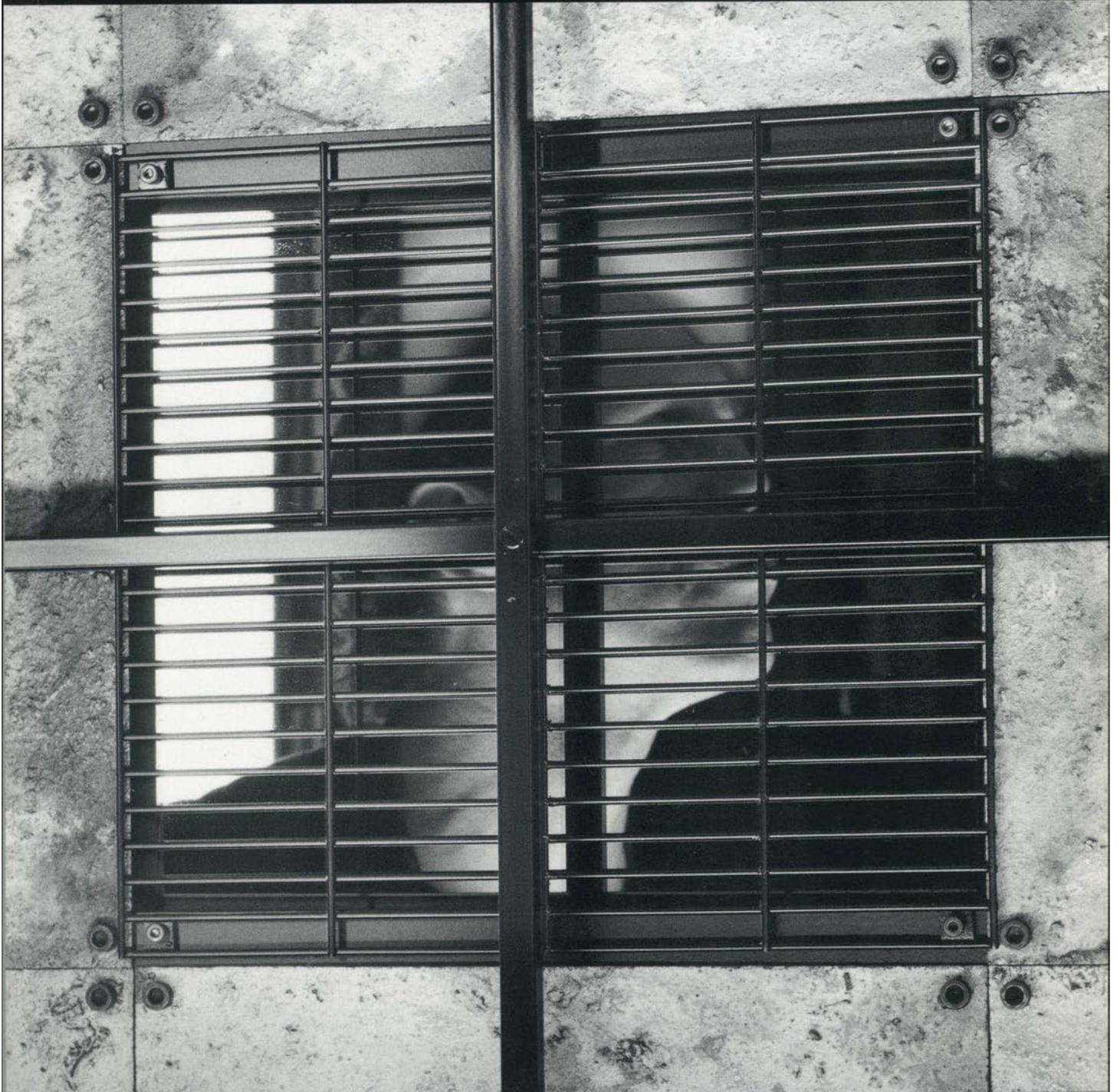


# Performance

Spring 1992 Double Issue No 65/66 £6



**Marina Abramović**

**Brian Catling**

**Philip Glass**

**Roberta Graham**

**Joan Jonas**

**John Latham**

**Denis Masi**

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### Performance

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London SW5 9BS  
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fax 071-373 8524  
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Editor Gray Watson  
Administrator Tonny Grey  
Picture Research, Layout  
Jo Brickett  
Design Consultant  
Gabriella Le Grazie  
Editorial Assistant  
Stephanie Vidal-Hall  
Administrative Assistants  
Richard Dyer, Lucy Nias,  
Joanna Wilson  
Origination, Printing  
Bookmag, Inverness  
Publisher  
Performance Magazine Ltd

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Front Cover:  
**Denis Masi, *Collective Commitment*, 1988**, mild steel,  
weld mesh, mirror and mixed  
media. (Photo Peter Mackertich)

Back Cover:  
**Roberta Graham, *Pale Battalions*, 1989**, detail. (Photo R.M. Graham  
and S.P.C. Trowbridge)

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## **Directors' Announcement**

As from this issue, *Performance* will be suspending publication indefinitely.

We have come to the conclusion that, in order to maintain and improve the present quality of the magazine, both editorially and in terms of production, it would be necessary thoroughly to overhaul the company's institutional structure. While the Arts Council, in addition to giving us unstinting moral support, has always matched this with as much financial generosity as is possible within the inevitable constraints of public funding, it has become clear that the necessary overhaul would require an injection of capital on a quite different scale. At present, such funds are not available.

Nor is it clear that it is now a good time to look for them. Apart from the much invoked recession, the cultural climate is not one in which many people regard the search for radically new ways of seeing and re-shaping the world — which is *Performance's* principal *raison d'être* — as a priority. At least in the short term, the predominant concern is with survival; and, beyond that, the relatively modest and practical aim of making existing structures work as well as possible.

It is our belief that this situation is bound to change; indeed, that recent developments in world history have already created the necessary preconditions for a more radical cultural climate to re-emerge. It will, however, take several years for this to happen and, more specifically, to express itself in a tangible rise in economic demand for publications such as *Performance*. In the meantime, therefore, the suspension of publication seems to us to be the most logical course of action.

We should like to take this opportunity to extend our thanks and best wishes to all our regular readers. (Paid up subscribers will be receiving a separate, individually addressed letter.) Those readers whose particular concern is with the coverage of 'live art' not covered elsewhere in the press should note that a new magazine, under completely new management, will shortly be launched with this intention — not to be confused with *Live Art Listings*, which is a listings service only. We wish this new magazine, which will be in receipt of the grant from the Arts Council which we have enjoyed up until now, every success.

**CHRISSIE ILES, *Chairman***  
**GRAY WATSON, *Secretary***  
***Performance Magazine Ltd***

## Editorial

**W**hen one says that art is, from the point of view of society as a whole, potentially one of the most valuable activities which can be engaged in at this stage in history, what does that mean?

It is clearly a claim with which only a miniscule section of society would agree, so it seems to imply that there is some form of opportunity on which society is missing out. But what form of opportunity? In what ways can art, in any medium, be said to possess the potential — fairly evidently so little fulfilled as yet — to be of real value to the world?

Let us begin by saying what such a claim does *not* mean. It does not mean that the arts can generate income or boost the Gross National Product; nor that the 'creative' ideas of non-commercial artists can be adapted for use in such applied arts as textile or product design, or by the entertainment business. Nor, on the other hand, does it mean that art can be used as a vehicle to propagate 'socially useful' ideas which are already consciously articulated in the artist's head or in the heads of critics who wish to promote a particular political, moral or ideological point of view. Nor does it mean that art can be useful in raising community or minority awareness. Art can no doubt at times be useful in all of these ways; but it is not in any of them that its main potential — what it, specifically and uniquely, has to offer — is to be found.

Of the art of all periods it can perhaps be said that its principal function is to extend and deepen our perception, experience and understanding of the world. Over the last two hundred years, however, art has increasingly acquired an important additional function. This is to propose radically new forms for making sense of a world which, largely due to advances in technology and their unforeseen repercussions, has been changing at an unprecedentedly rapid rate. New paradigms, of the sort which the more challenging and avant-garde forms of art have had to offer, have in fact been urgently needed both at a personal level and in most, if not all, areas of intellectual and communal endeavour. Certainly when it comes to subjects such as history, politics, sociology or anthropology — subjects, that is, concerned with human affairs — artists have for a long time (in the visual arts, let us say since Goya; in theatre, at least since Büchner) had a vast amount to offer, which has as yet however hardly begun to be taken up.

A good case could indeed be made out for the view that proposing new paradigms, capable of inspiring creative thinking in a wide variety of domains, is what modern art (in all media) has always been largely about — while it is the role of each successive avant-garde to destabilize previously proposed paradigms as soon as these begin to lose touch with the reality of experience and to ossify into orthodoxies.

That such a wide-ranging and ambitious view of art's function, even if it has been paid some lip-service, has still not yet had any real effect is only partly due to the understandable scepticism of those not directly connected with the arts. More culpably, it reflects the unimaginative parochialism *within* the world of the arts, particularly at the level of interpretation — one which the new orthodoxy of postmodernism has merely served to perpetuate.

