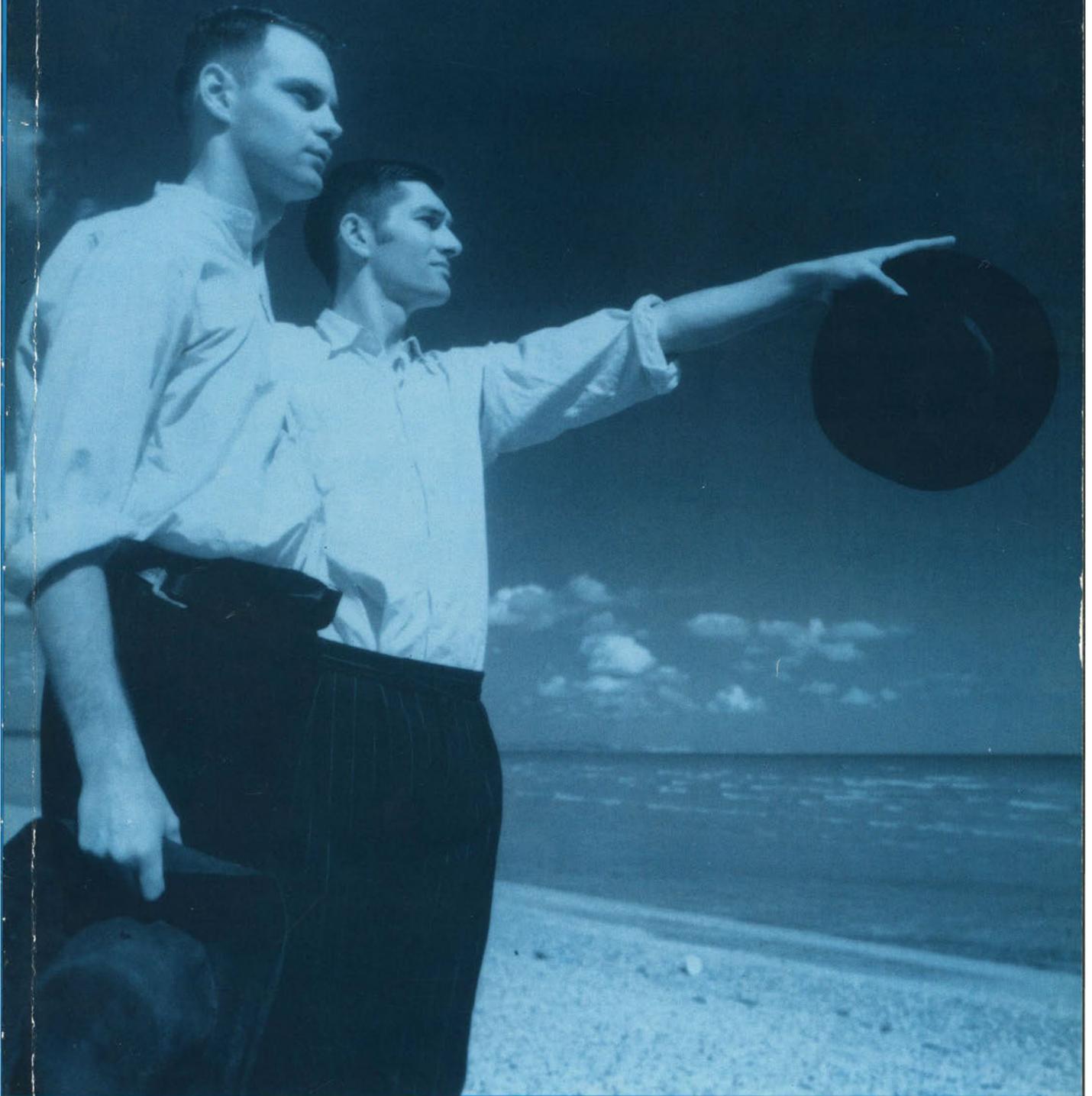


# Performance

March 1991 No 63 £4.50



**Yoko Ono      National Review of Live Art**

**Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit      Yoshi Oida**

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# Contents

## Performance

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**Derek Jarman, *The Garden*, 1990**,  
92 mins, Super-8/video  
transferred to 35mm.

Back Cover:  
**Christian Boltanski, *The Missing House*, 1990**, Grosse Hamburger Str., Berlin (East). From the exhibition 'Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit'. (Photo Christina Bolduan)

	<b>Editorial</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Gray Watson and Rob La Frenais</i>	<b>The Poetry of the Personal</b> In Conversation with Yoko Ono	<b>9</b>
<i>David Hughes, John Jordan, Nancy Reilly and Tony White</i>	<b>Glasgow Glimpses</b> Four Views of the National Review of Live Art	<b>17</b>
<i>Hans Dickel</i>	<b>Frontiers of Freedom</b> Notes on Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit	<b>25</b>
<i>Betty Caplan</i>	<b>Travelling Light</b> A Meeting with Yoshi Oida	<b>43</b>
	<b>Reviews</b>	<b>48</b>
	Opera Factory; Gaby Agis; Live Art Week; Brith Gof; Bruce McLean and Catherine Tucker; TSWA Four Cities Project (Newcastle); Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy; Long Tongues; Robert Wilson	
	<b>Films</b>	<b>58</b>
	Derek Jarman	
	<b>Books</b>	<b>60</b>
	Welfare State Handbook Body, Space, Image Oskar Schlemmer Diaries	
	<b>International Festivals and Art Gatherings</b>	<b>62</b>



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## Editorial

**T**he avant-garde is suffering from a severe loss of nerve. There are individuals - amongst them the best artists working today - who still believe in art's ability, in however subtle a way and over however long a time span, radically to transform our perception of the world; who in effect take it for granted, even if they might prefer not to express it too straightforwardly, that if the transformation of our perception of the world is not the only purpose of artistic activity, it is certainly one of the principal ones. But such individuals remain isolated. There are no groups even vaguely resembling, say, the Constructivists or the Surrealists, in their enthusiastic promotion of new visions or in their collective zeal to use the arts as key elements in much wider processes of revolutionary change.

Many, of course, would argue that this is hardly surprising, since conditions have altered so drastically. Not only has the twentieth century been beset by deep disappointments, in the effects both of technological progress and of political revolution; but the rise of a new mass culture has rendered the avant-garde, at least in that sense, irrelevant. For all their frequent rhetoric about championing the masses, the classic avant-gardes were circumscribed to a far greater extent than they realized by the terms of reference of the traditional culture which they were attacking, a culture which was the preserve of a then still dominant educated upper and upper middle class. Indeed the avant-gardists needed that class, as an adversary and as an audience. Since then, the traditional values against which they were railing have been swept away far more effectively by other, and arguably far more democratic, forces.

If (one often heard line of argument runs) one finds the consensus form of mass cultural values as horrendous as the traditional values they have replaced, then there is no point in looking towards any highbrow avant-garde to bring about changes. Rather, what hope there is lies with certain dissident subcultural groups whose terms of reference (TV, popular music, fashion, etc.) are close to those of the now dominant mass culture and which are, therefore, equipped to fight it from within.

There is no doubt that certain subcultural groups do operate to bring about changes in values in the wider culture, in ways which show interesting analogies with some of the ambitions of the avant-garde; and

certainly such groups go a great deal further in that direction than the narrowly formalist kind of 'avant-garde' which is concerned merely with overturning conventions in this or that particular artistic medium. It is very foolish, however, to exaggerate the extent of these changes. The amount of conceptual manoeuvring possible for any group, or individual, in whose frame of reference the values of entertainment and fashion feature prominently, is exceedingly limited.

A much more sophisticated argument is that, because of the profusion of images and texts with which we are now deluged, it is no longer meaningful for a serious artist to produce any new images or texts, the only remaining option being the recycling of existing ones. Again, it is the exclusivity of the argument that needs rebutting. Certainly, the re-cycling of images can produce work which makes certain types of insight possible: Warhol's work, notably, was a shining example of how the precise manner in which images are re-presented can create a wholly new and historically relevant aesthetic, one which successfully encapsulates many of the principal features of contemporary experience. Nor is there any doubt that much of the more recent work which can broadly be seen as stemming from his position (both in the fine art and theatre contexts) has made a number of further valid contributions to our understanding of the world we live in. But the insights derived in this way can only go so far.

The argument that only re-cycling is possible becomes pernicious as soon as it is used as a way of refusing to engage with images and texts which *are* new and original. And it is often used in this way. In particular, the concept of 'post-modernism' - whose meaning, outside the realm of architecture, is almost wholly nebulous - is used to perform a linguistic sleight of hand: on the one hand, it is promoted as in a sense universal and all-pervasive, the only possible sensibility in an era when 'modernism' - always rather reductively defined - is supposed to have failed; and on the other hand, it is identified with a very specific sensibility, characterized mainly by irony, detachment and a barely concealed cynicism. Any work which does not fit in with this sensibility can therefore be dismissed as hopelessly 'modern', which is to say, out of date.

Many of the critics championing this exclusivist position are of course partly or wholly disillusioned Marxists. Used for most of this century to having a virtual monopoly on all revolutionary thinking, if it is to include the

social domain, they react with no small annoyance to anyone who dares to propose other, more radical and far-reaching visions than theirs. Or rather, they are for the most part too stupid to see them. The unwarranted prestige which their particularly pedestrian ideology still continues even now to enjoy in avant-garde circles is both a symptom and a contributory cause of the avant-garde's loss of self-confidence.

More than ever, as old ideologies show their inadequacy, new visions are needed. The fact that a certain type of revolution, pushed through by arrogant, intolerant and power-hungry demagogues, manifestly does not produce the effect that artists and intellectuals had rather naïvely hoped from it, in no way means that we are stuck for ever with the form of society which we have now, or that the idea of any form of revolutionary change is automatically invalid. Nor does the pervasive power of mass media culture mean that there is no place for those who do not confine themselves to its terms of reference.

Far from being obsolete, the avant-garde's greatest contribution is yet to come. How quickly it will realize its potential will inevitably depend in large part on social and historical developments beyond its control. But it will also depend, crucially, on the extent to which the avant-garde comes to understand the significance of its own specific and unique resources - on the extent, it could be said, to which it succeeds in recovering its nerve.

*Gray Watson*

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# 63

**This issue is framed by meetings with two artists (one working, despite a connection with pop music, in the context of fine art; the other in that of theatre) who, in their different ways, share – in addition to Japanese ancestry and the same initials – a feeling for the light, the fleeting and the poetic: Yoko Ono and Yoshi Oida. In between these meetings, we are taken to Glasgow – where we are afforded four glimpses of the National Review of Live Art, in which performance art and installation work are mixed with visual theatre, cabaret and other hybrid forms – and then on to Berlin, for a guided tour of the site-specific works on both sides of the former state frontier (and in some cases right on it) which together made up the unique exhibition 'Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit', conceived by two artists and a playwright – and many of which reveal, both despite and because of their fragile beauty, the extent to which less visible frontiers, internalized within all of us, still inevitably curtail our freedom.**



**IN FACING**

*Painting To Hammer A Nail* has been presented in several different shapes since its conception in 1961. This time I decided to do it in this form: a shape of a cross.

Immediately after my decision, I recognized an immense fear in me which had nothing to do with my concern for the artistic merit of the piece but with my warped sense of value. I was afraid of hammering a nail in a piece of recycled wood while I shared and participated in a society which allowed men, women, children and other species on earth to be on the cross.

For me, this piece has worked on a kind of assessment, to start a new decade with a clearer vision, and to replace my reverence for the abstract with that of life.

I dedicate this piece to all martyrs in the history of the earth.

Yoko Ono  
January 4, 1990  
New York City

**PAINING TO HAMMER A NAIL**

Hammer a nail into a mirror, a piece of glass, a canvas, wood or metal every morning. Also, pick up a hair that came off when you combed in the morning and tie it around the hammered nail. The painting ends when the surface is covered with nails.

1961 winter

**Gray Watson and Rob La Frenais**

# THE POETRY OF THE PERSONAL

**In Conversation with Yoko Ono**

**Yoko Ono, *Painting to Hammer a Nail In*, 1961/1990**, participatory piece - wood, steel, hammers, buckets, nails, chain, step ladder, text: 'Do It Yourself'. (Photo Edward Woodman)

**G**ray Watson: Looking round your last exhibition in London, at the Riverside Studios, I was struck by the big gap in the dates. There were pieces from the 1960s and there were much more recent pieces, but nothing in between.

*Yoko Ono:* One of the reasons why I put old pieces in that and other recent shows is that many of the galleries feel, in order to give credibility to the recent works, that they need to show the old ones too. If I had my own way, I probably would have just put the cross, hammer and nail piece along with the new works. But, for an exhibition of my work to communicate fully, I can see that it is probably helpful at this point to show how these new pieces came about.

*GW:* Do you think that it is now a particularly good time, not just for you but for our culture in general, to go back to some of the visions of the '60s and develop them further?

*YO:* I think that history is something that gets changed anyway when a historian writes it down. And I think there is such a thing as genetic memory. So that whatever we did, we don't really have to know: it's in our subconscious, it's in our genes. I really don't think we have to know exactly what was going on in the '60s and casually utilize what happened then; I think that is something we are doing anyway.

*GW:* Can we come back at this from a slightly different angle then? Can you put a name to any new opportunities you feel there might be now? Do you feel there are new chances for art to communicate?

*YO:* Oh definitely. I think it's getting to be like the golden age for the art world and for the music and film worlds as well — for all the arts. Saying this has a double meaning of course: it means a lot of gold as well. Of course a lot of people still feel that poverty and artistic purity go side by side; they feel that art demands a certain amount of money, then it's vulgar and commercialized. But I think that age is past. I keep on saying this, but I believe that the peace industry will have to become equally or more prosperous than the war industry, in order to shift this whole thing, and actually help bring about world peace. The arts are the peace industry really.

*Rob La Frenais:* The bed piece you did with John Lennon was explicitly a statement for peace. To me at least, it was clearly both an artwork and a political work. To what extent do you feel you were in control of the way that work developed, given that a large element of it was the interpretation put on it by the press and television?

*YO:* Controlling it was not the part that we were interested in. Speaking for myself, I am an artist who is not interested in control, as much as throwing a dice and seeing what happens. That's what I did. And surprise, surprise: hundreds of reporters came. And, of course, the event was reported in many different ways. All that was probably part of the event. Did we expect a more respectful reaction? I don't know. We didn't

expect anything. We just thought it a great idea and we just put it on. A lot of things were said at the time which were not particularly favourable towards us. We were a laughing stock. Well, did we want to be a laughing stock? I think there probably was an element of clowning, but not to that extent.

*RLF:* Going on to your performance at the Fluxus exhibition in Paris, which was an extremely Parisian, sort of futuristic riot. What did you feel about the event?

*YO:* It was the same as the bed event. It was always like that. You think it's a good idea, and then these people push in and get angry and go on arguing forever. It's like trying to ride on a crowded subway car. But in a way I think that's what good art is about. I think that when art is in a museum environment with everybody coming to appreciate the work in a spirit of reverence and writing about it as if some guru had made a statement — when you get to that point, I think art is not alive in a way, maybe is not even necessary any more.

*RLF:* What do you think in general about the way Fluxus appears to be going, in that it does seem to be becoming museological? The market in Fluxus objects, which is quite clearly developing in front of us, is something which does start to invalidate some of their original aims.

*YO:* Maybe that's when Fluxus died. But, on the other hand, it's almost a reward to the artist who's struggled for years. I hope the Fluxus artists will finally come to a point where they can make their own living by the artwork alone.

*RLF:* I recall in a museum in Germany I saw a tie exhibited in a glass case, which apparently was the actual tie that Nam June Paik had used in one of his performances. It had a great sense of humour, which I suspect it wasn't supposed to have.

*YO:* [laughs] It doesn't matter. In a big picture, it's better that people want something like that than a weapon. We're talking about taste now, and who's to tell what is taste? Presumably you're one of those people who rebelled against the tasteful society of London or whatever. But then you're creating another kind of taste. And you're sort of saying it has to be this. If some people want to know what Paik was wearing, that's all right. It's like: O.K., this is a piece of sheet that the Beatles used to sleep in, or something like that. To some people it might be really vulgar, whereas to others it's great.

*GW:* The problem is, surely, that when this happens art is missing out on certain opportunities. You say that you do what you do in the art world because it provides an opportunity for you to get people moving, to put out, as it were, some suggestions to people which enable them to understand their own lives more fully and perhaps to change them. And the trouble with commercialization or fetishization is that it deflects attention away from this.

*YO:* There'll always be some sensible people who really understand art in its own context. But that is going to be an element that's probably only 10 per cent of people. The majority is going to admire something; they have this craving to admire something. So, let them admire — glasswork, tiles or whatever — and meanwhile we move on. Once that is done to Fluxus, Fluxus is probably dead. It's very interesting that once it's known to the world that so-and-so is a big name, usually they are already dead. Fluxus is right. Life is fluxus. It's always in flux. What was valuable is never going to be valuable the next moment. And that's how it should be.

*RLF:* This reminds me of one of your stepladders I saw in a gallery in Paris. There was some poor person who was desperately trying to stop people from putting glasses of wine on it, and was repeatedly telling them that it was a work of art and should be treated with respect. And the person who maybe paid for the stepladder, and was hoping to sell it, was getting more and more worried. O.K., it's a dynamic.

*YO:* Dynamic is right. But the point is that the stepladder and the ceiling painting to some people have a value — not as it was, what it was meant to be, but a value like the sheet that the Beatles slept in, that's all. You know, the stepladder that John climbed up and that was in the film, and people said 'wow! wow! wow!'; but it had nothing to do with the artistic value. So it's very similar to Paik's tie. But that's sweeter than people putting value on something that is violent or destructive or incredibly evil. It's innocent.

*GW:* Innocent, yes. But can you say something about how art can contribute, in a rather more positive sense, to peace at this juncture in history?

*YO:* Well, I think that the cross piece, for example, was a very political statement. For me it did something — there were cobwebs in my mind which represented some kind of old father figure that required respect — like the tie, which is now becoming a father figure. Everything becomes a father figure. We have so many father figures in the world and then we're crushed between the father figures and never have the opportunity to grow ourselves. So it's really good to somehow dispense with those cobwebs in your mind.

