealt with by the film critic, who is almost certain to apply, if not Hollywood criteria, at least criteria in which narrative and entertainment values feature prominently.

It is not only a question of whether works get covered at all; even when they do, expectations are brought to bear in judging them which have little to do with the work's intentions and almost everything to do with the associations attaching to the particular *medium* employed. If film is associated with narrative and entertainment, video is taken even less seriously, because of its associations with advertising and pop promotion — concerns which could hardly be less relevant to, say, Bill Viola. Conversely, the work of many artists who happen to use paint on canvas is accorded much greater intellectual weight than it can actually sustain.

Art (in the sense of fine art) is not, it is true, any longer presumed in half-way knowledgeable circles to be confined to painting and traditional forms of sculpture alone; although it is more or less confined to what is promoted by the established gallery network. Much worse than that, however, is the tendency — closely related to the classic formalist restriction of art criticism and history to purely stylistic factors, and just as unhelpful — to divide recent art up, once again, according to the medium employed: hence the establishment of, for example, 'video art', 'land art' and indeed 'performance art' as separate categories. While such a system of classification might be appropriate enough in the case of work which is merely reflexively concerned with the properties specific to its own medium, in the case of art which actually has something to communicate to the world it is the reverse of helpful.

Sayre is absolutely right to state in *The Object of Performance* that nearly all the best recent work 'cut[s] across the traditional boundaries between media. The medium of the avant-garde is itself "undecidable", almost by definition interdisciplinary.' And he is justified in quoting with approval Roland Barthes' comments, made apropos of André Masson's *Semiograms*, that these 'are proof that it is the *circulation* of the "arts" (or elsewhere: of the sciences) which produces movement: "painting" here opens up the way to "literature", for it seems to have postulated a new object . . . which decisively invalidates the separation of the "arts".'

There is, however, a danger of becoming fascinated by this development for its own sake. The transgression of formal and artistic boundaries is only of any real importance because, given the possibilities available, it follows logically from a belief in art's potential to play a leading role in helping to bring about a transformation of consciousness at both an individual and a collective level — a chance on which every serious artist, whether they might care to put it like that or not, in effect gambles.

For the question of categorization is intimately bound up with the question of purpose, or lack of it. Separation of the arts according to their medium reflects an essentially consumerist attitude — which is presumably why the distinction between time-based and non-time-based work remains one of the most intractable. A static work of art, even if one cannot literally *own* it, is seen as an object to be enjoyed; while a work which exists in time is seen as a piece of entertainment. So long as nothing much

more is expected from a work than the provision of aesthetic enjoyment or entertainment, categorization in terms of its physical properties makes perfectly good sense. This becomes wholly inadequate, however, as soon as the work is understood to be part of a vastly complex process of cultural transformation; and then the relevant questions become ones of precise purpose, content, approach and sensibility.

If it is true, therefore, that performance is central to significant contemporary art activity, this is not because of any properties exclusive to it as a medium but because it may justifiably be taken as paradigmatic. Sayre accords it a literally central place in his book, in the sense that of the seven chapters into which it is divided, Chapter 4 concentrates on three works which could *only* be called performances: Laurie Anderson's *United States Parts I-IV*, Eleanor Antin's *El Desdichado (the Unlucky One)* and Carolee Schneemann's *Fresh Blood: A Dream Morphology* [Schneemann's own account of which appeared in *Performance* No. 59]. His starting point, however, is photography; and, as he demonstrates in his first chapter 'The Rhetoric of the Pose: Photography and the Portrait as Performance', citing the work of, amongst others, William Wegman, Robert Mapplethorpe, Joel-Peter Witkin and Cindy Sherman, the performative element in much of the best work using photography is enormous. To his American examples, it would be easy to add such British names as Gilbert & George, Roberta Graham, Jean-Marc Prouveur, Holly Warburton and Boyd Webb.

The performative element in land art is equally enormous, not only because of the nature of the artist's physical involvement but also because of the theatrical quality of the gesture — Andy Goldsworthy's activities at the North Pole would be a good example here. Meanwhile, the close relationship between art involving the use of words — Jenny Holzer is inevitably one of Sayre's chief examples — is even more evident; in Brian Catling's case, visual poetry and performance are two equally crucial aspects of his output.

This type of work is significant because of the wealth of insights into our position in the world which, if properly used, it is able to provoke. Sayre rightly traces it back not to the modernist tradition beloved of the formalists but to the 'other' modernist tradition, stemming notably from Futurism and Dada, in which the element of performance was always

strong though under-recorded. One should indeed go back even further, at least to Romanticism, if the full extent of the proposed revolution is to be appreciated. One of the reasons that performance is paradigmatic is that, situated as it is on the intersection between the visual and performing arts, it brings together the seriousness of purpose associated with fine art — nothing less than providing new models for seeing the world — with the openness to the diversity of experience, and the realization of the inevitability of artifice, traditionally associated with the theatre.

It is when it is understood at this level of inclusiveness that the full interest inherent in performance is brought out. If it is perceived merely as an alternative form of specialization, then that place between the clowns and the stiltwalkers awaits it.

Gray Watson

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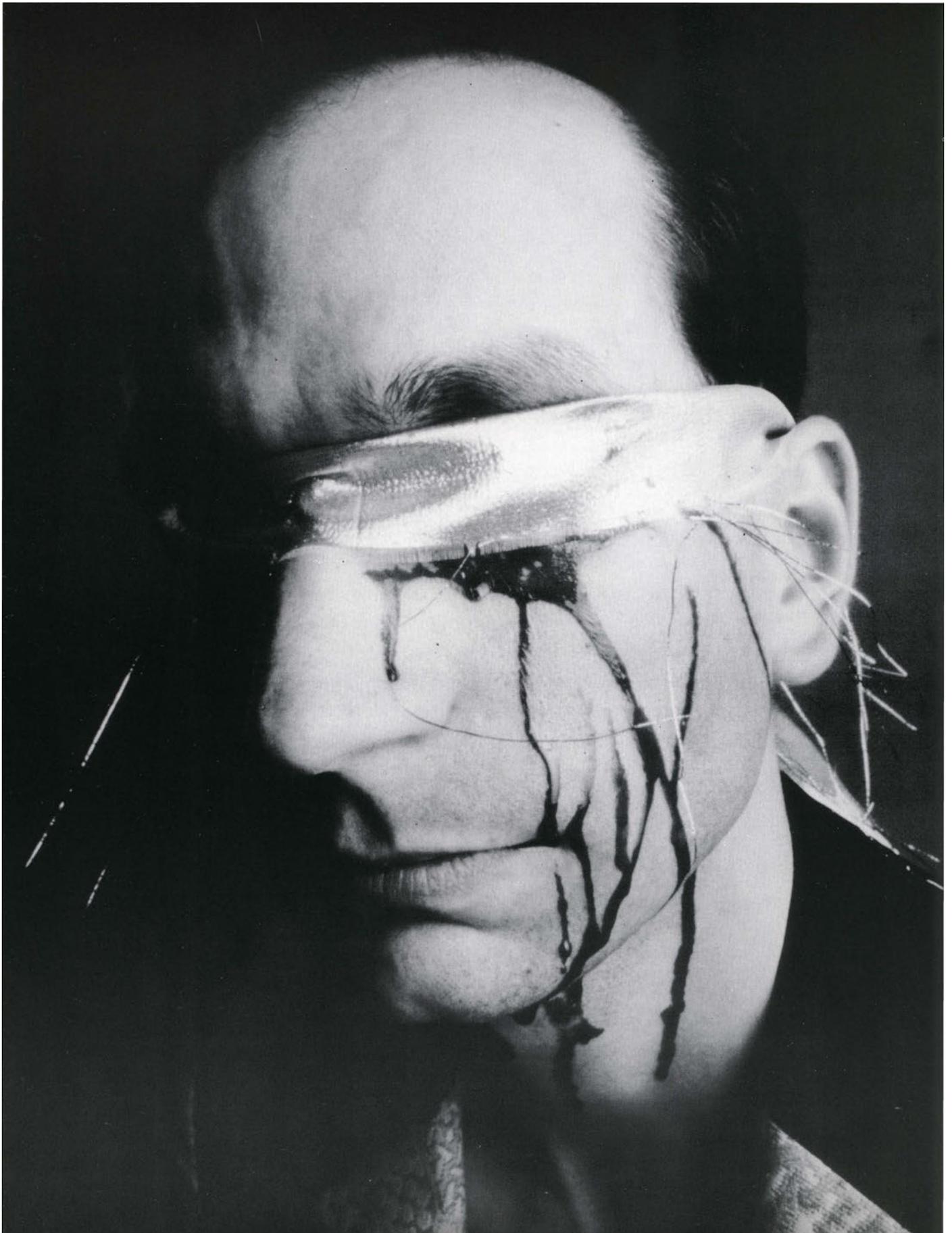
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no.

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Three of the articles in this issue are concerned specifically with developments in America: in a major interview, Nick Kaye discusses with Richard Foreman, veteran leader of the New York theatrical avant-garde, recent shifts of emphasis in his work; Andrew Renton shows how the work and career of Jeff Koons, painter and *enfant terrible* of a new New York avant-garde scene, can be seen as performance art on a massive scale; and David Hughes conducts conversations with two members of the Chicago-based group Goat Island, which he locates in the mainstream of American performance art. Meanwhile, it was his out-of-body experience while performing with an acting troupe in New England that was the starting point for Virginia-based writer Richard Squires' investigations into the part played by ecstasy in the Dionysian origins of theatre. The odd one out is Nicky Hamlyn's account of erotic films by women film-makers, all of whom are European: German, Austrian, Swiss, British and Irish. In terms of subject-matter, however, a concern with the body in relation to often extreme emotional and psychic experience unites it with Squires' discussion of ecstasy; while a concern with the body is also evident enough in Jeff Koons' cult of sculpted beauty and Goat Island's energetic but theoretically informed physicality.



David Hughes

LOCATING GOAT ISLAND

**Conversations with Matthew Goulish
and Lin Hixson**



Lin Hixson. (photo Robert C.V. Leiberman)

Goat Island Performance Company, *We Got a Date*, 1990, Matthew Goulish. (photo Robert C.V. Leiberman)

The members of Chicago-based performance company Goat Island come from varied backgrounds. Matthew Goulish is trained in theatre. The other two men studied improvisational performance and Joan, the fourth performer, is a painter. Lin Hixson, the director, is trained in dance and to some extent in theatre, as well as in political science and theory.

Between 22 May and 16 June 1990, I recorded a series of conversations with Matthew Goulish and Lin Hixson, while Goat Island were in London to play their latest production *We got a Date* at the ICA. Our conversations touched on their methods and intentions, their theoretical and material resources, the state of performance art in America, and in particular the political situation which has seen a return to the solo performance and away from company work — a move which leaves Goat Island one of a very few companies able to continue working together in a sustained way. It is partly because of this that their name is linked so persistently with that of the Wooster Group; although probably more important is the fact that their performance style obviously owes so much to LaCompte's work.

From our conversations I have distilled a series of extended statements which provide the grounds for locating Goat Island within the mainstream of current American performance art.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Matthew Goulish: I think parts of what we do would qualify as theatre and parts as performance. Lin has the final say. She remains outside and that's a structure that comes from theatre or dance rather than performance. A big part of it is that Lin has a command of theory, particularly of feminist and literary theory, and I know that comes into play in how the elements arrange themselves. I know Lin knows something about deconstruction and I think there is something in the work that connects with that: repetition of scenes, a kind of repetition or variation without themes, of scenes collapsing into each other. But we're more concerned with the physical language. That's why the material was generated by an event.

The previous piece, *Soldier, Child, Tortured Man* was structured by setting elements alongside each other without connecting them really for the audience. That piece was very much about the United States' policy towards Central America. The first sequence was organized around a series of non-existent military drills. Each one had a title that was shouted out, and the titles added up to a kind of text that was almost nonsensical or poetic, but there were phrases that suggested various things. Beside that there was placed an abbreviated scene from a play called *Mr Roberts*, an American play about WW II written in the '50s, a kind of neo-liberal defining of patriotism and war. It was very romantic in a certain sense. And then finally there was a scene that was suggestive of torture, but



Goat Island Performance Company, *We Got a Date*, 1990. (photo Robert C.V. Leiberman)

expressionistic almost. So it was really like putting on three different pairs of glasses to look at the same subject, with a kind of building intensity.

Foucault's work on punishment and discipline was important reading for us, the body as the seat of power, the way that torture has changed through the years, the way the body of the subject is treated and what that tells you about the organization of the state. In *We Got A Date* torture also plays a part, but as socialization of the body from childhood through adulthood, and I think that's why it's so linear for us, from childhood through death. It's not very linear really. But some kind of completion through pain.

I suggested to Matthew that pain seemed important to Goat Island in its work.

MG: I think so. I think it's appropriate, it's a contemporary way of looking at these ideas. In *We Got A Date* we're trying to make connections between personal sexual relations and political relations. AIDS is very much a part of the piece although it's only tangentially referred to.

There's a practical reason why we work so physically. We have our bodies as performers and we don't have a lot of money. One of the differences between us and the Wooster Group is that we don't use technology in the way they do, we dance more and use much less text. Text is almost light relief in our pieces. We try to create from the beginning a heightened state of physical urgency, there's no real trance going on but it does feel at times like a kind of possession. A lot of what we do is organized around a task or a series of tasks, and the way to deal with those tasks — and I'm talking as a performer now — is with a feeling of urgency. It's very real when it comes over me. There are all these people watching and I don't have anything to give them except, like, moving this chair. So we have to drill it for precision of timing, for speed or slowness, grace or lack of grace, lightness, weight: if you fly through the air, how you land on the ground. All those things become so rehearsed and so precise even though they don't seem precise. In performance we become possessed by the spirit of the action, by the impossibility of doing it correctly. Sometimes we try to dance and we can't dance. And the pieces become about watching these people trying to dance when they can't, but we're really trying.

At the beginning of work on *We Got A Date*, Lin asked everyone to bring in stories of sexual experiences. I was interested in working with this character called Roy Cohn, who was Joseph McCarthy's lawyer. So the piece became structured around these little pieces of text. The first one Joan tells is in early childhood. Greg tells one that's in late adolescence and then Tim has one that happened to him in grade school and high school. That's kind of dovetailed with the material she had me work on on Roy Cohn, which came from transcripts of *60 Minutes*, a television journalism programme, and transcripts of the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1952, which was when Joe McCarthy really hit the dust. Cohn was his lawyer and was at that time 22 years old. Years later, in 1986, he died of cancer that was

AIDS-related. He never said he had AIDS, he never even said he was homosexual, and the gay community was constantly pressurizing him to come out about that because he had very powerful Republican friends. So Cohn was brought into our show to build this very private material into a very public realm. Cohn was the bridge. He was someone who could be an interrogator and interrogated at the same time, and was victimising himself by tormenting others and living in this state of denial. So he became a real emblem of Washington. About my approach in playing him I like to use the term documentary. To study these video tapes and really just try to imitate him. There's a kind of Brechtian level of saying the words so that you hear the words.

Lin Hixson: I like to do things where people bring in performative things: if you just bring in writing that gets very difficult to deal with. For example for the next piece we're working on, the exercise was to research an event of terror and an event of bliss, and to bring in hand gestures and foot gestures that deal with that. Very minimal. But that's not because I have a vision of how the piece will look, it is rather that I'm interested in the idea of opposites, feet versus hands. But these are oppositions we approach much more from Foucault's work on the body than Derrida.

The Judson Church choreographers in the '60s were looking for objectified language with their pedestrian movement, which was a reaction against Martha Graham and her expressionistic dance, and a lot of them were working with non-dancers too, and we're a bit like that, non-dancers and pedestrian-like movement, but it's really not objectified, its subjectified. The movement comes out of an action, but it's not expressionistic dance.

I think the show is designed so that the performers have to keep concentrating. It hasn't yet become rote to them. I'm most interested from a director's point of view in their concentration when they do it. If that starts wavering we start to change the show. We make it more challenging to them, not just torturous, but in lots of ways. I'm interested in a physical language. We're concerned with narrative, with the physical, but it's not a literary, linear narrative. Given the post-modern sensibility of trying to remove the narrative I'm not sure if I don't have a more modernist idea of bringing this meaning into the dance and infusing the movement with meaning. We're also interested in the juxtaposition of things against one another, leaving the audience to make the connections, which is rather more post-modern.

POLITICS

MG: Sometimes I'm aware of mis-representing the work by making it sound politically correct. In the US calling it politically correct is almost like calling it bland and tedious and sometimes for good reason. So we've had to try and find a

way of dealing with the issues we want to deal with and still have it be interesting to people. And I think a lot of that is that we deal with it non-textually, we deal with it physically. There's a sequence in *We Got a Date* that comes from newspaper photographs, the way a painter might use photography. At press conferences, the hand gestures of men in authority. Lin worked them into a choreographic pattern. So it's dealing with something political but in this non language-related way . . . saying that's as important to the event as the words that are spoken.

This, it occurred to me, could open the company to the charge that they were watering down the political by abstracting it?

MG: Yeah, but that's part of defining what political art should be. Artists that try to deal with politics and also with aesthetics sometimes get into trouble, and I think that's really a false question. I think it takes work on all fronts to approach these issues and not to let them be defined by forces we oppose. Reactionary forces. There's this whole thing going on in the States just now led by Senator Jesse Helms, to stop funding work that he perceives as objectionable which has so far been work done by minorities and gays, work that usually deals with sexuality in some way. But it's pretty clear it's beginning to branch out to attack work that deals with politics. So clearly the Right in the States sees all this art that delves into these things as dangerous. I don't think we need to pigeon-hole ourselves into one of these kinds of categories, you have to do it this way or you have to do it that way. I think all those approaches are important and effective ultimately.

I respect entertainment. I've studied Buster Keaton as much as I've studied any performer. And I think that if you don't appeal to people on that level they'll continue to see political work as something that doesn't apply to them. They'll talk themselves out of it any way they can, you know, unless you can make it fun for them. You know the only people who've really levelled criticisms that our work is too obscure are people who spend their lives in the arts. We've performed to groups of homeless in Chicago, and groups of people who really don't have good education, and they get it as clearly as we get it.

GROUPS AND VENUES

Much is made of the comparison between Goat Island and the Wooster Group. They both took place names as the company name, they both use appropriated texts, they both generate material by subjecting the themes to differing theatrical treatments. But Lin and Matthew, though happy to acknowledge Wooster Group's influence, are also eager to distinguish themselves and assert their own identity: an identity that is defined by the communities to which they do or do not belong. Lin had recently interviewed Elizabeth LaCompte, Wooster group's director.



Goat Island Performance Company, *We Got a Date*, 1990. (photo Robert C.V. Leiberman)

LH: Although they are really a theatre group, LaCompte sees herself as a visual person. She calls it scoring. She talks about her work as painting. When I see their work though it seems clear to me that they're working within the theatrical tradition. We're just interested in stripping it all down. LaCompte considers herself a director and her actors, actors. We think of ourselves as performers, and Wooster Group have a much more hierarchic structure, whereas I really only come in at the end of our work. The really great visual director is Robert Wilson, of course. We're at the other end of Robert Wilson. My earlier work, like his, dealt with spectacle, but not with the same kind of beauty. For Goat Island the beauty is really . . . ugly.

One thing I think it's important to say is that there aren't many groups working in the United States. It's very hard to keep a group together. It's been hard for the Wooster Group even. There are groups of dancers that we know. There's The Shrimps, a dance group known for its oversized male dancers, and John Malpede's group that works with the homeless. His group, called LAPD, Los Angeles Poverty Department, has been together since 1986. In terms of work that's so-called experimental, there's really very little. Groups that manage to stay together and investigate with the same people over years. The system doesn't reward that. Even when you have a group that does that, and the Wooster Group is a perfect example, people are always trying to pull out the one person who's really doing it all, they don't accept the idea that everyone's contributing. They want the star.