For a long time art, or at least avant-garde art, has been promoted, discussed and criticized almost exclusively in the terms of two broad interpretative traditions. Perhaps the majority of those involved have seen art as essentially autonomous — whether in a formalist sense or in the sense of a narcissistically Duchampian fascination with art's institutional context. On the other hand, where attempts *have* been made to understand art within the context of wider historical, cultural and human concerns, and to see what use it could be, there has been an overwhelming tendency — certainly insofar as any political dimension is involved — to fall back on certain pre-existent values and categories, namely those of the already established political left. More specifically, whilst it is almost a cliché that there is an affinity between art and anarchism, it has come to be taken for granted that any *serious* account of art's relationship to society must be, if not specifically Marxist, at least consistent with a broadly Marxist analysis.

It is easy enough to see why Marxism should be attractive to anyone wishing to re-shape the world, in that its vision of the interconnectedness of all human activity seems to offer a lever by means of which, in a sense which has never obtained before, humanity could take control of its destiny and alter it. There is reason to suppose, however, that the motives of many people connected with the arts for being sympathetic to it have been rather more trivial; and, in any case, the unwillingness on the part of both artists and critics to challenge the assumption that only those theories

which can be fitted into a Marxist framework are acceptable as an alternative to a belief in art's autonomy has disastrously curtailed — in fact, to date effectively annulled — the avant-garde's revolutionary potential.

For it has blinded everyone to the hints and clues contained in numerous works of art which, if taken up and developed, could lead to other — quite different and arguably more radical — models for understanding both how we have got to where we are historically and thus, by extension, how we might be able at least to some extent to mould the future.

Whilst possibly all types of art have suffered as a result of this blindness, the types whose potential to generate valuable new insights has been most dramatically wasted have been those which engage with the unconscious, irrational, intuitive and emotional aspects of human experience: Romanticism, Expressionism, Surrealism; the type of visual theatre deriving from Artaud and Grotowski; those forms of performance art which employ the language of the body and of ritual, often combining a sense of the sacred with that of the erotic. Not that such types of art have not often received considerable acclaim; but even when the appreciation goes beyond the merely aesthetic and there is a genuine desire to see what the work can communicate to us, it is nearly always interpreted as being of relevance essentially only to the individual — as such labels as 'personal mythology', which have sometimes been applied to such art, testify — and of only very marginal relevance, if any, to the life of the community as a whole.

Yet one of the things which this kind of work most forcefully suggests is that factors of which we are unconscious, and which therefore appear 'irrational' to us, may play a far greater part in shaping the course of human affairs, not only at an individual but more crucially at a collective level, than most of us would begin to suspect. In a sense, this knowledge could be said to be an underlying principle of ancient mythology; and if we are to re-gain it, but with the added perspective that we may now be in more of a position to alter our destiny, then we need to accord to psychology and notably psychoanalysis — in that this is the principal modern language in which we can speak of these unconscious factors — a far greater potential scope than hitherto. This is not just a matter of

hitching it onto Marxism (or any other sociologically based theory) as a secondary partner, as has often happened in the past and which is particularly easy if one reduces psychoanalysis to a somewhat abstracted and formalistic Lacanian reading. Rather, it is necessary to open ourselves up to the possibility that factors which we would describe as psychological may play a fundamental causative role in the historical process, as independent variables which cannot, even 'in the last resort', be traced back to the socioeconomic.

Nor, of course, is it simply a matter of extending the domain of psychoanalysis. Other disciplines such as anthropology and zoology also have much to contribute if we are to follow up the leads implicit in what for convenience we may call the emotional and intuitive wing of modern and avant-garde art. If we are to learn, for example, from the ways in which Joseph Beuys uses animals in his work, we need to realize that it is not enough simply to study the changes within social structures which take place between different periods of recorded history. We need also to go back to the basic patterns of animal behaviour from which all human social structures ultimately derive; to go behind language systems and all the relatively superficial cultural factors which pre-occupy post-structuralists and postmodernists, and to examine pre-linguistic patterns of social interaction. However interesting the notion may be that we are unable to experience nature except at second hand, it is ultimately less significant than the fact that in another sense we are still totally dependent on nature and a part of it. And one thing which is particularly clear is that, until we have a much deeper knowledge of our *own* nature (our possibly very dubious reasons, for example, for according authority to certain types of people rather than to others), all future attempts to create a better world — whether along Marxist, more ecological or any other lines — will come to nothing; because they will be vitiated, as they have been in the past, by those who know how to use the currently respectable rhetoric to divert attention away from their real motives of establishing and maintaining power.

Thus not only the recent collapse of Communism but also the accompanying reduction in the prestige of Marxism is thoroughly to be welcomed — not because Marxism doesn't contain much that is still valuable, which it clearly does, but because, its monopoly being broken,

people will now be forced to look at alternative models with a more genuinely open mind. Now that it is no longer obligatory, if one is to be taken seriously as an advocate of radical change, to regard Marxism with an almost religious reverence, the way is at last open for the hints and clues embedded within works of art to be given the attention which they deserve. This creates a challenge to critics to think both more boldly and more rigorously; and it provides a greater opportunity than perhaps at any time before, for the arts to play a leading as opposed to merely secondary role in furthering our collective self-understanding.

The extent of this opportunity has not yet been grasped. Indeed, the world of the arts has so far responded to the changed situation mostly with confusion. If anything, the sense of aimlessness, visible for some time in the majority both of criticism and of the type of work which tends to get promoted, has further increased. This is hardly surprising, in that it reflects the current international cultural climate as a whole. While, understandably enough, people in those countries which have recently been liberated from Communist totalitarianism are primarily concerned with economic survival and are hardly in any hurry to embrace new Utopian speculations, in the West too there is a widespread sense that the most important thing is to get by as best one can, and a marked mistrust of radical forward thinking, since all political idealism has to some extent been tarred with the totalitarian brush.

This situation will not, however, go on indefinitely. In a few years' time, a more radical cultural climate is likely to emerge in which a significant minority will begin to question some of the fundamental presuppositions underlying this and other societies' value systems. One lesson, it is to be hoped, will have been thoroughly learnt: that the world cannot be changed for the better through either dogmatism or force. That is why art, proceeding as it does by means of intuition and open-ended proposal, should be in an ideal position to help. If the intuitive insights which it has to offer can be brought into intelligent and imaginative interaction with the more systematic frameworks offered by various theoretical disciplines, art will then at last come into its own as a primary agent of cultural transformation.

*Gray Watson*

As this double issue of Performance Magazine will be the last, we would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and pay respect to Performance Magazine's contribution to critical and cultural debate over the last twelve years.

For all of us Performance Magazine has been a vital forum for performance, live art and avant-garde activities and has played an unprecedented role in the development and awareness of radical areas of visual arts practice. The magazine was often provocative and controversial, but always supportive and forward thinking and it is impossible to think of the history of this sector over the last ten years without reference to the adventurous work of the magazine. It will be sadly missed and fondly remembered. Thank you to Gray Watson, Steve Rogers and Rob La Frenais as editors, Chrissie Iles as board member and the enumerable contributors for all your work over the years.

*SANDY NAIRNE (Director of Visual Arts)*

*LOIS KEIDAN (Live Art Officer)*

*Arts Council of Great Britain*

## LIVE ART: A NEW MAGAZINE A NEW CRITICAL CONTEXT

It is the intention of the Arts Council to offer franchise funding for a new magazine to cover Live Art and related activities that will follow in the pioneering steps of Performance Magazine and provide a focus for, and critical coverage of, this sector in Britain and beyond.

The Arts Council is seeking tenders from individuals or partnerships interested in establishing and running a new magazine. A detailed brief and information on the tendering procedure is available from:

*Daniela Karsten, Arts Council of Great Britain,  
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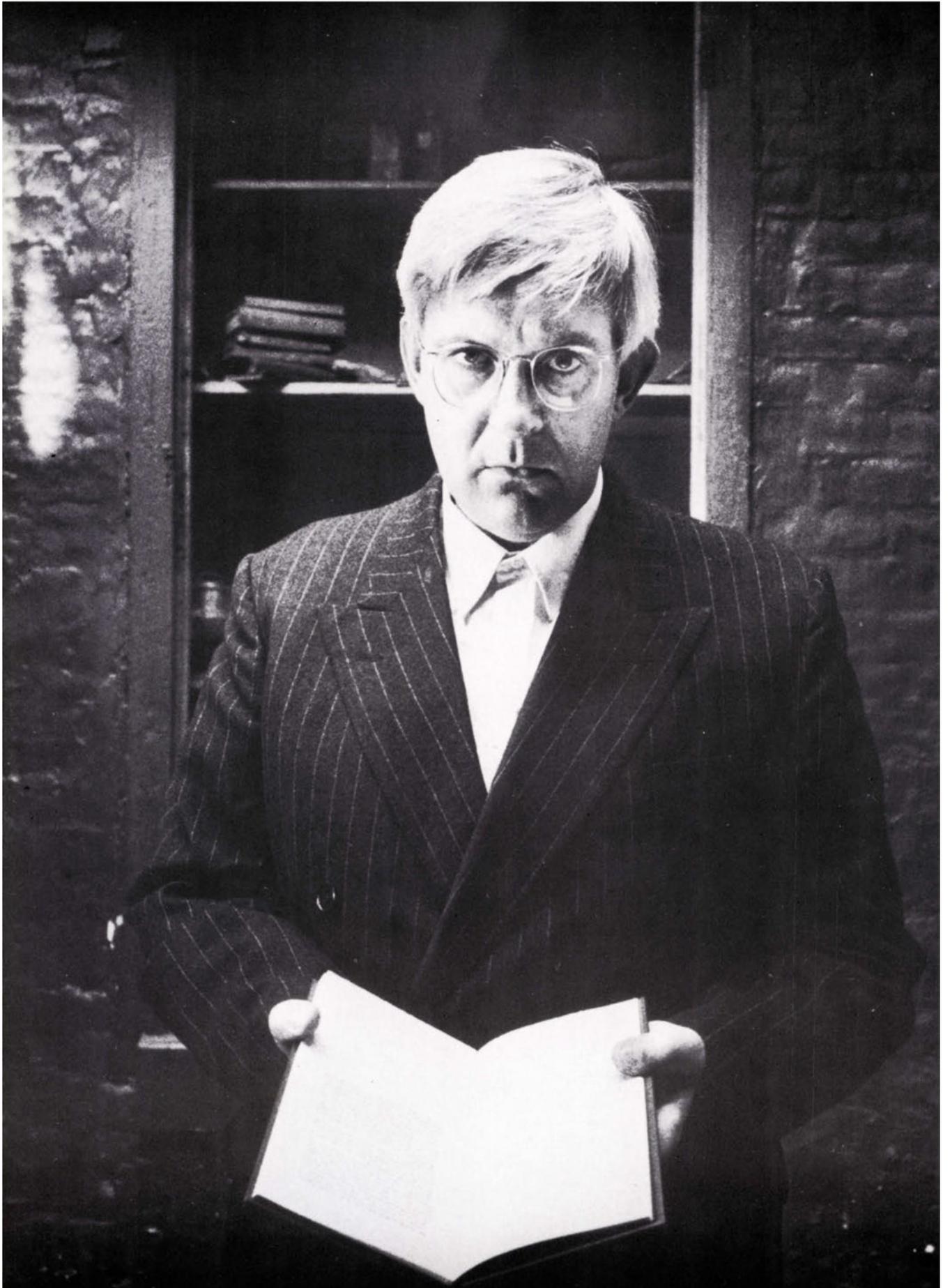


**Preliminary submissions should be received by March 16.**

no.

# 65-66

**This final double issue concentrates on individual artists whose work, which has now attained full maturity, raises implications taking us far beyond the staple fare of most contemporary debate. The first four artists are London-based: Liz Brooks uncovers the Gnostic roots of Brian Catling's art; Lucy Hughes-Hallett picks her way across Roberta Graham's battlefields of love; John A. Walker sets out the importance of John Latham's holistic vision; while Mike Archer experiences, in front of Denis Masi's recent wall-work, subtle insights into the nature of power. There follow two interviews with artists based in New York: the composer Philip Glass tells Nicholas Zurbrugg about his liking for work involving collaborations; after which Joan Jonas discusses with Nick Kaye the significance of mask, role and narrative in her work. Then to truly exotic locations, as Marina Abramović takes us to the amethyst mines of Brazil and proposes a more total form of departure; before we return to Britain to join Jeffrey Collins underneath the M5 motorway as he ponders, using the example of the Fine Rats International, on the possibilities of post-industrial performance art.**



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Liz Brooks

# OF KNOWING AND HAUNTING THE WORLD

The Gnostic Art of Brian Catling



Above:  
**Brian Catling, *The Occupant*, 1991,**  
performance. Bergen Natural  
History Museum. (Photo Ian Welsh)

Facing page:  
**Brian Catling, *The Stumbling  
Block, Its Index*, 1991.**

*'The Stumbling Block* has made itself of carbon paper, sucking the increasingly obsolescent material from offices at the centre of the city. It is compressed to become a pivot; diamond hard. The compacted density smoulders in the deep night blue of its waxy, slippery layers. The tiny scar letters are thick and noisy at its centre, their planktonic clusters bite and disengage continually, re-focusing the chattering confusion. This mute lexical friction gives the heat that powers the flexibility of shifting mass.

It can be heard only in the quiet times; its static, a translucent muscle, pulling between infinites. [. . .]<sup>1</sup>

**T**owards the end of his life, W.B. Yeats remarked that man can embody the truth, but he cannot know it. In his performance, poetry and installations, Brian Catling melts this distinction between physical and cerebral knowledge, harnessing a Gnostic way of knowing through untrammelled intuition to penetrate the unmediated experiential knowledge bound up in substances and artefacts.

In the process man and the material world are brought together in sometimes violent confrontation. In *White Wing* (one of five performances accompanying an installation at MOMA, Oxford, 1989) Catling's trusting 'disciple' advanced across a series of toy guns which shattered underfoot, releasing floods of milk and revealing red interiors. The symbolic rite of passage was devastated when Catling's Virgilian guide figure took the last gun and shot his 'disciple' in the stomach — causing him in his turn to gush milk, and disgorge feathers. Then, with a 'hideous compassion' the guide transformed his victim into a shabby angel (a shoulder holster was swivelled to his back, projecting as a kind of pathetic 'white wing') and led him from the room.

Angels, frequent visitants in Catling's work, are envisaged as rather stumbling, earthbound creatures — much as they appear in Gnostic writings. Gnostical angels are envisaged as part of a material creation, which is base and corrupt from its inception, the result of a divinely-willed self-degradation.

Each visitor to *Lair* at Matt's Gallery, 1989, was given a table of the angels which guard the hours of the day. The seraphic but melancholy installation documented the domestic arrangements of these reluctant vigilantes, trapped in human temporality. Single feathers were suspended beneath each of the metal steps which ascend to the gallery and fluttered at each section of its gridded windows, echoing the arrangement of the angelic table. Painted a glaring white,



Brian Catling, *Luna Prayer*, 1989, performance. (Photo Paddy Summerfield)

and this impossible to photograph, the gallery contained two iron sheets in the form of Eastern carpets, with a white feather attached to each.

Part of the main floorspace was composed of a deerskin parchment, of a kind used for sacred Jewish texts. It was donated to Catling by its maker as a challenge, but he found it so alive that he felt unable to cut or adapt it. 'There was so much information in it that I used it as a book.' The parchment preserved not only the mark of the deer's spine, but even the knife wound by which it was slain — enlarged and distorted in the stretching process. Small, frosted pebbles of perspex had been fashioned exactly to fit these knife marks and were placed adjacent to them in a hapless but oddly touching gesture of contrition.

If, like the parchment, all material things bristle with the knowledge encoded in their substance, they also possess a more arcane knowledge acquired through their mutability, through their transforming contact with other things and substance: — the wisdom of experience.

In this respect, a book is an exceptional class of object: its knowledge is encoded not in its substance, but on its surface, and consequently it gains knowledge not through its decay but in the invisible meanderings of its meanings through the minds of those into whose hands it chances to fall. A Gnostic perception — that knowledge transforms not only the knower, but the known itself — is intrinsic to Catling's poems and bookworks.

Though at times spikily obscure, *The Tulpa Index* (St George Press, Norwich 1983) has an ambit and force that countermand linear readings. On a level which is fruitful for this exposition, however, it can be seen as counterposing different possible fates for the knowledge which is enclosed in matter — and by extension for the book itself. The Tulpa of the title is a Tibetan concept of an imagined entity which can take on an independent life of its own (an ethereal Eastern version of the Golem or Frankenstein myths). The poem first conjures Deinonychus, an intensely compressed ex-human being who lies deep underground, where his transitional state between the organic and the mineral affords him a privileged knowledge of the world. He can be imagined brewing slowly, waiting to be exhumed by greedy prospectors and archeologists, a subterranean accusation to the cheap heritage history which litters the world above.

The book's central section contrasts this compressed and undiscovered essence with the dispersed remains of South African lawyer, naturalist and morphine addict Eugene Marais who, after his suicide, finds a different way of haunting and knowing the world. Eaten by insects and wild animals, blown on the wind, his cells penetrate all spheres from flies to skyscrapers. Into the last section of this highly hermetic work seems to be threaded the fear of its own sterility: as a mere representation, 'painted cardboard', it lacks the integrity of Deinonychus, the potential energy of Marais. Language itself is the enemy, not only a parallel for,

but in part a cause of the bloodless existence of socialized man:

'Blood/ will not be strangled/in prosaic diagram (the home,/the work) its  
heat/ wallows menacingly/ in a thin glass/ chalice.'

Ultimately the written word is denied, giving way to a celebration of the shattering dispersal of self occasioned in sexual love.