*GW:* And that may ultimately make war less likely perhaps?

*YO:* Yes, as long as we believe in these old concepts and grand ideas, we will not have the chance to grow. We are trying to live our own lives but we really try to live the life of what the father figure is telling us, or what might please the father figure. By just dispensing with the cobwebs in our mind we can start to see clearly, as with our own eyes.

*GW:* I had another slight feeling walking round your exhibition: that your art was more about the sky than the earth, more about visions of what might be than what things physically are now. At the very least, it seemed highly conceptual.

YO: Oh yes definitely, I come from that. In other words, I'm saying we have all this conceptual world within us. But at the same time we have to be reminded that that is also a part of the body. We are a body and we often forget that. My feeling is that we have enshrined art, enshrined in our minds and intellectualism and everything to do with something other than our bodies. We have so much reverence for that. We just have to somehow go back to our bodies and start from there ... Our society has been warped with ideas. What happened to the Communist world is so pathetic. Figures like Lenin, Stalin, they were father figures and they believed that it was a good thing. A lot of people wasted their whole lives, and many were killed because of that. The abstract idea actually did not work on the ground level. Marx, Lenin, those people were very intellectual. They were highly educated and far from working class. They designed this thing conceptually, and the blueprint was fine but it didn't work in reality.

RLF: Do you think the artist can do the job better?

YO: No, because then there would be too much reverence for the artist. It's wrong to place too much emphasis on something outside of you. What we can take care of is ourselves, but that's the last thing we do take care of, in fact. We always think that there is something other than ourselves that is great and we are to succumb to the ideas, but there is actually only us.

GW: What do you think of Joseph Beuys?

YO: He was another conceptual artist. He did good work.

GW: Is there any one piece in particular you liked? You must have had quite a bit of contact with him during the Fluxus phase.

YO: Not really. There's a kind of communication gap between Europe and America. When I came back to New York in 1964, David Byrne, I think it was, told me this chap called Joseph Beuys from Europe was doing some things there, reminding him of my work in the early '60s. He almost suggested that Joseph was imitating me. But historically, I can see he was doing it at the same time or maybe even before me.

GW: You mean independently?

YO: Yes. It was a kind of communication block.

RLF: Did you also find that, because you were largely moving in a pop music milieu, there was something of a communication gap between you and other avant-garde artists?

YO: Not to begin with. But the time I did feel an incredible isolation and kind of gap was when I made the *Bottoms* film in London. At the time, avant-garde artists or so-called artists at the cutting edge were feeling I was becoming terribly vulgar and commercial, because I was communicating more with the regular arena of



**Yoko Ono, *Mending Piece*, 1966/1990**, Participatory piece - thimble, needle, cotton thread, glue, broken crockery, text: 'Do It Yourself'. (Photo Edward Woodman)

journalism rather than with just the art journalists. So they thought I was getting too commercial.

GW: As an experiment it was quite radical.

YO: I felt it was radical, but the avant-garde artists suddenly revealed their snobbery about it. And I wasn't invited to dinner, you know. So when I was cut off from the avant-garde, and I was still not in the big arena as a rock star, it was a moment where I was frozen in between — in limbo.

GW: Did you ever meet Yayoi Kusama?

YO: Oh yes. I knew her in New York. At the time I was doing events and happenings, and she was a more established abstract expressionistic painter. And later she did the environment full of penises or something like that. But she was a more established artist than me, exhibiting at the Venice Biennale, and so on. I don't really know what she did after that. The only work I know is the expressionistic painting and then the environment with lots of stuff in it, which I felt was more surrealistic than the Fluxus stuff. I thought we were on a more cutting edge at the time.

GW: There was a slightly minimal quality in Fluxus. And that minimal quality still seems to be present in your work. Pure, like water.

YO: And also simple. Maybe I am one of those people who are much happier with basic things, not elaborating and constructing things. So I like the idea of being able to use just an ashtray or whatever it is around me to point out a thought.

GW: And that goes well with your liking for John Cage?

YO: Definitely.

GW: What's your view of the more extreme form of performance work, particularly on the West Coast of the United States? Like, for example, John Duncan's piece in which he went to Mexico and bought a recently dead female corpse; and he fucked this corpse and then had a vasectomy immediately afterwards, saying his last seed would go into a dead person ...

YO: Yuk!

GW: He recorded this and played it to performance aficionados back in Los Angeles. And most people, especially the feminist group who were very powerful in that world, found it pretty awful and were very hostile to him about it. The then editor of *High Performance*, Linda Burnham, said that if it had been her mother, she would certainly have strangled him for it.

YO: Well, in a big picture, probably, this might still be in the realm of art. If he wants to show his perversion in this way, that's up to him. He's giving vasectomy to

himself. It's probably less harmful than people who go into somebody's house and kill them for pleasure or something like that. His anger is expressed less harmfully. We all have strange tensions and fear and anger as a result of just being alive but it's not my cup of tea.

GW: Extremist works like that seem to me to be dealing with the most dangerous areas of the human spirit, the sort which are liable to lead to war. Maybe one needs some sort of ritualistic setting, in the sense of a safe setting — because ritual is partly about making dangerous things safe — in order to handle them. And art now provides one of the best forms for that.

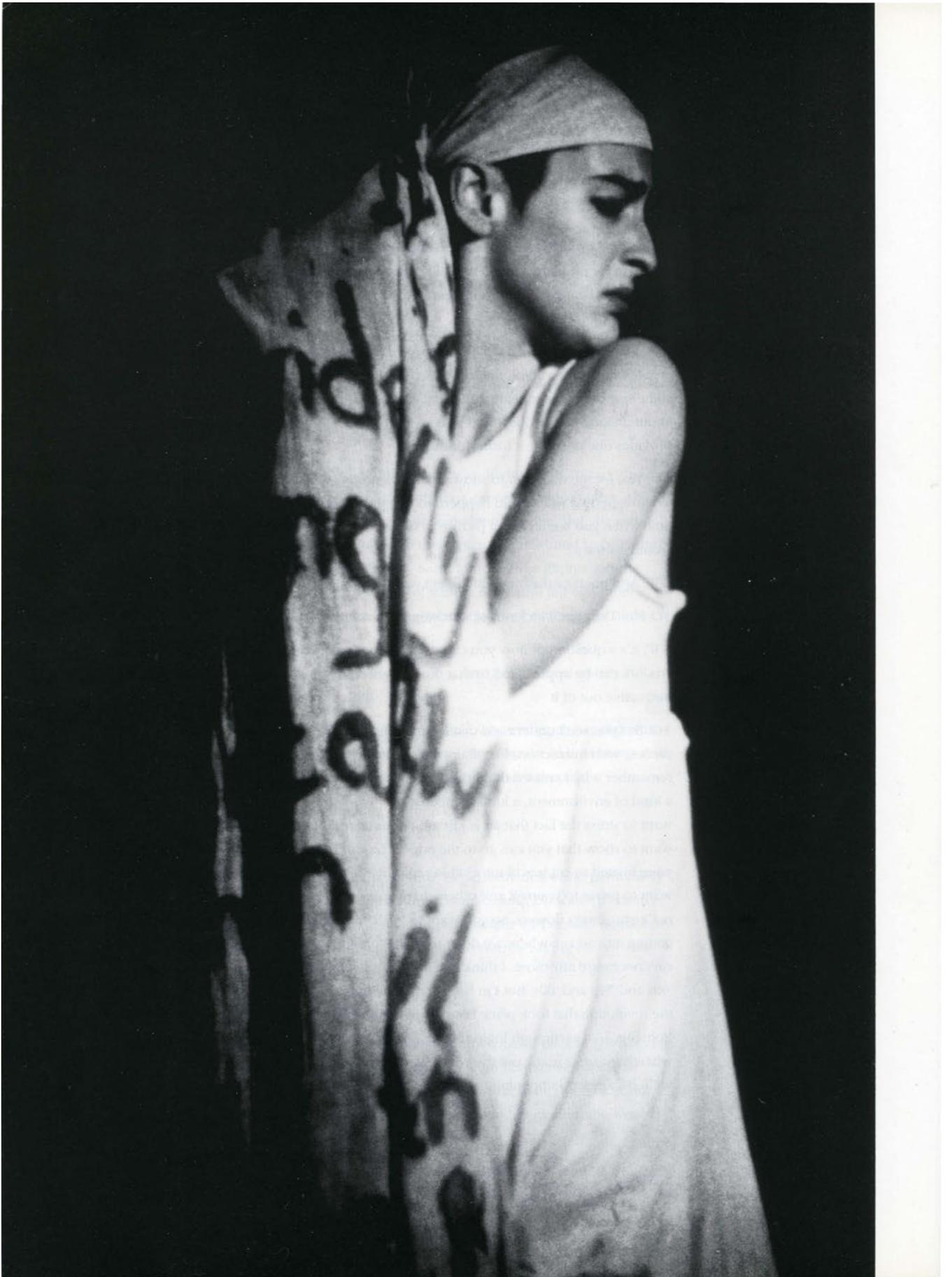
YO: Yes, for me it's better to show what violence is going on around the world and to show people what could happen, so that they control themselves. At the same time when you see a violent picture or film like that, there's a lot of people who would follow it.

GW: And not take the more intelligent way of learning from it?

YO: No. They get a kick out of watching violent acts.

GW: It's a question of how you can create a context in which the violent act in an artwork can be appreciated so that the audience can get something beneficial and instructive out of it.

YO: But you see I understand that feeling. I have made artworks, my 'participatory pieces', with instructions like 'Paint with your blood' or 'Keep painting till you die.' I remember why I created things like that. It's because when you're an artist, you're in a kind of environment, a kind of incubator or ivory tower. And you feel that you want to stress the fact that art is just as serious as real life. And to stress that, you want to show that you can go to the edge. The *Cut Piece* for example, when people were invited to cut bits of my clothing off me, was pretty dangerous to myself. You want to prove to yourself and others that you mean serious business — that you are not just painting flowers. So you want to push yourself to that extent. But we're getting into an age where we don't really have to do that. That sort of seriousness isn't necessary any more. I think that art was reflecting the heroism in society, in the '40s and '50s and '60s. But I'm hoping that the future is going to be different. Even the revolution that took place last year in all the East European countries — except Romania — was through logic and wisdom and not through violence. So it's an age when heroism is going out the window. And that is going to be reflected in art as well. It's already happening.



**David Hughes, John Jordan, Nancy Reilly  
and Tony White**

## GLASGOW GLIMPSES

**Four Views of the National Review  
of Live Art**



Above:  
**Lisa Watts, *Breadmaking*, 1990,**  
performance.

Facing page:  
**Fiona Wright, *Bride Kicks*, 1990,**  
performance.

**W**hat grabs the attention, what literally keeps you awake during the five exhausting days of the National Review of Live Art, is inevitably the work with the most immediate and accessible impact. But what ultimately stays in the mind is the work which had conceptual depth, and subtlety.

Of the artists invited to present already existing pieces, Ian Hinchcliffe, a magpie costumed in shredded paper, stays in the mind for sure. He combines a sculptor's ability to transform objects with a powerful style of delivering autobiographical monologue. His command of timing, pace, balance and structure, his physical presence and his vocal delivery are that of the stand-up comedian who has paid his dues in the roughest pubs and clubs. He works with obscenity and the odious in the way another artist might work with a particular palette. His work is full of primitive, childlike delight in the tactile, the excremental, the genitals, inarticulate sound and chaos. Here, in *Cranky Winders*, he stages recollections of the four most important women in his life: grandmother, wife, mistress, performance partner.

Of the artists commissioned to make new work specially for the National Review, only Alastair MacLennan sticks in the mind. For 72 hours he inhabited a gallery space surrounded by sheep's heads, old cash registers, dead branches, potatoes, bread and shopping trolleys. Sometimes wearing his 'terrorist's' balaclava, sometimes holding a sheep's head on a string and swathed in bunting, he slowly rearranged his materials. MacLennan was working with time, three days of it, but the pace of the Review meant that you'd hear people saying, 'well, I've got five minutes before the next event, I'll go and catch the MacLennan'.

The third strand of the Review is the Platform Performances. Two dozen or so shows and installations which, in the main, are theatre-based, packed into the last two, most hectic days. The most assured of these Platform Performances included: Ieuan Dagger's *The Oxymoron* (a discomfiting monologue which set the story of man's miraculous evolution against the speaker's life as couch potato); Big Five's *Ubique Five* (a straight comedy duo using grotesque caricatures and a little dance); Third Estate (political themes in club-cred dance with excellent live band); Robert Overson's performance poetry with mobile projections, *Tiny*; Lisa Watts' *Breadmaking*; and Fiona Wright's *Bride Kicks*. Watts and Wright, perhaps, made the strongest impressions of the weekend. Of the two Fiona Wright certainly opened the widest set of issues both theatrical and conceptual with her dances and poems of *Bride*, whose anarchic inner sea threatened to disrupt increasingly restricting conventions. Her performance started from her own poems and slowly the figure of *Bride* emerged, child-like, giggling, daemonic and roaring by turns. This one-person show was primarily dance with text spoken at a microphone and a short movie projected like a red splash onto the lap of her white bridal dress, which at other times was written over with text. Wright remains, along with Overson, one of the few performers I look forward to seeing at the next Review.

*David Hughes*

**G**radually over the last ten years the National Review of Live Art has shed its ragged edges and become a somewhat purer, more contained event. With this change has come a profound confusion of intention: gone are the healthy critical values of modernism and what is left is a frightening sea of meaningless eclecticism and a fatuous lack of purpose.

One of the works this year which best exemplified this confusion was Robert Overson's *Tiny*. The work began inspiringly enough, as two figures passed hundreds of texts through three overhead projectors and a recorded voice didactically repeated more text. Two minutes of this information onslaught, however, and all sense of understanding was lost. I found myself crying out for a moment of stillness. Ironically, a fragment of the text succinctly described my feelings about this and a lot of the similarly dislocating work which was to follow: 'Thinking becomes a problem...More sand in the eye of the onlooker.'

The incessant throwing of scraps of dislocated information at the audience was, in a sense, most successfully accomplished by the invited company Bodies in Flight, whose performance *Exhibit*, undoubtedly a stylish piece of physical theatre, was one of the festival's most powerful uses of theatricality. But like so much of the work this year, it relied almost entirely on loud music, energetic performers and perfect timing. A clever structural device, involving the pulling back and forth of a curtain across the stage, revealed various theatrical tableaux whose contents amounted to a shopping list of issues - 'Sex, Boys, Violence, Girls, Politics' - about which absolutely nothing was said. When asked why the group had tried to cram so much into one work, the director disarmingly replied that they were rather more concerned with effect than with meaning.

There were, nevertheless, some artists this year whose work resisted containment and the seduction of stylishness. Lisa Watt's performance *Breadmaking*, for example, was a strikingly simple and uncluttered work. It involved Watts manipulating a large quantity of dough on a table, at first quite sensually and then violently, finally reaching a crescendo where she stood precariously on top of the dough in a pair of stilettos kneading it savagely, a nightmarish transubstantiation, dough becoming torn human flesh. Here is an artist with the courage to present simple yet powerful ideas and whose every gesture carried conviction.

Most of the installation work was poor, but Meloni Poole's *Don't Put Your Shoes*



Ian Hinchcliffe, *Cranky Winders*, 1990, performance. (Photo Kevin Low)

*On The Table* was a profoundly engaging piece. You entered a fragile space made from hundreds of hanging bandages; inside a table tightly bound in more bandages was set with children's shoes, from which came the sounds of distant whispers. The mournful stare of an old woman, whose ghostly image was projected onto the gently shifting bandages, helped create a pervasive atmosphere of loss. This was a poetic space of contemplation and mourning; a remarkable work. It seems that between the style, the shouting and the overdoses of imagery, lay a few oases of meaning.

*John Jordan*

**F**rom what I recollect of my first impressions of the National Review... Most strongly, the catastrophic poetics of Alastair MacLennan's installation, *Still Tills*, in which he performed over endless periods of time, 72 hours. Installation work of this nature has not been around New York for the last five years. Though I suspect it has a life on the West Coast in the States it has not lived past the Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, etc. gallery/performance reign of terror and pleasure. And no new work that I know of has a street side. The fact that MacLennan took his work out onto the street raised my American brow. I don't know what to make of a performance artist strolling a sheep skull through a shopping mall.

Location strategies aside, I really didn't witness anything else with overt political overtones. And in that we have a red, white and blue parallel. I also didn't see or hear any filthy things at the National Review, nothing dirty or racist or even economically extreme. Nothing overtly gay, black, lesbian, radical, Northern Irish, full of piss and death; I can't even remember hearing one 'cock, suck, fuck' in any show I saw. I didn't see any type of physical tradition such as Karen Finley in the British work, not one bare ass under a hot light anywhere.

What I did see was highly personal work drawing on postmodern methodologies with decidedly esoteric leanings. Like in America, the National Review demonstrated a shift out of a visual arts basis into a textual one, and I cite with praise: David Izod, *Coasting*; Clare Palmier, *Slow, Slow, Quick, Quick*; and, though I did not attend, I also hear good things about the text-based *Oxymoron* by Ieuan Dagger.

I saw three pieces of experimental theater: Pete Brooks and Claire Macdonald's *The Fall of Lucas Fortune*; Dogs in Honey; and Forced Entertainment's *Some Confusions in the Law About Love*. They seemed so clearly to represent three entirely different rings of the experimental circus. The serious intent behind Forced Entertainment perhaps has an American counterpart in experimental theater artist John Jesurun. Does *The Lucas Fortune* experiment have an American counterpart? The Dogs in Honey show could easily be the runaway hit of PS 122 or DTW for that matter; it could also be seen as part of a Saturday Night Live television show. The

**Alastair MacLennan, *Still Tills*, 1990, performance. (Photo Kevin Low)**



work also shares sentiment and sensibility (use of toys, complete use of television format, poppy sets) with solo performance artist Paul Zaloom.