When young people join the field, they don't automatically think to form a group. There's a lot of solo work. But that could start to change. In the '80s you saw a major shift to solo work, cabaret work, work that could be done in bars, the venues are still very very small in the States. You'll have maybe three venues in Los Angeles. There's Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, and a new venue that's just opened up called Highways which is multi-cultural, which is something big in the States right now and has taken over pretty much from 'multi-disciplinary'. Now there's performance work coming out of the Asian community and the Hispanic community which is highly political, especially the Hispanic. This work's causing a crisis in criticism. The Hispanic concerns do not come out of a Western European sensibility, so how do you look at that work. There's going to be a big panel of critics in Chicago discussing how to look at multi-cultural work.

In New York there aren't that many venues. There's Performance Space 122 and Dance Theatre Workshop, La Mama does some sort of cabaret things. What's touring out of Performance Space 122 and around the country is a thing called Field Trips. That's like five artists doing fifteen minutes of work each. One of the ideas is to get it to a larger audience, to make it more accessible. There is some interesting work going on in New York at Wow Cafe amongst the lesbian

community. My students now automatically think about staying in Chicago. When I graduated in 1980 people pretty much felt you had to go to New York. The visual artists mostly went to New York, that was more or less a mandate, but that changed too in Los Angeles. Visual artists are now able to make a living in Los Angeles.

THE ACADEMIC INSTITUTION

LH: There aren't many programmes in performance. We have one at the Art Institute in Chicago. We have an MFA in performance, we're one of the few to have a performance department. NYU has a performance studies department, it's not a studio, that's Schechner's place. It seems the institution is having more and more of an influence on the field. More and more people are going to study before they do their art. My friends in New York, they never thought they'd have to go to school to do performance work. The institutions provide you with a community especially in performance work, which is difficult to get into alone. The institution provides that community. But it's interesting then how the institution influences the work. It depends on which performance people are teaching at these institutions. There are very few performance full-time jobs. There's Susanne Lacy who did large scale outdoor events, she's a dean of an art school, and Chris Burden. You have these key people placed. A lot of people go to study at San Diego where Kaprow is. Cal-Arts fits into this. I have mixed feelings about what the institution is churning out. What happened in the '80s was that when we went to school we learnt about marketing. We learnt that we had to document our work, you had to have your good slides, your good video, your package. It was less about ideas than this whole marketing emphasis. There is some discussion at Chicago Art Institute about what it is exactly we're turning out; because, come MFA show, people are really worried about their colour postcard, about getting the gallery people there, getting the presenters there. And the object has made a return. Some kind of commodity has to come out of the work. But you can of course market yourself. Especially since Laurie Anderson and David Byrne. Now we have models. We definitely have stars in the arts now. In *Vanity Fair*, you know. And there are those who are changing over into film, like Spalding Grey and Willem Dafoe and Eric Bogosian. And I've devised a sequence for a movie of Darryl Hannah's where she plays a performance artist. There are quite a few films with that kind of character now, but they're very stereotyped, a sexually promiscuous wild kind of woman. That typified the '80s mentality. It's interesting how Derrida, Freud, Lacan, and Foucault and the French Feminists like Cixous and Kristeva are what the art school students are reading. It's been a big issue in the visual arts and we spend a lot of time talking about it in performance studies.

J E F F K O N S

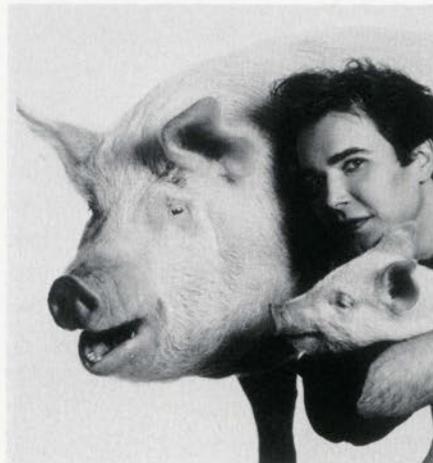
SONNABEND • NEW YORK • MAX HETZLER • KÖLN • DONALD YOUNG • CHICAGO



Andrew Renton

JEFF KOONS AND THE ART OF DEAL

Marketing (as) Sculpture



Jeff Koons, *Art Magazine Ads*,
1988/89, lithograph, portfolio of 4,
45 × 37¼" (detail).

Jeff Koons, *Art Magazine Ads*,
1988/89, lithograph, portfolio of 4,
45 × 37¼".

The title of this article is an allusion to Donald Trump's co-authored exercise in self-aggrandizement, *Trump — The Art of the Deal*.¹ Trump, one of the wealthiest men in America, inherited a small fortune and then turned it into billions. He sold one commodity, and that was his name. He took the designer gloss of the 1970s, more at home on the rear of blue jeans or on the breast of a T-shirt, and throughout the '80s put his mark on real estate. You buy Gucci loafers for the name. Should you want a new home — why not apply the same criterion? Trump Tower, Trump Parc, Trump Plaza. I would like to cite the rise of Trump in Trumpton, briefly, to point towards the need for Jeff Koons — the hyperreal necessity in the art marketplace. If Jeff Koons didn't exist someone would have to invent him. Or perhaps they already have.

In the '80s, the background became the foreground. The administrator, always already in control, was *seen* to take control. Yet if you play a tough game on the way up, you'll fall very hard on the way down, and no-one will lift a finger to help. Poor Donald Trump's divorce case promises to be the greatest television soap opera ever. Not even the prime-time soaps could dare to come up with the billion dollar wrangle we will be able to witness, live, on our TV screens. People operating at that level of hyperreality invent and reinvent themselves at every turn. Ivana Trump appears on the cover of *American Vogue*, remade and remodelled. Who, we may ask, has she rebuilt herself for? Is it a last attempt to win back husband Donald, or is it a more excessive projection, communicating to the masses, like the queen that the U.S. has always lacked?

So, too, with Jeff Koons, artifice and reality merge: the body as transcendental medium. The parallels between the Trumps and Koons extend not only to Donald's various enterprises but also to Ivana's reinvented self, where the body is subject to all manner of modifications that money might buy, in a gesture towards an aesthetic ideal. For Koons to use his body in his work as sculptor, and in what might be called a sculptural template, it must also aspire to an idealized form. His physical transformation over the past year or so as a consequence of strenuous exercise and strict diet is, I suspect, just the beginning of a more extreme series of transformations.

Jeff Koons is on the ascendant. He came to prominence perhaps four or five years ago and he has no intention of going away. The last great Koons climax along this trajectory happened near the end of 1988 when his one-person show took place in three world art centres simultaneously: New York, Chicago and Cologne. That the show was a resounding financial success, raking in an imponderable \$5 million for the 32 year old Mr Koons is, of course, only half of the mythology. I would like to conjecture at this point that 'artistic' success, according to more ancient aesthetic paradigms, need not get a look in here. Rather, Koons' sculpture succeeds on its own terms and takes on the whole weight of the century's history. What I would like to propose here is (a) that the work is

only a small part of the administrative system which is Art and (b) that it is a reflection of that system, participating and commenting on the network from within. In this way, Koons' careerist strategies may be perceived as performance art on a massive scale; more than biting the hand that feeds him, Koons plays the game of assaulting the bastions of capital and commodity, together with the collaborators in the game, whilst at once openly embracing all these as his own.

MEDIATIONS

The arch-mediator of them all, Andy Warhol, might usefully mediate here between Mr Koons and Mr Trump. This is an extract from his diary, dated Wednesday, August 5, 1981:

'The Trumps came down and his wife and two ladies who work for him, I guess. Mrs Trump is six months pregnant. I showed them the paintings of Trump Tower that I'd done. I don't know why I did so many, I did eight. In black and grey and silver which I thought would be so chic for the lobby. But it was a mistake to do so many, I think it confused them. Mr Trump was very upset that it wasn't colour-coordinated. They have Angelo Donghia doing the decorating so they're going to come down with swatches of material so I can do the paintings to match the pinks and oranges.'²



Jeff Koons, *Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, 1988, Porcelain, edition of 3, 42 × 70½ × 32½".

I consider this statement to be as radical a position as an artist could take. Manipulation, we learn from Warhol, may be used both positively and negatively, actively and passively. Here we see one of the very great artists of the century sacrificing his entire aesthetic before a crude money-making enterprise. One must add, however, that the joke is ultimately on us, and Warhol knows it. So does Koons. The difference between Warhol and Koons is that the former would let himself be pushed around as part of his pervasive strategy, Koons only pretends to be prepared to go that far.

Koons wants to mediate and will use the media to achieve this. Magazine advertisements, billboards and now a full-scale film in the offing are the means by which he recreates himself for the consumer. The film will be released at the beginning of 1991 and features Koons himself, of course, and Cicciolina, the Italian porn star turned M.P., whom Koons considers to be one of the two greatest artists of our time (the other being Michael Jackson). Rumours are flying around about 'Koons - The Movie', but everything is kept closely under wraps. Art, it seems, is like any other industry and is constantly subject to espionage (and/or paranoia). We can be sure the production will aspire to the mainstream, even if the representation may not. The film will be called *Made in Heaven*. We might assume that Koons has entered the realm of mutually exploitative

pornography, or at best a liberalization of sexuality. According to Koons, it will be sexually explicit, even graphic, with the film's hero aware of the immense manipulative power of eroticism. But Koons does not like the term pornography. Certainly the Koons/Cicciolina relationship will be laid bare, as it were, and publicly consummated, but the main premise of the film is not gratification, he assures us, but love:

'I'm not involved in pornography. Pornography is performing a sexual act. It really has no interest to me. I'm interested in love, I'm interested in reunion, I'm interested in the spiritual, to be able to [show to] people that they can have impact, to achieve their desires. Ilona [Staller, a.k.a. La Cicciolina] is my desire. So it has taken on this . . . sexual quality, because that's incorporated into what my own desire is, my personal desire. Now the manipulation of that desire, so that it can communicate to people about their own, takes place. But that takes place in the realm of the visual. And things that take place in the realm of the visual, and the metaphysics of the visual, can't always be so specifically interpreted into language. Even though language is a symbol also, these forms of symbols also deal in the metaphysics. And Ilona's eternal virgin aspect — which she is, Ilona is absolutely eternal — is in the realm of the metaphysical.'³

The prophecy of Jeff Koons is self-fulfilling. He knows how to market himself, using a technique which stems from an historic analysis of the way advertising works on a more abstract scale.⁴ Indeed, since 1981 he has been appropriating advertisements as a means of questioning their use value as advertising and, perhaps, more significantly for us, as works of art. For Koons has a notion that the artist is losing his position in the game. Unedited, except in that they pass in and out of his attention, with more or less the same commitment as they would with any of us, these advertisements point to an impossible product, and an impossible lifestyle. They also show, out of the commercial context, how they function semiotically within that context. Of course the gesture is self-enriching the moment we realise that they are entering into a secondary commercial realm with the advertisements acting as commodities in themselves, far more valuable than even the luxury goods they were originally conceived to sell. Even these quite secondary works are pointing towards a very possible scenario, about which Koons himself has voiced fears:

'What's so wonderful about art, and the reason that I'm not interested in leaving art and moving into another industry at this point, is because art is total liberation. Absolutely anything goes. If an artist was strong enough and could lead enough and wanted to just be farming, he could

make it farming, and that's what art could be. But if artists do not assume the responsibility to start to become great communicators, there is no room left for them in communication. There are computers which store information better than art work, and they communicate much faster; advertising has assumed a manipulation; and the entertainment industry has also assumed the role of seduction and manipulation. And if artists do not regain their stance, and communicate to people, I don't see there being any possibility in the future of any activity even called art. You will just have entertainment, and you will have advertising. And people will look back, and they'll say, "But I heard at one time there was a profession called art."

I have already spoken of the Koons movie, which, given this last statement, might imply that either Koons is hedging his bets by doing Elvis Presley-type vehicles for grown-ups, or is contributing to that bringing into parallel of the world of commercialism and the world of art. I suspect that he is doing both at once, revelling in the complexity of the double standard, even the double bind.

CAREER MOVES

It is necessary to run through the various stages in Koons' artistic career, however briefly, as even the biography seems to perpetuate the self-engendered mythology. The question is, did the biography inform the Koons enterprise, or vice versa? So we find the artist, fresh out of college, not wishing to go hungry, and working at the Museum of Modern Art in New York — not as curator or anything so glamorous, but sitting in the ticket booth, issuing entrance tickets all day. Ever the careerist, however, Koons moved from tickets to membership, and proved to be astonishingly successful in the process, bringing in, by his own reckoning, some \$3 million a year in revenue for the museum. This, perhaps, was the first hint at the strategic moves Koons would make in his official career, soon to follow. It would be too easy to suggest that Koons simply transferred allegiance from the public fund to applying the principles for his private gain — that would be to miss the point. What he did learn during this period was how the art system worked from within and, presumably, he made some good connections among the upper echelons of art patronage. It was through these very connections that he moved into pure commodity and became a broker on Wall Street — a move which most of his critics, after he had risen to prominence, found so unappealing. (I suspect that many of his subsequent rhetorical moves will cause even more offence.)

It is this kind of activity which informs much of Koons' enterprise as being one of administration. Apart from the conception of the work, his role is one of communication, and of conveying his ideas and schemes to others who will

execute them for him. The studio becomes an office with the highest technology Apple computer and a fax machine with fifty-four shades of grey. Communication and administration are the new art.

On Wall Street he specialized in futures, and cotton in particular, but he also traded anything from pork bellies to pure currencies. His rationale behind the move was very simply that not only did he have to support himself, but he had to fund the fabrication of his artworks. This latter consideration should not be underestimated, because Koons has never been short of ambition in respect of his pieces — an attitude which typifies a major trend within the current art market, where dealers or artists must invest huge amounts of money before the artworks are even made, such is the sophistication of work and materials involved. The post-Duchampian tradition is anything but an economical, junk-shop means of accumulation.

MATERIAL SEDUCTION

The Koons *oeuvre* really began in earnest with *The New* series. Encased in perspex, lit internally by fluorescent tubes, brand new vacuum cleaners were presented in a variety of combinations. Already, in this simple description, it is clear that Koons has to take on a variety of avant-garde positions. Surely, for example, we cannot see a fluorescent tube without thinking of Dan Flavin? Yet there is more to these pieces than anterior association. The encasings themselves provide protection for the new to remain doubly pristine — vacuum cleaners contained in vacuum sealed units. It is this newness which generates an unreproducible aura about it.

We see in *The New* series the start of Koons' searching for the value of his own commodities almost before any aesthetic considerations. His next collection was the *Equilibrium* series, with reference to which he speaks of 'ultimate states of being that aren't only personal, but social.' A more direct involvement in 'realms of the social' came with the *Luxury Degradation* and *Statuary* work. Koons confesses that these pieces are unashamedly bourgeois, because 'there's no way to deny that, and I'm at the service of that class.' However, the power struggle is more complex, as he continues:

'When I say that I'm at the service of that class, [I mean that] it's my power base, that I am able to be in a position to assume responsibility of leadership. It's not just to be a court jester there.'

These found pieces are recast in stainless steel, an artless material, even a proletarian one. Yet the highly polished surface creates the new aura of so-called 'proletarian luxury' - seduction by simulation, that is, a faked luxury.

Perhaps the culmination of this enterprise was the re-presentation of a public



Jeff Koons, *String of Puppies*, 1988, Polychromed wood, edition of 3, 42 × 62 × 37".

sculpture to the people of Münster. The original having been removed during the war, Koons had the piece recast in stainless steel, a secondary re-materialization for the people, and unveiled it with all the pomp, brass bands and ceremony he could muster. Koons was approached by the people of Rotterdam to make another public monument. His solution proved too much for the powers-that-be. He envisaged a column, much in the manner of Nelson's and certainly as big. Yet perched atop this edifice was not some great figure of the Dutch Enlightenment but a cute, cuddly little puppy dog. The commission, unfortunately, was never granted.

It is this kind of gesture which led Koons to the *Banalities* pieces of 1988. Puppies, incidentally, feature (along with pigs, goats, snakes, etc.) strongly in this series' menagerie: *String of Puppies* and *Stacked* are not just cuddly toys, but might well be even a wry comment on a cool minimalism and multiples, as Koons piles the animals up, like a Carl Andre *Equivalent*, or something out of Warhol. These are pieces made in Italy and Germany for Koons, primarily in painted ceramics or polychromed wood. We are dangerously close to kitsch here, although it is a term vigorously denied by Koons himself. It is probably worth attempting to define the word, beyond its most usual meanings of inauthenticity and bad taste. Milan Kundera sees something more than this:

'There is a kitsch attitude. Kitsch behaviour. The kitsch-man's [*Kitschmensch*] need to gaze into the mirror of the beautifying lie and to be moved to tears of gratification at one's own reflection.'⁵

This sounds like Koons to me. He even constructs the very mirror we require for that gaze, as a reflection of and on his installation. Perhaps Koons is more ironic than this, when we see a white-skinned Michael Jackson lounging gracefully, god-like, with his pet monkey, Bubbles. Or, compare Kundera with what Koons has to say about a piece from the *Banalities* series, *Amore*:

'*Amore* is a little teddy bear that has this heart, "I love you", and the piece is very much pubescent, not even adolescent, very child-like love, where it really doesn't love you, it's only interested in self-love.'

Koons' ambitions for the show are no more modest than trying 'to remove the guilt and shame of the bourgeois':

'They feel a tremendous amount of guilt and shame . . . So, in trying to remove that, I thought a great deal about the Masaccio painting of the Expulsion, the horror, and the guilt and shame on Adam and Eve's faces. My piece *Naked* — the young boy and young girl — were like Adam and Eve, overly sentimental, like standing on a heart that's flowered. And instead of Original Sin being knowledge here, in this case Original Sin

was sex, because I was trying to play on guilt and shame, and people can respond to guilt and shame through sex — it's the easiest device to pinpoint that.'

THE AD MAN COMETH

This tendency culminates with Koons' collaborations with Cicciolina. The fruits of this perfect partnership, premièred in the *Aperto* section of the 1990 Venice Biennale, include, in addition to an enormous polychromed wood sculpture of the two of them, a series of paintings with the couple exploring what Koons claims to be the restoring powers of love as innocence. Koons incorporates his own image into his work, parodying the institutional genres of artifice on the way. In adopting the most conventional, preservable, presentable (and saleable) of all art-historical media, he makes perfect, uncomplicated artworks of himself, and makes himself, more and more, the perfect artwork.⁶

But perhaps the radicality of Koons' enterprise is most clearly brought out by the advertisements for himself which he placed in various art magazines in 1988-89. Not that something quite similar hasn't been done before. Again, it was Warhol who saw that radicalism had to play capitalism at its own game. He set up a magazine for the contrived dissemination of his own brand of banality. He took control of a cable TV station and pointed his camera (or rather, had someone point a camera) at nothing in particular. Koons' case is slightly different. He has gone to the core of the art establishment and has seen that the ultimate domination of the scene is to be found in manipulating the media, and its inverse, that is, being manipulated by the media. The self-advertisements are both the ego overblown to parodic proportions, and a kind of pre-emptive strike at all his critics, offering an interpretation of his own work together with a rhetoric of both self-accusation and self-defence. For the 1988 shows, Koons set about creating advertisements with individual publications in mind.

'Flash Art was Giancarlo Politi [the founder and co-editor of the magazine]. And I wanted to give Politi real debasement, and real banality. I was there with two pigs, a big one and a small one — so it was like breeding banality. But I wanted to debase myself, and call myself a pig, before the viewer had a chance to, so that they could only think more of me in the future.'