When Catling embraces the violence of physical existence, it is *against*, in opposition to, culture as the realm of representation. But he is also aware that, though repressed, violent physical existence is culture's heart and foundation. Amongst Catling's interventions at the Pitt Rivers ethnographical collection in 1990 (a show including seven other artists) was a subtle modification of the British Army rifle — a Lee Enfield — under which the whole collection was amassed. The gun, suspended discreetly over a case of writing and drawing instruments, might normally go unremarked. By replacing the stock with a replica which tapered to a point (almost 3 metres long) and naming the piece *Quill*, Catling had succinctly conflated brutality and scholarship, the eccentric Wunderkammer/ museum and a charnel house of bleeding trophies.

The atomistic conception of objecthood enshrined in the museum seems to act as a direct incitement to Catling's more fluid sense of the physical. His performance at the Bergen Natural History Museum, *The Occupant* (May 1991), discovered him rattling at the glass display cases with thimble-capped fingers, releasing a clattering hail of noise and setting up vibrations with which the stuffed and preserved exhibits visibly resonated. The onslaught of sound became increasingly transgressive as each bone in the museum was implicitly challenged to defy death. But as in many of Catling's performances, an element of humour noir unsettled the solemnity: in Edwardian evening dress with wing collar and black tape cravat, the performer was more cartoon sot than sorcerer.

Half-reparative and half-malicious, the thimble hands alighted on a glass case enclosing a *homo sapiens* skeleton, one of two which flanked the foot of a broad stairway. Conspicuously failing to elicit a response, and perhaps frightening himself in the process, the performer attempted escape via the stairway, only to be thwarted by the black tape which extended from his cravat to the handrail. In a twist unsuspected even to Catling, the tape failed to give at the appropriate moment; and, progressively throttled, he was forced to wrench it loose with his teeth. More pathetic than the stuffed and preserved relics he had humiliated with his challenge, the Edwardian ossophile stumbled up the stairs, shouting.

This was a powerful performance to watch, even on video, where most of the acoustic and atmosphere is lost.

If the rigidity of the museum installation invokes a violent response, Catling's own installations, characterized by low key intermarriages of mutable materials, are contemplative in effect. Very much anti-museums, they mirror the structure

**Brian Catling, *Spøgelsesmesse*,  
1986, performance, Leifsgade 22,  
Copenhagen. (Photo Finn Petersen)**



but deny the spirit of those institutions. Installations in Bergen and Copenhagen were arranged in low horizontal groupings of materials and texts, disposed at irregular intervals, like museum display cases. In Leifsgade 22, Copenhagen, (1986) groupings were carefully and sparingly lit with a single low-slung light source, recalling Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, a play consciously organized around the Gnostic antithesis of darkness and light.

The light which is Gnosticism is divine and transcendent here serves to illuminate a material gnosis as objects and substances — chalk, fish, clay, wood, iron, salt, paper, bread — meet, merge, mutate and decay, 'knowing' one another, the space they are in and the history of the locality. In their metamorphoses, these materials 'know time', ticking away the duration of the exhibition like decelerating clocks. In an installation in Aachen's Ludwig Collection (1988) a wet clay bell (*Glocke* in German) gradually dries to a pale pink, cracks and crumbles onto its cushion of paper until it has reduced to a pile of dust.

The objects also 'know' space and extension as they decay and permeate the atmosphere with their smell. In Leifsgade 22 a special Danish treacle bread forming part of one grouping progressively imparted its pungent and evocative aroma to the whole room as the week progressed. Elsewhere in the installation a dead fish, covered with grey clay and placed at the tip of a large paper cone, gradually transmitted its smell to the room and its oils to the paper cone which pointed towards the sea outside.

The installation in Bergen Hordaland Kunstnercentrum (1987) alluded to the seven surrounding mountains and, more specifically, to the frozen lake, where the artist made a leaden cast of the moon's reflection. Transferred to the gallery, the cast seeped its thaumaturgical energy through the space like a long-running battery, charged up by the silent intermingling of moonlight, lead and ice.

In the invocation of such archetypes as the moon, in his preference for honing down to simple geological or archeological forms, in his apparent rejection of a culture transmitted through representations, Catling would seem to be a polar opposite to his friend and collaborator Iain Sinclair, whose extravagantly allusive, intertextual, triple-epitheted writings are steeped in the Black History of London and its literature. Yet Sinclair's *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings* and *Downriver*, in which Catling makes frequent appearances as 'that utterly obscure sculptor, S.L. Joblard', illuminate a whole nexus of shared ideas and enthusiasm, not least London's East End, where Catling grew up, and the central idea of objects and artefacts as storehouses not only of their own experience but of whole historical contexts. The two have collaborated in performances and readings in sites of mutual fascination, such as the tower of Guy's hospital, where operations used to be performed before students, and the abandoned home for derelicts in Fieldgate Street, Whitechapel.

*Downriver* and *White Chappell* present a theory not unlike the Tulpa idea: that



Brian Catling, *Spøgelsesmesse*, 1986, performance, Leifsgade 22, Copenhagen. (Photo Finn Petersen)

personal myths, or those embodied in works of imaginative literature, can take on an independent life in the real world. Supporting this notion is *Downriver's* uncanny prophecy that S.L. Joblard's next project would take place on the Isle of Dogs. This did in fact happen last November, in a collaboration with Robin Klassnik of Matt's Gallery, entitled *At the Lighthouse*.

With the 1990 bookwork *The Stumbling Block*, the 1991 Bergen performance and this most recent piece, Catling's work is reaching an unusual degree of power and purity. Perhaps this is related to the fact that the separate strands of his work, performance, poetry and installation are increasingly coming together. 1992 sees the publication by Paladin of *Written Rooms and Pencilled Crimes*, poetic sketches for unrealizable or phantastical installations and performances. But this does not imply that Catling is about to withdraw from performance into literature. 'What seems to happen is that performance artists fade. I'm forty-two now. Do you know Rooster Cola, the John Wayne character in *True Grit*, an aged sheriff who's too fat to sit on the horse any longer? I have a romantic conception of being that kind of performance artist. As some unspecified age in the future I'll have to be pulled off the stage.'

#### NOTE

1. Brian Catling, *The Stumbling Block: Its Index*, London: Book Works, 1990.



**Lucy Hughes-Hallett**

# THE BATTLEFIELDS OF LOVE

**Insights in the Work of Roberta Graham**



Above:  
**Roberta Graham, *Back to Nature*, 1982**, light-box. (Photo R.M. Graham and S.P.C. Trowbridge)

Facing page:  
**Roberta Graham, *First Cut*, 1982-83**, light-box. (Photo R.M. Graham and S.P.C. Trowbridge)

Every year, in the fields around the Somme, human bones are brought to light by the plough. The local farmers use their redundant outhouses to display relics of the First World War; in one such makeshift museum the artist Roberta Graham saw an assemblage of *objets trouvés* whose eloquence still haunts her. 'There was a boot and a human thigh bone, and someone had stuck the bone into the boot. There's something so astute and moving about that. No huge display at the Imperial War Museum could ever be so tragic.' Nearby, overlooking a stretch of land scarred by trenches and still littered with the detritus of the world's first fully-mechanised war, stands a colossal stone figure of a weeping woman, a monument to the sixty thousand dead who have no known grave. 'They couldn't even pick up the bits.' As Graham points out, 'the poem about a corner of a foreign field being forever England is so true' — though not quite in the way Rupert Brooke intended. When Cadmus, the mythical founder of Thebes, sowed dragons' teeth in the ground, armed men sprung up; but on the battlegrounds of northern France men sunk down into the earth, their dismembered bodies merging with the soil alongside the dragons' teeth — the bullets and shells — that killed them.

*Harvest of Steel* and *Conspiracy of the Fallen*, the two series of photographic collages Roberta Graham has made on the theme of the First World War (first shown last year in Nottingham Castle and Manchester City Art Gallery respectively) bring together many of the themes she has been exploring in her work for a decade or more. The former is an intricate work, large in its size and scope, minute in its exquisite detail. Onto large-scale hand-tinted photographs of sections of abandoned trenches still littered with rusting weaponry are superimposed scores of smaller photographic images — fragments of flesh and bone, faces, hands, flowers and ferns, x-rays, an hour-glass, images of the crucified Christ and copies of the pathetic snapshots found in the pockets of dead soldiers. The scale shifts, a torso may be smaller than the finger that adjoins it. As the viewer peers closer, more and more objects become visible, emerging from the tangled grass of the ground. The effect is similar to that of Richard Dadd's fairy pictures (painted in Bedlam, in the building which now houses the Imperial War Museum and where, by an odd coincidence, Roberta Graham did much of her preparation for this work). It is a lyrical, delicately coloured, meditative piece, a world away from most representations of war, whether pacifist agit-prop or gung-ho celebrations of military glory. It contains a narrative, albeit an almost imperceptible one, and its hermetic structure requires of the viewer a slowing down, a taking stock. 'I hope that by the time you have ferreted through the tiny images you might be given cause to question why people are continually slaughtering each other for territory or absurd principles, and to think about wars with compassion, in relationship to your own body and to what might happen to it. We all have this vulnerable little thing we walk around in. It's hardly novel, but

it bears saying that life is precious.'