To someone who comes from the land of obese objects of art (Hollywood, Broadway, the New York art market), a miraculous component of the British performance scene is how, with almost no funds, artists create terribly interesting situations and enjoy the hell out of it, believe in it as a working necessity regardless of economics. There is a real grass roots effort to keep things moving here, going on.

As for the future, one hope I have is for more global mixing up. Here's a myth worth pursuing: the 'global artist', fully international companies. Maybe the next National Review should be an International Review.

Nancy Reilly

**A**lthough making no pretence of being a festival of installation, the National Review of Live Art has always had a strong programme of installative performance work. In 1990, works by Alastair McLennan and, particularly, Alan McLean carried this tradition further.

McLean's collaboration with Tony Mustoe, *My Body Did Everything I Asked It*, is an emotionally and intellectually demanding work which tackles issues of power, sexuality, representation and handicap head on. *My Body . . .*, performed in the past as an hour-long site-specific performance, was stretched to seven hours and located within a gallery installation; far from being compromised by this, it succeeded in being the most radical and challenging work of the festival.

The Glee Club's day-long installative performance, *How We Invented the Airplane*, was also originally a one hour performance, but in this case the extended programming was not an advantage. The fictional process in which they were engaged, of (re-)inventing the aeroplane, allowed for several delicate and well constructed jokes, but suffered from a sense of foregone conclusion.

One almost-installation that couldn't quite fulfil its potential in this context was Marty St. James and Anne Wilson's *Video Portraits*. This was a simple and effective idea - heavy gilded frames containing 'portraits' on video screens rather than canvas - but the corridor location did not do justice to it.

This year's National Review also marked a welcome return to live work for Anne Seagrave. *Or Even What Leaving Was* saw Seagrave standing at a microphone beside a large video screen, on which hi-tech effects were mixed with the crudest kind of pencil-drawn animation. Images of a figure straining to open an ever-shrinking door suggested an attempt to resist closure and, indeed, there was no easy way to read this work. Visually the mixture of hi-tech and lo-tech worked well and there was never a sense that video effects were being used gratuitously. However, an



Alastair MacLennan, *Still Tills*, 1990, performance. (Photo Kevin Low)

accompanying sound tape in which electronically sampled snatches of prose were looped, repeated and, at times, echoed by Seagrave at the microphone, was less successful. This is an area of work that Laurie Anderson has made her own, and she's a hard act to follow. But Seagrave's work has always had a very strong sense of its own purpose and, in spite of some serious flaws, this won the day.

*Tony White*



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Hans Dickel

## FRONTIERS OF FREEDOM

Notes on die Endlichkeit der Freiheit



Above:

**Hans Haacke, *Die Freiheit wird jetzt einfach gesponsert - aus der Portokasse*, 1990**, modified former Watchtower BT-9 on 'death strip' by Berlin Wall. (Photo Christina Bolduan)

Facing page:

**Christian Boltanski**  
***The Missing House* 1990**  
Große Hamburger Straße 15/16  
(Photo Werner Zellien)

DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

**Z**wei bedeutsame Jahrestage deutscher Geschichte standen am Anfang und am Ende dieses aus dem gewohnten Kulturbetrieb herausragenden Künstlerischen Projekts. Eröffnet wurde die Ausstellung 'Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit' an 1. September, dem Tag des Kriegsbeginns vor 51 Jahren (1. September 1939), zu Ende ging sie am 41. Jahrestag der Staatsgründung der DDR (7. Oktober 1949). Mit den beiden Daten waren auch thematisch die Bezugspunkte der Ausstellung benannt, denn Berlin ist eine Stadt, deren politische Teilung zu den Folgen des deutschen Faschismus gehört, und deren tatsächliche Teilung durch den Bau der Mauer (13.8.1961) eine Folge der geschichtlichen Entwicklung der DDR gewesen ist.

Die Idee, international erfahrene Künstler einzuladen, sich durch Installationen im städtischen Raum zum Problem der Teilung Berlins zu äußern, hatten Rebecca Horn, Jannis Kounellis und Heiner Müller schon vor der Öffnung des Ostens. Die Wende in der Weltpolitik sicherte ihrer Initiative dann die Zustimmung der Berliner Behörden. Elf Künstler (Giovanni Anselmo, Barbara Bloom, Christian Boltanski, Hans Haacke, Rebecca Horn, Ilya Kabakov, Jannis Kounellis, Via Lewandowski, Mario Merz, Raffael Rheinsberg und Krzysztof Wodiczko) waren schließlich eingeladen, in Ost- und West-Berlin jeweils eine Arbeit zu realisieren, die sich mit ihrem Gegenstück zu einem Ganzen verbinden sollte. Zweiteilige Werke sollten es sein, Pendants, die aus subjektiver Sicht die Gegensätze und Gemeinsamkeiten, 'Differenz und Ähnlichkeit' (Heiner Müller) der beiden Stadthälften Berlins erfassen sollten. Es galt Spuren der Vergangenheit sichtbar zu machen und Perspektiven für die Zukunft der Stadt zu formulieren. Parallel zu der rasanten politischen Entwicklung war das ursprüngliche Thema der Gegenstücke neu zu diskutieren: vor dem Hintergrund der Vereinigung galt es, den Augenblick der Gegenwart festzuhalten, auf eine sich schnell wandelnde Realität zu reagieren, noch ehe die Spuren der Teilung getilgt waren. So entstanden anstelle der Pendants auch einige in eins gesetzte Werke auf dem inzwischen frei geräumten Todesstreifen der Grenze im Zentrum der Stadt. Haacke, Horn, Kabakov und Rheinsberg zeigten in dem Gelände der von Wachtürmen und Schießanlagen gesäumten ehemaligen Mauer nur jeweils eine Arbeit, denn dort treffen die Gegensätze der beiden Stadthälften Berlins direkt aufeinander. Die Künstler arbeiteten in einem über dreißig Jahre leer gelassenen, verwüsteten Gebiet, dessen militärische Funktion alles Leben verhindert hatte. Skurril gewordene Kulissen dieser Art gehören zum eindrucksvollen Angebot, das Berlin als bildhafte Stadt der deutschen Geschichte den Künstlern zu machen hatte. Statt jedoch ihre im Museum bereits bewährten künstlerischen Positionen noch einmal im öffentlichen Raum aufzuführen, versuchten die Künstler mit einer persönlichen Form auf den gewählten Ort zu reagieren.

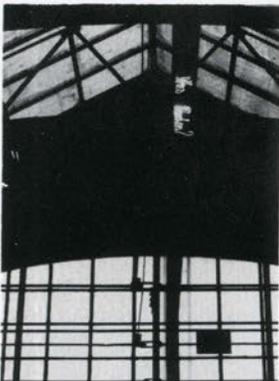
Entstanden sind Werke im eigenen Auftrag: die Künstler suchten von sich aus die Auseinandersetzung mit dem öffentlichen Raum und melden damit zugleich ihren Anspruch auf Öffentlichkeit an. Der von Heiner Müller formulierte Titel *Die*

Two significant anniversaries of German history were marked by the beginning and the end of this artistic project which ranged well beyond the usual bounds of the cultural domain. The exhibition 'The Finitude of Freedom' opened on the 1st September, the day on which the Second World War had broken out fifty-one years before (in 1939), and closed on the 7th October, the forty-first anniversary of the founding of the German Democratic Republic (in 1947). These two dates also announced the exhibition's thematic reference points, in that Berlin is a city whose political division is one of the consequences of German fascism, and whose physical division, through the building of the Wall (in 1961), was a consequence of the GDR's historical development.

The idea of inviting internationally renowned artists to elaborate on the theme of the division of Berlin, through the making of site-specific installations, had been conceived by Rebecca Horn, Jannis Kounellis and Heiner Müller before the Wall came down; but it was the fact of political change which secured the approval of the Berlin authorities. Eleven artists (Giovanni Anselmo, Barbara Bloom, Christian Boltanski, Hans Haacke, Rebecca Horn, Ilya Kabakov, Jannis Kounellis, Via Lewandowsky, Mario Merz, Raffael Rheinsberg and Krzysztof Wodiczko) were invited to contribute two contrasting but complementary pieces each, one in the West and one in the East, intended at once to reflect the different pasts of the two parts of the city, to record the present while those differences remained, and to forecast the reunited and rapidly changing city's likely future.

In the event, in place of two separate pieces or 'pendants', some of the artists (Haacke, Horn, Kabakov, Rheinsberg) produced just single works for exhibition in the newly-cleared no-man's-land in the city centre, which for over thirty years, because of the Cold War, had lain deserted and dilapidated, denuded of all living things, and which therefore provides to this day a telling testimony of the far-reaching contrasts that existed between the two halves of the city. However, instead of merely repeating works of theirs that could already be seen in museums, they strove to react in a personal manner to the locations of their choice. Though artists were free to pick their own angle, Müller's theme 'the Finitude of Freedom' nevertheless implied that artistic freedom has reached what may be termed socially definable limits.

This issue was addressed directly by **Mario Merz** in a pair of neon signs, installed in two Berlin S-Bahn stations, which put the city's political situation in a nutshell by re-asking Lenin's famous question 'What is to be done?'. His signs helped to bring out the stations' connections with the historical process of industrialization and the rise of the modern metropolis. His open-air *Arte Povera* gesture fused art and reality so cleverly that it gave rise to any number of possible associations. The choice of colours alone - blue in the western station, red in the eastern - was significant, painting as it did a contrast between cold and hot, while the illuminated text highlighted the process of thought and decision making. The two stations,



**Mario Merz, S-Bahn Project, 1990.**  
(Photo Jochen Wermann)

DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

*Endlichkeit der Freiheit* deutet sogar darauf hin, daß, die Freiheit der Kunst an Grenzen gelangt ist, die auf Ziele im Sinne einer gesellschaftlichen Finalisierung der Kunst verweisen.

**Mario Merz** stellt diese Frage ganz direkt und bringt damit zugleich die politische Situation Berlins in einem Bild zur Anschauung: *Was Machen?* fragt er mit Zwei in Berliner S-Bahn-Stationen montierten Neon-Leuchtschriften. Seine Markierungen rücken die beiden Bahnhöfe - Stätten der frühen Industrialisierung - als Orte des Aufbruchs ins Bewußtsein, sie erinnern an den Beginn der modernen Metropole. Seine *Arte povera* - Geste im öffentlichen Raum beschränkt sich auf minimale Mittel und verbindet doch das künstlich Gesetzte und das real Vorhandene so treffend, daß Assoziationen antstehen können. So signalisiert die Farbigkeit der Lettern einen Gegensatz, als seien Blau (im West - Bahnhof) und Rot (im Ost-Bahnhof) zugleich als Gegensatz von Kalt und Warm zu lesen. Die Übertragung in Leuchtschrift visualisiert die oft in Gedanken gestellte Frage *Was machen?*, es entsteht ein Bild jener Situation des Nachdenkens vor der Entscheidung, des Abwägens vor dem Schritt zur Tat. Die beiden Bahnhöfe, deren denkmalgeschützte Eisen-Glas Architektur mit dem Gewölbedach und den gekurvten Gleisen den berühmten Iglus des Künstlers ästhetisch verwandt ist, werden selbst zu Teilen seines Werkes: Merz aktiviert die alte Metaphor des Bahnhofs als Ort des Wartens, der Übergänge, des Aufbruchs.

**Barbara Bloom** ist es gelungen, ein Thema ihrer Kunst - die Symmetrie - vor Ort als sinnfällige Berlin-Metaphor zu gestalten und damit zugleich auf den Gegensatz und die Entsprechungen von Natur und Kultur zu verweisen. Sie wählte für ihre Arbeit zwei Orte aus, das Naturkundemuseum im Osten und die Gipsformerei im Westen, die als museale Sammelstätten des 19. Jahrhunderts symptomatisch sind für die Ästhetisierung der Wirklichkeit. Werden in einem Gebäude die Schöpfungen der Natur konserviert, so werden im anderen Kunstwerke und Büsten berühmter Dichter und Denker gesammelt sowie artifiziell reproduziert. Bloom tauschte einzelne Exponate aus, so daß nun zwischen den mit aufgespeißten Insekten gefüllten Glasvitrinen antike Janusköpfe stehen. Im Lager der gipsernen Doubletten der Köpfe historischer Helden haben dagegen konservierte Schmetterlinge Einzug gehalten. Als ein Titelbild ihrer Arbeit zeigte die Künstlerin in einer Postkartenserie zwei didaktische Tafeln über Schmetterlingssorten. Sie demonstrieren die natürlich - kunstvolle Ornamentik der Tiere: die einflügelig gestutzten Exemplare können mit einem Flügel immer nur im Kreis fliegen.

Mit einer 100m langen Reihe von Kabeltrommeln aus Ost und West, die eigentlich der Kommunikation per Tele -Technik und Fernsehen dienen sollen, errichtete der Berliner Künstler **Raffael Rheinsberg** eine neue 'Mauer'. Die Rollen



Barbara Bloom, *Regallager*, 1990,  
Natural History Museum, Berlin  
(East).

text highlighted the process of thought and decision making. The two stations, whose vaulted iron and glass rooves (a listed feature) and curved tracks are aesthetically related to Merz's own Igloos, were themselves made part of this design through their being places of waiting, interchange and departure.

**Barbara Bloom** contrived to turn symmetry, one of her personal obsessions, into a meaningful metaphor of Berlin, while at the same time underlining what nature and art have, and do not have, in common. Her two chosen locations were the Natural History Museum in East Berlin and the Plastercast Collection in the West, both typical of the nineteenth century museum's tendency to turn reality into a branch of aesthetics, the one conserving products of nature, the other both collecting and copying works of art and the busts of famous writers and philosophers. By changing round some of their exhibits, Bloom placed ancient Janus heads between glass showcases full of spiked insects on the one hand, and conserved butterflies among plaster copies of the heads of historical figures on the other. In addition, she illustrated her work in a series of postcards showing two different varieties of butterflies in textbook tables - creatures of infinite adaption and ornament, yet able only to fly in a circle if deprived of one of their wings.

**Raffael Rheinsberg**, who lives in Berlin, built a new 'Wall' from a 100 metre-long row of both East and West German cable drums, intended for use in telecommunications. These joined together to form a mobile barrier temporarily re-blocking the crossing from East to West. A pioneer in the display of archaeological miniatures, Rheinsberg here for the first time worked on a huge scale, trying to make visible what normally cannot be seen. The work, not immediately recognized as art by passers-by, underscored not only the obvious need for a new and integrated telephone network but also the invasion of public space by the mass media.

For **Christian Boltanski** and **Ilya Kabakov**, Berlin presented an entirely new challenge. Both had previously exhibited for the most part indoors, illustrating individual lives by means of fragile little artefacts made up of snapshots, leaflets, cardboard boxes, knick-knacks and the like, whereas now they were confronted with their first major exhibition outdoors.

When Boltanski, looking for a suitable location, was walking through the centre of the one-time Imperial German capital, situated in the former East Berlin, he soon rejected the Prussian boulevards with the old government buildings so redolent of the German past. Instead, with the help of a 1936 street map on which subsequently destroyed synagogues were marked with an asterisk, he discovered a district at the time mostly inhabited by Jews. There, in a side street, he spotted something which in affluent West Berlin is barely to be found any more: 4-storey blocks of flats, built around a garden, of which only four of the five original blocks remained fully intact.

DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

verbinden sich zu einer Sperre, die als mobiles Monument auf Zeit den Übergang von Ost nach West blockiert. Rheinsberg, der als Spurensicherer versuchte, die Anschaulichkeit kleiner Fundstücke zu wahren, arbeitet hier das erste Mal mit einem Riesenformat und versucht das Nicht-Anschauliche sichtbar zu machen durch eine Installation von Gebrauchsgegenständen im öffentlichen Raum. Die von den Passanten nicht sofort als Kunst erkannte Arbeit verweist durch den blauen Kunstgriff der Aufstellung auf die Dringlichkeit neuer Telefonnetze, aber auch auf den Verlust des öffentlichen Raumes, der auf den Einfluß der Massenmedien zurückzuführen ist.

**Christian Boltanski** und **Ilya Kabakov** trafen in Berlin auf eine für sie völlig neue Aufgabe. Beide hatten bisher vorwiegend in Innenräumen gearbeitet und Inszenierungen zur Lebensgeschichte einzelner Menschen gezeigt. Ihre fragilen, aus Fotos, Zetteln, Schachteln, Hausrat, Briefen und den kleinen Dingen des Alltags bestehenden Werke waren bestimmt für geschlossene Interieurs. Nun war ihnen eine ganz andere Aufgabe gestellt, und ihre ersten großen künstlerischen Arbeiten im Außenraum sollten gleich hohen Erwartungen standhalten.

Als Christian Boltanski auf der Suche nach einem geeigneten Ort durch *Berlin-Mitte* ging, durch das im Osten gelegene Zentrum der alten Reichshauptstadt, wollte er schnell weg von den preußischen Prachtstraßen mit den Behördengebäuden der Gründerzeit, die so deutlich von der Geschichte der Deutschen zeugen. Mit einem Stadtplan aus dem Jahre 1936, auf dem Sterne die später zerstörten Synagogen markieren, fand er ein damals vor allem von Juden bewohntes Stadtviertel. In einer Seitenstraße entdeckte er einen Ort, den es so im saturierten Westen der Stadt kaum mehr gibt: In einem viergeschossigen Wohnblock mit früher fünf um einen Garten gebauten Mehrfamilienhäusern fehlt das mittlere Haus im Hinterhof. Vermutlich wurde es durch eine Bombe zerstört, die Baulücke blieb bis heute leer. An den Mauern der Nachbarhäuser sind noch die Ansätze der Etagen zu erkennen. Boltanski zeigt an den noch sichtbaren Wohnzimmer-Wänden Schilder mit dem Namen und der Berufsbezeichnung von Menschen, die in dem Haus lebten.