Is this clever, or is Koons' philosophy of banality getting the better of him? When he speaks of his work he seems to be operating at a level of unbelievable simplicity. This deliberated over-simplification, in my opinion, seems to engender what might be called an over-determination of meaning. Not only is the advertisement an invention, a fictionalization, but Koons' commentary operates as

Jeff Koons, *Ilona with Ass up*, 1990. (photo Riccardo Schicchi)



metafiction. What he is trying to do — and, I think, he is quite successful in his efforts — is not only to pre-empt misinterpretation, adverse criticism and disbelief, but also to engender new meanings for his work at every turn. That these are created after the fact is, in itself, not important. Koons' enterprise is so sophisticated that in his commentary he creates a banalization and a complex exegesis at once.

Flash Art was the medium for Koons' affiliation with the European aesthetic, which, he has claimed, he feels closer to than the American one. The magazine represents the kind of institution that he needs to perpetuate not only the value, but also the meaning, of his work. *Artforum* is New York, and home ground. He has to tread more carefully. We find him perched on a desk in front of a class of school children, with the double polemic 'Exploit the Masses/Banality as saviour' spelt out on the blackboard. Koons perceives both the readers and critics of *Artforum* as these kindergarteners, who may be either innocents about to be corrupted or already corrupt and about to be 'baptized in banality', to use Koons' own phrase. He is both victimizer and willing victim at once. The obfuscatory and the cleansing seem to co-exist in his work.

The cleansing metaphor recurs in his *Arts Magazine* ad, in which Koons sits, as squeaky clean as they come in his crested robe, either having emerged fresh from bathing in his own pool or about to submerge himself in baptism. The performing seal brings with it circus connotations, reinforced by the striped cabana like a big top — Koons as king and clown. Here we find Koons at his most immodest:

'It was really about assuming leadership, and declaring myself king. And even though the subjects of this world of mine may just be these seals, these protectors of mine, I was still king of my world.'

The art magazine advertisements are central to all of Koons' work. But perhaps their most fascinating resonance is that they have now become artworks in themselves. Like his appropriated advertisements through the '80s, these advertisements are now available in a deluxe edition of photolithographs, in an embossed box. The commoditizing agent, a hitherto unchanged catalyst in the equation, becomes the commodity itself. So successfully have these pieces been integrated into the officially designated Koons canon that we may now find them being used as illustrations, examples of Koons' work, within the pages of art magazines. The difference now, of course, is that they are functioning *gratis*. The re-presentation is an overwhelmingly ironic commentary on the circuitous nature of the art system, self-enclosed and self-perpetuating.

In talking about yet another advertisement, this time in *Art in America*, Koons is describing himself, and is annotating his entire performative enterprise:

'[It] was kind of playing the role of the saviour, but instead of being a



Jeff Koons, *Art Magazine Ads*, 1988/89, Lithograph, portfolio of 4, 45 × 37¼".

donkey, being this miniature horse, it's being very sexual. And there's two girls there — one's offering me cake, the other one's holding the neck of the horse. It's very phallic, it's open. But the girl offering me the cake, that's very much like the aristocracy saying it's like the temptation of Christ, like, "Jeff, we are very clever, and here we offer you anything you want. Just work with us, and you'll have anything you want." And I'm looking off in the other direction, and looking at these flowers, just kinda thinking about love, and in a way, rejecting that temptation, knowing it's there. Or it could be this girl offering me virginity . . . what [do] I do, being in the role of the saviour? Like what do I want for myself? I mean, am I in this for sex, and money? I mean, what am I in this for?'

As the old prayer goes: 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom . . .'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The origins of this article lie in a lecture given at the Royal College of Art, on 8 March 1990. I am grateful to Christian Bensing for the original request.

NOTES

1. Donald Trump, with Tony Schwarz, *Trump — The Art of the Deal*, New York: Warner, 1989.
2. Pat Hackett (ed.), *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1989, p. 398.
3. Jeff Koons in conversation with Andrew Renton, 12 April 1990. Unless otherwise stated, all further quotations are from this interview, or one conducted on 16 October 1989. Due to the frequency of the quotations, they will be cited in the text without reference. For further information, see my "Superstar", *Blitz*, No. 85, January 1990, pp. 52-59, and my "Interview with Jeff Koons", *Flash Art*, No. 153, Summer 1990, pp. 110-115.
4. On his *Commercial Piece #1* (1989), which appears very much in the recognisable style of his proliferating, appropriated corporate logos, Ashley Bickerton sold space on the surface of his work — not necessarily to the highest bidder, but paying advertisers nonetheless. These are investment banks, this time fully paid up (an achievement indeed — who said crime, in this case, theft, doesn't pay?) Meanwhile, names such as Nina Ricci and Azzedine Alaïa bring the connection between design and art closer together. The contention is problematic, but the ultimate market is exactly the same. The final paying guest on Bickerton's surface is, inevitably, Jeff Koons.
5. Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher, London: Faber and Faber, 1988, p. 135.
6. Most reviewers have assumed these works to be photographs. Koons, however, refers to them as 'paintings', in that although they use photographic means, he wishes to ally them to the historical tradition of painting.



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Nick Kaye

BOUNCING BACK THE IMPULSE

An interview with
Richard Foreman



Richard Foreman, *The Cure*, 1986,
Kate Manheim. (photo Nancy
Campbell)

Richard Foreman, *Symphony of
Rats*, The Performance Garage,
New York, 1988. The face on the
TV screen is Richard Foreman.
(photo Paula Court)

Nick Kaye: I'd like to begin by asking you about some of the influences on your work. You've talked about film — Jack Smith, I think. Kate Davy talks about the influence of Gertrude Stein.

Richard Foreman: Yeah. That's all so far in the past. Sure, Gertrude Stein was a major influence. Brecht was a major influence. Neither of those people mean that much to me today.

NK: There also seems to me to be an enormous coincidence with Cage. Not in terms of what you do — though I know that in some of the manifestoes you talk about chance work — but in terms of sensibility, an idea about presence or ways of looking. I wonder if that was important.

RF: Well, I would say — even though I know John slightly and find him a wonderful person and obviously a very interesting and important figure — I think he was so important that probably I was more influenced by people who were influenced by him. And I never spent that much time actually paying attention to the source. But certainly when I started in New York all the people were dominated by the kind of thought that Cage was a fulcrum for.

NK: How about visual art? At that time?

RF: Well, I was never that enthusiastic about contemporary trends until Minimalism happened. And when Minimalism happened I thought, for the first time I don't seem to be alone in the world. Even though I later realised that in my heart I wasn't that Minimal, there was something — a clearing of the decks — that Minimalism forced that was akin to what I was trying to do when I started making theatre, which was really to begin from the basic building block elements, to regroup my theatre and learn a new language. And then as the years go by, eventually, that language is used for more and more romantically oriented projects, and projects whose interests are other than pure Minimalist interests. But there's no question that — two things — Minimalism and a very superficial encounter with some of the ideas of alchemy, the kind of work that one did in alchemy, were really at the centre of the way that I began in '68 or so.

NK: Could you expand on this concern with alchemy?

RF: I had read a few secondary texts just talking about the way material was processed and reprocessed, you know, how the stuff was mixed and remixed or boiled and reboiled. And the repetition of that activity, again and again and again, in the hope that at a certain moment, grace, or if you're going to read Jung, the unconscious, or something else, would take over and cause a transformation that you had not purposefully aimed at. You were just creating a space in which this grace might descend. Also, at the beginning, the whole notion of working only with materials, not letting ideas and theories and so forth interfere with the work.

Sort of, attempting to be totally honest about reworking physical materials. So in the early plays all the talk was about the physical manifestations, about the physical feelings of the body and things like that. The language was pared down so that it was just a kind of notation of those feelings without allowing any interpretation to enter through the characters.

NK: Doesn't Minimalist sculpture also open itself up to a kind of theatre in the way that it confronts the viewer? Was that important?

RF: Yes, well I felt all that very strongly. And I felt especially that the demand it made upon the spectator to recognise how he was dealing with the confrontation with this bare, brute fact was important. But, as I say, that was softened over the years. Except, I don't know. I'm always trying to change. I'm always trying to do something different, but in a sense I'm experiencing at this moment a kind of need to retouch some of those sources. So I don't know what will come of that.

NK: I think you've suggested that *Egyptology* (1983) may have been a point at which things changed.

RF: This is really very hard to say. I do know that there's been a drift from this Minimalist beginning to a kind of Post-Structuralist stance, which was an attempt to deal with the fact that the objects and the presence no longer seemed to be anything except the interaction of all the codes and all the languages and so on. So the style got much faster, in the obvious sense, but also objects were shuffled in a way that to me implied that the object itself didn't really count for much, it was just garbage to be discarded. These days, I think there is a shift, frankly, to a quieter mode, perhaps where some people are able to start but I wasn't. And that is to just let it flow, really, and totally destroy any intellectual effort to control any of this stuff and just not to think. I've been working for twenty years to read everything so that I could throw it out [*laughs*].

NK: It sounds like you're talking about something that is more intuitive than intellectual.

RF: Well, I've always worked intuitively. But the intellectual concerns and the reading that has accompanied the making of all of this stuff must have informed the angle at which I came at all of these things.

NK: Isn't one of the changes to do with genre? *Penguin Touquet* (1981), for example, seems to refer to a murder-mystery. At the same time what interests me is that there's no taking apart of the genre in any simple or systematic way . . . This is a genre in which objects and their meanings are very important, yet here objects seem unable to acquire the kind of significances that they should be able to. And so there's a kind of breaking of the genre which leads to something which is much more open, chaotic and slippery.



Richard Foreman, *Egyptology*, 1983.

RF: I think that's because I certainly was not thinking in terms of playing with genre. The impact that that has, partially, is to do with a different *modus operandi* in the way that the plays were staged, in the way they were cast and the pull of the theatre. Those analogies with things like a detective story were simply a much more conscious effort on the part of me as a director to try and make the material cohere. I've always been unhappy, in a sense, with myself as a director because as I get to working with people in the social situation of the theatre I feel that I tend to make the texts cohere and become organised in certain ways that the writing does not necessarily imply. But in a sense I haven't had the courage to let the *mise-en-scène* be as fragmented and as non-coherent as the writing. I think at various times I've told myself, well, that's a strength, there's a struggle between the writer who dares just to put down all kinds of disassociated material and the director who's more concerned with finding thematic lines in this material. That tension, perhaps, is productive.

NK: It must also require a certain kind of performer to enter into that kind of fragmentation and maintain it.

RF: Well, that's why at the beginning I used non-professional actors. Then I worked with Kate Manheim for many years — until she stopped acting — and she developed a particular kind of technique of her own and urged me to do things because she wanted to do them, things in which she needed to be playing off of people with more technical virtuosity. So that changed the texture of things also. Now it's interesting. In the piece I've done this past year, *Lava* (1989), I went back to using non-actors. One of the reasons being that most of the material was me talking on tape and the performers interacting with that. I'd like to continue in that direction, but in a practical sense it's difficult. Space is becoming so difficult in New York. I have to do my play next year in a theatre that has a contract to use equity actors. So that has an influence that's not totally desirable.

NK: Watching the work there seems to be this constant disruption that puts familiar material into question.

RF: Well I always want to try and notice material that has less than official status within the scene. Like, if you have a scene of conflict between husband and wife, what are you supposed to notice, what is supposed to be important? Well, yes, but what is the rejected part? The part that psychoanalysis, for instance, would obviously say is the crucial part, the little details that don't seem to count.

NK: And also points where there might have been a clear focus when a distraction enters.

RF: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. But I think sort of for the same reason. I mean, mostly I spend my life being bored . . . I go to the movies, think, oh this is a



Richard Foreman, *Penguin Touquet*, 1981, Kate Manheim.
(photo Carol Rosegg)

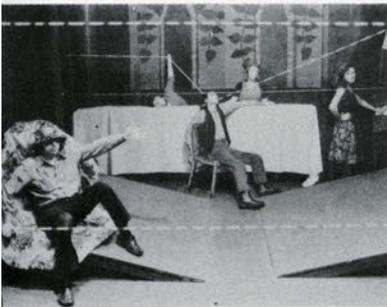
great movie, but, OK, now we have this, the scene between the husband and the wife, that's going to take about five minutes and we've got to wait until that's over. That's what has driven me up the wall occasionally when I've had to — not had to, you know . . . I have also directed quite a few 'normal' plays, and every time I find myself sitting there, and some of them have been quite successful, and I'm sitting there in the middle of rehearsal and going out of my skull with boredom. I mean, we *know* that this emotion is going to be worked through in this scene. Once you see it starting to happen, it's time to move on. But, of course, normal plays work through it, fulfil the expectation.

NK: In one of the reviews of *Symphony of Rats*, you were reported as saying that the piece was political. I wonder if you could talk about that aspect of the work?

RF: Oh, that's two separate things. I've always thought that the work was political in the sense that, especially in the American context, the conservative, reactionary forces in America are the product of a character structure that cannot function in ambiguity; which needs to know if things are good, bad, black, white. And progressive character structure has always been people who know you're never going to make those distinctions. So an art that teaches people to exist in an evolving mesh of these various qualities that we perceive in our lives is essentially going to promote a progressive character structure which does not panic when finding itself in a sea of ambiguity. To me that's progressive. Now, something like *Symphony of Rats*, when I said that was political, the subject matter that I chose to play with had political references and that was just publicity hokum. One is always looking for a way to make people interested in what you're doing. It happened to be ostensibly about the President of the United States dealing with the fact that he thought he was getting messages from outer space, but it was no more or less political than the other things, really. To get the *New York Times* to write an article, you have to think up some new angle; there has to be some gimmick.

At times I have wanted to make directly political theatre. And to raise people's political consciousness. However, I've always felt that in order to talk to people you have to be 'understandable'. Yet if you are speaking most honestly, using the language that is closest to you personally, to be 'understandable' means using a language that no longer reflects the delicate woop and warf of your own sensibility. And you are therefore choosing a language which is not yours and so, in a sense, speaking down to people so that they will understand. I mean, that corrupts your work.

It's very hard for me. I can do a pretty good job of telling people what the subject matter is, but when I look at my work, and I'm honest, it's very hard, and I've spent twenty years trying to frame for myself exactly what it is I'm getting at, and I know it's something very specific. The greatest compliment that was ever



Ontological-Hysteric Theatre,
Pandering . . ., 1973, written and
directed by Richard Foreman.

paid to me in my life was along those lines. Once somebody brought Foucault to see one of my plays and he said, you know, I'm very interested in this because I see that there is a very rigorous system at work but I can't figure out what it is (laughs). And I thought that was a gigantic compliment, especially coming from Foucault.

NK: One of the things that struck me watching the documentation, particularly *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation* (1975), was the feeling that it wasn't the structure or the system that was important, but the way in which these structures somehow got in the way of the thing that was being presented, the material that was somehow at the centre of the work. There seems to be a tension between the text with its structures and the presence of the performers themselves. It's as if a constant referral is being made to the ways in which these structures can't encapsulate something that is there, as if the structures are being presented in order to show what they cannot do.

RF: Right, because in those days I was trying to wipe out the text; and whatever intelligence and whatever interest was in the text I wanted to wipe out with the brute fact of — presence. As if to say, whatever intellectual construct you make of it and whatever intellectual construct you make in your life, it's so contingent.

NK: Because that is partly what it's about, isn't it? It's concerned with a kind of failure of these structures. It's rather like the impossibility of naming or something.

RF: Yes, and that's even true today. Of course, that was a long time ago. It's hard for me even to remember. You might not like as much what I'm doing these days. I don't know. It is true that the last play that I did, *Lava*, for instance, was still me talking all about how language didn't work. I mean hopefully I was making fun of its associations with Derrida and so on — with this kind of approach. But it was certainly about the total self-blocking quality of any kind of language that one would attempt to use. The language problem, to me, is the most interesting problem. And I'm interested in problems and I'm interested in solutions and to me the most interesting solution is the 'no-mind' solution. So it is a war between those two tendencies, I think, that takes place in my language.

NK: This brings me to one of the things that has come out of being here for me, which is the recognition of a sort of fundamental current that seems to underlie a whole range of performance — a kind of denial — denials that are made in order to produce something that couldn't be there except by way of that denial . . . It's to do with language as a contingent construction, but it's also to do with an admittance of things into the frame of the work which can't be there simply by making them or taking control of them, but which require a crossing out of the artist's intention or structure in order to be admitted. And part of that in your

Richard Foreman, *Particle Theory*.
(photo Babette Mangolte)



work seems to me to be an attempt to capture a kind of elusive and fundamental moment of experience.

RF: Again, though, I've always found that easier to do in the privacy of writing than in the social situation of staging the plays. Even though some of that, I hope, is still present, and you're implying that it is present.

NK: I'm saying that it is. For me this is what the documentation brings out; the way in which the whole edifice of the text is in tension with the sense of presence it seems to reveal. And this tension is established in a whole series of ways, one of which is the performance style, where some quality or emotion that is alluded to in the text, for example, is drained from the performance itself. Or the way in which the performance comes to show you what should be there and yet offers you only an empty signification. It all seems to point toward something about what these constructions do to experience.

RF: You see I'm not sure if I'm still doing that, I think I may be doing something slightly different and which may be less interesting or it may be more interesting. I think that the thing that's happened in my work recently, you know, my work has always been terribly personal, of course, but I'm older and I blush to admit, because I know that in the circles in which I travel it's a horrible thing to admit to, but I'm becoming more Jungian. [*Laughs.*] And the plays are partaking more in an attempt to, in the course of letting material float through me, as a writer, to . . . God, I'm blank, I don't know how to say it because it's not going to sound any different from what I've been saying for twenty years — so maybe it isn't. I know it is curious that the last two years I've started doing plays in which the dominant thing in the plays is hearing my voice, all the time, just telling stories and speaking and working against that. And I know that I have in the last couple of years — you talked about this crossing out of material — well, I've gotten so sick of people saying that mostly they relate to my theatre because of its visual impact that I'm desperately trying . . . to make a theatre in which people aren't basically looking but they're listening. I'm finding that hard. *Lava* was an attempt, specifically, to do that. I think I succeeded in a certain way, but it was still too visual for me. I may get bored with that effort, but everybody says, 'but Richard, you're trying to eliminate all of the best things.' Of course, that's the point.

NK: Presumably, if one of the things you're dealing with is the attempt to overcome languages that replay familiar experiences, then you don't want to get caught in your own trap.

RF: Oh, but I do. And of course I'm aware of the fact that I, just as any artist, am caught in my own trap. But it's very tough to get out of your own trap.

NK: Isn't that one of the subject matters of the work?

RF: Yes, it is exactly part of the subject matter. I am under no illusions about the extent to which I am caught in my own trap. But every time you try to escape the trap you feel that you're doing things arbitrarily and they have just as little connection with the necessity that is you as well as the bad things you see. So it's a tricky situation.

NK: It interests me what you say about this change, this difference. It reminds me of the idea of trying to find a centre — you were talking about 'no-mind'— a centre which is a sort of clear point that is free of things in some way. And you say the work is very personal. But at the same time it seems to me that within those terms it's absolutely necessarily personal. If you're going to deal with the moment, with this idea of arriving at a centre, it's necessary to do it from a personal point of view. But in pursuing that it becomes public.

RF: Of course, in trying to arrive at this centre, the work is mostly the documentation of all the things that are not the centre, things that get in the way of it.

NK: What's interesting to me is that it seems to be precisely all this clutter that enables you, in some way, to get to that point.

RF: Well, I don't think I've got to that point.

NK: I mean that through the way these things are treated, it might become apparent that it's not the things, the structures, the objects, that you're really interested in looking at.