The themes of physical anguish and the fragility of the flesh have always been prominent in Roberta Graham's work. In *Reflections on the Kray Brothers* she explored the rituals of violent crime and in *In the Slaughterhouse of Love* she created images of sexual violence which, being both passionately self-revelatory and coolly non-judgemental, shocked audiences. 'I haven't shown it for ages,' she says. 'I can't stand people throwing things at me and shouting.' These works have earned her something of a reputation for sadism, one she has been mischievously inclined to foster (her 1982 Christmas card, entitled 'Avenging (Christmas) Angel', was an image of herself holding a rapier and titillatingly clad in mask, boots, gauntlets, black stockings and nothing else). But her approach to the topic of violence has more often been from the viewpoint of the victim. As a child she used to go fishing for trout but 'I couldn't do it now; I'd hate to have to kill the fish.' Her depictions of the human body are imbued with pity for the poor bare forked thing that it is. In her extraordinary series of self-portraits, made up of large transparencies mounted on lightboxes, she appears to pull aside sections of her own skin and muscle tissue to reveal the bones and blood vessels within, calling attention both to the miraculous ingenuity of the body's structure and to the pathos of our mortality. Drawing on the transparencies, Graham makes connections between human forms and those of inanimate nature. A vein becomes a waterfall, a system of arteries a bolt of lightning. Like the slaughtered soldiers of her more recent work, her own figure merges with its environment. All flesh is grass, she seems to be indicating. Humans, carnal and mortal, are as marvellous and as evanescent as the lilies of the field.



Roberta Graham, from *Life Sighs in Sleep*, 1983, light-box. (Photo R.M. Graham and S.P.C. Trowbridge)

She spent her early childhood in Derry. The street where her family lived was unsegregated; Catholic and Protestant children played together, 'but we were certainly aware we were different.' Her grandfather and father were both staunch Orangemen and she had her own little orange sash, but she has no memories of sectarian hostility. She suggests that her preoccupation with pain and suffering is rooted, not in any experience of political violence, but in religious imagery. 'My favourite time was Good Friday, when we were taken to church to spend three hours meditating on bodily agony.' She is now a staunch unbeliever but the figure of Christ crucified appears over and over again in her work, and her latest piece, *Out Of The Stones*, is in part a tribute to the Oxford martyrs, the Protestants Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley who were burnt alive for wishing to give the common people a book of common prayer. She is moved and excited by physical endurance, by extreme and traumatic experiences and by those who 'suffer as an act of faith'.

In 1964, when she was ten, her father, a printer, was made redundant and the family moved to England, to the army town of Aldershot. Four years later she found herself making history. 'My buddy and I got hold of a copy of *Oz* — I

can't think how, I can't remember knowing anybody who would have been interesting enough to have one, but we did.' The editors were inviting school-children to come and take over the magazine for one issue. Roberta Graham was among those who did so. 'I'd barely even been to London before, and suddenly there I was in this enchanting den of vice.' She did some drawings. She wrote some articles. Most notably she posed in her school uniform, chubby, sweet and fourteen, for a full page photograph captioned 'Jail-bait of the Month'. The moral majority was outraged. The editors were charged under the obscenity act. The trial became one of the great spectacles of '60s Britain, a ritual contest between newfangled libertarianism and established propriety. The establishment won. The editors of *Oz* were each given prison sentences. They were accused of depraving and corrupting young minds. 'I'll fully admit I was depraved and corrupted,' says Graham, 'and very happy to be so.' It was the trial and the ensuing sentences she found shocking. 'The things that were deemed obscene were natural, innocent bits of childish experimentation. The sentence was so unjust. After that I found it was impossible to have any respect for authority at all.'

The 'Jail-bait' photograph precipitated the end of her school career. 'I wasn't expelled exactly but the headmistress delicately suggested that I might be interested in doing something else.' She went on to art school, and thrived in the culture of mid-'70s London. One of her student works was a picture made of fur; 'you were supposed to touch it but I'd put needles in the back.' Very punk. She was clubbing till three in the morning. 'It really felt at that time that living in London was dead exciting.' She cropped her hair and wore a lot of leather. But *Reflections On The Kray Brothers*, her first work to be publicly shown (at the Whitechapel Gallery), demonstrated that she had a far richer appreciation of the complex issues raised by human aggression than that purveyed by most of her fashionably outrageous punk contemporaries.

The influences on her work, she maintains, have always been more literary than artistic. She admires Francis Bacon, Joseph Beuys, Balthus — the list is long and eclectic. But her own work has been shaped less by them than by works of 19th century Gothic and Romantic fiction. She has made a series of works inspired by the life of Mary Shelley and her novel, *Frankenstein*. She worked for some time on the idea for a film (for which the funding has yet to be found) mingling imagery from reports of the Moors murders with the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë and the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Her preferred form, the hand-tinted photograph, has a 19th century feel. She is fascinated by witchcraft, by alchemy and by the superstitions and rituals with which humans attempt to control the great physical epochs of childbirth, sexual intercourse and death. Her works tend to be dramatically dark (Joseph Wright of Derby is another of her favourite artists). All of these preferences combined to ensure that her piece on the Krays was far from being another bit of documentary realism.

**Roberta Graham, *Pale Battalions*, 1989, installation. (Photo R.M. Graham and S.P.C. Trowbridge)**



'I was going to college in Plaistow, getting the bus through the old East End.' She read *The Profession of Violence*, John Pearson's book on the Krays, and began to photograph the sites, many of them condemned for demolition, of their crimes. She was also reading *The Golden Bough*. 'People in primitive cultures believed that knives could be possessed by demonic forces. In the same way the Krays had favourite guns. I kept noticing similar rituals and the same reverence accorded to objects associated with violence.'

The medium she chose was tape-slide. She composes her images with painterly care but she has never been a painter. 'I like the way a photograph is a ghost or residue of something that has existed.' Fascinated by talismen and totems, she aims to create works which have in themselves some of the symbolic charge of magical objects. One of her earliest photo-collages is an enlarged print of a witch's fetish — a bundle of animal skulls — enclosed in an egg-shaped mount and surrounded by a collaged frame of tiny bones — the debris picked from an owl's droppings. It is spell and counter-spell, the Easter imagery of the egg containing and controlling the baneful *memento mori*. The camera is a useful tool for an artist who wishes to practice such sorcery. In her second tape-slide piece, *Projected Rituals*, Graham explored voyeurism and the superstitions surrounding photography, 'the ancient fear of the captured shadow, the camera as the predatory eye.' The imagery was (characteristically) sado-masochistic but the presentation was more subtle than her previous works. 'I was learning how exciting tape-slide could be'.

In 1979 she showed a piece on cosmetic surgery, *Short Cuts to Sharp Looks*, at an all-women show at the ICA. The juxtaposition of sharp metal and vulnerable human flesh and the elegant lucidity of the formal arrangement marked it as a typical Graham work, but it was, for her, unusually direct in its polemic. Graham's feminism is too absolute for her to feel much need to express it in her art. 'It's just natural. These are simple democratic human rights we're talking about, the fundamental right to be respected for what you are.'

A feminist sensitivity to the potentially exploitative nature of the use of female models, especially in depictions of the nude, was one of the factors in her decision to make her next substantial body of work a series of self-portraits. More fundamentally, 'it makes sense to use your own image if you are expressing your own emotions; using models in very intimate work isn't being very honest.' In the light-box pieces the perverse sexual imagery of her earlier works gave way to a more complex and more humane approach to the subject of physical frailty. She showed the skull beneath the skin, but without any of the gruesome relish with which the Jacobean made the same revelation. Dreamy and poignant, her light-boxes play a brilliant double game. Glowing like stained glass, lushly presented (in some the central image is lapped around with velvet, like a diamond necklace in its case), they celebrate the sensuous glories of the human body, but at the same time they subvert its glamour. A seductive image of a naked back becomes a very