Stellvertretend erinnert seine Installation *The Missing House* an alle getöteten Zivilisten dieser Stadt. Ohne den ästhetischen Aufwand, der vielen offiziellen Denkmälern einen eher peinlichen Beigeschmack gibt, erinnert der Künstler mit einer sparsamen Geste an die Toten der Jahre 1939-45. Während vor Ort ein sparsames Mahnmal inszeniert wird, dokumentieren zwei Berliner Studenten im Auftrag des Künstlers das Leben der zerbombtem Bewohner: Spuren ihrer Existenz, Fotos und Aussagen Überlebender waren in einem verwilderten Garten in verglasten Vitrinen mit dem Titel *The Museum* aufgestellt. Selten sind Schriftzeichen von solcher Signifikanz wie in dieser konkret auf den Lebensort der genannten Menschen bezogenen Installation. Deutlich wird hier die Beziehung der Zeichen zum Bezeichneten: wenn reales Leben verschwindet, werden Zeichen zur

Top:

**Barbara Bloom, Regallager, 1990,**  
Natural History Museum, Berlin  
(East). (Photo Christina Bolduan)

Bottom:

**Christian Boltanski, The Museum,**  
1990, Alt-Moabit, Berlin (East).  
(Photo Christina Bolduan)



DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

Erinnerung gesetzt. Als das Zuhause der Menschen verschwand, blieben nur die Namen im Adreßbuch. Boltanskis 'Klagemauern' erinnern an die Gefallenen und zugleich an den Fall des Hauses. Seine minimale Zeichensetzung deckt auf, was hinter den intakten Oberflächen verborgen ist: die Installation bezieht sich auf die Bewohner des Hauses, der Straße, des Viertels, auf den Ort und seine Geschichte. Was bei den Recherchen zum Vorschein kam, berührt direkt die deutsche Geschichte. Selbst bei der Beschränkung auf diese kleine Nebenstraße, die bis Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts wegen des friedlichen Zusammenlebens von Bewohnern verschiedener Konfessionen Toleranzgasse hieß, stießen die beiden mit Boltanski kooperierenden Berliner Kunst-Studenten auf grauenvolle Tatsachen: das ehemals jüdische Altenheim gegenüber dem Wohnblock war Deportationsstelle für ca. 50.000 Juden, die von dort aus in die Konzentrationslager verschleppt wurden. Boltanskis Arbeit, die nicht als Kunst in konventioneller Form auftrumpft, fand bei den Anwohnern so positive Resonanz, daß man mehrheitlich für den Verbleib am Ort votierte, ein für zeitgenössische Kunst seltenes Ergebnis.

Ilya Kabakov suchte sich für seine Installation einen Ort in der Mitte zwischen Ost und West, im leer geräumten Todesstreifen der alten Grenze. Als er am Potsdamer Platz zu arbeiten begann, glich diese Nahtstelle der beiden Hälften der Stadt noch einer öden Wüste. Mittlerweile konzentriert sich hier der Touristenverkehr, die Menschen aus Ost und West begegnen sich gerade hier.

Kabakov baute zwei parallele Korridore aus frisch gehobelten Holz, sie stehen in unmittelbarer Nähe der ehemaligen Mauer, der Titel: *Zwei Erinnerungen an die Angst*. An längs gespannten Seilen hängen in Kopfhöhe der Besucher Fundstücke vom Ort: Plastikteilchen, Scherben, Müll, Reste einer westlichen Konsumgesellschaft, lauter ephemere Kleinigkeiten. Statt solcher Abfälle des Überflusses findet man in den Ländern des Ostblocks an vielen Wänden Zettel voller Wünsche und Sorgen, vollgeschrieben mit Gesuchen, Angeboten und politischen Meinungen - improvisierte Marktplätze einer unterdrückten Öffentlichkeit, die nur über wenige Waren verfügt. Kabakov hat Äußerungen der Menschen über die jeweils andere Seite (z. B. 'aber vielleicht haben sie etwas Menschliches') gedruckt auf kleine Metallschildern mit Drähten an den Abfallteilen befestigt. Auf den pendelnden Täfelchen sind nachzulesen die Mutmaßungen der Bürger beiderseits der alten Mauer über die jeweils auf der anderen Seite Lebenden: vor allem Furcht vor dem Militär und Angst vor dem Fremden, die sich steigern zur Paranoia als einer Folge der Feindbilder des Kalten Krieges. Die wie Bildlegenden den Objekten zugeordneten Texte sind im östlichen Gang in Deutsch und Russisch, im westlichen in Deutsch und Englisch zu lesen. Im Gegensatz zu den schnell vergänglichen Resten des Alltags erscheinen die gedruckten Sätze als dokumente eines klischeehaften Denkens, das Langzeitwirkung hat. Beide Zeit-Ebenen, die der konkreten Objekte des Alltags und die der abstrakten Weltbilder, kommen an dem eigentümlichen Ort gut zur Geltung, denn dort gab es ein Vakuum der Zeit. Die von Kabakov zur Publikation gewählten

The middle block which was located at the rear was gutted, presumably by a bomb, during the War; it remained as a hole in the landscape. Since traces of the edges of various floors could still be discerned on the neighbouring walls of the adjacent flats, however, Boltanski was able to affix boards to the still visible living room walls, showing the names and occupations of the former inhabitants.

Entitled *The Missing House*, this work commemorates the city's war dead generally; and it does so with admirable economy, without the unpleasant after-taste left by the ostentatiousness of many official war memorials. Nearby, in what is now a derelict garden, glass cases bearing the description 'The Museum' showed memorabilia of the bombed-out people's lives - photographs of survivors, tributes and other documents - which two Berlin students had assembled on the artist's behalf. The relationship between place and people, between symbols and those (no longer alive) whom they symbolize - people whose homes have been destroyed and who themselves survive as mere names in an address book - could hardly have been more poignant. Boltanski's 'wailing walls' mourn the death of both people and their homes. Employing the minimum means, he reveals what the surviving surfaces hide - the block's, street's and district's inhabitants, the place and its history. The research directly brought to light a chapter of German history. Even in this small side street - which until the end of the nineteenth century, because members of different religious groups lived peacefully together in it, had gone by the name of Tolerance Lane - the two Berlin art students working for Boltanski came across some gruesome facts. The one-time Jewish old people's home opposite this particular block of flats had, during the Second World War, been a collection centre from which 50,000 Jews were deported to concentration camps. Such was the present-day local inhabitants' response to Boltanski's hardly conventional work that, by a majority, they voted for it to be permanently retained - a rare occurrence indeed for contemporary art.

Ilya Kabakov, for his piece, picked a location in the centre between East and West Berlin, in the cleared no-man's-land where the border had been. At first, when he was starting to work in Potsdamer Platz, where the two halves of the city met, that square was still something of a desert. Now, frequented by tourists, it has become a popular meeting point for people from both sides.

Using newly-planed wood, Kabakov built two parallel corridors, entitled *Two Reminders of Fear*, close to the former Wall. From longitudinal ropes he suspended, at eye level, local finds such as plastic fragments, potsherds and other items of refuse, remnants of a Western consumer society, a miscellany of ephemeral odds and ends. Countries of the former East bloc do not have such scraps of affluence; instead they have, on many walls, hand-written political bills and little notices advertising things wanted and things for sale - improvised marketplaces of oppressed people owning few goods. In partial imitation of this, Kabakov inscribed small metal discs with things that people living on one side of the Wall had said about people living on the other (e.g. '...maybe they're human after all') - along with such feelings as fear

DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

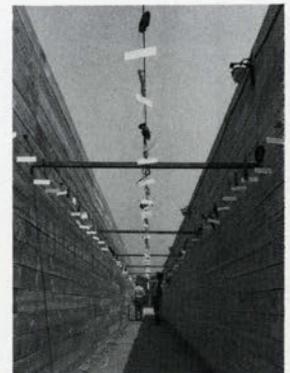
of strangers and terror of military action, culminating in paranoia sparked off by enemy pictures of the Cold War - and attached these with wires to the bits of rubbish. The caption-like inscriptions are in German and Russian in the eastward passage, in German and English in the westward. Set against the perishable everyday rubbish, they reflect a mechanical, repetitive kind of thinking that has a lasting effect. Both the objects as well as the inscriptions well suit the odd, timeless location. In turn, Kabakov's choice of quotations admirably illustrates ideologies which took years to take hold in people's minds and will be slow to eradicate. The political sayings themselves, unlike the rubbish, are strangely abstract, emerging as curious figments of the imagination. It is as though Kabakov is suggesting that it is outdated ideologies which are the real rubbish.

Running parallel to the Wall, Kabakov's installation shows which walls in people's minds still need to be dismantled, which mental barriers still stand in the way of people freely living together. Those who have studied the rubbish and accompanying inscriptions should walk out on the other side in a chastened mood. Those 28 metre long corridors with their considered trifles put history in a powerful new perspective. Aesthetically, too, they confront the soulless materialism and the throw-away society of the West, with the crying needs of a materially still deprived East. The fact that his installation right in the centre of Berlin has outlasted the exhibition intact demonstrates Kabakov's success in providing a work of 'outdoor art', when such exhibits normally come to be demolished.

What the works of Boltanski and Kabakov have in common, and what makes them so interesting, is their non-figurative approach, which greatly enhances their political message. Both use found materials and linguistic signs to illuminate social systems in place of traditional figurative methods.

If their subject and placing alone make those installations politically meaningful, it is left to the subjective reaction of their makers, and the temporary signposts they offered in a changing city, to convey their specifically artistic message. Boltanski and Kabakov exhibit their works as contributions to open-air debate - not to commemorate the past, but to stimulate thought concerning the future of both halves of Berlin. To them, Berlin's situation in 1990, which prompted the exhibition, was a matter of direct personal interest. And their works met with widespread public approval, being intelligible to an uninitiated local public by virtue of the manner of their presentation. Having something to say about the political situation direct - itself something of an achievement in a city stuffed with museums on both sides of the Wall - they were not perceived first and foremost as art.

The traces of the past, and the possible evolution of the two political systems which once clashed in Berlin, were also what **Via Lewandowsky** from Dresden and **Krzysztof Wodiczko** originally from Warsaw and now living in the United States were concerned with. Used to operating in an urban environment with existing



**Ilya Kabakov, *Two Reminders of Fear*, 1990.** (Photo Michael Harms)

Sätze belegen beispielhaft die Ideologien, deren Entstehung sich in den Köpfen der Menschen über Jahre vollzogen hat und die nur langsam wieder aufgelöst werden können. Im Gegensatz zu den Abfallteilen erscheinen die politischen Äußerungen der Menschen seltsam abstrakt, sie werden als merkwürdige Kopfgeburten entlarvt. Listig legt Kabakov den Umkehrschluß nahe: der eigentliche Müll sind die von der Geschichte überholten Ideologien.

Seine Installation parallel zur ehemaligen Mauer verdeutlicht, welche Mauern in den Köpfen noch abgebaut werden müssen, welche geistigen Blockaden noch den Weg zu einem offenen Zusammenleben verstellen. Wer den Müll und die Texte in Kopfhöhe wahrgenommen hat, sollte die Gänge an der anderen Seite geläutert verlassen. Die 28 Meter langen Korridore bündeln die Kleinigkeiten zu einer Intensivstation der Geschichte. Auch in ästhetischer Hinsicht findet in den mit Müll und Zetteln behängten Gängen eine Begegnung statt zwischen dem seelenlosen Materialismus des Westens, der Wegwerfgesellschaft, und der puren Not des materiell noch unterversorgten Ostens. Daß die Installation an dem zentralen Platz Berlins die Ausstellung unversehrt überdauert hat, zeigt, daß Kabakov die Aufgabe, 'Kunst im öffentlichen Raum' zu realisieren, bewältigt hat, denn sonst ist die Zerstörung solcher Kunstwerke die Regel.

Was die Arbeiten dieser Künstler verbindet und über den Anlaß hinaus als Kunstwerke interessant macht, ist der Verzicht auf eine festgelegte Figürlichkeit, der zu einem Gewinn allgemeiner politischer Aussagen führt. Boltanski und Kabakov arbeiten mit authentischen Materialien und sprachlichen Zeichen, die anstelle der tradierten bildnerischen Mittel soziale Zusammenhänge sichtbar machen.

Während Thema und Ort den Installationen vorab eine politische Bedeutung verliehen haben, erhalten sie ihre spezifisch künstlerische Aussage erst durch die subjektive Reaktion, durch die temporäre Zeichensetzung in der sich verändernden Stadt. Boltanski und Kabakov zeigen ihre künstlerischen Arbeiten als Diskussionsbeitrag im öffentlichen Raum. Sie sollen keine Gedankstätten sein, sondern als Denkmäler wirken für die Zukunft der beiden Teile Berlins. Die Künstler gingen dabei von einer individuellen Fragestellung aus, sie waren am Anlaß der Ausstellung, der Situation Berlin 1990, persönlich interessiert. Ihre künstlerischen Arbeiten stießen auf breite öffentliche Akzeptanz, denn durch die Form, in der das Thema dargeboten wurde, waren sie für ein nicht vorinformiertes Publikum vor Ort verständlich. So wurden sie nicht primär als Kunst wahrgenommen, weil sie direkt etwas zur politischen Situation mitzuteilen hatten, was in der ansonsten so musealisierten Mauerstadt Berlin als künstlerische Leistung zu werten ist.

Nach den Spuren der Vergangenheit und der möglichen Entwicklung der beiden in Berlin zusammentreffenden politischen Systeme fragen auch **Via Lewandowsky** aus Dresden und der in den USA lebende **Krzysztof Wodiczko** aus Warschau. Sie operieren im städtischen Raum mit den schon vorhandenen Bildern. In Berlin haben

DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

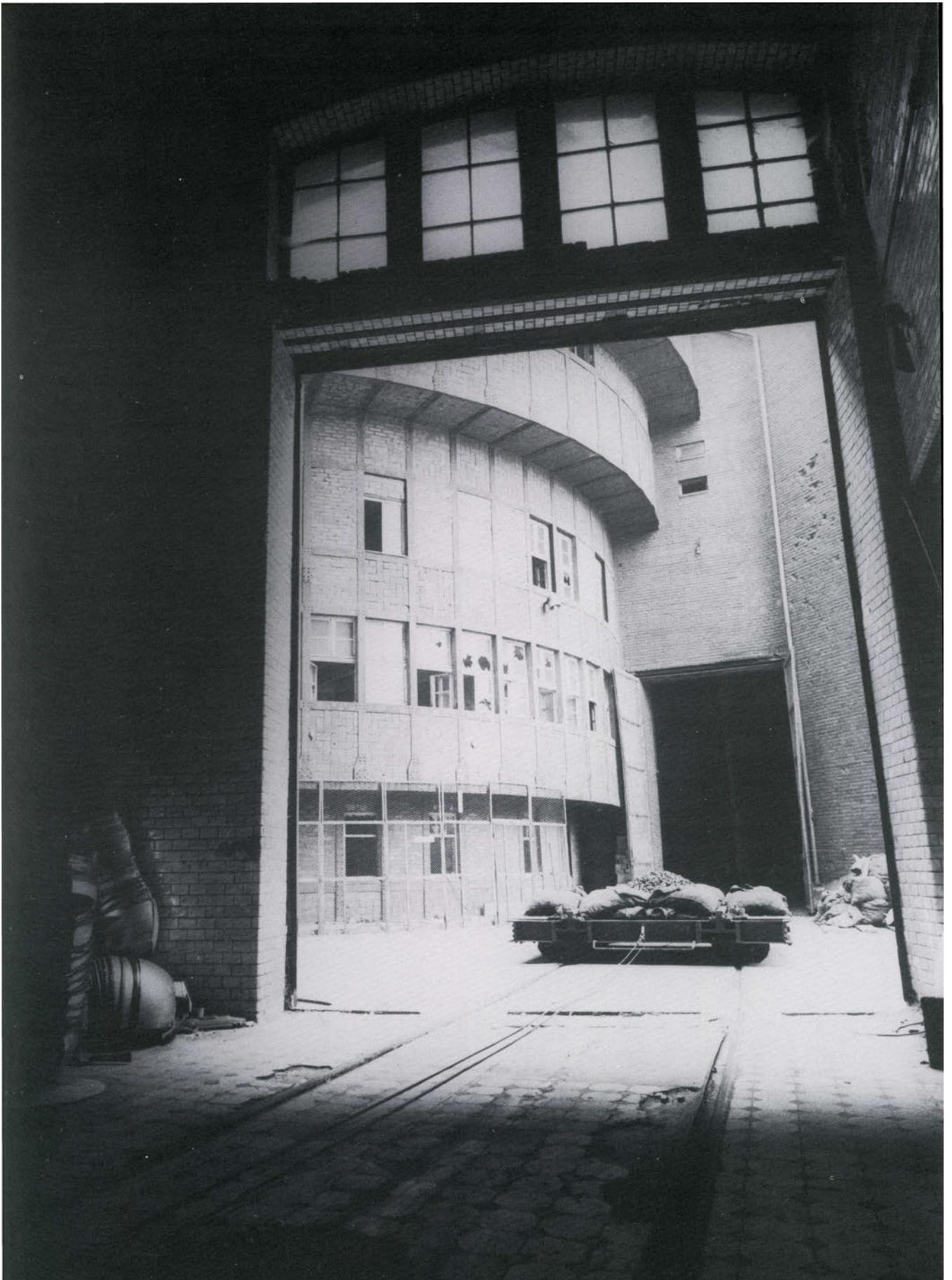
sie sich Monumente ausgewählt, die einmal öffentlich Ideologie vermitteln sollten, die Siegestsäule des geeinten Kaiserreichs im Westen bzw. das Lenin-Monument im Osten.

Lewandowsky hat der zur Kaiserzeit, und dann noch einmal 1939, während der national-sozialistischen Herrschaft, feierlich enthüllen Siegestsäule das Sockelgeschoß genommen, indem er ein unten umlaufendes Schlachtenbild durch helles leuchtendes Material verdeckte. Von dem unsichtbar gewordenen Mosaik, das nach einem Entwurf Anton von Werners die 'Rückwirkung des Kampfes gegen Frankreich auf die Einigung und die Schaffung des Deutschen Kaiserreiches' darstellen soll, nahm er eine Frottage ab, und hängte sein Abziehbild des preußischen Militarismus, einen auf die Strukturen der Steine reduzierten 'grauen Geschichtslappen', vor ein Wandbild in Ost-Berlin, das die DDR als Paradies der Werktätigen erscheinen lassen sollte. Indem er das reaktionäre Bild des Krieges mit dem verlogenen Bild des Friedens, also ein idealisierendes Historienbild mit einem Meisterwerk des Sozialistischen Realismus kombiniert, demontiert der Künstler zwei Ideologien zugleich.