RF: Yes. That is the effort, that is the effort. The subject is not anything you can see. And that's very difficult for people to understand also. Very difficult. I think it's just, like — one is continually attacked by form, you know — you start to make a move and immediately form, inherited form, says, 'hey, that belongs to me!' So you find yourself pushing through this morass of form that just clings onto you as if you were a magnet. Indeed, I feel often that — I've never thought of it this way — but making all of this stuff, it's almost as if you want to get to the 'no-mind', you want to be still, you want to get to that point, but you are a magnet, unfortunately. So you're spending all your time dealing with these things; forms, objects, ideas; and everybody sees all of that and they say, 'oh, that's very complex, how's he putting that together?' But, really, no, that's all the garbage. And you're trying to say: 'help, help, there's something else underneath!'

NK: This acknowledgement that just to move or to speak is to replay inherited form interests me very much. And this is very different from, say, Cage. It seems to me that Cage is enormously influential and yet in a way quite different from most of the people whose work in one sense or another may have a relationship with his. On a fundamental level with Cage, there's an assumption, which is

acquired from Zen, that meaning can be overcome in the simplest of ways. Yet part of the subject matter in your own work seems to be the impossibility of getting rid of all this baggage of which language is a part.

RF: Well, it's just that John is purer.

NK: Yet it seems to me that your work suggests that it is impossible to escape, that if you're enmeshed within language, within these systems, then there's no stilling of the mind to a point of nothing. I mean that in a way you have to go through all this.

NK: That's right, I find it impossible to escape. Now I always thought, in a way, that that was a character failure on my part, because I would like to be able to get rid of all this baggage. I mean, I'm not particularly happy about that for myself, speaking personally. So that's the struggle. The work is about that struggle. At the same time, it may be a convenient struggle — that I have chosen to sit in a particular hall of mirrors telling myself this is my struggle, because it gives me material for my work. Who knows if there's anything genuine past the hall of mirrors? I don't know.

Basically I've always said that I feel that I'm living in a world that does not satisfy me, that does not seem to be built in such a way that [it] refracts the energies that I experience when I'm awake. So I'm trying to build in my work a new world in which I can exist in which everything that happens — be it having a cup of tea, be it shooting somebody, be it worshipping somebody, whatever it is — is built in such a way that it refracts that generating energy that I feel is the source of my being awake and perceiving the world.

Because normally gestures and actions that one performs, I feel, get lost and absorbed by intention. And intention is controlled by the particular intentional patterns that a particular society you're living in has set up. And I don't want the impulse of gesture and thought and action to get sucked in to those intentional patterns. I want to put up these mirrors strategically that bounce back the impulse. And that's what the phrase does, that's what the bit of staging does, that's what the bit of music does, ideally. They say, no, don't get swamped by the tidal wave of intention that everybody gets lost in.

NK: Part of this seems to me to do with the fact that as soon as you start with theatre you're dealing with a complex of action, interaction and physical presences that, music, for example, simply doesn't encounter.

RF: Now this is very interesting because for many years I've said I'm in the theatre because I have all these fancy theories or I have all these fancy ideas about how one should attack life. And it seems relatively easy to make this point of view happen in words or in visual imagery or in the sounds of music. But theatre, being concrete, three dimensional, in time, with real bodies — if you can make your

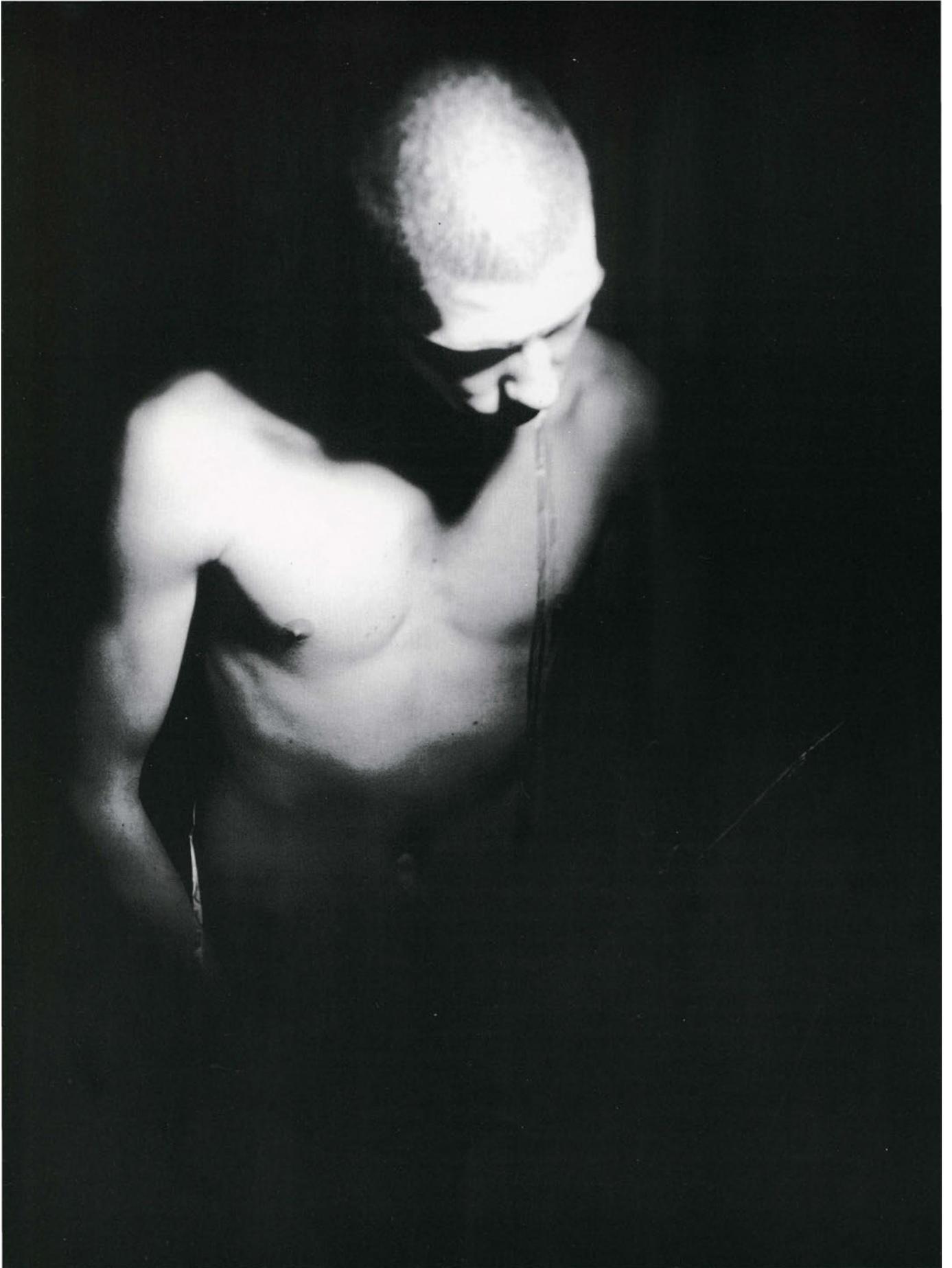
vision happen there, that proves that it is true or it's real because it's the closest to real life. Over the last couple of years I've started thinking, well, that's absurd. That maybe, in a very Gnostic sense, this is a fallen world. So the idea of taking these intuitions of how being might engage itself, manifest itself, be differently, should not be dragged down to the concrete reality of three dimensional concrete life. And the plays have actually been addressing that issue of trying to be 'not there' and they're full of images of not making art, of retiring, as a reflection of that, and dealing with this whole notion of: why on earth make things that are mental, spiritual, what you will, be fleshy things? Maybe that's a perverse thing to do, in a sense.

FOREMAN'S PLAYS AND MANIFESTOES

Kate Davy (Ed.), *Richard Foreman: Plays and Manifestoes*, New York, 1976.

Richard Foreman, *Reverberation Machines: The Later Plays and Essays*, New York, 1985. (Including *Egyptology* and *Penguin Touquet*.)

Bonnie Marranca (Ed.), *The Theatre of Images*, New York, 1977. (Including *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation*.)



Nicky Hamlyn

EXPLORING SEXUALITY ANEW

**Erotic Films by European
Women Film-makers**



W and B Hein, *Kali Film*, 1988.

**Orlagh Mulcahy, In Narcissus'
Pool, 1988, 16mm colour 12mins.**

As outgoing chairman of the BFI Production Board, Colin McCabe remarked in a newspaper article that by the end of the 1970s it was clear that the kind of formal experimentation the Board had been supporting had come to a dead end.

The majority of the Board's beneficiaries in that period were quasi-academics particularly concerned with questions of gender, sexuality and representation. Unfortunately the films resulting from those concerns were invariably overburdened with theoretical preoccupations. This resulted in aesthetically clumsy work, which failed to integrate radical sexual politics with novel forms as promised.

But in the last two or three years a new wave has developed in the form of 'erotic' films by women which explore sexuality anew, with a striking sophistication, both political and aesthetic. Much of the work being done in this area is by German-speaking film-makers and, whatever their differences, they seem to constitute a well-defined movement compared to the fragmented and aimless state of the current British 'avant-garde' scene.

That said, the precursor of much of this work, Jayne Parker, is British. Her pioneering video tape *Almost Out* was made in 1984 when she was on an Arts Council video placement at the then North East London Polytechnic. For nearly two hours Parker confronts first her naked mother and is then herself confronted, in a video edit suite. She demands to be shown where she 'came from', desiring to restore the state of intimacy that she enjoyed before she was expelled into the world. In the second half of the tape Parker films herself with the aid of an unseen male assistant. In contrast to the spontaneous dialogue with her mother, her words are recited from memory, and the assistant prompts her when she falters.

Almost Out is a complex work that is confrontational on almost every level. Firstly, Parker's relentless questioning of her mother is shockingly aggressive, particularly when she is demanding to see where she came from. This repeated question confronts not only her mother but also the boundaries of what film and video can meaningfully represent, since the answer to the question cannot be reduced to facts of mere time and place. (The sight of that place, or even its reclamation, could not begin to capture all that is suggested by the question.)

In confronting her mother on tape, Parker seeks to turn the power balance of the Mother-Daughter relationship in her favour, but later is herself intimidated by the dispassionate camera as she struggles to present herself in a favourable light and to remember her lines.

Besides breaking new ground, *Almost Out* constitutes a courageous rejection of the crippling taboo on nudity that was prevalent in the early 1980s; and, once again, is confrontational in the forthright manner in which it challenges us to re-evaluate our attitudes to nudity in film.

In her latest film, *K* (12 mins, 1989), Parker again uses her own body in a



Jayne Parker, *K*, 1989, 16mm b/w
13min.

meticulously filmed performance in which she regurgitates an endless ribbon of intestine: 'I bring out into the open all the things I have taken in that are not mine and thereby make way for something new.' When she has finished regurgitating, she knits the ribbon into a skein using her arms as needles. In the second part, Parker repeatedly dives into a swimming pool and climbs out again. In this sequence, immaculately lit and photographed in black and white, all the efforts of balancing — toe muscles twitching apprehensively, heels tense and slightly raised, gaze fixed on the water beyond the frame — are heightened and dramatized, before the dive brings these efforts to an abrupt climax.

In sharp contrast to Parker's highly wrought work is the *Kali Film* series (1989) by Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. In their long career the Heins have been consistent in two respects: firstly in their aggressive iconoclasm; and secondly in their use of found footage. The *Kali-Filme* are the latest in a long line of such works that began with the seminal *Robfilm* of 1968. The *Kali-Filme* consist of clips from Corman-esque 'sexploitation' movies such as *Women behind Bars*. The clips are all of women, invariably nude or nearly so, committing the kinds of acts of violence normally associated with men. The material is loosely grouped into thematic sections — violence against other women, mainly prison governesses; violence against men (including castration); the use of knives, guns etc. — while the soundtrack is a slow, melancholy passage from Dvořák's *New World Symphony*.

The large number of clips used for the films highlights the existence of a significant sub-genre of sexploitation films one of whose chief characteristics is acts of violence by women. By their choice of subject, the *Kali-Filme* raise the very general question of what the implications are of attributing traditionally male acts of violence to women. Remembering that some of the films in this genre are made by women (notably Stephanie Rothman, a student of Roger Corman) what is the relationship of women, both as spectators and participants, to these films? Are they in any sense liberated, or are they exploited by their collusion in the perpetration of supposedly male fantasies?

But these are larger questions which are not explicitly taken up in the *Kali-Filme*. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the films is the way they bring the eroticism of looking, of 'visual pleasure', into critical conjunction with a simultaneously disturbing torrent of violence. In their striving for ever increasing realism in the portrayal of stabbings and castration, the films from which the extracts are taken push against and expose the limits of what cinema is capable of: one has the constant feeling that the next step towards greater verisimilitude would entail real stabbings.

The *Kali-Filme* establish, in the most extreme way, the inextricable link between violence and eroticism and, interestingly, it is mainly the German speaking film-makers who have done this. At a recent screening of the work at the London Film-makers' Co-op, a puritanical distaste for the films was expressed as a feeling

that they were in some unspecified way *unsound*, or that they were only concerned with the dark and *negative* side of sex.

The most accomplished of the films under discussion is undoubtedly *Between* (1989) by the West German Claudia Schillinger. Transferred to film from tape, and beautifully lit, shot and edited, *Between* consists of a rapid sequence of moments of sexual activity. The recurring image is of a naked woman with a strapped-on dildo, which she caresses in mock masturbation. In her gyrations in front of the camera, the familiar image of the gogo dancer is utterly subverted and transformed by the presence of the false penis. In subsequent scenes she caresses, fucks and buggers a variety of partners whose gender is never firmly established. At one point we think we see a man, his penis just visible in shadow at the extreme edge of frame, and yet . . .

In its exploration of sexual and gender ambivalences, *Between* eloquently reveals how the process of positioning oneself, and hence deriving pleasure from the sight of naked bodies, is dependent on the usually automatic process of sexing the perceived. Once this process is problematised, however, the determination of gender becomes a deliberate activity. In deliberating, one is stimulated to reflect on the urge to determine the sex of a body (faces are not shown in *Between*) given that one has already derived an (albeit uneasy) erotic pleasure from the sight of it. In other words, the film unearths our bisexuality and confronts us with it.

Mano Destra (1985), by the Swiss Cleo Uebelmann, is a stark, extended black and white video work on sadomasochism. It begins with low-angle views of deserted service tunnels and corridors, accompanied by the sound of footsteps on metallic surfaces. After a while we see a bound woman in a cage, and long shots of a large, almost empty space containing a saddle and stirrups. Eventually the dominatrix is introduced, in an isolated shot of upper body and head. This establishes the pattern of the rest of the 53-minute work: all the shots are made with a static camera, and the bare elements; Dominatrix, her victim and the space they occupy, are isolated from each other until the very end. There is just the smallest amount of in-frame movement.

In *Mano Destra*, erotic content gradually drains from the imagery leaving just the bare iconography of S&M: the Baroque leather garments; the endless coiling and knotting of pristine white ropes; the vain small movements of the trussed victim. These static and interminable rituals are perfectly mirrored in the form of the work itself, which offers an exhaustive set of minimal variations on the principal visual elements.

Vel (1987), by Regine Steenbock, is an almost unwatchable study of cosmetic surgery. The camera scrutinises, in extreme close-up, various operations including eyelid tucks, breast enlargement and diminution, and the extraction of fat from the inner thighs. The 'pain inflicting pictures' were accompanied by a 'pain relieving text', actually a self-hypnosis tape for the purposes of achieving deep relaxation.

**Cleo Uebelmann, *Mano Destra*,
1985, 16mm b/w 53min.**



At the Film-makers' Co-op screening of this work, hostility was again expressed, but this time it was voiced as an objection to the use of a male voice-over, which was seen as being 'legitimizing' and patriarchal *a priori*!

Among all this serious and sombre work are some witty animation and live-action films by the Austrian Maria Mattuschka. In *Mein Kampf* (1987), which is 'about the heroic, about the work you do in order to repress other things,' a woman hammers nails into a wall and then removes them. She tries to make a 'phone call, but puts her finger in her navel instead of the dial. *Untergang der Titania* (1985), again, is about repression: 'because Titania isn't aware of anything. She is more than mature for love, but she doesn't know it'. Here a woman lies in a black bath, her knees and breasts visible as glimmering white islands emerging from the water.

The bathtub is also the setting for the animations. Mattuschka paints directly onto the area around the plughole, out of which various androgynous creatures emerge and scamper away. Using wet paint, she achieves rapid and unexpected transformations by smearing the paint into new shapes, or abruptly wiping an image away and starting afresh.

Another light-hearted piece is *Schumpfsquartett* (1988) by Angela Rodiger. To the sound of a jew's-harp, four men, roped together by their penises, descend a steep and treacherous bank. This image is intercut with that of a noise ensemble blowing down pieces of conduit.

Two Irish film-makers whose work provides a strong contrast to the German are Moira Sweeney and Orlagh Mulcahy. Mulcahy's *In Narcissus' Pool* (1988) treads a familiar path. With its grainy, slow motion imagery of a harshly-lit naked youth, and a chicken hanging on a cord in the middle of the space, the film recalls the earlier work of Cerith Wyn Evans and Michael Kostiff. The youth is seen in a number of poses, sometimes static, sometimes revolving in front of the camera. His body is transformed in unexpected ways by the low key lighting, which creates burnt out highlights and deep, creeping shadows. Occasionally he wears a white veil or holds a large translucent ball in his arms. But although mesmerising and not without a quietly seductive rhythm, the film doesn't really develop the theme of androgyny suggested by the ambiguous way in which the youth is represented.

However, this is Mulcahy's first film; and as such, it exhibits considerable formal finesse, due partly to her previous work as a photographer. And despite the comparisons with other work, there is a more oblique and gentle sensibility operating here than in Wyn Evans' harsher, homoerotic set-pieces.