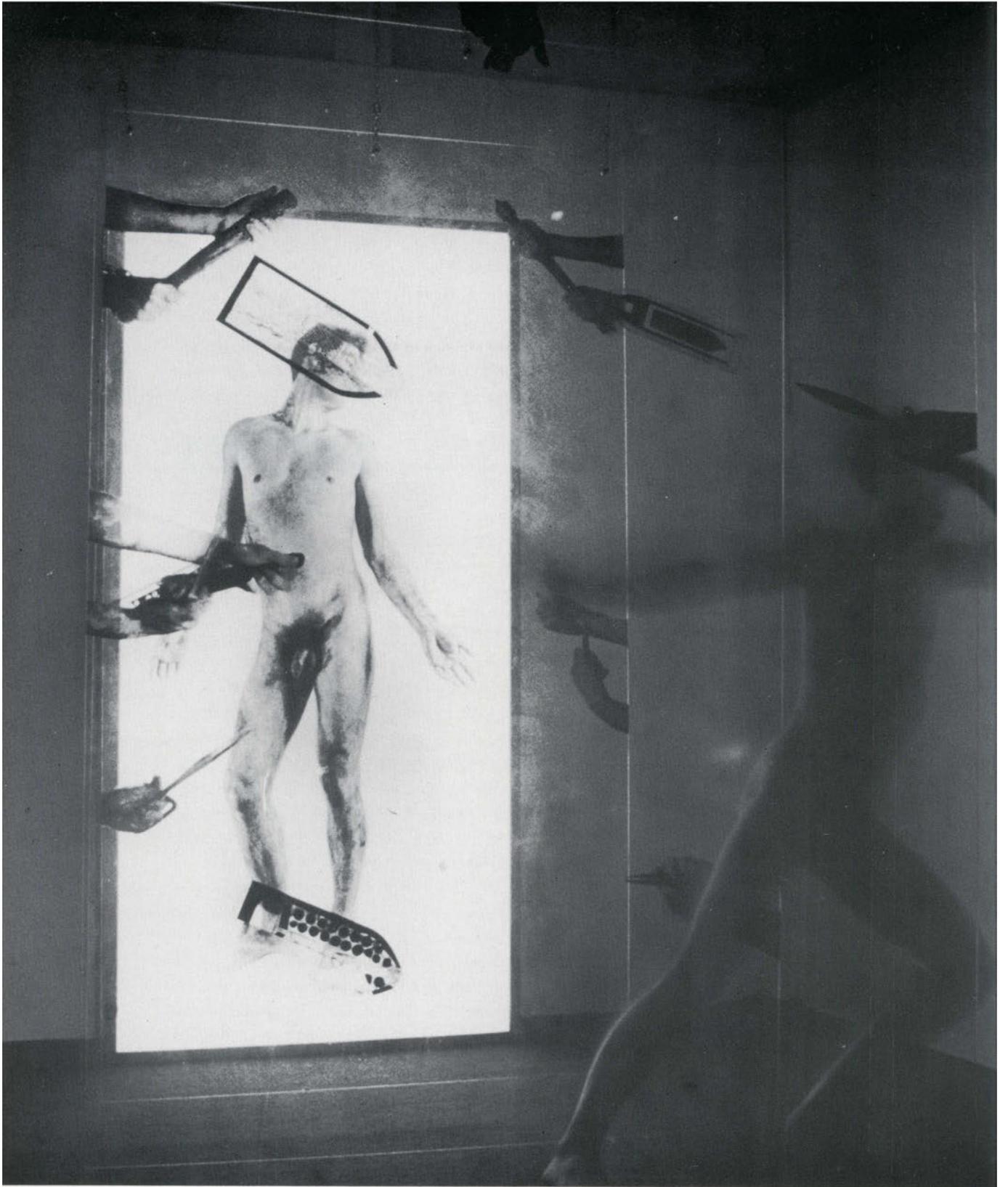


Roberta Graham, from *In the Slaughterhouse of Love*, 1984, detail from light-box. (Photo R.M. Graham and S.P.C. Trowbridge)

different thing when, as in one of Graham's pieces, a skeletal spine is laid along it, its curves following those of the living spine beneath.

Having explored her own carnality, in 1983 Graham made a work based on her physical relationship with another. *In The Slaughterhouse of Love*, commissioned for a festival in memory of Georges Bataille, marked the beginning of her partnership, personal and artistic, with Ken Hollings, the writer whose texts have formed a part of all her subsequent works. She has always had collaborators. Ever since she began to use her own body as subject matter she has relied on Sean Trowbridge to take the actual photographs which form the basis of her finished works. She composes the image, but she leaves its technical realisation to him. 'We've been working together so long that Sean knows exactly what I want.' Another long-time associate is Adrian Fogarty, who records and edits the tapes that form the soundtrack to her works. Hollings' involvement is more intimate. His image appears alongside hers in her most autobiographical works as well as representing, in a more generalised manner, the type of victimised male humanity — he is the dead soldier in her World War I pieces, and the immolated martyr in *Out of the Stones*. *In The Slaughterhouse of Love* is, at one level, a depiction of their relationship. 'Sex is a very violent experience, disruptive emotionally and physically. I was trying to find some way of expressing these extremes of feeling, that passion.' The work is full of lusciously sensuous imagery, of food and rich textiles as well as of the lovers' bodies. The passage which made it so controversial shows Graham cutting Hollings' arm with a blade and then licking his blood. It is an intensely erotic image. 'It was designed to make people question their own sexuality,' says Graham, 'and ask how far they were able to push a fantasy into a real-life situation, without denying the fact that it could be dangerous.' But the work's implications spread beyond the bedroom. Bataille's novel, *Blue of Noon*, ends with the outbreak of the First World War. Graham's work, which was partly based on the novel, ends with a tumult of ominous drumming. Her researches for it included reading memoirs by those who had fought in the trenches. A work which explores the erotic origins of violence led her eventually to *Harvest of Steel*, which so poignantly laments its consequences.

Before returning to the theme of warfare, though, she made *Fallen Angel*, a series of eight large pictures, with accompanying text by Hollings, based on the life of Mary Shelley, on her creation, Frankenstein, and on Frankenstein's creation, the Monster. Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died in giving birth to her and Shelley herself had a series of miscarriages, one of which very nearly proved fatal. *Fallen Angel* is a series of images of conception and birth. A richly allusive work, it is full of references to alchemy, to Romantic literature and to 19th century science and superstition. Frankenstein made his monster out of parts of dead bodies. Graham doesn't depict the Monster, but his ghastly and pathetic story underlies her own meditations on birth and its proximity to death,



and on the process of artistic creation as a similarly mysterious and perilous phenomenon.

Her First World War pieces followed. Then, last winter, while showing her lightboxes in a group show at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, Graham became preoccupied with Oxford, with the colleges of the university which turn blank walls to the street, revealing the quasi-ecclesiastical beauties of their cloisters and halls only to initiates, 'hermetic institutions protecting knowledge'. She was moved by the story of the Oxford martyrs who died in agony for attempting to breach the parallel exclusivity of the church. Her enduring fascination with religion and equally enduring distrust of established authority fed into the work. The main panel shows a thigh-bone lying on a ground of burnt paper — human bodies and human achievements both destroyed by the fire of repressive fanaticism. Over them cascade a stream of images — martyrs in agony mingling with carved mythological figures, fronds of ivy and, above all, gargoyles, all photographed by Graham in the quads of Oxford. 'Gargoyles are there to horrify and drive off evil spirits, but they are also designed to frighten the people within the church. The piece is partly about that suppressed fear, the fact that the thing which protects you also frightens.' About authoritarianism, in other words, about its dangerous comforts and about the heroism of those who confront it.

From East End criminals to Romantic/Gothic fiction, from the First World War to 16th century religious persecutions, Roberta Graham has found her inspiration in widely diverse sources. Her researches are eclectic and scholarly. Something of an outsider in the art world, she spends a great deal more time reading than she does going to private views. 'There are so many brilliant books you can curl up with on a sofa — and there aren't that many people you want to curl up with.' But if her raw material is literary and cerebral, her work is that of a true visual artist. The richly infolded symbolism of her work gives it a potent charge. Her subjects, the great, banal mysteries of pain and love, are given subtlety and intriguing distance by the allusiveness of her treatment of them. 'Often you can penetrate the heart of a subject by looking at it from an oblique angle, not following a simple documentary route.' But her art, like all work worthy of the name, stands or falls — in her case stands — by virtue of its material form, the grandeur of its presence. A friend once likened an exhibition of her light-boxes (shown, as they should be, in a darkened space) to 'a cross between a cinema and a church'. It is a description which pleases Graham. In her best work she contrives to combine the sexiness and yearning fantasy of the cinematic dream-machine with the awfulness of sacred art.

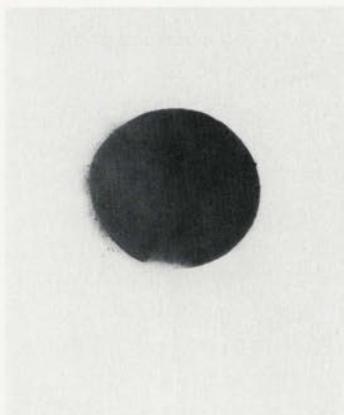
**Roberta Graham, *The Wound Man*, 1989**, light-box installation. (Photo R.M. Graham and S.P.C. Trowbridge)



**John A. Walker**

# THE LAST AVANT-GARDIST

**John Latham's Holistic Vision**



Above:  
**John Latham, *Full Stop*, 1961.**  
(Photo Chris Moore)

Facing page:  
**John Latham, *Emit Wolley*, 1960.**  
(Photo Chris Moore)

‘Perhaps the only genuine radical in British art of the post-war era’ — Waldemar Januszczak, *The Guardian*, 1987.

‘A poor artist and a bogus philosopher’ — Tim Hilton, *The Guardian*, 1991.

**T**hese contrasting critical judgements illustrate the divergent responses John Latham’s art regularly provokes. To some he is a visionary, to others a vandal. He has been called an anarchist and a conservative. His position in British art is a curious one; he is both known and obscure, a success and a failure, respected and despised. The indifference, antagonism and misrepresentation emanating from some quarters of the artworld is matched by the strong backing of the Lisson Gallery, shows at the Tate Gallery, works in major international collections and a considerable acknowledgement of the importance of his contribution over several decades to assemblage, performance, destructive and conceptual art, experimental film and video.