Proteste bei einigen Bürgern im Osten der Stadt löste Krzysztof Wodiczko aus, als er das Lenin-Monument zum Bildträger seiner Diaprojektionen machte. Der 30 Meter hohe Denkmal-Gigant steht auf einem imposanten Platz, der von einer vor allem für verdiente Staatsbeamte errichteten Hochhaus-Siedlung umgeben wird. Statt jedoch wie einst in der Zeit des Sozialismus im Scheinwerferlicht zu leuchten oder wie seit der Wende nachts im Dunkeln zu bleiben (gleich nach dem 9. November 1989 wurde die Beleuchtung abgestellt), verwandelte sich der Revolutionsführer aus rotem Granit durch Wodiczkos nächtliche Lichtzeichen in einen Shopper aus dem Osten, der mit vollgepacktem Einkaufswagen Waren aus Westberlin transportiert, wie es seinerzeit tatsächlich überall zu beobachten war. Solche Montagen sind in der Tradition gerade so sozialkritischen Berliner Dadaisten der 20er Jahre zu sehen, denn Wodiczkos Arbeitsprinzip ist ebenfalls geeignet, gesellschaftliche Widersprüche sichtbar zu machen.

**Hans Haacke** nahm wie bei früheren Arbeiten auch diesmal auf vorhandene Objekte im städtischen Raum Bezug und fügte nur wenige akzentuierende Zeichen hinzu, um die ökonomischen Verhältnisse (Besitzstand, Methoden des Machterhalts) in einem prägnanten Bild zu verdeutlichen. Im Grenzstreifen der Mauer hat er einen ehemaligen Wachturm restaurieren und in einen vornehmen Werbeturm verwandeln lassen: der auf dem Aussichtsdach montierte Mercedes-Stern wirkt wie ein Blickfang für künftige Konsumenten. Die an den Wänden zu lesenden Sätze 'Bereit sein ist alles' (Shakespeare) bzw. 'Kunst bleibt Kunst' (Goethe) sind Zitate aus Mercedes-Reklamen. Haackes drastische Koppelung von Symbolen der alten und neuen Machthaber irritiert alle Ost-Bürger, die noch nicht gegen moderne Werbestrategien abgehärtet sind. Den West-Bürger dagegen bietet der Mercedes-Turm im Todesstreifen

**Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled*, 1990, Mauerstraße, Berlin (East). (Photo Werner Zellien)**



DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

andere Lesarten an, denn seit langem dominiert der Mercedes-Stern auf dem Europa-Center die Skyline von West-Berlin und der Konzern ist das größte Industrieunternehmen in der BRD, seit er auch im Militärgeschäft operiert.

Lange nach einen geeigneten Ort zu suchen hatte auch **Jannis Kounellis**: die erste Idee scheiterte am Einspruch der Anwohner, die zweite, bestimmt für ein ruinöses Industriegelände aus den 20er Jahren, konnte nur durch den schnellen Einsatz und das organisatorische Geschick hilfsbereiter Techniker realisiert werden. Eine breite Lore wird durch ein Zugseil von einer maschinell betriebenen Winde hin und her gezogen. Die stockende Bewegung zwischen den zwei stillgelegten, verlassen Hallen einer Umspannstation für Starkstrom wiederholt sich in regelmäßigem Rhythmus.

Umgeben von gefüllten Jutesäcken liegt dort in der Mitte ein magisch inszenierter Haufen schwärzlich glänzender Kohlebrocken. Das Energiepotential erinnert an die frühe Industrialisierung, doch die zwanghaft wiederholte Bewegung des Wagens läßt Melancholie aufkommen bei der Frage nach dem Fortschritt. Kounellis verweist auf die Geschichte des Ortes und läßt dessen Zukunft ahnen. Der Mechanismus kommt nicht zur Ruhe, ein Pendeln ohne Ziel, und doch ist die szenische Bewegung zugleich ein Zeichen neuen Lebens. Die Bewegung zwischen beiden Hallen ist lesbar als bewegtes Bild der Verbindung. Hatte Kounellis in früheren Werken vor allem das Feuer als archaische Energie dargestellt, so ist der nur mühsam vorankommende Wagen nun zugleich ein Bild der in Berlin bevorstehenden Prozesse.

In einem direkt an der ehemaligen Mauer gelegenen, dicht verschlossenen dunklen Lagerraum eines Geschäftsgebäudes aus dem 19. Jahrhundert inszenierte **Rebecca Horn** ein mehrteiliges Ensemble, das die Grenzen in der Stadt zum Thema hat. An der Decke sind paarweise sechs schlangenförmige Kupferrohre montiert, die mit Hochspannungsstrom geladen sind und zwischen sich ein zischendes Blitzlicht erzeugen, elektrische Küsse, die vor Ort als Bild der deutsch-deutschen Vereinigung zu deuten sind, aber auch an die elektrifizierten Wchanlagen im früheren Todesstreifen erinnern. In der Achse darunter schaut der Besucher durch ein Fernglas auf zwei Gucklöcher in der Wand: der Blick geht hinüber von Ost nach West und folgt den Augen der früheren Grenztruppen des SED-Staates, der hier durch ein skurriles Fundstück dargestellt wird, durch eine alte eiserne Schneidemaschine. Das Gerät gab der Arbeit den Titel *Der Raum des verwundeten Affen*, denn ein sich rhythmisch daraus hervorhebendes Element ähnelt tatsächlich dem Umriß eines Ausschau haltenden Affen. Am Fußboden schlagen zwei Metronome verschiedene Zeit-Takte an, im Westen schneller als im Osten. Der Besucher wird in diesem Raum in ein Wechselspiel von verschiedenen Geräuschkulissen und Bewegungsabläufen verstrickt — es spukt allenthalben.

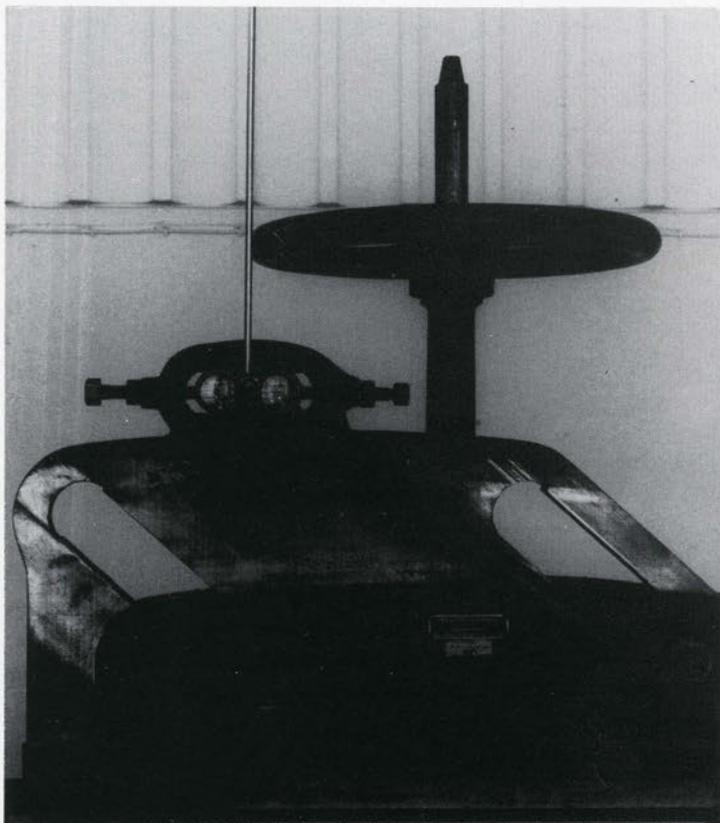


Via Lewandowsky, *Zur Lage des Hauptes*, 1990, Victory Monument, Berlin (West) (Photo Christina Bolduan)

images, they picked two of Berlin's monuments - West Berlin's Victory Column, erected after Germany's unification by Bismarck in 1871, and East Berlin's Lenin Monument - which epitomized the ideology of their respective epochs. In the case of the Victory Column, which in 1939 under the Nazi regime was solemnly unveiled for a second time, Lewandowsky took the plinth and covered the battle frieze running round its lower part with a phosphorescent material. Having made a rubbing of the (now invisible) mosaic, based on a design by Anton von Werner which represented the 'Effect of the war with France on the unification and creation of the German Empire', Lewandowsky displayed this image of Prussian militarism (a 'colourless rag of history' engraved in stone) in front of an East Berlin mural depicting the one-time German Democratic Republic as a workers' paradise. Thus, by combining a reactionary representation of war with a mendacious one of peace, or what masquerades as an image of historical inspiration with a supposed masterpiece of socialist realism, he killed two ideological birds with one stone.

Wodiczko, meanwhile, provoked some East Berlin protests when he used the Lenin Monument as a screen for his slide show. The 30 meter high red granite monument stands on an imposing square, which is surrounded by high-rise blocks constructed primarily for deserving bureaucrats. Instead of being illuminated by spot-lights, as it was during Communist rule or remaining in the dark as it has since the collapse of the Wall (the lights were turned off immediately after 9 November 1989), the leader of the Russian Revolution was transformed into an East Berlin shopper, like so many others at the time, returning from West Berlin with a heavily-laden shopping basket. The use of such montages to point up social contradictions follows a long tradition hallowed by Berlin dissidents, notably the Dadaists in the years following the First World War.

**Hans Haacke**, as in his previous work, made use of existing buildings, merely adding a few special features to highlight issues of ownership and power. Thus, in the no-man's-land by the Wall, he had a former watchtower restored and converted into a structure for high-class advertisements, including a Mercedes tristar prominently mounted on its look-out roof; while Shakespeare's 'The Readiness is all' ('Bereit sein ist alles') and Goethe's 'Art is art forever' ('Kunst bleibt Kunst'), both of which had been used as advertising slogans by Mercedes, were plastered on the walls. This drastic coupling of past and present power symbols offended some East Berliners not yet hardened against contemporary advertising techniques; whereas West Berliners, for whom the Mercedes tristar on the Europa Center had long dominated the local skyline, just as the Daimler-Benz company has dominated the West German industrial scene since it diversified into the armaments business, tended to read the significance of the watchtower in a thoroughly different way.

DIE ENDLICHKEIT DER FREIHEIT

**Rebecca Horn, *Raum des Verwundeten Affen*, 1990,**  
Stresemannstr., Berlin. (Photo  
Christina Bolduan)

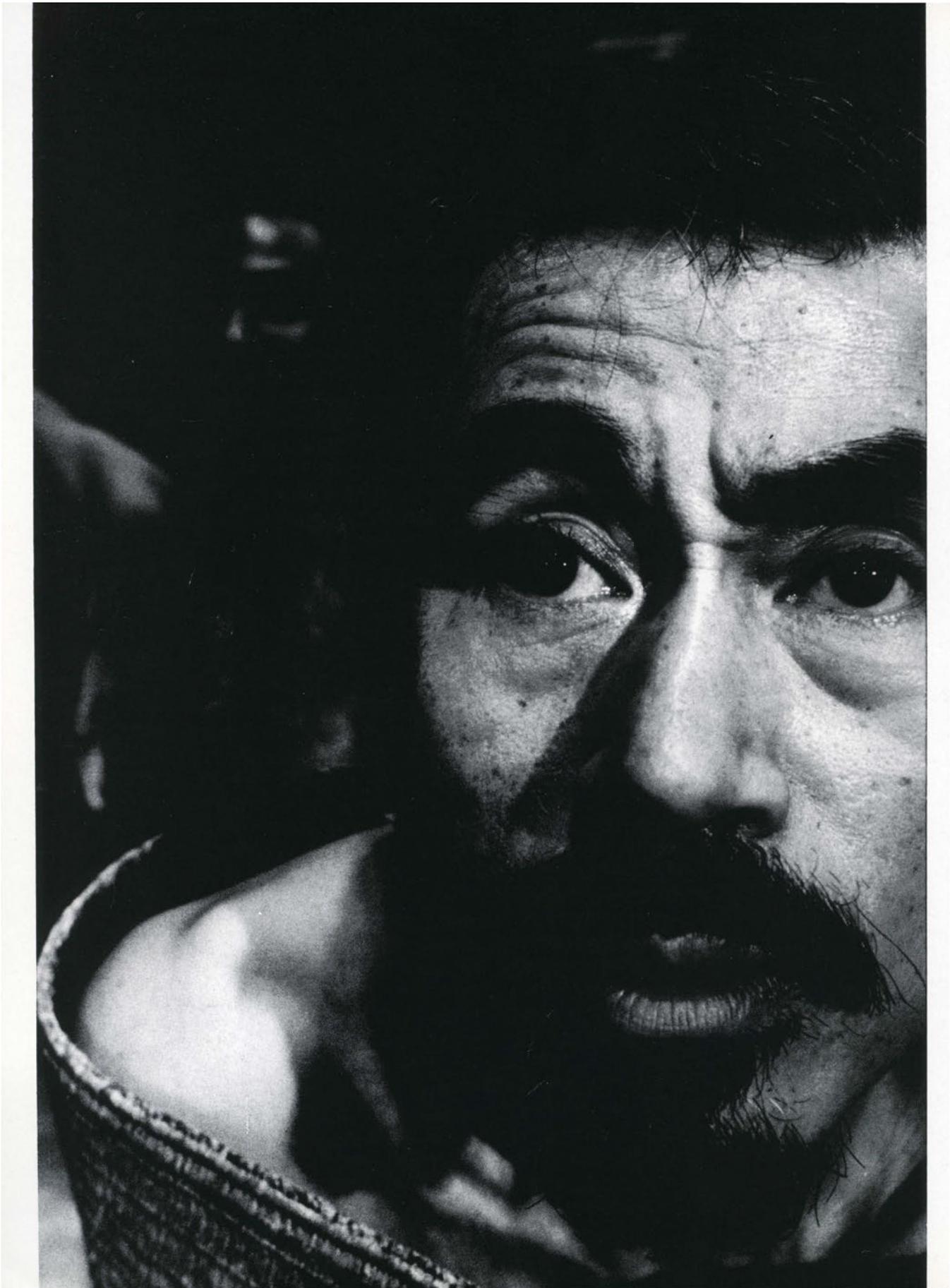
Dazu passend hat die Künstlerin ihrer Arbeit einen Märchentext der Brüder Grimm zugeordnet, in denen eine reiche *Blutwurst* eine arme *Leberwurst* zu fangen versucht - wie der Westen den Osten. Rebecca Horn hat das Thema ihrer biomorphen Apparate hier in einer auch politisch zu verstehenden Form variiert. Es ist ihr damit exemplarisch gelungen, die 'freie' künstlerische Arbeit in einen gesellschaftlich gegebenen Zusammenhang zu stellen, ihr auf diese Weise eine 'Endlichkeit' im Sinne einer Finalisierung zu geben.

Dennoch besteht ein Unterschied zwischen der Kunst und der Politik, der nicht zu unterschätzen ist. 'Das Lebendige an der Kunst ist die Differenz zur Politik - das Kunstwerk weist sowohl auf den Terror der Verwirklichung als auch auf das Unwirkliche hin', schrieb Heiner Müller, der von den ausgestellten Kunstwerken meinte, sie erlaubten 'einen Blick in den Abgrund der Freiheit, den das Plastiklächeln, mit dem die Medien den Planeten einspeichern, dem Auge der Mehrheit entzieht.'

**Jannis Kounellis** had to look for a long time to find a suitable location. His first project was blocked by protesting neighbours, while his second needed the prompt assistance and organizational skill of some helpful technicians to get it off the ground. A cable from a mechanically-operated winch jerkily pulled a wide trolley to and fro between two derelict high-voltage transformer sheds. In between the two sheds lay, surrounded by filled jute sacks, a magically set heap of glistening black lumps of coal. While the latter was reminiscent once again of the early days of industrialization, the cable car's stuttering advance raised a question mark over subsequent progress - a silent but eloquent pointer to the history of the place and its future. The mechanism never rests, a pendulum moving without a goal, and yet the somewhat theatrical movement denotes new life. The movement between the two sheds can be read as a dynamic image of connection. If in his past work Kounellis represented primeval energy by means of fire, his picture now of painfully slow progress, offered a glimpse of things to come.

**Rebecca Horn**, in a windowless nineteenth century commercial warehouse adjacent to the former Wall, created a multi-part installation taking the frontier which had run through the city as its theme. First, six serpentine copper tubes in pairs were mounted on the ceiling; charged with electricity, they generated hissing sparks, like electrical kisses, which in the local context could be held to symbolize German reunification, but which also recalled the electrified fences installed in the former no-man's-land. Below them a telescope directed the visitor's attention to two peep-holes on the Wall looking from East to West, along the sight lines of the border guards of the East German Communist state. These were scurrilously represented by an old iron cutting machine out of which there protruded a component which resembled a watching monkey in profile - hence the title of *Space of the Wounded Monkey* given to the exhibit as a whole. On the floor, finally, were two metronomes beating different times, the western one faster than the eastern. Visitors were thus caught in a witches' kitchen of conflicting sounds and moving pictures. The artist complemented her work with a Grimm's fairytale in which a rich black pudding seeks to capture a poor liver sausage - like the West vis-à-vis the East. Horn thereby conferred a specifically political dimension on her biomorphic apparatus. In doing so she succeeded, to an exemplary degree, in placing a 'free' work of art in a socially determined context and in pointing towards a 'finitude' in the sense of a finalization.

The distinction between art and politics remains, nevertheless, crucial. 'What is special about the arts,' wrote Heiner Müller, 'is that which distinguishes them from the world of politics: a work of art encapsulates the terror of realization and the unreal alike.' And, with particular reference to the works in this exhibition, he added that they permitted 'a glimpse of the darker side of freedom which, for most spectators, the plastic, toadying smile of the mass media carefully conceals.'