With *Imaginary III* (1989) Moira Sweeney has moved decisively forward from her previous films. In the past she has always made extensive use of the optical printer to rework (usually to slow down) footage of the Irish coast or children in rural cottages. These films all have a diaristic quality that stems from the personal

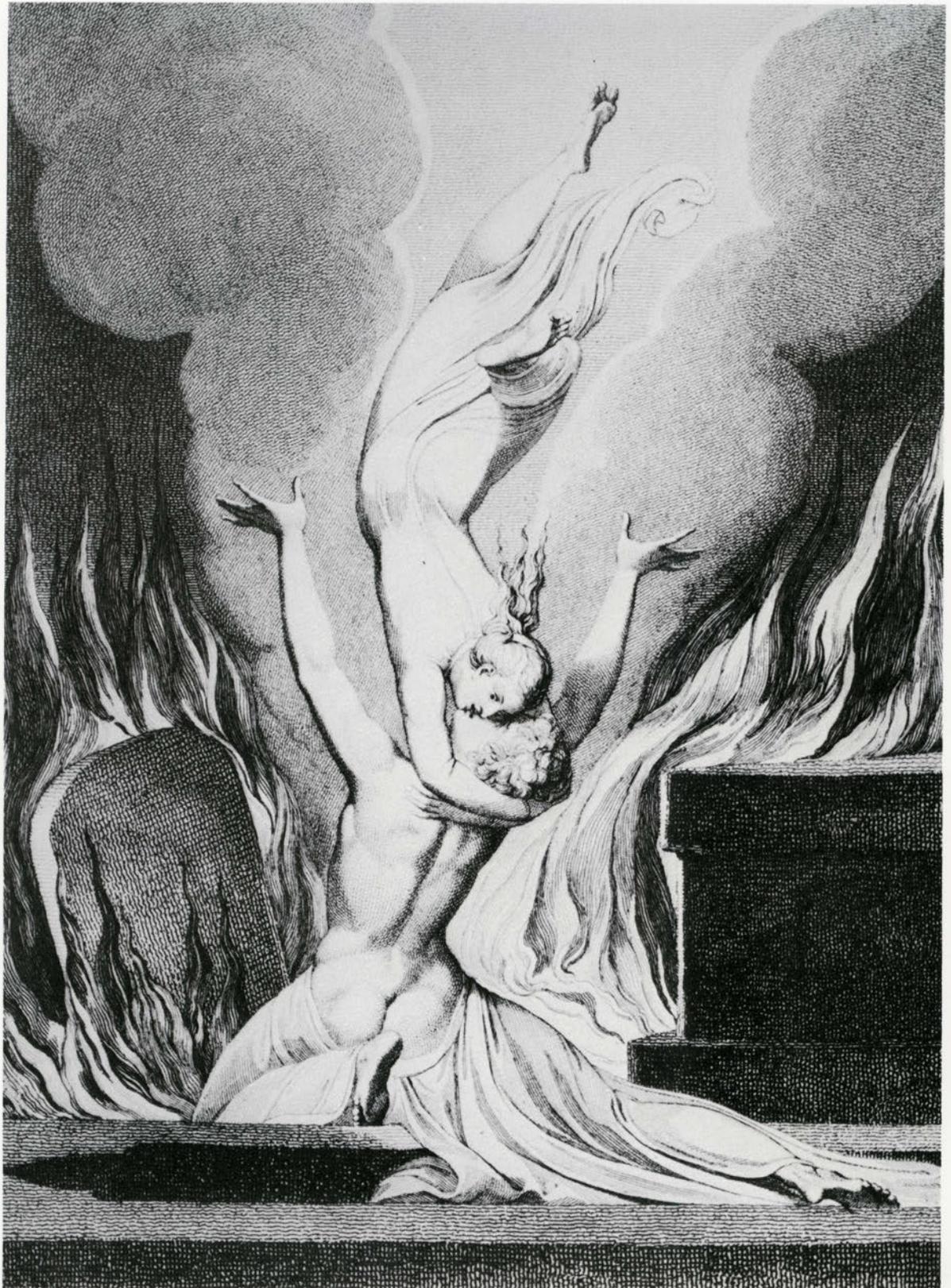


Regine Steenbock, *Vel*, 1987,
16mm colour 15min.

nature of her source material and the informal manner in which it is gathered. Although still very much an optical printer film, *Imaginary III* is a more purposeful piece in which bodies (skin) and the textures and patinas produced through the re-filming process intermingle. Sweeney uses a mixture of 16mm and unsplit standard eight film, which contains four frames within the area of one 16mm frame. The pleasure of *Imaginary III* is not an explicitly erotic pleasure, but a more general scopophilic one, the product of the film's rich, suggestive textures, and the cross-rhythms generated by the standard eight sections.

NOTE

Between, K and *Imaginary III* are available for hire as part of three mixed packages of work from: The Film and Video Umbrella, Top floor, Chelsea Reach, 79-89 Lots Rd, London SW10 0RN (Tel: 071-376 3171). The other works are available through the London Film-makers' Co-op, 42 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1 7BQ (Tel: 071-586 4806).



Richard Squires

THE MEANING OF ECSTASY

**William Blake, *The Reunion of
the Soul and the Body*, 1808,
from Robert Blair's *The Grave*.**

In the winter and spring of 1969 I worked as an actor in a small company from Manchester, New Hampshire, called the Players Theatre of New England. The Players Theatre was directed by a man called Harvey Grossman, who was born in the Bronx but who came of age in Europe, where he received his education in the theatre by working as secretary first to the author and designer Edward Gordon Craig and then to the great mime Etienne Decreux. Harvey was a guileless man for whom art, religion and life were practically synonymous terms, as oblivious to current fashion or critical style as he was to financial reality.

I joined the company to help them mount an improvised production of Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, for which they had bookings in villages all over New England. Nowadays our work would be called dance-theatre; back then it was still called mime. In any case, we told the story with our bodies while a narrator interpreted our action to the audience from time to time. We used our voices for sound effects, but there was little traditional dialogue, no entrances or exits, and precious little characterization. Instead, the six mime-dancers in the company would coagulate to form a ship, dissolve to form the individuals who disembarked from it, coagulate to form the great oak tree they found on land, dissolve to form the animals grazing underneath, and so on through the play in a kind of ritual evocation of the story of Icabod Crane and the headless horseman who destroyed him.

We toured this traditional tale from town to town in the backwoods of New England, putting on the show in town halls, churches, schools, lawns, and once or twice in the bottom of an empty swimming pool. At twenty, I was the youngest member of the company. I'd been selected mostly for my acrobatic talents, and generally took the parts with the highest physical demands — somersaulting horseman, a lunging horse of death, or a mesmerizing medicine-man.

The medicine-man's dance had been added to Irving's story — a bit improbably — to suggest the primitive and barbaric surroundings of the early colonial settlers and the fragility of their hold on civilization. To perform it I put on a gruesome mask and leaped into a circle of settlers grouped in prayer around a fire, hypnotizing them one by one to the ominous beat of an Indian drum. I danced, gesticulating wildly, bringing out the most guttural and rhythmic sounds my lungs could; but in the end they all became infected with my frenzy, and the finale of the scene had us whirling about the stage in a kind of mad, leotard-clad St. Vitus' Dance.

This was good theatre: the hall would always be silent as a stone when we were through. And there was one occasion, in the little village of Gorham, New Hampshire, just below the Canadian border, when the performance of that dance gave me what I think must be the greatest gift in theatre: the experience of *ecstasy*.

Our performance that evening went normally enough through the opening scenes that led to the medicine-man's dance. And the dance itself went well in the

beginning. I revelled in the part and gave it all I had, and soon enough turned that quiet prayer meeting into a cacophonous evocation of Beelzebub. But when I came to mesmerize the last of the settlers, an actor named Gary Carkin, something happened. Carkin always put up a good strong fight, refusing to submit to me, and the look of fierce determination and fear that came over him whenever we faced off remains with me to this day. He would answer my guttural commands with tenacious defiance, match my gesticulations step for step, and sometimes push me to the point of exhaustion before giving in. And that evening, staring into the contorted mask on my face, and looking around in horror at his fallen comrades, he held on in utter desperation, as though the spell were really happening to *him*.

Suddenly, without a moment's warning, I found myself in the steel rafters near the ceiling of the room. I was aware of the gloom of the girders vectoring up through the shadows, and looking down on the spectacle below I was startled to discover that my vision had changed: I could see everything in the room — every hair on every head it seemed — *all at the same time*. I took it all in, in a single omnipresent glance: hundreds of heads arranged in wavering rows of portable chairs, a half dozen babies sleeping in laps, hair of many different colors, shining from the light on stage — and then my attention shifted to the stage, and there we were in multicolored leotards, whirling about in our dance, and there I was — *there I was* — face to face with Gary Carkin.

I was in two places at the same time, and the moment that my mind became aware of it I felt a rush of panic. And then in an instant I found myself staring into Gary Carkin's desperate eyes again, and felt my feet pounding the floor, my voice shouting, my lungs straining. And finally Gary gave in and the scene was over.

I finished the play in a state of exhilarated confusion that was destined to last for weeks. Much of the confusion centered on the question of time, because it was impossible to tell how long the experience had lasted or how my body had continued to function during the time my mind had left it. When we came backstage, I asked Gary Carkin if he had noticed anything unusual during the witch-doctor's dance. 'Well, yes,' he replied, 'it was a bit more intense this time, wasn't it?' Harvey Grossman only noticed that the scene went well. Much to my surprise, I'd had the experience all alone.

ECSTASY AND ENTHUSIASM

In the months and years that followed I naturally tried to learn what I could about what had happened to me that night. I learned that out-of-body experiences, while always rare, are among the more common paranormal events, and that the conditions under which I'd had the experience were somewhat typical. Out-of-

body events tend to occur when a person is exposed to bodily danger. Thus they are relatively common in places like hospitals or during events like car accidents. People who have the experience in these kinds of conditions are likely to describe it as a protective movement of the soul or mind to separate itself from an imperilled body. It also occurs to people whose lives aren't in mortal danger but whose spirits have been pressed, as had mine, by a great physical and emotional exertion that forces those spirits quite literally to burst their bounds. Orchestra conductors have reported the experience, as have actors and dancers. Moreover, an apparently growing contingent report *ecstatic* experiences through meditative practices. The medical profession has taken an interest in these things, and an impressive variety of accounts like mine can be found in books like *Out of the Body Experiences*, by Dr Celia Green of the Oxford Institute of Psychophysical Research.

I know that out-of-body tales create issues of credibility for many people. There's ample reason for suspicion and my readers can be certain that I often share their doubts myself. But if one cannot always be responsible for one's experience, one must be responsible to it. I can't pretend it didn't happen even if I wanted to. The only thing to do is to try to understand it.

I started by asking whether the sensation of being a conscious entity apart from my own body was accurate or only illusory. Could I believe my own eyes or did it all just happen in my head? Was it a natural phenomenon or just a mental aberration? I naturally wanted to believe my eyes — an alarming, pathological event that took place *inside* my head would be turned into a glorious transformation of reality if it happened outside of it. Both the vividness of the experience and the omnipresent nature of my vision, which saw everything in the room at once with the precision of a hawk — could seemingly be argued either way. But when I think of things like the rivet pattern in the girders of the ceiling, or the balding spot on the man with the red checked coat in row five, or a hundred other details that filled my sight in the midst of the event, it seems more reasonable to call it a natural phenomenon than to call it a hallucination. No autoscopic (self-seeing) hallucination, drawing only from the information that my mind possessed, could have been so full or accurate in detail.

Of course I need to explain my meaning when I say that I chose to believe my own eyes. My eyes, after all, had remained on stage, while my identity and *its* perceptions drifted in the rafters. I've tried a number of scenarios to explain how it could be possible to thus perceive in the absence of any organs of perception, or how my organs of perception could have stopped perceiving when my mind withdrew from my body. What kind of suspended animation had my body entered into when my mind withdrew from it? Or was it time itself that was suspended, if only for a moment? These and a host of other hard questions make it easy to understand why reputable scientists shy away from such accounts.

I don't believe in supernatural phenomena, and this experience, ironically enough, has only strengthened my bias against them. It seems more reasonable to assume that the world is a coherent place in which every event is a natural phenomenon — to relegate an event to the supernatural is to make it in some sense unreal. So when I seek an explanation for what happened I think of the various degrees of frenzy in my fellow actors, the desperate pitch to which I had been pushed, the charged and silent concentration of the audience upon my wildly dancing body, and the infinite web of electro-magnetic energy that we are all a part of, that constitutes the final scientific definition of reality. I wonder if there might be times when a man becomes so charged with electrical potential that the normal boundaries of the mind dissolve for a moment as the charge is released. This sudden, lightning transit would be what the ancient Greeks called *ecstasy*.

In its original usage *ecstasy* (from the Greek *ek-* out + *stasis* place) had two meanings: either the state of someone who was 'out of his mind' — insane — or that of someone whose soul had been transported from his body in religious trance. Since the word was regularly applied to the cult of Dionysos it's tempting to think it was used in the first sense by those who opposed his orgiastic and theatrical rites, and in the second sense by those who actually experienced them. Whether *ekstasis* meant madness or the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body would have thus depended on one's own experience. On this score nothing much has changed since antiquity.

But there's no longer a word in the English language that describes the actual experience of *ecstasy*. The word was last used in this sense, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in 1879; afterwards it must have fallen victim to the rational cast of modern times. Phrases like 'astral projection' and 'out of body experience' (O.O.B.E.) have to make do now — the first sounding like a kind of occult dementia, the second like a military command post. Ecstasy now means something like 'a state of intense emotional exaltation', a meaning that the word *enthousiasmos* used to convey. This is interesting because both *ekstasis* and *enthousiasmos* (from the Greek *en-* in + *theos* god, whence our own *enthusiasm*) were characteristic gifts of the god Dionysos to his followers. It's too bad that the distinction between a god going into the soul of a man, and the soul of a man going out of his body, is no longer clear: *enthousiasmos* is a state of overpowering emotion, while *ekstasis* — at least in my experience — is a state of no emotional content at all, save awe.

For ten years my experience in Gorham remained a somewhat isolated event in my life, with no simple name like *ecstasy* to call it by and no context to put it into. Then one winter's day in 1979 at the Library of Congress, I chanced upon a book that established a connection between my experience on stage and the ritual ceremonies of Dionysos, god of theatre, in ancient Greece. The book was *Psyche*, Erwin Rhode's great study of primitive Greek religion. Reading his chapter on the

'Origins of the Belief in Immortality: The Thracian Worship of Dionysos', I came to a passage describing the worship of the Maenads ('wild ones') of Dionysos, and discovered something utterly different from everything I'd known before about Greek religion.

Rhode describes a nighttime ceremony held in the mountains under the flickering light of torches, with cymbals crashing and kettledrums roaring amid 'the "maddening unison" of the deep-toned flute.' The chorus of worshippers, mostly women, excited by the wild music, danced in whirling circles, crying and singing over the mountaintops. The *orgyia* continued through the night, the women dancing to the point of exhaustion in the still, high, rocky reaches, lighted only by their fires and the moon. Women who were nursing held newly born fawns and wolves at their breasts, waiting for the sign that Dionysos had arrived and entered one of the animals. Then, 'in the "sacred frenzy" they fell upon the beast selected as their victim and tore their captured prey limb from limb. Then with their teeth they seized the bleeding flesh and devoured it raw', thus capturing the spirit of the god from the quivering flesh. Rhode continues:

'The participators in these dance-festivals induced intentionally in themselves a sort of mania, an extraordinary exaltation of their being. A strange rapture came over them in which they seemed to themselves and others "frenzied", "possessed". This excessive stimulation of the senses, going even as far as hallucination, was brought about by the delirious whirl of the dance, the music and the darkness, and all the other circumstances of this tumultuous worship . . . The violently induced exaltation of the senses had a religious purpose, in that such enlargement and extension of his being was man's only way, as it seemed, of entering into union and relationship with the god . . .

These extraordinary phenomena transcending all normal experience were explained by saying that the soul of a person thus "possessed" was no longer "at home" but "abroad", having left its body behind. This was the literal and primitive meaning understood by the Greek when he spoke of the "ekstasis" of the soul in such orgiastic conditions of excitement.'

THE GREEK GESAMTKUNSTWERK

I had become a playwright in the meantime, with a natural interest in the history of my craft, and this encounter with *Psyche* — along with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* — led me on to explore the origins of Greek theatre, to try to discover if my experience of *ecstasy* might have antecedents in the very foundations of the theatre itself. The first tragic actors were simply following the lead of the Maenads by cultivating circumstances that would lead them into states of



Relief on a bronze vessel found at Dherveni, Macedonia, 4th century BC, showing Dionysian ecstatic revelries.



Voodoo dancers building up to an ecstatic trance, Haiti. (photo Guido Mangold)

enthusiasm and *ecstasy*? Were the religious ceremonies that we now call theatre, dedicated to the mad god Dionysos, Lord of the Underworld, founded in part so that actors could be granted glimpses of the immortality that it was his province to bestow? These performances, after all, were fierce exultant spectacles that made strenuous physical demands on the actors, and the earliest Greek tragedies are closer to dance-opera or dance-oratorio than to what we now call tragic drama: practically every word in the tragedies was sung, and every note had a dance step to accompany it. Athenacus has this to say about the first tragic poets:

'They also say that the ancient poets, Thespis, Pratinas, Phrynichus, were called dancers not only because their plays were dependent on the dancing of the chorus but because quite apart from their own poetry they were willing to teach those who wanted to dance.'

Phrynichus was said to have invented as many new dances as waves on the sea, and it was said that one could dance the different steps of Thespis all night long. Leo Aylen devotes a chapter to 'dance drama' in his ground-breaking work *The Greek Theatre*, pointing out that the literary bias of our own culture has obscured the reality of the early tragic performances, which are best thought of as '*Gesamtkunstwerk* — song, dance, groupings, color, and spectacle together.' In contrast to the common image of wooden actors pounding out ponderous verse, the real Greek theatre was a passionate exhibition of wild dancing and rhythmic lament.

What we would call the stage of the Greek theatre — the flat, usually circular area at the bottom of the seats — the Greeks called the 'orchestra', a word meaning 'dancing place.' The early performances can be imagined by thinking of a group of twelve men, one of them standing to the side to act as commentator while the others sing and dance together to tell the story.

Thinking about the actual experience of performing on that stage, it's easy enough to infer that the early actors were seekers of *enthousiasmos*: the state of emotional exhilaration from the sense of a divine infusion of energy is *still* one of the most powerful attractions of the theatre to an actor, even if the words used to describe the experience are no longer the same. When theatre people talk of a magnetic performance, a charged audience or an electric house the words they use are literally true; and many an actor's life has been transformed by the concentration of the psychic and electrostatic energy of the audience upon his person.

Now imagine an actor playing Oedipus the King, standing in the orchestra of a Greek theatre, a chorus of 24 men dancing around him in a frenzy of emotion over the unspeakable suffering he's endured. A spellbound audience of 15,000 people watch while Oedipus, moved to gouge his eyes out with his own hands, cries:

'O! O! O! They will all come, they will all come out clearly!
 Light of the sun, let me see no more of you again.
 I was born accursed, born of a cursed bond,
 And I was cursed in marriage, and cursed in killing too.'

In the extraordinary intensity of such a cry, and its effect upon the actors and the audience, one can begin to imagine the *enthousiasmos* of the Lord of Souls.

That this *enthousiasmos* would be followed from time to time by *ecstasy* seems reasonable enough to me. We've seen what the meager resources of the Players Theatre of New England could produce in a basketball gym. Imagine the singing and dancing of the greatest tales of lamentation the world has ever known, acted out before the smoking altars of the Lord of Souls, the attention of 15,000 people concentrated on the actors in the circle of the orchestra, the circle in the apex of the huge inverted cone of the theatre, the spirits of the actors literally pressed from their bodies by the convergence of energy. The relevant question isn't whether such things happened, but to what degree they were consciously elicited and controlled. Did the ancient performers take to the stage in deliberate pursuit of *ecstasy*?

These questions are of more than just historical interest for those of us who think the theatre is still presented and watched for the same reasons as it was in Greek antiquity. These reasons are essentially religious: actors seek transcendence and audiences hope for revelation. It may be, and often is, *bad* worship, but it's worship nonetheless. It's good to remember that modern theatre is the direct descendant of the liturgical church dramas of the middle ages, and that modern opera evolved from attempts to recreate Greek tragedy by musicians of the Renaissance.

If the driving force in theatre is its search for spiritual meaning, then it's natural that one of its fruits is spiritual experience. Theatre is well suited to such pursuits because it is the one art that can encompass all the others in itself, concentrating the full spectrum of thought and feeling into the power of a unified expression. Every part of life can be included in its spectacle of music, scenery, song and dance: Dionysos is not only the god of wine and comedy, but also the god of tragedy and Lord of Death. The theatre may be tawdry and bankrupt, a stepchild to the movies, a soap box for political scolders and moral debauchers, the sanctuary of sofa drama and hysterical therapy, the most boarish and bourgeois of all artistic institutions; but it is also the vehicle chosen by some of the most profound writers in the European tradition.

Indeed, Yeats put dramatic poetry over lyric in his hierarchy of values (a hierarchy whose necessity he insisted upon), and he founded the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to make a laboratory — or a temple — in which transcendent experiences might be created. It was there that he saw a performance of Synge's *Deirdre of the*

Sorrows, writing afterward about an actor in the play who had 'ascended into that tragic ecstasy that is the best that art — perhaps that life — can give . . . [when] we too were carried beyond time and persons to where passion, living through its thousand purgatorial years, as in the wink of an eye, becomes wisdom; and it was as though we too had touched and felt and seen a disembodied thing.'

Is Yeats here describing his subtle perception of a moment of *ecstasy* on stage? Or was it rather *enthousiasmos*, when the bounds that separate man from man dissolve and all are caught together in a moment of united consciousness? I think that these phenomena happen whenever the conditions are ripe for them, that if we combine the correct proportions of conviction, beauty, and intensity on stage they will arise as if from a chemical reaction.