‘Art after Physics’, a major retrospective exhibition of Latham’s work at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, provided a rare opportunity for the present generation of undergraduates, most of whom have never heard of Marshall McLuhan, to discover one of Britain’s most important living artists. Latham is a prophet more honoured abroad than at home; the Oxford show originated in Stuttgart at the Staatsgalerie, and the last substantial retrospective exhibition of his work was initiated by the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, in 1975.

Latham’s return to Oxford marked the resumption of a debate begun in 1963, when his reliefs, constructed from burnt and torn books, were shown at the Bear Lane Gallery. At the time they prompted strong debate amongst students and in the press, and the challenge to language and books presented in their contention that Western civilization was a ‘burnt-out case’ worried many academics.

I had thought through my years of study of Latham that I had mastered his work, but the extent and variety of the Oxford exhibition stopped me in my tracks, inviting a complete re-assessment. The titles and fragments of text in one book relief alone suggest a plethora of allusions — to Latham’s own life, to art, literature and science. The Oxford exhibition contained over forty works including spray-gun paintings, book reliefs, a time-base roller and the infamous, anti-Clement Greenberg piece *Art and Culture* (1966/7), a documentation of the action *Still and Chew*. Chrissie Iles had also added several extra works: two early paintings from the 1950s — one, *Praying Figure*, indebted to Francis Bacon; three glass and book reliefs from the early 1980s; and a new, free-standing glass and book sculpture, *God is Great*, which incorporates the Bible, the Koran, the Talmud and the Torah. The works fitted the upper galleries of the museum splendidly and their arrangement and hanging were exemplary.

Latham, like Francis Bacon, is rare amongst British artists in finding inspiration in Spanish art. The blackness of his reliefs echoes the blacks so typical of Velasquez; *The Burial of Count Orgaz* (1958) is based on a painting of the same name by El Greco. There is something poignant and tragic about Latham's assemblages of charred and damaged books, wire and plaster. German scholars tend to discuss his art and ideas from a philosophical perspective, but the historical and social contexts must not be forgotten. The book reliefs, for instance, were made during the era of 'bomb culture' and CND marches, a decade or so after the World War in which Latham fought, in which over 50 million died and in which the horrors of the holocaust and atomic explosions occurred.

Since European 'civilization' caused this unprecedented outbreak of violence, destruction and atrocity, it could be argued that Latham was right to indict it, to depict civilization as a ruin, a system dominated by logic and language which had gone terribly wrong. Given such a perspective, he would eventually have to search for the source of the error, and in doing so he was undoubtedly right to learn from scientists like Gregory and Kohsen (with Latham, founders of the Institute for Mental Images in the 1950s), who were committed to inter-disciplinary research for the purpose of understanding the totality and not just the parts. He was also right to devise an alternative conceptual schema — 'event structure' — which he felt would help to overcome the divisions between nations, between science and art, and between science and religion which, for many centuries, have bedevilled the human species.

As an artist who has made time and events rather than objects and space his primary concerns, Latham has made several important contributions to the transitory, temporal medium of performance. Factual descriptions and photographic documentation of some of his performances in the '60s can be found in *John Latham: Least Event*, a booklet published by the Lisson Gallery in 1970. To gain a complete picture of Latham's work, one needed to have more information than was available at Oxford about these non-object based activities: for example, his contributions to the Destruction in Art Symposium held in London in 1966 (his Skoob Tower ceremonies which took place in the streets and adventure playgrounds); and the 'book plumbing', mixed media performance events and environments created, with other artists, in the basement of the alternative bookshop Better Books in the Charing Cross Road in 1967.

The exhibition itself did not include a reconstruction of the 3-dimensional structure *Skoob Box* (1960, later destroyed) or of the ecological work/marine tool *Big Breather* (1973), or of the polemical, triangular display unit *Offer for Sale*, a piece about art and economics exhibited in The Gallery, London, in 1974. Nor did it describe in any great detail the research Latham undertook with the Artist Placement Group (APG) during its projects in Scotland and Germany.

It was, however, valuable to see the re-interpretation of his performance piece,

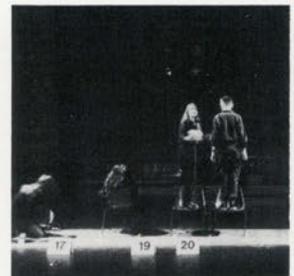
*Government of the First and Thirteenth Chair*, first performed at the Riverside Studios, London, in 1978 and performed during the exhibition by students from the Ruskin School of Art, at the Oxford Union. There were also two showings of his films from the '60s and more recent video pieces at MOMA and at the London Film Makers' Co-op — a belated tribute, since his experimental films have been largely omitted from standard histories of independent and avant-garde British cinema.

In *Government of the First and Thirteenth Chair* (this Oxford performance of which has been recorded on video) chairs are the key props, echoing the game of musical chairs, or Ionesco's tragic farce *The Chairs* (Paris 1952, London 1957). Philosophers and conceptual artists are also fond of citing mundane objects such as chairs: witness Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs*. To Latham, the chairs are readymades with certain useful properties: stability; a close relationship to the human body; different bases from which the sitter can speak with different voices; and the potential for several to occupy the same space, by means of stacking.

The performance, in two parts, employed a director (Latham himself), several actors and thirteen chairs, eleven black and two white. The first part began with a David Toop sound track 'The Chair Story', followed by silent actors placing a single chair in position, then knocking it over, repeating the action until a second chair was introduced which traversed a circle around the first, until they were eventually stacked. This sparked off a champagne celebration and at this point Latham and three other actors left the audience and joined the action. (Breaking frame foregrounded the artifice of the artform, at the same time as illustrating the idea that the observer is also part of the event).

In the second half, chairs were positioned in rows on a carpet outlined with a numbered grid. The actors moved around, sat on chairs and hid behind them, debated and argued. Their verbal discourse varied in tone and emphasis according to the chair they occupied, following a script which Latham had encouraged them to interpret and improvise. The piece ended with several remarks: 'Performance art is comprehensive. Performance science is not'. 'Ideas are dangerous . . . nothing will come of it.' 'Nothing? Nothing? In art, nothing is the form of everything. Everything will come of it.'

*Government of the First and Thirteenth Chair* was intended as a visual demonstration and exploration in real time of Latham's belief that there is a correlation between the sources of human action and the different bands of what he calls the 'time-base spectrum', a concept also found in his motorised *Time-Base Roller* (1972). The various numbered bands of the 'time-base' represent, schematically, all evolutionary developments which occur between the first moment of the cosmos and the 'whole event'. The human life span exists between bands 17 and 30, hence the thirteen chairs of the performance's title. In Part One of the performance the appearance and disappearance of the chair could represent



John Latham, *Government of the First and Thirteenth Chair*, 1991, performance, Oxford Union. (Photo Chris Moore)



John Latham, *Government of the First and Thirteenth Chair*, 1978, performance, Riverside Studios, London.