**Betty Caplan**

# TRAVELLING LIGHT

**A Meeting with Yoshi Oida**

**Yoshi Oida.** (Photo Ivan Kyncl)

**Y**oshi Oida is not a very wise man. If he were he wouldn't be here. The Tibetan Book of the Dead, on which the first of his two-part spiritual odyssey *Voyages* is based, makes that quite clear. 'If you understand, you don't need to come back to this world,' he maintains. 'As for me,' he laughs, 'I'm not very enlightened!' He is well acquainted with the foibles of mankind. Greed, for example: 'I know how much I need to eat in order to stay alive, but I want to eat *more!* Why?' He shrugs. He only knows it's stupid. A 56-year-old man inhabiting a body thirty years younger, it obviously hasn't done that much harm.

Oida draws constantly on a rich store of knowledge to inform his acting. We talk about emotion in the theatre; how actors so often resort to shouting and screwing up their faces. 'But that doesn't happen in real life,' he says. 'Only in the theatre! When you're sad you're very quiet.' His demeanour changes and his face grows darker as he speaks. 'Of course emotion is involved in the theatre,' he says. 'The problem is, what kind of emotion?' If a director or actor sets out to make an audience laugh or cry, that is manipulation. But if you tell a human story which moves you, it will move the audience. Brecht wasn't aiming at cutting emotion out of the theatre, merely sentimentality. Because he felt the human situation, he was able to produce his own poetic. Japanese theatre, with its highly developed sense of the aesthetic, no longer thrills Oida. 'Going to the theatre is like taking a shower. You feel refreshed. It gives you the courage and energy to keep living.' Or should.

We talk about his performance as Drona, the god-like warrior in Peter Brook's production of the Mahabharata. For me, the image of the warrior, completely defeated at the news of his beloved son's death, is indelible. Krishna has succeeded in identifying his most vulnerable spot, his Achilles' heel. The fact that the news is false, is merely a plot to weaken the side, makes it all the more terrible. But Drona never asks for proof, never expresses a wish to see the body. It is as if he had already succumbed to despair. In an interview in 1985 for *Alternatives Théâtrales*, Oida said:

'Drona's death is tragic, violent and beautiful: the death of a Samurai. It was Peter who found the gesture of me pouring blood over my own head . . . The attitude I take in this performance reflects what I understand by death, the relationship between body and spirit at that precise moment.'<sup>1</sup>

What is so moving about this scene is the fact that in extremity, Drona displays no emotion. 'What is the mystery of acting,' Oida says. 'At that moment, the actor can't work emotion. The audience must put emotion into the actor. I am just trying to connect with the sound of the Japanese drum. I don't try to be sad. I create an empty space where the audience can put its imagination.' Peter Brook's notion of the empty space has moved inside, to the actor's solar plexus. The concentration on the drum is like a mantra.

'I take up a meditation position. I await death without feeling any fear. I try to go beyond the body, to separate body and spirit . . . At that moment, when he sits in the yoga position, Drona abandons his body, he throws it away, then struggles to keep his spirit alive; and at that moment someone physically kills his body.'<sup>2</sup>

This nothingness, this empty space, is the place where true creativity comes from. It is the stillness of the mind as it ceases to chatter and focuses on a point, the chaos out of which the world was born. It is, for a fleeting second, the nirvana to which Buddhists aspire.

The sacred *Bardo Thodol* in the Tibetan Book of the Dead deals with the transition period between death and the next life. For someone so tinglingly alive, Yoshi Oida is very pre-occupied with death. Why did he take on the gargantuan task of adapting such a difficult book for the stage? 'Life we know very well, but we don't know what happens after death.' Though he doesn't count himself a Buddhist, his attitude towards death is foreign to Westerners. He has even been criticised for treating death as a joke. But it could be claimed that it is only when we deny death that it becomes so threatening. The book teaches us that in learning how to die, we learn to live. It also shows how generous Buddhism is. There is no concept of eternal hell, merely a succession of chances to reach the Enlightened State, listed in order of preference: 'Even if not liberated at one setting-face-to-face, one ought to be liberated at another; this is why so many different settings-face-to-face are necessary.'

Oida plays a recently dead man who does not appear to have read the book. He ignores its chief warning, viz 'Abandon all dotings and hankerings.' He cannot disentangle himself from the needs of the flesh. Using very little text, Oida and Afro-American dancer and choreographer Elsa Wolliaaston rely on movement and on the haunting music of Olivier Coupille which, using a variety of instruments relayed electronically, frequently evokes the sound of ghostly, disembodied voices. There is very little narrative: the piece deals more with bodily states - the rage the dead person feels at being invisible, inaudible and thereby impotent, the longing he has to inhabit another body in order to enjoy the flesh again. Wolliaaston leads him through his journey to rebirth where the whole wretched cycle begins again. Yet there is a lightness about the whole thing, an attitude of amused detachment. The lack of gloom can probably be traced back in part to the fact that although Buddhism scorns the illusory pleasures of this world, it lacks Christianity's positive sense of sin. The same is true of other religions in which Oida is interested. 'According to Shinto,' he says, 'you merely have to remove the dust from man, and he's like a god.' Sin is an individual problem, not something you're born with. 'After birth, yes, then I do many bad things!' He also maintains that in Africa God is not special, God is everywhere, even in the dirt, whereas in the West God is considered to inhabit special places like churches which have

therefore to be cleaned up. Oida sees a universal energy everywhere; he is aware of participating in the universe.

The search continues. As the hero in *The Tale of the Chameleon*, unlike his two mercenary companions, he shuns the promise of wealth in favour of knowledge. 'I want to be...Nothing. I want to look for the sense of what I have seen.' It is this fortitude which enables him to persist, though versatile West African dancer Koffi Kokko as the eponymous chameleon puts him through many hoops before allowing him to perceive God. The piece ends on a joyous note as Kokko, his skin whitened to represent the godhead, initiates him into the dance. 'This ending is very characteristic of Noh,' Oida says. 'Combining the serious with the light-hearted. Ending with a dance.' The union of opposites. Like *Voyages*, Yoshi Oida is deadly serious and very funny at the same time. The ratio of laughter to words on my tape is about 2:1. And this understanding of irony and contradiction helps him find his way to a character. 'Irony allows us to communicate a more complex indirect truth, a truth difficult to convey using only logic.'<sup>3</sup>

Since May, he has been rehearsing the part of Gonzalo in Peter Brook's production of *The Tempest* which will open in Glasgow in the autumn and subsequently tour round Europe. 'The human being does illogical things,' he says. Then, pausing for thought, 'even Queen Elizabeth! If you look for the character using logic from the text, you won't get it. Every human has different faces. Only God doesn't change. You must discover the possible opposites. Prospero says Gonzalo is wise, Gonzalo is kind. I must find where Gonzalo is *not* wise, *not* kind.' With Drona, he often experimented with ways of approaching the character which didn't feel right, and found a rightness inadvertently; just as in the Sahara with Peter Brook's troupe, he had learned what it was to be a bridge between the sky and the earth. 'Discovery is more than words. You may *know* something, but not *feel* it to be true.' That was borne out for him in India. Watching bodies being cremated on the banks of the Ganges River made a profound impression. 'Living in cities, surrounded by cars and cafés, you don't feel you exist on water, earth, air, fire.'

Was a particular interpretation emerging? I mentioned Jonathan Miller's recent production which focused on the play's colonialism. 'Peter never teaches or directs actors on the stage. He gives a situation where actors can develop. He doesn't push a message. When I first met him, 22 years ago, I thought, 'This man hasn't got his own opinion!'' More laughter. 'If you put a political message on the play, you make Shakespeare smaller. And only those interested in that message will come. But the play has many facets. Each audience must be allowed to judge for itself.' Here Yoshi Oida digresses a little to point out the difference between the ideal and the real, the spirit and the flesh. 'Marxism is a wonderful philosophy, but controlled by human beings . . . well, that's different!' Peter Brook aims to



Yoshi Oida and Koffi Koko. (Photo Ivan Kyncl)

attract an Elizabethan audience, where groundlings can rub shoulders with kings.

Where does he think today's theatre is heading? Isn't the modern theatre in a great crisis when it attempts to deal with contemporary issues? Has it found an appropriate language and *modus vivendi*? I put it to him that Peter Brook has found a valuable form of theatre by utilising material which is so distanced in time and place. 'Yes,' he agrees, 'he does tell a story in his own way. He does it by removing all that is conventional to the theatre. That leaves the one essential: the actor. The actor makes the theatre. A beautiful set is only one side of the theatre, though given a choice I wouldn't refuse it. But actors can become a mere decoration on the set, or models for the costumes. In this case the human being doesn't come out.' Like his mentor, Oida has chosen very simple material for *Voyages*; a simplicity which allows for strong acting. 'The stories today are too complicated. Besides, I'm a foreigner.' The story needs to be simple so that it can be shared universally, and, more specifically, so that he is able to perform it in the native language wherever he goes, even though the key role of the storyteller in *The Tale of the Chameleon* does in fact change en route.

Where next? During the London run of *Voyages*, Oida was giving actors' workshops; although, typically, he referred to them as workshops for human beings. Press him on the theatre, and again and again he comes back to life. After all, few people can expect to become actors or directors, he says, but everyone will be able to take away something. He feels it's very difficult to teach acting anyway but, through the use of the voice and the body, you can understand something. He demonstrates: in the *Tale of the Chameleon*, God speaks with many voices, one of which is that of a beggar. 'You want to know? Listen and observe.' Vocal tricks don't work; but if the actor feels the self-confidence to *behave* like a master or priest, the voice will sound right.

Next year, Methuen will publish an English edition of his book *The Floating Actor*. Why floating? Physically he has moved around a great deal. Mentally, too, he has constantly been looking for an answer to the basic questions: what is an actor? what is an audience? He does not have a fixed idea. But, for him at least, it certainly does not mean staying in one place and working in a National Theatre which may well have considerable practical advantages but can too easily become a beautiful cage.

However, he says that he is a little bit ashamed: he feels as though he is clutching at a straw in the middle of the ocean. 'I act, direct, teach because I don't know what to do! What is Yoshi Oida? Nothing!' He tells me he no longer has the desire to do Great Acting. Perhaps that's because he is already there.

#### NOTES

1. Quoted from *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, compiled by David Williams, London: Methuen, 1988, p3.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*

# Reviews

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

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## LONDON

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### Opera Factory

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#### Satyricon

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#### Drill Hall

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*Reviewed by David Hoyle*

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'There's so much to buy for next month's banquets', muses the hermaphroditic slave, Niceros, as he bends over and is repeatedly penetrated by one of the guests at Trimalchio's party, 'sausage, blood pudding, giblets...'

Opera Factory's production of Bruno Maderna's *Satyricon* played for twelve performances in October/November, marking the first British staging of this music theatre piece since its Amsterdam première in 1973. The stage was arranged so as to provide no real focal point. Instead the eye wandered uneasily across the breadth of the stage: occupying the right-hand third or so, a band of seventeen musicians, in the middle a stepped pyramid structure on whose tiers the party-goers could nod off or quarrel, and on the left a fountain splashing onto a basin of grapes behind which ran a raised platform. The lack of visual focus might reflect ambiguities of response to the decadent banquet scene in Petronius' novel, the absence of a definite moral standard, but there was still a sense of imperfect planning and a feeling that the set was squeezed into the space left available by the orchestra.

It is true that the sort of devices that have made Opera Factory a revitalizing influence on mainstream opera productions

over the last decade were in evidence: a strong sense of ensemble, with good actors as well as singers (in this case four of each); the protagonists, whether singly or in groups, always meaningfully placed and active in the set; enthusiastic music direction (by David Parry); and evocative and original lighting (Steve Whitson). Besides the scene highlighted above, there were other pleasing details: a slave becomes a 'ship' on whose back Trimalchio rides holding open a papyrus scroll as if it were a sail. At the prow is a slave-girl as figure head and, following behind, Niceros pouting breath into the sail... Then there is the sight of Scintilla (charismatically played by Sian Thomas) rejected by her husband and seeming to break into a whining lament, only for us to realize that the sound emanates from a Yamaha keyboard. Details like this, however, are not in themselves sufficient.

Nor is the fact that Maderna's music has not stood the test of time as successfully as that of his fellow avant-gardists Boulez, Stockhausen and Berio - the most memorable parts of the score being where he launches into sheer pastiche - the main problem.

Apart from this being an 'open work', its sixteen sections performable in any order, *Satyricon* remained incomplete at Maderna's death; and this should allow huge scope for the imposition of a strong production concept. In the past Opera Factory have excelled at this but, despite the director Robert

Chevara's admirable additions to the quadri-lingual text (English, Latin, French, German), the event as a whole lacked a sense of unity and power to provoke. The Petronius original with its massive sense of ribald fun, its opulence, debauchery and cruelty was authentically if shockingly reproduced in the Amsterdam production. The London audience, however, scanning the broad stage for the next random episode, expressed little more than the occasional titter or chuckle, as if this were an *Up Pompeii!* for the intelligentsia. There was no real blood sausage to get its teeth into, no giblets to penetrate.

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### Live Art Week

#### Serpentine Gallery

Reviewed by Tony White

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Last September, the Serpentine Gallery played host to live works by a number of London-based artists. The programme was varied, ranging from large-scale, ambitious (or hubristic) *Gesamtkunstwerk* to smaller, perhaps more realizable pieces which played against their own limitations.

A good example of the latter was John Carson's *So What*, an understated story-telling performance. A slide of Ian Paisley, stamped with the word 'Paddy', was accompanied by Carson's rendition of 'I am a rambling Irish man', after which he sat at his table, opened a bottle of Guinness and started



talking, reciting seemingly inconsequential anecdotes.

Gary Stevens' *Simple* was a solo work specially commissioned by the Serpentine Gallery. In *Simple*, he used furniture, flowers, crockery and a Mr Kipling cake to create a delightfully obsessive comic character who played ridiculously anal games on the edge of a precipice. Both Gary Stevens' and John Carson's performances were slight, small and economical, but (as the humourously self-deprecating titles suggest) knowingly so.

Definitely not playing against its limitations was Marty St James and Anne Wilson's *Civic Monument*, placed outdoors on a specially constructed stage, an elaborate facsimile of a triumphal arch. One or two images were fairly striking, e.g. the sight of two men atop the monument pouring coffee from a Thermos flask in mock-heroic pose, but on the whole *Civic Monument* was disappointing. It was well enough

performed, but it seemed that there was too little room for the performers to do much more than just go through the motions, as one tableau followed another in relatively arbitrary order. In terms of imagery and content Civic Monument seemed, at best, simplistic.

For his outrageous piece of entertainment, *Taboo*, Trevor Stuart of Lumière & Son appeared in a cloud of dry ice, wearing naught but a straight jacket and a pair of pebble glasses, pulling a ghetto-blaster on a skateboard by means of string attached, with a ribbon, to his penis. *Taboo* was very, very funny.

*Logo Lingo*, the new performance from Sylvia Ziranek, was mainly concerned with one issue: sponsorship. After making her entrance on a huge BMW motorbike (well nearly, it didn't quite fit through the door), she asked, 'Are we all sponsored comfortably?'. *Logo Lingo* was a relaxed performance.

Deborah Thomas' *Figures in*

*the City* presented the vivid image of two grimy characters who were always lost in their own meaningless eternal tasks: one pushed a large fragment of a classical portico, while the other manoeuvred an immense metallic ball. This was a stylish and seductive work which remained relatively open to a play of possible readings without giving anything away too easily.

In some ways, the most moving work was Clare Carswell's simple and genuinely beautiful durational piece, *Endless Devotion*, which placed two women on opposite sides of a grid or field of china plates, on which ice hearts slowly melted.

Overall, the 'Live Art Week' was a strong programme of work. It was also a welcome (and increasingly rare) opportunity to see performance art in a gallery context.

*Illustration: Clare Carswell*

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### **Gaby Agis and Company**

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#### **Pale Shelter**

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#### **The Place**

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*Reviewed by Sophie Constanti*

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Corrugated iron sculpture by Kate Blacker, light installations by Bill Culbert, urban scripts by Kate Pullinger, music by ex-Japan pretty boy David Sylvian... these have been the fatal attractions of Gaby Agis' shows since the mid '80s. And through her collaborations with such modish figures Agis has discovered one of the most effective ways of replacing the dance audience which, once supportive, has now

come to recognize her doltish, sub-feminist brand of movement as Agis' great limitation rather than (as she continues to assert) her personal aesthetic choice.

The gradual evaporation of dance qualities - and quality - in Agis' work is problematic because it highlights the shoddiness of what is still, essentially, dance informed physical performance. This year's project, *Pale Shelter*, registers as yet another lazy choreographic exercise in which Agis relies on the artistic input of her collaborators - here Steven Brown and Blaine Reininger of cult (sic) American band Tuxedomoon. *Pale Shelter's* dimly-lit opening tableau - three women (Agis, Henrietta Esiri and Miranda Pennell), each emerging naked and in semi-foetal position from her own ragged, cocoon-like structure to the treated sounds of a field recording of African elephants - harbours an organic articulacy so lacking in the subsequent episodes of this hour-long work. Likewise, there's a trace of creative discipline in the sequence of curved, weighty arm swinging dancers, (with Pennell constantly forcing a balletic turnout of legs and feet: this preparatory posture jarringly inappropriate next to the pigeon toed meandering of her companions). However, the bulk of Agis' choreography lumbers aimlessly alongside the sometimes lush, sometimes frolicsome rhythms of Blaine and Reininger's piano, violin and synthesizer compositions played live.