Black figure vase depicting
Dionysian ritual scene, Greek,
6th century BC.

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

John Cage

Europera 3 & 4

Almeida Theatre

Reviewed by Catherine Brownell

Time more than flies when one is enjoying oneself — it becomes unimportant, receding into the distance of one's attention.

Traditionally, it is assumed to be a measure of excellence when a performance eclipses the presence of time. But in John Cage's *Europera 3 & 4* time is doubly emphasised, both by the precise length of each piece — noted in the programme as lasting exactly 70 and 30 minutes respectively — and by the presence of large televised digital clocks on the stage which monitor the passing of every second.

This infringement of traditional artistic decorum makes explicit that here the audience is not intended to be absorbed within the work but to exist independently in relation to it. The hyper-awareness of time, and its associative value of boredom, is intended as a detaching lever. Cage, quoting Zen theory, suggests that 'if something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty two and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting.'

By its very nature, the work invites an awareness of its status as both a thing performed and a thing received, recalling Duchamp's stress on the

interdependence between the art work and its audience. It is in this way that Cage's works are not primarily music in the traditionally accepted sense, but conceptual art which employs music as the medium of artistic transmission. Since his celebrated silent piece *4'33"* in 1953, Cage has continuously explored the position of viewer as participator; and, if *4'33"* can be identified as the scaffolding around which he has erected his conceptual statements, then *Europera 3 & 4* can be identified as the honed and crafted structure.

The stage is cluttered with cumbersome gramophones, fussy lampshades and pianos. Lined along the back of the stage on benches are a group of singers who periodically burst into operatic song, adopting, momentarily, full operatic character. Isolated from each other within the stage, all the elements are subordinate to the computerised time, taking the cues from the digital clock.

This barrage of musical elements all vying for precedence and attention does more than reverse, and thereby paradoxically reinforce, Cage's original statement of noise as music. Rather than just a cacophony of notes, individual tunes are identifiable. What emerges is the capacity of music as a quotable commodity. Cage addresses our powers of organisation, and of making distinctions between noise and harmony, live sound and recorded sound, instrument and

voice. Thus the work generates questions around our own cultural position as listeners and recipients of cultural signs.

East Country Yard Show

East Country Yard
South Dock, Rotherhithe

Reviewed by Tony White

The 'East Country Yard Show', an independent exhibition of contemporary art by seven young London artists, took place in an abandoned produce warehouse in Surrey Docks through June 1990. On arrival, the initial impact of the show came from the sheer *amount* of space involved. All four floors of the building were used, each the size of a football pitch, with just one bisecting wall. Taking advantage of this partition, each artist occupied half a floor.

The most exciting work, even if not fully realized, was *Throbbing 1-7* by Sarah Lucas, who with Henry Bond also co-curated the show. At the far end of Lucas' space, seven small cubes of brick were bracketed against the original brick of the bisecting wall. The cubes were all slightly different shades of red-brick. Each one was labelled — e.g. *Throbbing Severn Valley Reds*, *Thousand Sand Limes*, *Throbbing Stocks* — Stocks, Sand Limes and Severn Valley Reds etc. all being trade-names of varieties of brick.

This work was exactly what site-specific sculpture/installation is all about: an economical

interrogation of the *nature* of a space. The piece was extremely understated, hardly even noticeable at first glance, but this was its strength. The result was not only a very sharp and highly appropriate intervention, but also rather charming and funny.

The shows by Henry Bond and Gary Hume also demonstrated a thorough understanding of installation. Both pieces used large hanging banners and both were concerned with a rather tongue-in-cheek elevation of the mundane to the monumental. But there the similarities ended.

Henry Bond's installation consisted of several hundred paper banners which hung the fifteen or twenty feet from ceiling to floor. Snap-shots (from the dustbins of 24-hour processing labs) were stuck at an equal height on all of these. Subject matter was varied: a baby crying, traffic, the blue sea, majorettes rehearsing in an empty football stadium . . .

Using two rows of huge green tarpaulins, Gary Hume had constructed a corridor which ran the whole length of his space. Each tarpaulin was titled, names coming from the numbers and letters crudely stencilled on the ceiling by the building's previous occupiers: *Bay A*, *Bay B* etc. Cut out of each tarpaulin were the shapes of hospital doors, the round windows, the handles, the kick-guards. The architectural motifs, thus repeated, became totally meaningless. Which, I suspect, was the point.

The work in 'East Country



Yard Show' was diverse. Virginia Nimarkoh had pasted enormous colour-saturated blow-ups of family photographs onto the walls and doors. Michael Landy and Peter Richardson showed a continuous video of three greengrocers setting up displays outside their shops. Thomas Trevor projected a film-loop silhouette of a running man onto a circle of car-wrecks in the near dark. Anya Gallaccio laid out a rectangle of several thousand oranges on the floor. A quite accidental, but totally charming, addition to this piece occurred in the first days of the exhibition. Before the rain washed them away, the quayside was littered with hundreds of tiny, screwed-up 'Jaffa Orange' stickers.

What I felt to be most important and vital about the show was that it had happened at all. It was an ambitious project, with no public funding, and I had the feeling that contact with that kind of bureaucracy could have killed the idea stone-dead.

Rather, an opportunity was seen and seized; they just got on with it. 'East Country Yard Show', was a successful attempt to put exciting new work on in London *outside of existing structures*. It should be applauded. And if some of the work was flawed, it was, taken as a whole, a very impressive show.

As I left and walked in the pouring rain past the useless 'Marina Village' and the huge Surrey Quays shopping complex, it struck me that the event was also quite *refreshing* — standing, as it did, in stark contrast with the monument to a profound lack of vision that is London's Docklands.

Illustration: Henry Bond

Fran Cottell

Double Interior — Part 3

Greenwich Citizens Gallery

Reviewed by John Carson

Two large arms offered an embrace from within the wide shop window. I accepted the invitation to slip in through a curtained entrance and arrived in a boudoir or chapel illuminated by a few discreet ultra violet lights and the incandescence from several 12 feet high white bloused female torsos, like ghostly headless caryatids. The feeling was a mixture of wonder and apprehension, like happening upon a secret or sacred space and interrupting some white-garbed ritual.

The cartoon quality of the big arms traced on the front window was dramatically offset by the intensity of the interior space. Five purring projectors beamed five different views of the upper torso of a woman wearing a loose fitting white slip. Her face was never seen; just a glimpse of neck or chin. The images were teasingly multi-layered as the projector beams penetrated through the transparent lamina of gauzes hung floor to ceiling. As images became larger and potentially more revealing, they also became fainter, due to their distance from source, some eventually becoming distorted as they hit the wall at an angle.

On the floor and the walls, short luminous strips made 'dotted' lines, indicative of the seamlines of a garment pattern or lines of absence such as the chalked outline of a body removed. In places these lines would form a circle or an ellipse, like large eyes, heightening the sense of voyeurism as the roving gaze would settle on such details as a white strap across a collar bone, a low back neckline revealing shoulder blade and nape of neck or a soft hairy armpit, suggesting other body crevices when distorted by angled projection. I found myself somewhere between the sexual knowingness of a Calvin Klein ad and the Persil-clean eroticism of the underwear section of a mail order catalogue. I was alternately absorbed by the mood of the installation and then slightly uneasy about wandering through the wardrobe of Fran

Cottell's mind. I thought of the stolen intimacies of ballerinas observed by Brassai or Degas. Feelings of intrusion were reinforced every time I crossed a projector beam and became implicated by my shadow. Projector beams were also interrupted by three crumpled white dresses suspended midway between ceiling and floor. Sinister like death robes, those dresses added a disquieting extra presence: ancestors or soul sisters?

The construct was strong on atmosphere and technically immaculate, yet I felt that I could not quite hear what those ghostly female forms were trying to tell me. If the work was about the constrictiveness of clothing and architecture as interrelated psychological conditioners, then the statement could have been stronger. Also I wondered about the relevance of gender to interpretation of the work — considering my own exclusion from experiences of 'sisterhood' or sexual vulnerability in relation to layers of clothing. My



interpretative efforts were recurrently affected by the erotic undertones of the imagery. Having been so seductively lulled I would have been wide open for a vicious or enlightening twist.

In most respects, this was the strongest of three works by Fran Cottell which I have seen lately. The *Window Shopping* installation in the window of 109 Charing Cross Road seemed too quiet and subtle to grab the attention of bustling passers-by. A performance of *Conceptual Clothing* at the ICA had its moments, but I felt that it lacked the dramatic structure or coherence to command the interest of the audience, physically at quite a distance from the action. There is a delicacy about Cottell's work which I feel needs a sympathetic audience. With *Double Interior* she won the sympathy of the audience by requiring them to enter totally into a space which was enthralling. However it felt like a brilliant stage set without any decisive action. And in this one respect *Window Shopping* in Charing Cross Road did have an advantage — on those occasions when its peep show appeal was cleverly subverted by Cottell herself appearing in the window and peering back at the viewer through the eye hole. For all its allure, *Double Interior* missed the challenge of such a confrontation.

Wim Vandekeybus

Les Porteuses de Mauvaises Nouvelles

The Place

Reviewed by David Hughes

Some years ago during the Brighton Festival I found myself confronted by something quite new to me: the particularly physical form of visual/dance theatre of the Belgian company Epigonen. They gave me an insight into the possibilities of an aesthetic derived from sheer physicality combined with a formal choreographic discipline. Physicality for Epigonen was not the anarchic formal solvent I had been used to; the physical was only one of the elements they had fused into a very distinctive form. A certain attachment to some ethic of purism had blinded me to many of performance's possibilities. I was impressed.

Wim Vandekeybus' *Les Porteuses de Mauvaises Nouvelles* is not impressive in the same way. Which is neither to say that this piece was not impressive, nor to disparage it in any other way. Rather, this dance performance brought to a kind of perfection the qualities hinted at in Epigonen. Thus it couldn't have had the shock of that new; rather it gave a sense of resolution and satisfaction at a job well done. In some sense it was definitive. I immediately cancelled all my dance press tickets for the rest of the month. It seemed to have said it all.

A string of responses immediately came to mind:



elegant and teasing solutions to logistical and logical problems, physical commitment of a singularly un-British kind, a fresh, unselfconscious and open self-presentation, rigorous and unremitting obedience to the logic of seriality and repetition, subtle and effective use of space and lighting, clarity of gesture and purpose, visual and verbal wit.

A floor of 2' x 2' cork tiles and a hanging wall of cork define the performance area. In an upstage corner a hunk of ice hangs over three smoking irons. When, later in the show, the hunk is removed and thumped on the stage floor, it is revealed as a shirt frozen in a block of ice. A male performer puts on the shirt.

From the lighting rig hang three coat hangers/trapeze bars on which are items of clothing. The main action-generating problem of the show seems to be how to get access to the dry clothes, which are beyond the reach of the performers even

when they lift and support each other in an effort to relieve the palpable discomfort of the man in the ice shirt. All possible variants of lift and support are tried, but set in a series of circuits which are staged with a compelling rhythm and slapstick humour. Eventually, like some outward bound initiative exercise, the performers stack up the wooden pallets of flooring to create ladders and platforms from which the clothing can be reached. But the whole process of stacking and climbing and rearranging of stacks is executed according to an arcane logic, the moment of achievement almost interminably delayed. Every possibility of ascending and descending is explored, as though the logic of their world demands elimination of all unsuccessful strategies. As with most European companies I've seen over the last year or so, a small amount of material is made to go a long way as the choreography subjects minimal material to exhaustive permutation. Throughout, the adversary is gravity. Almost all the activities involve falls either into the arms of fellow performers, always just there with circus timing, or onto the floor. Indeed, gravity is introduced at the very outset: darts are thrown onto the cork flooring before any of the performers are allowed onto it, their downward flight a marker of gravity's presence.

After the young man puts on the dry clothes the pallets are stacked under the hanging wall, now resembling a vast abstract

expressionist canvas and a final sequence moves the bodies from leaps to squats and finally into a sequence of rolls that evoke the choreographies of sex, although a very real sense of the erotic has permeated the entire event.

At the end the pallets remain stacked upstage. The logic of audience expectation somehow seems to demand that in a logistical and theatrical tour de force the floor be relaid. But the game is over, the job done, the demands of their logic satisfied and the real-time objective achieved. An impressive achievement, an impressive restraint, an impressive rigour.

Graeme Miller

A Girl Skipping

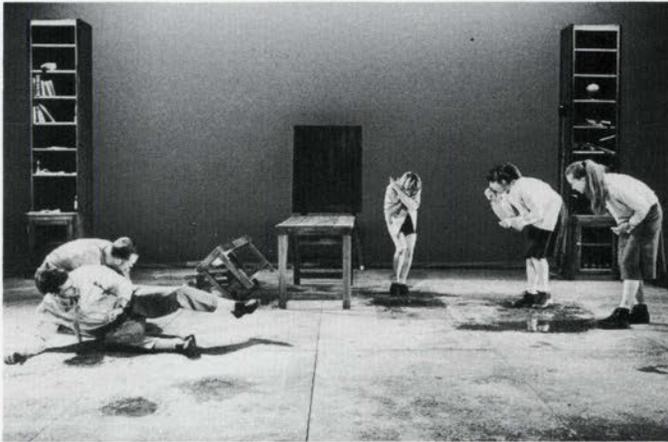
The Place

Reviewed by Tim Etbells

A Girl Skipping takes place in a safe zone where adults play children's games. The zone is a tarmac school yard, made in loving detail with puddles and paint lines and drains. The games they play, like art, are part of the world but also strangely outside of it. In play the actions and emotions of our lives are reordered and exaggerated, perhaps even exercised. Games are always defiant because they involve pretence; a conscious rejection of the truth. Furthermore, the consequences of action, let's say a pretended death, can always be walked away from, laughed at, shrugged off.

In *A Girl Skipping* the system of language and action games is a way of flirting with what can't quite be known or understood. Invariably it is death and sex that lie in wait for the players, but alongside these there are further ideas about the breakdown of intellectual and cultural certainties. Logic, representation, history, time and language are all implicitly threatened and reduced to chaos in a series of games, wordplays and puns. The game-playing throws the performers into a world, like ours, where reality is up for grabs, where everything must be re-named, where watches are broken playing conkers, where signifiers and signified are as real (or as unreal) as each other. 'There were bodies everywhere . . .' says Emma Gladstone at one point ' . . . some with red crayon coming out of their arms and some with their arms all on fire.'

Since Impact's demise Graeme Miller has been the least prolific of the ex-members, but although *A Girl Skipping* is only his second solo show it is still very assured. The lighting is brilliant, the performances fine. At best it's poignant and funny and a clear development of the themes Miller first took up in *Dungeness*. There are problems though. The piece's apocalyptic trajectory feels tried and tested, as well as being strangely unsuited to the '90s. The loss-of-innocence motif feels precious after a while and as the piece proceeds its improvisational bones begin to show through and wear thin. There are unconscious



groans as yet more props are fetched from tall cupboards to provide fuel for new games.

For me the piece stands or falls on its ability to balance seriousness and irony, to pitch assumed naivety against fear and knowledge. There are several sticky sections where a sort of catch-all doom descends and a tendency to overclarify images and ideas wins out. The result is that effects are lost in a weight of explanation or cloying sentiment. Perhaps the worst moment of all has one performer as a bottle-waving drunk, yelling his head off as the others sing sadly 'England! England!', their dewy eyes looking out to the audience.

The piece is clearly at its best when it trusts its audience and refuses to spell out the gravity of its games. There are plenty of moments like this. In 'watch conkers' or in 'kiss chase' it is genuinely ambivalent, the seriousness of the content held in perfect tension with a flippancy in the style.

Eventually, after Miller himself

has arrived to deliver the lesson the 'children' have thus far avoided, this ambivalence is extended into almost nihilistic exuberance and joy. His lecture, title BIBLE - BABEL -BABBLE on a blackboard at the back, is soon lost in an explosion of noise in which a woman skips between two speeding ropes and around her there is running, jumping, leaping, the sound of bells rung, a trumpet blown, voices singing and shouting.

The show closes with an ominous rainburst that interrupts the cacophony. The performers slow down, staring at the audience as their clothes begin to drop. But for all its power this image really doesn't work. It's too familiar and it's working too hard. Days after the melodramatic soaking is forgotten I'm still thinking about the tremendous liberation of the woman skipping through the noise. One feels as though somehow she both rides and contains the immoral and uncertain world the performers

have found — a hymn to the spirit of play, she keeps on jumping, enjoying, bound up in the double helix of the ropes.

Christian Boltanski

Reconstitution

Whitechapel Art Gallery

Reviewed by Edward Allington

Like a warning, a black flag flutters outside the Whitechapel Art Gallery, announcing a major exhibition of the French artist Christian Boltanski, who calls himself a painter but does not paint. Rather, as the exhibition title indicates, he reconstitutes.

On first entering the main gallery, one is largely unaware of the transformation Boltanski has wrought upon the normally museum-like space of the Whitechapel. Glass cases contain examples of early mail art, carved sugar cubes, samples of hair, and strange knives. On one side metal gauze-covered trays jut from the wall containing reconstructions, in children's modelling clay, of objects from the artist's childhood; on the other, hang one block of framed, fading photographs of the 62 members of the Mickey Mouse Club, and another of the clothes of François C; while straight ahead is a wall of family album snapshots, the result of a curiously futile attempt by Boltanski to reconstruct someone else's family history.

It is only when one passes behind this wall into the main

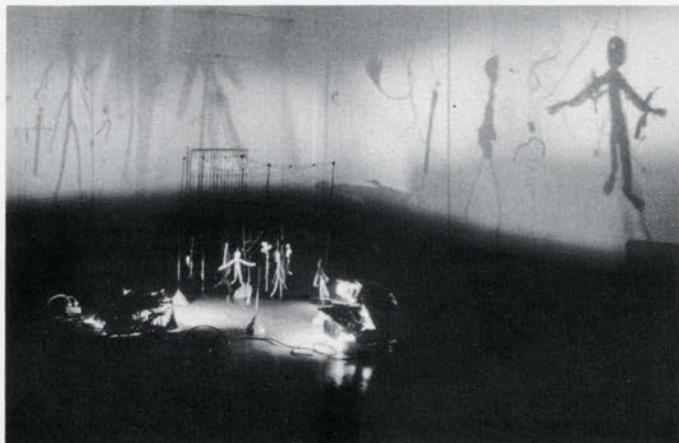
gallery, where a pallid light penetrates the drawn blinds, thin black lines cobweb over the walls and lamps reflect light from browning photographs of staring faces, that the significance of the clues provided by those works from the early '70s becomes apparent. The works in this area are from the Monument series, formal arrangements of frames, lights and images of faces. There is an air of ambivalent pathos as Boltanski begins to erode the viewer's distanced art viewing attitude, and to invade their personal emotional space. At the back of the main gallery are two rooms of shadows: *Les Ombres/ Les Anges* casts wavering shadows from two projectors rotating in contrary directions; while in a further room, viewed through a window, frail objects hanging from a crude frame cast further shadows, performing an ominous and ritualistic dance.

Upstairs the tone of the work darkens to oppressive proportions. The new gallery houses shelves of cardboard boxes filled with jumbled images of criminals and victims culled from a sensational French crime magazine; photographs are taped to the boxes, clip-on lamps shine, wires dangle, a notice states that the contents are organized indiscriminately. On one wall candles on narrow shelves cast shadows from small cut-out figures. The attendant, church warden-like, is equipped with a taper to rekindle these flames should they expire. In the corridor is a work made specifically for the Whitechapel

— four columns of tarnished tin boxes, wires and lamps — while in the gallery proper, more photographs of faces stare from the walls, along with more wires and more lamps. A shelving system of photographs wrapped in linen, that cloth favoured for shrouds, raises the question of whether these people are alive or dead. It becomes hard to see that this huge body of work is controlled, formally organized with great precision. Its sheer mass and symbolic, almost ritual, repetition of elements creates an experience more akin to wandering through a crypt, a memorial park, or a vast archive — which is exactly what it is: an archive of an artist's efforts to reconstitute his own life and the lives of others. Boltanski has built upon the realization that in most photographs, in most family albums, people look the same and that recognition of individuals is dependent upon memory or information not captured by the camera. A photographic record of a life is

like the dried out carapace of an insect when compared to the minutiae of actual experience which constitute life itself.