Most of the group contact

work had the women looking worried, insolent and apologetic by turns: no surprise, given the weakness of Agis' movement material and the shortcomings, both technical and expressive, of all four performers. This glaring incapacity for co-ordinated interaction wrecked almost every encounter - duets broken into by a third party resulting in heavy-footed derailment, more by accident than by design. Unison ensemble work also suffered, the dancers' muscle memory seemingly perplexed by the most facile four or five step phrases. But it was Agis' cereal packet-style animal bop for the quartet - each member now sporting a tail - which supplied the real death blow for this production. Aiming, perhaps, for an echo of prehistoric simplicity and innocence, Agis fared better in the two-dimensional stasis of frozen positions than in this misguided, toy zoo romp.

In common with past works created by Agis, *Pale Shelter's* potential for communication and effect rests in its performers' ability to particularize images and make them memorable - something Agis has, occasionally, achieved in earlier projects such as the improvisatory duet made with Royal Ballet dancer Ashley Page and performed on a bare stage during the 1984 Dance Umbrella. *Pale Shelter*, however, is a theatrical experience only in terms of Brown's lyrical piano meditations and Reininger's impassioned, seesawing bow action on the violin. In response to the duo's strong and easy, if occasionally saccharine,

harmonies, Agis shuffles from one underdeveloped idea to the next, her loss of focus symptomatic of choreography in which neither internal logic nor conviction are apparent.

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## CARDIFF

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### Brith Gof

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#### Pax

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#### St David's Hall

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*Reviewed by Penny Simpson*

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Brith Gof's new large-scale music theatre work *Pax* took eighteen months to evolve in settings as diverse as a disused valleys brewery and Westminster Abbey. Individual elements were each explored in isolation: a complex system of aerodynamics, a soundtrack combining pre-recorded musical material and live orchestral playing, a bilingual libretto for four voices and the construction of a full-sized cathedral from the type of scaffolding normally reserved for work on oil refineries. For two nights only in September these component parts were brought together for the first time in the interior of Wales' national concert hall. Overnight, technicians built into the hall a section of 'Gothic' arcades, originally drawn up on computer by scenographer Cliff McLucas. (In later performances, the cathedral will be constructed to its full size.) This construction was illuminated by strategically placed spotlights, which made the cathedral glint throughout the performance like some insubstantial, ghostly mirage,

looming above a floorspace littered with the detritus of chemical workers, dressed in goggles and protective clothing.

There was no questioning the huge gulf that existed between the two worlds above and below: what was marked was the degree of unnaturalness prevalent in the polluted earth situated below the pared-away purity of the aerial dimension, evoked in the spiritual symbol of a medieval cathedral. Outside this surreal world lay the third major component: the orchestra of the musicians, three singers and the narrator.

The presentation of the libretto - an exchange of letters between a mother and her astronaut son who was seen to be spiralling around the planet on a space mission as the performance progressed - acted as a crucial link between the two distinctive worlds. Choral sounds were played alongside rock tracks and recordings of whales and elephants in a powerful collage

of sounds which brilliantly underpinned the actions of the angels, from their opening balletic movements that took place 40 feet above the air to the spins and tumbles that characterized work on the ground.

The impact was there from the start with the angels lined up in niches created out of blue spotlights. Through a system of pulleys built into the Gothic columns, they began their descent, their movements developing from overstretched poses (a bit like dolls floating in water) into writhings and twistings expressing their distress as they came into contact with the ozone layer they writhed and twitched. Chained together by twists of rope or by their own limbs, the angels then tried to breach a wall of indifference, to rescue a land 'where nature has run out of time'.

Later, these messenger angels were parcelled up in plastic bags and hoisted back into the air, or



left caged in giant radiation cylinders. The ending, however, was left deliberately ambiguous with the angels back in their aerial sphere, hanging and swaying in an eerie blue light. Were they motionless because they were exhausted by their efforts to save the planet or was this Armageddon?

*Pax* gave a daring visual treatment to topical environmental issues, turning performance into parable in exhilarating and at times quite stunning ways. A far-reaching project; and it is to the company's considerable credit that it did not overreach itself in its expression.

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## HALIFAX

**Bruce McLean and Catherine Tucker**

**Vertical Balcony - A Real Gazebo**

**Henry Moore Sculpture Trust**

*Reviewed by Tim Etchells*

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Entering the beautiful large gallery at the Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, we are faced with a rhythmic arrangement of metal shapes and constructions: a flat green rectangle against a pair of red triangular boxes, a large yellow tray against a tall black obelisk. The formal concerns with the relationship between the vertical and the horizontal, between objects that have depth and capacity and surfaces that have none, are soon picked out and expanded by the performance, in which McLean

and Tucker executed a series of clean and minimal movements, gestures which appeared both to mark out and to measure the limitations and possibilities of the space. Height, breadth, depth and distance were all explored. Described in its subtitle as an 'architectural ballet', *Vertical Balcony* had at its heart a concern with a human relationship to environment; the accompanying text by Mel Gooding explodes this idea in a number of directions.

As the two performers move, a chaotic jazz soundtrack plays continuously at high volume, scrambled and repeated, looped, scratched, cut up. The moving and measuring hands of the performers soon become fists ready to punch, while their glances to each other become some kind of cocktail bar flirtation, looks full of longing, threat and alienation. The strength of the piece is that, on a performance level, it flirts gently with the notion of fictions; it eases from pure abstraction to reference and back with a casual move. Especially in the case of McLean the whole thing is played out in a style that is witty, allusive and fine.

Spatially, however, the piece lacks this ability to move from reference to abstraction and back. The actions of McLean and Tucker energize the sculpture(s) but ultimately it is a dead space, a sculpture that makes more allusion to art history than it does to the politics of living rooms or cityscapes. McLean and Tucker use each sculptural element in

turn, moving on when the immediate possibilities for interaction are exhausted. In truth this is more of an order than a structure and it left me checking off the elements one by one in an attempt to predict the length of the piece.

Compared to the fluid, more referential environmental work of Station House Opera, *Vertical Balcony* presents a space that was a static given, a fixed world that must be related to, a monolith in which one must find (not build) one's place. The ideological implications of this are clear, and despite its enjoyable surface they made this a bleak piece at times. It was about adapting or just coping, not about making or rebuilding. The performance showed us body shape and movements prescribed by a given space, and allowed invention only through reaction.

It is critical to the piece that McLean and Tucker, although employing a similar vocabulary of gestures in response to the space, infuse their movements with very different ideas. The style and reach of the performances, however, did not make it quite clear to me that these differences had been worked through and exploited.

**NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE****TSWA Four Cities Project**

High Level Bridge; HMS  
Cavalier; Victoria Tunnel,  
Biker; Northumberland Street

*Reviewed by Louise Wilson*

This Autumn, the TSWA Four Cities Project targeted Glasgow, Derry, Plymouth and Newcastle as cities in which to commission site-specific sculptural works. Artists from Britain and abroad were invited to submit proposals for public sites, pre-arranged by each of the host organizations. In the case of Newcastle, this was Projects UK.

*Trace Elements* by Stefan Gec was located beneath the High Level Bridge which spans the River Tyne, connecting Newcastle to Gateshead. Eight steel bells were suspended from one of the three wooden pier structures surrounding the base of the bridge. The bells were cast from parts of eight decommissioned Soviet submarines recently scrapped at Blyth, further up the coast. A small plaque, attached to the iron railings on the nearby Quayside, offered a map of the northern coast of the Soviet Union and the names of the eight Soviet naval ports.

The chiming of the bells was faintly audible above the traffic noise and water flow. The work prompted thoughts on the nature of the nuclear industry and its power to transmute. The intention of the artist to melt down the steel and change the form further, thus confirming



Boltanski's assertion that 'artists are the last alchemists', was successful. Its power lay in the scale of the piece's conceptual implications which extended far beyond the formal simplicity of its arrangement.

The work by American artist Chris Burden also dealt with transformation of redundant military hardware. His original idea was to fit masts and sails to the destroyer, HMS Cavalier, and to sail it up the Tyne. However, the costs of such a conversion were prohibitive - so the resulting installation presented the concept in the form of a model 7'6" long, displayed with scaled drawings and mathematical equations which continued Burden's interest in empirical investigation and a simplification of technology. The use of the Cavalier afforded an invaluable opportunity to address the history and acceptability of 'touristing' what is essentially a war memorial. Unfortunately attention was focussed below deck rather than on the unsettling sight just

over the river of a newly painted warship in dock. However, by invoking the contradictions involved in the greening of a warship, the artist's presentation certainly offered possibilities for imaginative thought of a far-ranging kind.

The physicality of Mona Hatoum's piece *Alive and Well* was startling by comparison. It was sited in Byker's Victoria Tunnel, built in the 1840s to transport coal under the city from the Spital Tongues Colliery to the river. In the course of construction a fatal accident had occurred; but during the Second World War it was ironically appropriated as a place of safety, an air raid shelter. For Hatoum's piece, the viewer proceeded along the dimly lit tunnel, through a thick smell of electrical burning in the damp, towards a glowing object at the far end. This slowly revealed itself to be a chair constructed from radiating domestic heater filaments. Despite providing a meditative focus, the single image also

induced fear. The promise of safety underground was inverted to suggest isolation and disorientation.

The last of the four pieces was situated in Northumberland Street, a busy shopping area in the centre of Newcastle.

*Standard Lives Abridged* by the Canadian Jana Sterbak consisted of 24 back-illuminated light boxes on street lights. Displayed were constructions from sheets of Letraset which had been enlarged and re-presented as simple monochrome images conveying the stages of life from babyhood to old age. Women cleaning floors led to male executives. The lollipop-shaped signs made a cursory bid for attention during Europe Week, nestling beneath large festooned flags from member countries of the EEC. The overstated imagery of delineated sex roles, however, added nothing to a constructive critique for change. Despite its centrality, the piece afforded little visibility or impact.

TSWA's intention was to present large-scale artworks of a temporary nature, giving artists the chance to make work for 'places whose structure or symbolic status, whose very lack of neutrality, may have discouraged the idea that they were available for art' (TSWA catalogue). To this extent the works were successful and have provided a healthy foundation for forthcoming projects.

*Illustration: Stefan Gec*

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## AMSTERDAM

### Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy

Stedelijk Museum, Fodor Museum

*Reviewed by A.A. Bronson*

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'Naturally no-one can produce the entire truth all by himself. A permanent discussion concerning all human problems would have to be initiated, a social discussion. I call this the 'Social Sculpture' which brings about that sense of rising above everything. Art is a means of connecting two worlds, the visible and the invisible, the physical and spiritual. In my mind this is how the concept of art now comes to the fore as the basic form of economic production.'

Using this idea of Joseph Beuys as a starting point, Louwrien Wijers, the Dutch artist and writer who in 1982 had arranged a public meeting between Beuys and the Dalai Lama, conceived this unique hybrid project. 'Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy' took the form, principally, of a symposium involving artists, scientists, spiritual leaders and economists, the audience consisting largely of business managers, together with a few artists, critics and other cultural workers. This event was supplemented by videotapes, books, workshops, an exhibition and an art project on the Amsterdam trams. Original plans had called for an experimental building to house symposium

and workshops alike: this clay structure was conceived by a group of builders who had worked on projects with Beuys and were immersed in his teaching. But finally the symposium unfolded in the Stedelijk Museum, while the exhibition, workshops and a half-scale model of the originally intended building shared the grounds of the Fodor Museum. This reduced version, although lacking the physical unity of an actual sculptural structure, was a conceptual knot of people, belief systems, disciplines and artworks in somewhat abrasive juxtaposition.

The symposium itself acted as a microcosm of the entire project. Each day the proceedings were introduced by video portraits of the panellists in their own environments: on the first day these were artist Robert Rauschenberg; Nobel Prize-winning physicist David Bohm; the Dalai Lama; and the Russian economist Stanislav Menshikov, member of the Politburo and credited by some with the invention of Glasnost. In the face of such distinguished speakers, moderator Brian Redhead of the BBC - an extraordinary choice for the chairing of such a symposium - laboured at keeping his own white smile on camera, running the discussion with a kind of 'Brian Redhead Show' glamour, which involved summarizing each participant's speech and reducing it to a pulpy platitude. In the question period which followed lunch, Redhead subjected each question to his folksy modifications and

commentary before throwing the remains to the panellists. The week proceeded in this abortive rhythm, moments of brilliance and insight from the panellists alternating with stretches of Redhead's treacle.

By mid-week a number of themes were emerging from the conversation, specifically environmental issues and topics of third world cultures in relation to industrialized nations. Mother Tessa Bielecki, an American Carmelite nun who helped found a monastic community for men and women together, played the part of the Mother Superior on Wednesday; firmly blocking Redhead's attempts to trivialize, she encouraged the other speakers to develop their themes in longer, more deeply felt speeches than they had previously been allowed.

By now the position of the panellists was clear: the artists were promoting a point of view which could be summed up as 'Think globally, act locally'; the scientists were firmly separating the uses made of technology from the spirit of scientific enquiry; and while spiritual leaders distanced themselves from organized religion, the economists were eager to project a warm humanity and global vision.

On Friday four charismatic participants meshed into an enthusiastic team. Artist Marina Abramovic, new age scientist and environmental activist Fritjof Capra, Hindu/Catholic priest-philosopher Raimon Panikkar and Sufi economist H.J.

Witteveen (once Managing Director of the IMF) agreed, and agreed to disagree, on a variety of subjects ranging from monetary and environmental policies of national governments and the IMF to the need for 'cultural disarmament' in the West's relationship with third world countries.

A social sculpture has shape, weight, mass; and on this final day it was the shape of the sculpture that emerged, the vessel in which we found ourselves. Our own physical weight contributed to the moral weight of the sculpture; together we provided the critical mass needed for the completed artwork to emerge. And although the subject matters discussed come with their own implicit baggage of clichés and platitudes, what had emerged was something more significant. As Louwrien Wijers herself said at the beginning of each day, she had designed a social sculpture, she had assembled the parts and set it in motion; and now it was a living creature.

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## NEW YORK

### Long Tongues

#### Apollo Theatre

*Reviewed by Richard Squires*

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An ambitious new addition to the family of total theatre came to the stage last December at the Apollo Theatre in New York. The jazz opera *Long Tongues* was created and scored by saxophonist Julius Hemphill of the World Saxophone Quartet, with a



libretto by Judith Jackson, who also directed. The production featured Thomas Young, the City Opera tenor who was last seen in the leading role of Schoenberg's *Moses und Aaron* at Lincoln Center last fall. He was supported by the 14-piece Harlem Festival Orchestra in the pit, Mr Hemphill's saxophone choreographed by Martyn Worrell and Ajax Joe Drayton and historical films and slides projected in the background.

It all added up to a multimedia extravaganza that for sheer entertainment was about as good as new operatic work can get. The story revolved around the chance encounter of the Professor (Thomas Young), a street-sweeping bum dressed up in a memorable suit of neckties, with a couple of young hip-hop rappers from the streets of Washington, D.C. After absorbing the customary abuse for his age and eccentricities, the Professor tells them a thing or two about music, embarking on a reverie about the city corner where they stand - a corner where the jazz

club Crystal Caverns had featured big names in jazz like Duke Ellington in the '40s, and the saintly John Coltrane and Satanic Miles Davis in the '60s - before closing in the wake of the inner city riots which followed the assassination of Martin Luther King. As he describes its history the club transforms itself on stage, with the music and dance of one era flowing into those of the next, until by the end nearly half a century of black American culture has been portrayed.

It is interesting to compare a virtually all-black production like *Long Tongues* to new operatic work from white American composers. American blacks have a considerable advantage in staging *Gesamkunstwerk* like this, because they are able to draw from a rich vein of indigenous culture which lends their work an immediate sense of pride and vitality. Prokofiev and Bartok had a similar advantage in refining the folk idioms of their own national cultures - and their example was followed if not quite realized by American composers like Harry Partch and Aaron Copland. But there is precious little indigenous culture for most modern-day white Americans to build upon, and many contemporary composers have turned to theoretical models instead - borrowed from the European serialism of Schoenberg, the American indeterminism of John Cage, or the minimalism of LaMonte Young. The unfortunate result of such dependence on theory over experience is often a repetitious torture that even a good Wagnerian could never

abide. By contrast, a work like *Long Tongues* can seem suspiciously naive and entertaining - and even joyful, if the truth be told. It's enough to make one think of Mozart.

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## PARIS

**Robert Wilson**

**Black Rider**

**Théâtre du Châtelet**

*Reviewed by Fiona Dunlop*

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Number 12 is the dominating structure of Wilson's new rock-opera staged last October at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris by Hamburg's Thalia Theater. An extraordinary combination of talents brought together three generations of American culture in this burlesque tragi-comedy: music by Tom Waits, text by William Burroughs, sets and direction by Bob Wilson. Twelve scenes, twelve characters, twelve songs (later boosted to thirteen), and twelve magic bullets manipulated by a devil.

For Wilson 'the figure 12 has many meanings. There is the graphic interest of a straight and a curved line, it's also at the top of the clock representing the passage from darkness to light, interior to exterior.' His approach to the very Faustian Bohemian legend *The Black Rider* starts from an exterior visual construction into which Waits' songs and Burroughs' text are embroidered. A medley of cultural references range from nightmarish shadows on a giant screen (nods to silent films of the

1920s such as Murnau's *Nosferatu* or Weine's *Dr Caligari*) to pure circus clowning, while the central character, Wilhelm, is a cross between Chaplin and Laurel. Samurai warriors point to Kurosawa in one scene but more constantly present is a sinister 2001-style black monolith which opens and closes the show, discharging them re-engulfing the characters in a birth to death trajectory.

Pulling the audience through this magic universe where sound becomes as sophisticated an element as the changing hues of the lighting, is the buoyant music of Tom Waits. Exploiting his stylistic breadth to the full, Waits has a perfect platform to run the gamut from circus mood (where percussion instruments come into their own) to haunting melody as in *In the Morning* sung by the two main protagonists while flying across the stage on wires. Berlin cabaret form in the opening song *The Black Rider* introduces the devil, Peg Leg, an expressionistic limping master of ceremonies who sardonically plays with the protagonists' fate throughout. Waits' gypsy music even manages to draw us through the only weak moment of the performance, when two acrobats awkwardly occupy the stage for no apparent reason other than scene-changing.