At this point in the exhibition one begins to feel that fellow spectators, like oneself, are struggling to maintain a sense of distance, a nervous desire to read labels, to reaffirm a sense of identity, but these labels are far from reassuring: 'reliquary', '364 dead Swiss' . . . Boltanski has stated that he wants to make people cry, that he wants the work to generate sentiment, unfashionable though this is. But if one were to succumb, for whom would one cry? The exhibition ends with a wall of used clothes collected from local second-hand dealers. It is a devastatingly ugly work, colourful, commonplace, yet in this context so pathetic and repulsive, so overpowering that it is almost impossible to look at. One leaves the spiral of increasingly demanding emotion which Boltanski has created in the Whitechapel, exhausted by



battling to maintain one's equilibrium.

This is a truly extraordinary exhibition, which has to be experienced, unfettered by the details which can be clarified later by the extensive archive in miniature which is the boxed catalogue — an exhibition which must establish Boltanski, to date largely ignored by British audiences, as an artist of great power and significance. This is art without concessions, of simple but great formal invention.

BLAENAU FFESTINIOG

Gwynedd

Will Menter and others

Cân Y Graig (Slate Voices)

Llechwedd Slate Caverns

Reviewed by Chris Cheek

Cân Y Graig (Slate Voices) toured North Wales during May. It's a combined arts performance for which composer/musician Will Menter has collaborated with singers, sculptors, musicians, textile artists and the Welsh poet Gwyn Thomas.

Blaenau Ffestiniog is a slate mining town built in one of the most extraordinary places among the mountains of North Wales. Sharp hills cut down to a valley railway, hills that bristle with leaves of slate.

In an underground chamber known as the 'Sinc', brought by the deep mine car to Level B of Llechwedd Slate Caverns at 450 feet, a sizeable audience gathers,

walking the wet stone corridors in blue and yellow hard hats to emerge by a green and yellow floodlit lake. The cavern is huge and serene with a clear 'wet' acoustic, it spits out space.

Cân Y Graig has come home to its roots. Of all the shows on this tour, such as Bangor University and the Welsh Slate Museum at Llanberis, this one feels truly appropriate as Site Specific Work. A song cycle forms the work's core, written in celebration of slate — inspired by the presence of the quarries themselves. It deals with the age of slate, of those who cut and gouge and split and prise it from the rock, of its qualities and its uses.

'Peswch injan (the coughing of an engine)

Wagenn'n Cloncian (the clanking of wagons)

Rheillau'n Clepian (the clapping of rails)

Slediau Fel Bustych Hadd-dy (sledges of rocks like heifers in a slaughterhouse)

Yn Herolan Hercian (jerking jerking)

Tua'r Felin (towards the mill)

So begins one particularly strong section in which a wry and understated contrast is drawn between the physical and social pain, the exploitation sometimes to the point of death involved in getting this stuff out of the ground and the uses that slate is put to. Disease (silicosis is a common problem for slate miners — basically it makes you breathless) can progress to a point at which a speaker needs to take a breath between every



word and the next. Yet the product achieved (human disease becomes a by-product in the market place), slate, forms roofing to keep people cosy and warm, it is the underlay for billiard and snooker tables and is a vehicle for information, a tool of history, in framed school classroom boards. This section ends in a neat summary by listing names for types of slate which in themselves simultaneously mock and convey stature, are affection or insult, have a double edge of class:

'Queens, Duchesses, Little Narrow Counties, Princes, Ladies, Little Doubles and Great (Doubles)

To make the world cosy.'

'Cwins a Dytjis a Chowntis Bach Culion,

Prinsus a Ladis, Dyblau

Bychain a Mawrion

I ddiddosi'r byd.'

To play this out etched in thickly textured scraping and digging, a violin broken away into solo also fusing its context, pushes and pulls, blends and

discards, joyous and contemptuous, on fire between hoe down and scratched slabs of harnessed noise. As such over rhythms layered as the purple slate tresses, that echo picks at a rockface, played on clattering percussion and marimbas themselves made out of slate (Menter names these Llechiphones). Augmented by archive film of a valley train emerging, through plumes of smoke, from a set of slide projections documenting in close-up the feel of the hills surrounding Blaenau itself.

Sections mostly segued into each other through taped interludes. This raucous swathe gives way to the nursery rhyme simplicity of:

'Tai, tai, toeau (houses, houses, roofs)

Gloyw, glkoyw yn y glaw;
(shining, shining in the rain;)

Tai, tai toeau

Glas a phorffor yn yr heulwen
(blue and purple in the sunlight).'

The archive films have been beautifully assembled. They progress as short takes filmed with great tenderness and respect but pulling no punches about conditions under which the miners were forced to work: footage of workers scrambling to avoid huge wedges of falling slate and momentarily surf boarding on the sheer rock.

Llechiphones have a clear fat tone and enough resonance for separate notes of a melody to blur. Other instruments used include large diameter plastic piping banged as a bass drum

with a fruity twang, lengths of plumbing pipe blown as digeridoos and 'Bambooziers', shortish lengths of thin bamboo that trickled down a string from high in the cavern moving by tension and friction in a stuttering collision pattern that sounded like a small distant avalanche of shale.

Cân Y Graig ended as the audience left for the surface after prolonged applause which gave us all a chance to fill this cavern with our own sounds. A litany of the names of those who died in mining accidents was shouted starkly out across the still deep lake, horn blows from the plumbing pipes reverberated and died.

Music, conception: Will Menter

Words: Gwyn Thomas

Voice: Sianed Jones

Textiles: Anne Menter, Barbara Disney

Sculpture and Film: Lucy Casson, Andy Hazell

Musicians: Henry Shaftoe, Mark Anderson, Ralf Dorrell, Sianed Jones, Will Menter.

BRIGHTON

Brighton Festival

Zap Club, Brighton Pavilion
Music Room and other venues

Reviewed by Ariane Koek

With the theme of this year's Brighton Festival being 'Curtain Up: the New Europe' it was surprising that there were only two Eastern European theatre companies in the whole programme: Drak Theatre from Czechoslovakia and the Russian

company Satyricon, making their British debut. Both companies had strong performance elements to them, breaking away from traditional theatrical styles. And their work was in fact probably the most performance-oriented in the whole festival: certainly much more convincingly so than the British 'performance' groups Man Act and Action Syndicate.

Drak Theatre, an extraordinary puppet/acting group, presented two of their most famous productions at the festival — their much-lauded production of *The Bartered Bride*, and the great Nordic myth, *The Mill of Kalevala*. What is so special about this company is the way in which the puppets and their handlers fuse into one, so that the distinction between puppet and puppeteer almost vanishes. Take for example a scene in *The Bartered Bride* in which the lovesick Johnny confronts the wicked Kecal who is trying to prevent him from marrying his true love. The puppet of Johnny is slapped threateningly in the handler's hands like a cosh, the facial and physical expressions of the puppeteer betraying this subtle swopping of identities. Throughout their performances, this circulation of power and identity — who is pulling the strings? who is controlling whom? — puts across a powerful political message which the company seeks to drive home — they are a people's theatre. In the programme, the players'/performers' names are not distinguished from one another, not even by the names of the

character they are portraying.

It is this theme of circulation of power and identity which is also central to Jean Genet's *The Maids*, which was presented by the all-male company Satyricon Theatre. Deliberately playing with the idea that textuality as much as sexuality is not fixed, this electrifying production is at once mixture of high camp, farce, tragedy, and pop. Konstantin Raikin — also the company's director, transforms himself seamlessly into Madame, the maids' enslaver, then into pouting singer of camp torch songs like Marilyn Monroe, and then a male striptease artist. The boundaries between reality and illusion are continually broken in an elaborate set, composed of mirrors, which at once distorts and transforms the action on the stage. There was no doubt that this company's energising performance was the highlight of an otherwise drab festival.

But what of the British performance companies? Man Act presented the premiere of their Zap Art/Brighton Festival commission, *Slow Dancing*, including people from Brighton in the show based on the gruelling marathon dances of the '30s in America. The spectacle of a marathon dance was faithfully reproduced, presided over by Philip MacKenzie, the show's designer, who doubled as the Master of Ceremonies. To say that the show was trite is an understatement. From the opening and highly patronising words of the compere — 'People have always danced, from the



aborigines to Kylie and Jason' — the performance was very one-dimensional, skating on the surface and using the concept of performance as a recreation of an event, not as a dynamic multi-layered exploration. All the audience was faced with were dancers pretending to be dancing for 4572 hours, slipping and sliding across the sawdust-strewn arena. The only moment of any interest, departing from conventional narrative theatre, was at the end, when the dancers each repeated a series of different actions and gestures to a deafening pulse of music, as if caught in a moment in time which endlessly repeats itself. But even that kind of sequence was a much-used performance trick.

The other performance piece at the Zap Club was *A Perfect Action* by Action Syndicate, which was billed as a cricket-

dance-opera. It was an exploration of masculinity and cricket, the English battlefield of male pride, and it sought to unravel the web of myths at its centre by using an all-woman troupe of dancers each of whom represented one of the cricketers: Botham or Gower, for example. But the piece never explored these ideas in any depth, and all too often toppled over into self-indulgence; for example, in the final scene in which the dreaming cricketing boy takes up a cricket bat strung like a guitar and plays/hits the ball. The electric bat seemed farcical and obvious, suggesting that *A Perfect Action* is a piece which has never got beyond its first draft.

A much more interesting work was *La Soupe*, an exotic dance/opera conceived by the performance group Carousel, which is a mixed group of performers with and without learning difficulties. The piece was based on the writings and poems of some of the performers, with dances and music conceived by Liz Aggiss and Bill Cowie, and the performers' texts also sung by the Bhangra singer, Parrujit Pammi. The performance was set in the Brighton Pavilion's Music Room, making it a powerful statement about privilege, exclusion and the appropriation of culture. The performance was spliced through with pieces by the heavily expressionist dance group Divas, which performed oddly surreal pieces, with teapots on their heads and soup ladles in the air. *La Soupe* proved that

performance can be a liberating structure, open to everyone, beckoning a rethinking of political and social boundaries.

Illustration: Satyricon Theatre

GLASGOW

**Edge 90: Cornelia Parker,
Mark Thompson**

Dundas Vale Teachers'
Centre

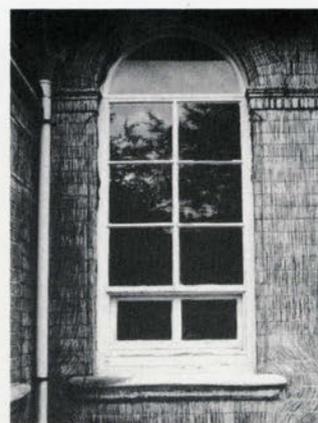
Reviewed by David Hughes

Of all the installations at Dundas Vale, the one which drew most effectively on the educational associations of the building was *Exhale Schoolhouse*, a site-specific chalk drawing by Cornelia Parker. On a red-brick school-room in the yard of the teachers' centre, which resembles nothing so much as a fortified barracks, Parker drew chalk marks, as though all the chalk that had been used in that room over the hundred-odd years of its existence had oozed out, trickled down its walls, covering its bricks with a kind of bird-dropping calcium deposit, or an ectoplasmic materialisation of the spirit of the building. The marks are so consistent, vertical marks the height of each brick, about a quarter of an inch apart, so obsessive, so regular that it takes some time to detect their presence. The building simply looks grey and pink. What finally gives the game away is the curved lines that mark the poles of the stone window sills and the blue chalk (apparently snooker

cue chalk), at the edge of the building which adjoins a snooker hall. The curved lines look like presentations of the effect of magnetic poles on iron filings, registering energy and tension. A vertiginous feeling accompanies the realisation that the building is completely covered.

Part of this vertiginous feeling comes from the connection with the prisoner's habit of marking off the days of captivity; the building becomes an island in this playground with the lives of those who have passed through it marked off on the wall. It evokes Robinson Crusoe's desert island or a child's etching of its initials into a desk-top. The marks of the life of the building are complete. It is as though the building has had a line drawn under it, to mark it off. The playground is now a parking lot and the lines demarking the parking spaces continue some way up the school-house wall. These lines connect the lines of force of the building with the ground, making the building seem squatter, bearing down on the ground, into the ground. It's terrifying, as though the work of a doomed prisoner.

Approach to Mark Thompson's installation, a version of his *A House Divided* project, is made by way of an unlit spiral staircase which leads into the bell tower of the Dundas Vale Centre. At the foot of the stairs is a small phial of honey stopped with a cork and sealed with wax, alongside which, almost unreadable in the shadows, is the legend of the



idiot boy from the *History of Selbourne*. The idiot boy was obsessed by bees and was the bane of the local bee-keepers' lives. He would catch the bees and drink their honey. He died before manhood, the clipping tells us, as though cocooned, himself, in the hive of his life with bees.

In a first room at the top of the stairs there is nothing, but the window has been blocked out with amber beeswax and an amber glow vibrates in the room which exudes the smell of warm wax and honey. Already the sound of bees has reached the intrepid viewer. What awaits one in this room 101? Are the bees loose, will they swarm and engulf me like in a John Carpenter film? The room is very dark today, the sunlight low, so that hardly any light is let in through the amber wax bricks which also block this window. The installation looks like some kind of medical life-support system but could as easily be an instrument of torture. There is a seat beneath

the glass case and a hole in the bottom of the hive through which the person sitting on the chair can put his head, or have his head forced. The photo on the poster for this exhibition is one of Mark Thompson with his head in the hive and an oxygen mask on his mouth, a constricting circle of wood around the crown of his head. The mind immediately projects Thompson's head into the hive, and imagines what it would like to have one's own in there.

The dark worker bees, not at all charming, make circuits of the box, dropping down onto the floor with sickening plops. A funnel leads from the top of the cage out to an upper window from which they can escape and return. I begin to wonder who the idiot is. Thompson for putting his head into this den of vipers, or me, for standing so close to imminent death? I leave without delay.

But invigilator Malcolm Jamieson tells me that he finds the experience very calming, almost meditative, and not at all horror-movie. I go up again, this time with a borrowed torch, which I only used to read the clipping. Lots of people are going through the exhibition by now and the room is heating, the smell of honey and wax intensifying. I talk to the spectators as they go through. Most like it a lot, think they'd like to sit and close their eyes and daydream of the country. Strange.

It is impossible to avoid the connection with Joseph Beuys'



coyote piece, or with the manner in which fat, felt and animals functioned in his work. But all we know is that Thompson has worked as an artist, and bee-keeper, with bees for the last 16 years. In Berlin, his hive with bees from east and west had a distinctly political edge. Here, the installation can only really be an exercise in atmospherics. But intriguingly, the same conditions can either be read as intensely threatening or immensely comforting.

Illustrations: Cornelia Parker and Mark Thompson

LIVERPOOL

North Face

Bluecoat Chambers

Reviewed by Sean Cubitt

The Bluecoat Gallery in the heart of Liverpool continues its exceptional programming with four commissioned video installations on themes of living in the North of England. To

some extent, the show exhibits the strengths and weaknesses of most commissioned art. Isabella Emslie and Ivan Unwin centre on the destruction/reconstruction cycles of the North. Unwin's work is more focused on the work of demolition and features a sound score that menaces as much as the darkened space it occupies. Emslie engages not only with the rebuilding characteristic of so many areas (here the Mersey waterfront) but also with the ways in which they are most typically seen: from the new suburb, the moving window of the private car. At the same time, her mix of slide and video insists upon the permanence of the river itself in the cycle of urban decay and regeneration. Politically I doubt it: the river I know is dead and dirty. Aesthetically, the work almost makes it believable.

Sarah Haynes' *Guaranteed for Life* and *Theme Shopping Time Bomb Park* by Mike Stubbs and Dick Powell are concerned with the rise of consumerism in the '80s, and the ways it has shifted relations between people and their environments. Haynes' piece surrounds its monitors in a canopy of garish shopping bags, and accompanies each screen with a note on the scale of private debt on Merseyside: the new impoverishment of the working class. At the same time, the performances recorded on screen feel as if they should have been live, or in some way less cryptic about their relations to one another and within each screen.



The Stubbs/Powell work occupies a space decked in floral wallpaper and illuminated with ultraviolet; on the walls mementos of past production/construction-based industries — shovel, helmet, pick. Three benches with audio and video fittings invite you to sit beside a B-boy dummy, carrying a monitor like a ghetto blaster, or to sit at the back where a child's voice recites new nursery rhymes of credit and debt. In front looms a truncated wooden pyramid topped by a funeral bouquet, in which a closed circuit monitor plays back from four sites nearby, one of them trained on you as you sit in the best vantage. The brightest images come from outside the gallery, in the street, and from a toy town inside the pyramid. The last is a dim and misty image of yourself watching in the ultraviolet light. In its interweaving of surveillance and reflection, its ability to work with and through high and low culture alike, the work seemed to

me the most successful on offer.

It is true, though, that no one piece really lives up to its promise. The disappointment many visitors felt must, I believe, stem from the conditions under which resource-dependent work is made throughout the UK. No artist or critic is ungrateful for the chance to make and see work of this kind, but the problem of the thematic commission remains.

Illustration: Ivan Unwin

NEWCASTLE

Edge 90:

Various venues

Reviewed by Malcolm Dickson

I risk stating the obvious in saying that promotion and not expression characterises the curatorship of activities outside the conventional gallery structure. This is an unfortunate

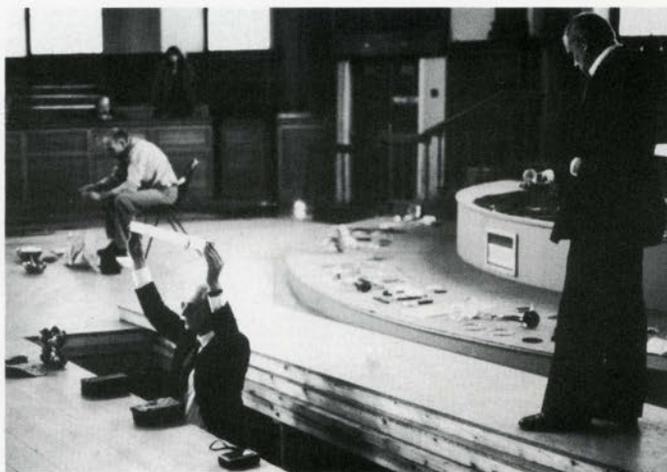
fact, however, since it seems that what is required today is a reassessment of what 'experimental' art is, who its audience might be and how new ways of working might emerge throughout the '90s. 'Edge 90' seems less concerned with this type of question than with the creation of an alternative art show, 'an organic art village' made possible by the soon-to-be-refurbished urban environment it utilises (usually derelict sites), where 'art precedes gentrification', as Oliver Bennett states in the catalogue introduction.

'Edge' was spread over thirteen days and involved a multitude of installations, most of which were held in Hanover Street Warehouse, which also hosted 'The Observatory', an international collection of artists' videos. There were a number of performances in a variety of venues and limited discussion on related themes at a two-day conference session, 'Art and Everyday Life in the '90s'. My own exposure to 'Edge' happened in the final four days, so a broad impression of all the works is reluctantly exchanged here for a very selective exposure.