With a twenty year old history of collaboration with other artists such as Philip Glass, David Byrne or Lucinda Childs in theatre, opera, dance, film or video, Wilson's collaboration with Burroughs, now 76, constitutes a



landmark. For Burroughs the story of the Black Rider had a familiar echo in his own life. Its climax, treated by Wilson in agonising slow motion, is reached when Wilhelm uses the infallible magic bullets obtained from Peg Leg to hit a target and thus win the hand of Kätchen. But the magic of these bullets trafficked with the devil is otherwise, and the crucial shot actually swerves to kill this heartthrob. Wilhelm becomes insane. End of story. In real life, in 1951, when still a morphine-addict, Burroughs killed his wife while playing a similar game: the bullet intended for a glass balanced on her head buried itself in her forehead instead. But not end of story for Burroughs; as he admits that this tragedy inspired him to write *Junkie*, *Naked Lunch* and *The Exterminator*, thus launching him as a cult underground writer.

In his script for *The Black Rider*

the bullets become an allegory for a fix and Wilhelm increasingly addicted to their power.

Twentieth century '*oblige*', Mephisto/Peg Leg is the drug pusher, propelling the characters through a hallucinatory universe of sculptural light and piercing synthesised sound. Wilson manages somehow to wrap this harsh message in a light-hearted package, juxtaposing moral truth with a clownish fatalism, at the same time as incorporating an astonishing range of techniques.

## Films

**Derek Jarman**

***The Garden***

92 mins, Super-8/video  
transferred to 35mm

*Reviewed by Nicky Hamlyn*

*The Garden* was shot in London and on location at Derek Jarman's cottage, which lies in the shadow of the Drax B nuclear power station - the oldest in Britain - at Dungeness in Kent. The film reworks moments in the story of Christ; and presents them in terms of Christianity's attitude to homosexuality. The setting is contemporary, although Christ sometimes appears in period costume, while at other moments he is replaced by two male lovers. Ultimately though, the film is about Jarman himself, and he appears frequently throughout, writing in his notebook, asleep in bed set in the sea, or dreaming in his house.

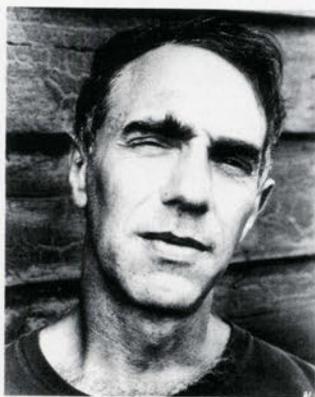
*The Garden* opens in a characteristically defiant mood, at night, with banks of electric lights glaring back at the viewer. A voice-over warns: 'I offer you a journey without direction - uncertainty and no sweet conclusion.' But as the film progresses, defiance mingles poignantly with sadness and conciliation. The theme alternates between pleas for tolerance and understanding expressed through the tender embraces of the two male lovers, and angry outbursts against the closed-minded twin enemies homophobia and the film and TV industries, the latter personified as SAS-style camera-wielding aggressors. In terms of

imagery, *The Garden* continues the apocalyptic style of *Jubilee* and *The Last of England*. The garden and power-station function symbolically as well as literally.

The early part of the film consists of super-8 time-lapse footage of the landscape: wind-blown poppies, shallow breakers, sunrises and sunsets over Drax B, and black and white scenes of the inside of the cottage which establish Jarman as the film's 'eye'. As he falls asleep and dreams, *The Garden* comes to life.

Gradually the events from the life of Christ are introduced, including a last supper tableau with female disciples, the component images of which are collaged together electronically. These are interspersed with documentary film of a gay pride march, and with an attack on the way Christian festivals have become corrupted by materialism. Hence Christmas is represented as an orgy of shopping in well-stocked department stores. The blazing window displays obliterate the spirit of the ancient festival of the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year. Like the Christmas shoppers the media terrorize the audience. The thuggish cameramen (they are all men) are also a recurring image, harrying and attacking their subjects in oblivious pursuit of a story at any cost.

In complete contrast to these brutish manifestations are the two gay lovers who first appear in a bath, in tender embrace. Indeed,



Derek Jarman



loving tenderness is the quality accompanying all their subsequent appearances, so much so that these scenes lack any of the violence or even eroticism of Jarman's earlier work. The other main elements in the film are Christ - an appropriately calm reassuring presence, and thus the film's visual anchor - and, in contrast to Him, Tilda Swinton who appears as a Cranach-style madonna with child and as a fool figure, an outsider of unfixed identity who fills her sieve with pebbles, gathers driftwood and performs the amaretti wrapper trick.

The Garden will please followers of Jarman's work who found *The Last of England* sloppy and self-indulgent. Despite longeurs, it is more thoughtfully structured than its predecessor, particularly in the way it builds on and recombines its recurring elements. For example, the motifs of Christmas corrupted, the

cameramen, and the lovers are brought together in a scene in which the cameramen, dressed as Father Christmasses, flagellate the lovers.

Through the film's vivid colours and grainy origins - Super-8 edited on D1 digital video and then re-transferred to 35mm film - Jarman contrives to create a work which is at once home-movie and feature film, a work which brings the aesthetics and production values of the diary films into the cinema.

There is, however, something paradoxical about the representation of homosexual love. The plea for tolerance and the conciliatory mood of the film is expressed through the almost platonic tenderness of the lovers' embraces. Yet by using muscular, crop-haired young men with tattoos Jarman invokes the clichéd image of rough trade, and hence of homosexual activity as unconventional, subversive and

dangerous. Yet from the perspective of gay iconography this ubiquitous image is utterly conventional and its use suggests that *The Garden* is to some extent stuck in a gay subculture, despite its clear address to a non-gay audience. Why not have the lovers played by old men, for example? In a sense that would have been really subversive, challenging a number of assumptions, and not just about what homosexuals do when they've grown old. But perhaps this would have been too confrontational for the mood of the film, and also for its home-movie/diary ethos, which is very much to do with working informally with one's circle of friends and associates, as opposed to making films about issues in some straightforward sense.

## Books

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**Tony Coult and  
Baz Kershaw (ed)**  
***Engineers of the Imagination:  
The Welfare State Handbook***  
Revised Edition  
Methuen, £8.99

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**Miranda Tuffnell and  
Chris Crickmay**  
***Body, Space, Image***  
Virago Press, £12.99

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*Reviewed by David Hughes*

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Both these books declare themselves to be guide-books, handbooks offering practical information. *Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State Handbook* has been around for some time, and contains a little history, a little description, a little theory, a little political statement. It also contains quite a lot of helpful material about making props, sets and spectacles, and how to stage them: from getting permission to insurance; from bonfires and fireworks to licensing. But perhaps there's not quite enough of the practical guide in the *Handbook*, and although there are warnings on almost every page, I was at first rather worried that anyone let loose with this information might easily get things tragically wrong, torching entire communities or building towers that crash into the spectators. But I guess there can't have been any major disasters to date. Welfare State are self-confessed Pathological Optimists and I join them in the belief that this book gives a good leg up, without really encouraging foolhardiness.

They themselves, for all their apparent anarchy, have certainly not been foolhardy. There aren't many groups who have survived the '80s, let alone stayed in existence since 1968. They are shrewd operators who have plugged into an unsatisfied need we tight-arsed islanders have for celebration, pageant, festival, carnival, the pagan and the Rabelaisian.

The main revision, apart from the extended 'ographies', is Baz Kershaw's seventh chapter, 'Techniques of Survival - Statements of Hope: Welfare State in the 1980s'. Whereas in the '70s Welfare State had been living a life of touring in caravans and international festival hopping, they now own a building in Ulverston. They've come in out of the cold; but Kershaw's assertion that they choose to live where they stare into the face of death in the form of nuclear power in all its guises (Cumbria builds Trident, houses Sellafield and was highly polluted by Chernobyl) rings a bit hollow. There is special pleading too in Kershaw's (undoubtedly illuminating) critical analyses of three theatrical events, placing his own insights and inside knowledge on the front end of the material, as though it were there for all to see from the outset. Nevertheless, the prose style is spirited and engaging and the three projects from the '80s are animated to illustrate the extent to which the State have been making a commitment to creating opportunities for local communities to be creative.

Miranda Tuffnell and Chris



from: *Engineers of the Imagination.*

Crickmay's *Body, Space, Image* also claims for itself guidebook or handbook status - in this case, for those interested in movement and performance improvisation. But whereas the State's book is a blow-by-blow guide, this book both demands quite a degree of foreknowledge before the user can make good sense of it, and is set out with such a poetic and visual sensibility that it is difficult to imagine the work conditions in which it could be used. It does not offer up its wisdom easily. It makes explicit reference to a number of source works such as Cage's *Silence*, and it echoes that book's typographic style.

This is a period piece - not, I think, a book for the moment - and the style of dance it encourages is of the misty-eyed, soft-bodied, floating spine through the top of the head school. Grotowski tells how he chose very carefully from Yoga for the elements he brought into his own training programme, because Yoga's focus wasn't either sharp enough or sufficiently performance-directed. This is the problem implicit in this form of improvisation, and sits at odds with the current feel of high impact dance work. However, this is a lovely, and in a way quite inspiring little book, worth having around for the useful connections it sets up between disparate forms and practitioners, as well as for the wealth of marginal quotes from a wide variety of sources.

**Tut Schlemmer (ed)**  
***The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer***

Trans. Krishna Winston  
Northwestern University  
Press, \$17.95

*Reviewed by Nigel Farndale*

*[Letter to Gray Watson. London, 11 December 1990]* I must confess I am struggling with *The Letters and Diaries of Oskar Schlemmer* you sent me. They are breathtakingly dull and repetitive. Whilst I do not doubt that they will be a valuable resource for art-historical research, I fail to see the point in publishing documents that are so devoid of backstabbing, salacious gossip. It is plain that Schlemmer intended them for public consumption and that through them he hoped to achieve some form of immortality. They read like one long self-gratifying manifesto. And I mean long. I don't think Tut Schlemmer, his wife, has edited, or for that matter read, a single word. In her foreword she gushingly refers to Schlemmer's 'penchant for jokes and bon mots, his modesty and charm', none of which are remotely in evidence. She also claims that these letters and diaries reveal his 'innermost being' which sounds quite revolting. They do reveal that he was a vain, arrogant man who took himself far too seriously. I shall brood upon how best to review this book and write to you again in due course.

*[Letter to GW. London, 24 December 1990]* This review is proving difficult to write. I cannot



decide upon a style. I must opt for classicism or romanticism, Ingres or Delacroix, Bach or Beethoven. Please bear with me, I need more time.

*[Diary. 2 January 1991]* I am a genius! Now the entire breadth of my rich and versatile creativity can be perceived. I have devised the perfect method of reviewing the Schlemmer diaries. I shall expose his conceits and pretensions by allowing my review to grow out of my own powerful artistic drive, out of an unquenchable faith in life and the future, and of a yearning, restless devotion to the goal of pure artistic expression. The Teutonic muse is in attendance. Apollo and Dionysus have been pouring me black coffee and lighting my cigarettes. I am ready to begin.

*[Diary. 1 February 1991]* Another writer's block. The idea is there, it is the form I lack. What does the reviewer do? He makes the unclear clear, the unconscious conscious, the impossible possible; plucks order out of

*continued on p.64*

# International Festivals and Art Gatherings

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## 1991

<b>March</b>	<i>7-10 Mar</i>	<b>International European Theatre Meeting</b> Lisbon, Portugal tel c/o Gulbenkian Foundation (351) 1-793 4068
	<i>11-16 Mar</i>	<b>Ulster Festival of Performance Art</b> Coleraine, Northern Ireland tel 0265-44141
<b>April</b>	<i>18-21 Apr</i>	<b>Art London '91</b> London, England tel 071-486 1951
	<i>19-24 Apr</i>	<b>Art Frankfurt 1991</b> Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany tel (49) 69-440226
	<i>20 Apr-6 May</i>	<b>Video Positive</b> Liverpool, England tel 051-709 2663
	<i>26 Apr-6 May</i>	<b>8th Northern International Festival of Mime, Dance and Theatre</b> Kendal, England tel 0539-725133
	<i>27 Apr-5 May</i>	<b>International Festival of Modern Dance and Movement</b> Utrecht, Netherlands tel (31) 30-332032
<b>May</b>	<i>3-25 May</i>	<b>Mayfest</b> Glasgow, Scotland tel 041-552 6612
	<i>3-26 May</i>	<b>Brighton International Festival</b> Brighton, England tel 0273-674692
	<i>7-9 May</i>	<b>Eurodanse</b> Mulhouse, France tel (33) 89-456831

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		<b>London International Opera Festival</b> London, England tel 071-359 9926
	<i>24 May-9 Jun</i>	<b>Bath Festival</b> Bath, England tel 0225-460030
		<b>Granada Theatre Festival</b> Granada, Spain tel (34) 58-263695
<b>June</b>		<b>The Last Weekend</b> Alston, England tel c/o Edge 091-232 0862
<b>July</b>	<i>1-21 Jul</i>	<b>London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT)</b> London, England tel 071-836 7433
	<i>13-28 Jul</i>	<b>Cambridge Festival</b> Cambridge, England tel 0223-463363
	<i>18 Jul-20 Aug</i>	<b>Salzburg Festival</b> Salzburg, Austria tel (43) 662-842623
<b>August</b>	<i>9-13 Aug</i>	<b>Edinburgh Festival</b> Edinburgh, Scotland tel 031-226 5992
<b>September</b>	<i>12-28 Sep</i>	<b>Melbourne International Festival of Arts</b> Melbourne, Australia tel (61) 3-614 4484 or c/o Victoria Ho 071-836 2656

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**All information is subject to change closer to the date.**

continued from p.61

chaos, simplicity out of multiplicity.

*[Letter to GW. London, 5 February 1991]* The Schlemmer review is not going well. I have spent the last ten days writing ten words. One word each day. Perhaps I need to travel to Weimar. There is more space there.

*[Letter to GW. Weimar, 7 February 1991]* I have made a great discovery here: the artist must be rooted in the feelings of mankind. There now, I think it is time for me to return to London.

*[Letter to GW. London, 9 February 1991]* I have decided upon a new form for this review:

it shall be a ballet. I shall perform the part of Schlemmer. I shall call the performance 'Oskar' and the medium shall become a purpose unto itself (and who knows, perhaps there is a hit West End musical in this for me as well).

*[Diary. 13 February 1991]* Was arrested in Trafalgar Square for disturbing the peace. I had to attend my trial still dressed in what the witness for the prosecution mockingly referred to as my 'Michelin Man' costume. I remained silent throughout: he who defends himself becomes his own accuser. Was given fourteen days without the option and was bound over to keep the peace.

Philistines! My persecution is akin to that endured by Schlemmer under the Nazis. I felt his spirit with me in the dock.

*[Letter to GW. London, 3 March 1991]* My dear Watson, I simply cannot finish my review. Apologise to your readers for me. I am enclosing excerpts from my diaries by way of explanation; but really I cannot explain my unborn review, for if I could, I would have had no need to write it. Doubtless you will not understand. No one will understand. I am alone, alienated even from myself, an artist.

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- 12 Cabaret Futura / Richard Layzell / State Performances / Artists Enquiry into Art
- 13 Roland Muldoon / Gay Culture & Performance / Theatre of the 8th Day / Gilbert & George / Provisorium
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- 22 Impact Theatre / Bloodgroup / Video Afterimage / Basement Group
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- 26 Lindsay Kemp / Burnt Wreckage, Sculpture / Lumiere & Son / Performance Journeys
- 27 Silvia Ziranek / Philip Glass / Fashion / Camp Art / Ddart / John Stalin
- 28 Derek Jarman / Kenneth Anger / African Magic / Performance Artists from Outer Space / Carnival
- 29 Gilbert & George / Ideal Home, Crufts, Boat Show / Freud & Performance / Bellingring
- 30 Molissa Fenley / Images of Deviancy / The Wooster Group / Adult Puppetry
- 31 Charlie Hooker / Georges Bataille / Rose English / Andrei Tarkovsky
- 32 Yoshiko Chuma / Rose Garrard / Impact Theatre & Russell Hoban / Pornography
- 33 Stuart Brisley / Performance in Australia / Visual Theatre Report / Glamour & Garbage in New York
- 34 John Jesurun / Spalding Gray / Philip Glass, Andrew Poppy, Michael Nyman / Soap Opera
- 35 Els Comediants / La Gaia Scienza / Peking Opera / Bow Gamelan / Winston Tong
- 36 Steve Willats / Krzysztof Wodiczko / Elvis Presley / Tom Phillips / Tina Keane
- 37 Bruce McLean / Performance Artists Survey / Laurel & Hardy & Performance / Anna Project
- 38/39+ Steve Reich / Robert Wilson / Brecht & Pop / Magic Flute/ Anti-Opera / Portuguese Performance
- 40 Marty St James & Anne Wilson / Bow Gamelan / Anne Seagrave / Welfare State / Ian Munro / Deep Sea Diver / Critics
- 41 Laurie Anderson / Mona Hatoum / Tara Babel / Video Special / Jan Fabre
- 42 Australian Special Issue / Rose English / Magdalena Festival / New Arts Consort
- 43 Rose Finn-Kelcey / Artists in the Theatre / Furniturisation / Stuart Brisley / Carnival
- 44/45+ Mark Pauline / Photography & Performance / An Artist in Nicaragua / J.S. Boggs / Women & Sculpture
- 46 Anthony D'Offay / Richard Demarco / Conrad Atkinson / Robert Ashely / State of the Art / Critical Language for Video
- 47 Alastair MacLennan / Steve Willats / Performance Art in Education / TSWA 3D / Art on TV
- 48 Lily Savage / Ethyl Eichelberger / Who Watches Performance? / David Freeman / Internationalism
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- 50/51+ J.G. Ballard / Harold Budd / Cage & Cunningham / Akademia Ruchu / Sounds of Sheffield / Edinburgh
- 52 John Wyver / Steven Taylor Woodrow / Pirate TV / TV & Community / High Tech vs Minimalism
- 53 Marina Abramovic & Ulay / Tina Keane / Images of Men / Performance & Sculpture / Performance Documentation
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