A lasting image from 'Edge 90' was provided by Marina Abramović's performance *Boat Emptying Stream Entering*: five pythons symbolising the five elements were placed on her head, the performer sitting motionless within a circle of ice blocks intended to contain the snakes, whilst these slowly moved through the sixty-minute

piece. Whilst Abramović's performance was static and silent, Black Market's forty-five-minute one was lively and aggressive. Littered with gadgets and toys, punctuated by noises, it involved a seemingly loose structure around which the several male participants built up an effective piece of visual anarchy. Black Market's members, who from time to time come together to perform, are drawn from a variety of countries. On this occasion it was composed of Tomas Rutter, Jürgen Fritz, Norbert Klassen, Boris Nieslony, Nigel Rolfe and Alastair MacLennan; each contributed fragments from his own work. This at times gave rise to a lack of coherence but such clashes also afforded unexpected pleasures. The idea of a pan-European group of artists with a shifting make-up and growing membership indicates a fruitful way forward.

The anticipation of a new internationalism and a much more radical position was in evidence at 'Edge 90' through the presence of the Mexican artist Guillermo Gomez Pena. As well as undertaking a performance at the festival, he made a few pirate radio broadcasts. Although intended to interrupt the airwaves of Tyneside's local station, they went out on their own frequency, thereby minimising the interventionist intentions of the artist. As a 'Border Artist', he works between 2 cultures — as part of a rich urban pop and political culture in Mexico, and as part of



a new wave of 'multi-cultural' artists (white supremacy's definition, not his) in California. It is the collision between the two cultures that his broadcasts — and his work as a whole — deal with, combining autobiographical segments and storytelling in a mixture of English and Spanish.

A 'vernacular chronicler' and a 'media interventionist', Gomez Pena recognises the importance of changing positions and moving between definitions as a strategy to avoid the tailoring of 'radical art'. Such a stance might at first seem antithetical to an enterprise such as 'Edge 90', but as is often the case with big events, the curators market the package — in this case Art and Everyday Life — and hope that some of the artists will blow it apart to maintain credibility. The creation of a multiplicity of voices away from the centre and the setting up of models of artistic self-determination presents the most important

challenge for artists in the '90s. How big organisations in the pursuit of financial backing contribute to that and outsmart their own packages is an issue which seems no less important.

Illustration: Black Market

RHYMNEY

Gwent

Brith Gof

Los Angeles

Old Whitbread Brewery

Reviewed by Penny Simpson

In *Los Angeles*, Welsh language theatre company Brith Gof continue in their tradition of creating radical new languages. An exploratory work, it is one of several studies being use by the company as preparation for their next large-scale project *Pax*, which tours Britain and the European continent from September. Even in this 'draft' form, however, there is a strong suggestion of the remarkable

possibilities that will be opened up with the development of a new aerial dimension.

The aerodynamics are achieved by the introduction of a pulley system, which extends simultaneously the boundaries of the performance space and the range of gesture available to the performers. The result is a spectacular and unconventional re-interpretation of traditional religious iconography, set out in a striking tableau of visual images that integrate superbly with John Hardy's electronic soundtrack.

By working in the elements of air and earth, the two performers, Marc Rees and Mike Pearson, manage to sustain an extraordinary impact on the audience, who gather around a circular sawdust arena situated far below their suspended, curled bodies. Slowly they are seen to unfold from these foetal positions, setting up a pattern of gestures that are repeated on the ground level — palms shielding faces and shaking, shuddering steps that accompany their individual descents from the rafters; all work to suggest impending catastrophe in their 'fall' to earth. The impression given is very much that of alien creatures being forced to acclimatise to unfamiliar terrain.

The build-up of tension — the struggle of one angel to emerge from a tank of water placed on top of a metal framework which dominates the circle centre — contrasts with moments of great stillness. On one occasion, for example, the two performers descend strapped together by



their harnesses creating a 'frozen still' that echoes a Renaissance Deposition. Danger is evoked by the angels choking on soot and water; sometimes they are laid out shaking like discarded, malfunctioning mechanised toys. In previous works like *Goddodin* and *EXX-1*, the sense of threat spilled out into the space occupied by the audience; here, it is contained within the sawdust circle, limited to the interaction between performers. It will be interesting to see how this intensely physical way of working will be adopted to the libretto/text being written by Lis Hughes Jones for the finished touring work, consisting of a series of letters from an astronaut to his mother.

Cliff McLucas' distinctive scenography is another key component of this work, drawing natural elements — water, rocks, lilies — into contact with the technical world, represented here by the eight flickering TV screens placed

along the edges of the circle. In the middle space, hung between the suspended 'angels' and the audience, are large plastic bags filled with soot and water, used during the process of exploration to paint the bodies of the performers. The shadowy interior of the disused brewery is another important design element. The mechanized flight of the performers finds a contrast in the movement of bats, which flit in and out of the rafters after being disturbed by the spotlights focusing on the 'angels' winched up into their midst.

Before the work began, the audience had made a trip by coach to the site, which remained unidentified until the very last minute, a device which further enhanced the idea of the transforming experience to follow. And it is the surreal, poetic landscape produced by this riveting fusion of design, architecture, music and aerial performance that remains in the memory.

AMSTERDAM

John Jesurun

Everything That Rises Must Converge

Schaffy Theatre

Reviewed by Tim Etchells

For eight years American John Jesurun has been working at the interface between performance, film and video. He has often used groups of live performers in direct interaction/dialogue/conversation with performers on



video or film, sometimes transferring characters from one medium to another over the course of a piece. More radically, he has pursued the theatrical appropriation of film and video effects or structuring devices: camera pans, jump cuts, dissolves and soap-style narratives. The latest piece, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, is full of very exciting ideas, dazzling formalities and pretty good jokes. Here a number of mutually exclusive texts are intercut and overlaid, gaining associations and links with time. The audience is divided into two and seated on opposite sides of a wall that runs across the stage. There are tables attached to each side of the wall, whilst up above are ten monitors, five facing one audience and five facing the other. The actors are also divided, some on one side of the wall, some on the other.

The general tone suggests that a second of low-budget TV high-drama has been sampled and then

repeated till the cows come home. There's archaic talk of kings and cardinals placed next to message machines, translators, discos and decoders. The constant puns and double puns, references and repetitions mean that its world is never more than a jumbled linguistic construct through which the ghost-echoes of a story, or stories, can be heard.

However the combination of fragmented word play and cool structure produce a very alienating effect. The impression is often of a single conversation that has been divided at random between the seven live performers; and although there are developments, nothing ever really matters much. Neither the rotation of the wall so that audience perspective on the action is altered nor the slow changes in the kind of shots relayed by the camera operators produce very much effect. The rotations and fragments of rock songs that go with them are ideal punctuation points; but the climax, in which the wall spins and spins at high speed while the 'king' and 'queen' are lying flat on the tables attached to it, seems to come rather late in the day.

The main problem, I think, is in the balance of the piece: the generic references to intrigues and conspiracies, and the physical isolation of the characters help create a situation packed with narrative drive, whilst all the time a formal architecture holds this, and the characters, in check. In principle

this is very sound but unfortunately on this showing the two elements never quite work hand in hand and neither implied narrative(s) nor formal or rhythmical structure ever really pay off. The last twenty minutes especially are marred by the two structures appearing to be out of synch, one promising to wind itself up just as the other lurches and renews itself. These problems are exacerbated by a slight clumsiness in the narrative revelations and some quite noticeable inconsistencies in the performances, particularly from Larry Tighe who strayed too far from the clipped-and-rapid-fire style established by the rest of the cast.

All this said, there are some excellent achievements in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*; and chief amongst them is the vivid and real-time manner in which it deals with its concerns. Given a distrusting and conspiratorial fiction, a world where mediated and unmediated experience are inexorably and perpetually entwined, its tactic is not to *describe* but to *place us inside*. Fear spreads: before long the audience suspect that some of the monitor images might be disinformation, taped characters masquerading as real ones. They are right. Analysis spreads: we find ourselves in complex calculations about which action we're watching most — mediated or live. I noted, with vague TV-addict guilt, that the second-hand won out via the utter seductiveness of those faces that are removed, but that look right

at you when they speak. In the end, even double-guessing spreads, and the strength of the piece becomes clear: we find ourselves trying to work out just what the other audience can see, trying to calculate the other side, other subjectivities, other transcriptions of the code.

ANTWERP

**Anna Teresa de
Keersmaeker**

Stella

deSingel

Reviewed by Tim Etchells

Stella, the seventh full-length piece choreographed by Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker, is both dazzling and self-confident. Earlier pieces, like *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983), had a sharp uniformity and minimalism in which costume, setting, dance language, and overall architecture were tightly pared down and controlled. Set against this came small details: tiny idiosyncrasies in the dancers' steps, brief individual moments of resting, of tying shoes, of smiling or of watching. No matter how much one admired these details, and their provocative place within the work, the weight always lay, in the end, with the universality of the group.

Stella takes hold of this earlier work and, with a passing nod to contemporary theatricals The Wooster Group and Need Company, calmly breaks it all apart. Somewhere at its centre perhaps is the same chorus of women from *Rosas* or

Mikrokosmos; women in temporary freedom from direct male power, women in simple black dresses, women who run together, tumble and fall. But there are big changes too. For a start there are few sections where the five women are pulled together in dance. Mostly they don't dance at all. Instead they have verbal texts with accompanying movements, drawn from theatrical or literary sources. There are shared elements of content or theme in these texts, but there's no attempt to homogenise purpose or style; they are from different eras, in different languages, performed in different ways. The women rarely collaborate and, although they sometimes watch each other with interest, most of the interaction comes through their attempts to interrupt or upstage.

In this chaotic context the dancing serves as a binding agent, but it too has changed. The structures used are looser and cooler, and the drop-outs more frequent. The composure and speed we've seen before are challenged by humour and ungainliness, as though the women enjoy themselves, wryly refusing to conform. At other times the old composure is challenged by desperation, and the women roll and thrash as though scared that this dancing itself might not work anymore.

Like much of the best in new performance, *Stella* foregrounds the processes of theatrical presentation. The space is a clutter of props and chairs, the

hanging back and side walls only the backs of cheap theatre flats. In this space the women exist on two levels: as the black dressed performers who dance, watch, change costumes and wait; and also as the products of the found texts they are trying to perform. These texts are drawn from Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Goethe's *Stella* and Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. The women are all defined by their uneasy relationships; with men and with themselves. One is an alcoholic, two are victims of rape, one is an innocent on her way to being hurt. The male world is present only in its looming absence. As they run, yell and laugh their way through the piece, the women constantly undercut all their roles, gaining and shedding costumes to underline the change, dropping from high drama to a smile at the audience, replaying moments as though rehearsing, or looking away in discomfort when someone else goes too far.

The purer choreography and the self-generated content of the earlier pieces has not been replaced with theatre, found material and wholesale undercutting as part of some apologetic failure of nerve, but because of a very clear contemporary understanding of the way we manage our identities. In problematizing performance, and in challenging the purity of her work, de Keersmaeker asks questions about our abilities to construct and present ourselves for the world.

Such questions, dramatized or handed to us on a plate, would be pointless. Instead we are thrown into the thick of things; the demands and responsibilities of the audience are repeatedly challenged and brought to the fore. Very often, for example, the women just look at each other, with concern or with complete indifference. De Keersmaecker asks, what is it to watch? What is it to witness? What do we want? In one section, which uses Ligeti's *Music for 100 Metronomes*, the debate about the role of the audience takes on a mocking, confrontational aspect. Here the metronomes are set moving in a delicate cacophony across the front of the stage and it soon becomes clear that the performers will simply wait for them to run down. How long this section lasts in measured time I couldn't say, but by turns it is boring, tetchy, comic and sublime.

We are present at an event which, although public, often makes demands by being reserved, by taking its time, by keeping its distance. At first we are bombarded with texts which we're unlikely to understand, or which remain cryptically incomplete. The text drawn from Blanche Dubois works especially well in this respect because what started life as dialogue is here only monologue, a string of nervous rhetoric, rushed out to the audience with no real hope of reply. Blanche's text becomes the nexus of a thousand aspirations and doubts; the private, the



public and the artistic all bound together on the stage.

'I don't know if I can turn the trick anymore . . .'
'Is it dangerous to be tender?'
'Are you listening to me?'
'I don't know if I can turn the trick anymore . . .'

In their fluorescent-lit arena the dancers struggle with the fragments of their roles, their precedents and myths, just as we in the audience must struggle with ours.

In *Stella*, de Keersmaecker uses a form which perfectly suits the complexities of our contemporary situation. There are some structural weaknesses, especially the relative ill-definition of two of the dancers, but it does remain a considerable achievement. It may be bleaker and less transcendent than previous pieces, and it may also be a harder ride for traditional dance audiences, but in moving away from a collective optimism

it has found a voice that is vital, effective and honest.

Part of this review was reproduced in the programme accompanying the showing of Stella in Glasgow.

Books

Susan Bassnett (ed.)

Magdalena

Berg, £12.95

Tadeusz Kantor

Wielopole/Wielopole

Marion Boyars, £14.95

Reviewed by David Hughes

Susan Bassnett's account of the Magdalena Project is as disappointing as the project itself. Or rather, because the project never realised the aims it set for itself, the book can only be an account of the hindrances, disappointments and failures along the way. At various times Magdalena was an attempt to find a women's theatre language and an attempt to clear a space free of hierarchic and patriarchal structures in which women could work creatively together. Because there was such an ambivalence on the part of Jill Greenhalgh, the project director, to taking creative lead, it seemed that the women themselves fell back into received structures of work and the power structures of regular theatre. An attempt to circumvent a hierarchic structure, then, allowed its return. The performance project which finally came out of the series of meetings and conferences was directed by Zofia Kalinska, a long-time performer with Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre, whose work, by all accounts, was powered by an Oedipal reaction against those years of Kantorian tyranny. Perhaps the daemonic woman she was seeking to release in her actresses was the archetype constructed from, or to give shape to, her own rage.



from: *Tadeusz Kantor, Wielopole/Wielopole.*

The conclusion of the project and the book seems to be that a women's theatre is one that deals with female issues, a question of content, rather than form.

Zofia Kalinska also makes an appearance in *Wielopole/Wielopole, An Exercise in Theatre*, by Tadeusz Kantor. A book can't capture a performance, of course, and this is particularly true of Kantor's work where the visual dimension frequently works in direct opposition to the textual. This book, then, collects together those particularly textual elements with a fine collection of production photos. Kantor's work photographs supremely well, the stage image been conceived in monochrome. I was only sorry that the book wasn't produced on glossy paper so that the photos had even greater impact.

An introduction by G.M. Hyde, who also co-translated, is excellent. It economically binds together Kantor's artistic development, the art movements he has passed through and absorbed, and his relation to the texts of Gombrowicz, Schulz and, of course, Witkiewicz. He particularly illuminates Kantor's use of space in both the sense of 'space of memory' and the theatre space, making use of Kantor's own manifesto-like writings. Equally illuminating is his reference to the seeming lack of Freudianism in Kantor's scheme of things. Hyde puts this down to a rejection of 'totalizing' philosophies such as Freudianism and Marxism. It would be too

simplistic to argue, with Hyde, that this is because of what he calls Freud's 'low profile' in present day Poland. Much more to the point is his contention that 'Kantor's art is *against interpretation*: to rationalise the irrational is no part of his purpose . . . (his) view of the world is posited upon randomness, chaos, fragmentariness.' Random and fragmentary, but hardly chaotic, *Wielopole/Wielopole* serves Kantor handsomely.

Barry Miles
Ginsberg: A Bibliography
 Viking-Penguin, £20

Reviewed by Rick Gekoski

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix . . .

Who was this madman? It is almost impossible to reconstruct the effect the words had on us as American teenagers, back in the late '50s. We still pledged allegiance to the flag, built fall-out shelters and went to proms; we liked Ike, and dreamed of getting a Corvette, or laid. Nor were we entirely Philistine. I'd read Whitman and Blake, so I recognized the voice, a little. I knew about free verse, but I didn't know it could be that free.

It wasn't long before it hit the news: they were called Beatniks, they lived in Greenwich Village.

They drank coffee and smoked reefers, wore sandals and beards, and called each other 'Man'. And they were all poets, every one; but especially Allen Ginsberg.

By the time we got there to check it out, he was gone. To San Francisco. And, in retrospect, it seems as if an entire post-War generation of Americans spent their formative years tracking Allen. You could get glimpses of his shaggy head, way up ahead, doing his own thing. He'd been on the road, everywhere: there he was with that Dr Leary from Harvard; chatting with Fidel Castro; protesting about some country called Viet Nam; on the front lines, at the Chicago Convention in 1968; on stage, with the Beatles, or Dylan; chanting OM, OM, like a hairy prefigurement of E.T., and talking about Buddhism; setting up underground magazines and poetry festivals and institutes; expanding, moving on, unmasking, taking his clothes off. And most of all, throughout, fucking, unabashed, celebratory: men, sometimes women, everybody. Sex was good. It was OK to be homosexual. It was OK to fuck, to talk and write about it, and everything.

Rereading the poetry — soon to be issued in a proper *Collected Works* — it may not seem possible to make a case for Ginsberg as a poet of the first order. Or so one thinks. But I remember hearing Ginsberg read, sometime in the mid-70s. The sections from *Howl*, and a moving segment of that great

lament for the death of his mother, *Kaddish*, were perfectly fresh and immediate. But then came something new: Allen had set some Blake lyrics to music, and sang them with Orlovsky, accompanied by Steven Taylor. We'd never heard the like: the room seemed to glow with the spirit of the verse, an ecstatic chorus rose and grew, and rebounded round the room — 'and all the hills echo-ed, and all the hills echo-ed.' The room was animated by Blake — I'd never understood him before — eerie, and thrilling. It made us rethink what a poem was, and what it used to — and still could — be.

It is Barry Miles' thesis, in this admirably cogent and sympathetic study of Ginsberg, not merely that we need to take Ginsberg into account when we think of the post-War years, but that their major cultural developments are quite impossible without him. The son of a Patterson, New Jersey poet and left-wing activist, Ginsberg inherited from his father a reverence for the power of the word, and the need to be involved; from his sad, psychotic mother, plagued by hallucination and paranoia, a fascination with, and reverence for, the unexplored undergrowth, the dangerous and forbidden. It was a heady combination; it would have broken most people, but it made Allen, and making him, us.

Records

Allen Ginsberg
The Lion for Real
 Antilles, AN8750

Reviewed by Chris Cheek

Surprisingly, after several more than just dodgy blues albums, Ginsberg turns in his best piece of work for years. It's not particularly radical lyrically or musically. He has wisely taken Marianne Faithful's advice that 'maybe you shouldn't sing' to heart, and reads straight down the line. It's a strong, balanced and varied set, 16 poems in all, over half of which are from his earlier collections between '48 and '58. Yes, it's 'classic' Beat material and here finally are the musicians to do it justice: several names will be familiar from recent albums by Tom Waits, such as Marc Ribot, Michael Blair and Ralph Carney who mix it adeptly with the likes of Arto Lindsay from the New York downtown New Music scene.

It doesn't tell you to PLAY IT LOUD anywhere in the cover copy, but you should. Played loud, the full and surprisingly dark textures of their musical arrangements, hidden at background-listening volumes, come forward. These are mixes with a depth which belies initial suspicions of shallow cliché.

As for the poems, it's a strong introductory batch, and acts as a taster for the Collected Poems 1947-80. Honesty, paranoia, self-mockery, name-checking, dreams, magic realism, self-induced delusion, brilliant juxtaposition, sex and religion all feature here. With some echoes

of Liverpool Scene pieces, such as 'The Entry Of Christ into Liverpool', this does go some way towards bringing that old beast of poetry and music back onto centre stage. Ginsberg himself says in the sleeve notes to 'Kraj Majales' that it is 'the most perfect poetry music recording I've done — unobstructed exaltation, every syllable chanted conscious'. Great late-night reading-listening.



from: Allen Ginsberg,
The Lion for Real.

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