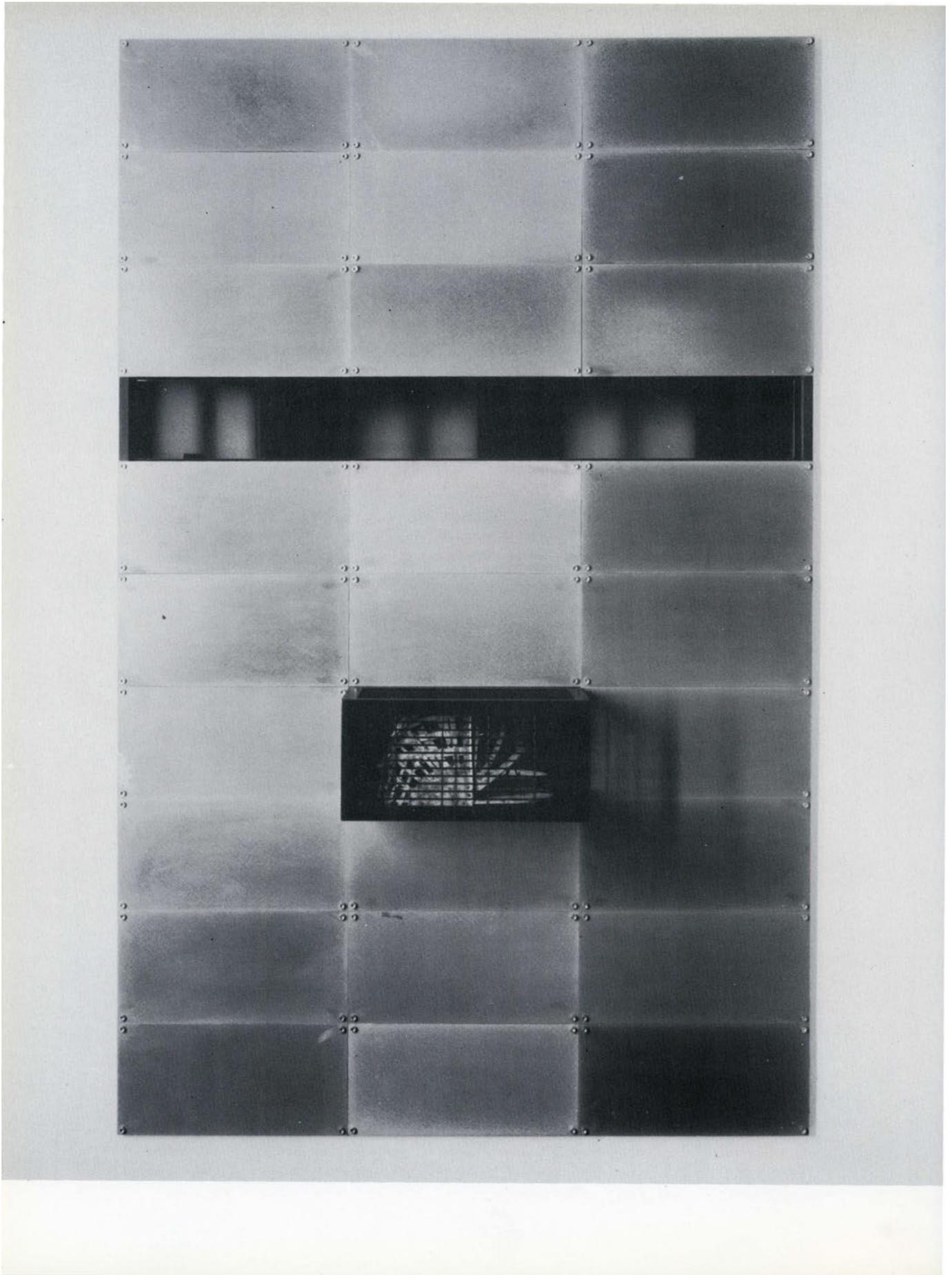
the creation of something from nothing, a process which is repeated until it becomes a 'habit'. It could be said that the two chairs represent two traditions — science and art — which, after a period of conflict, synthesize, restating Latham's contention that in 1954, when he executed his first spray paintings, the two separate traditions of science and art converged.

In Part Two, the chairs are arranged in a line along the time-base spectrum painted along the strip of carpet. The actions and discussions which take place represent an elaboration of Latham's 'event structure' theory. Latham's works increasingly recapitulate his own historical development. A single meaning cannot be distilled from *Government . . .*, because it is designed to generate associations. Like the evolution of life itself, it becomes more complex over time and reflects the influence of chance. Latham has compared it to a Rorschach ink blot which encourages viewers to project their own meanings onto it. Indeterminacy is built in, just as it is in the workings of nature.

Several critics have complained of difficulty in understanding Latham's ideas and the quasi-poetic, quasi-scientific language he uses in his writings, some going as far as to conclude that he is a 'bogus philosopher' (Tim Hilton). The two cultures syndrome C.P. Snow identified decades ago still persists in Britain; most lovers of art and literature are scientifically illiterate, and vice versa. The fact that only a few of Latham's critics might be able to understand, say, quantum mechanics, does not mean that Latham's theory is meaningless or without practical consequences. Works of art which attempt to transcend both art and science, reason and intuition, necessarily do not conform to existing categories. Even if one cannot grasp Latham's theories, or decides that they are mistaken, the general thrust of his project is still of value. His insistence on the importance of taking into account the whole event of the cosmos and of the needs of society as a whole has been more clearly indicated in recent years with the realization of the ecological crisis humankind now faces.

Latham is arguably the British equivalent of Joseph Beuys. The parallels between the two artists are striking. Both were born in the same year, saw active service during the Second World War, and have produced work embracing objects and actions, made with the conviction that the artist had a crucial part to play in changing society for the better; both had a deep interest in science, and clashed with their respective educational systems and officialdom. Beuys invited Latham to take part in the programme of his 'Free International University' at Documenta VI in 1977. Beuys has achieved a much greater degree of fame and commercial success, but time may well prove Latham to be the more profound artist.

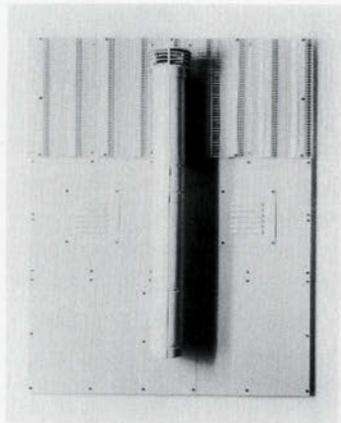
I have dubbed Latham 'the last avant-gardist' because, since the death of Beuys in 1986, he seems to stand alone as an artist who is inspired by a holistic vision containing lessons which, should they be heeded, would be of benefit to all humanity.



**Mike Archer**

# THE CONFINES OF POWER

**Denis Masi's Recent Wall-Work**



Above:

**Denis Masi, *Territorial Imperative*, 1990**, mild steel, corrugated steel, weld mesh, flue and louvres. (Photo Peter Mackertich)

Facing page:

**Denis Masi, *Seemingly Humble*, 1989**, mild steel, weld mesh, mirror, found object and nickel-plated cladding. (Photo Peter Mackertich)

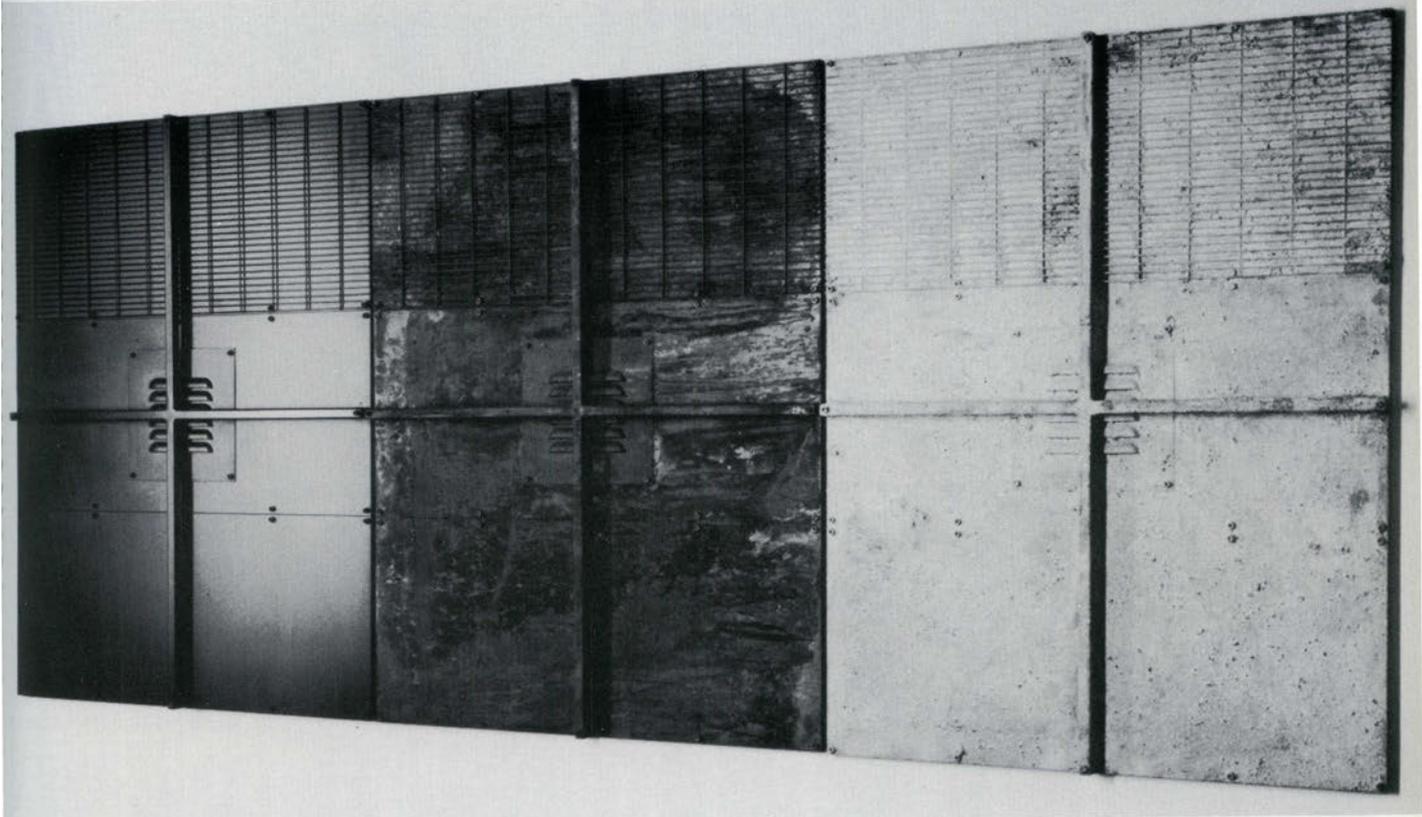
**D**enis Masi's recent work — made since *Enclosure*, his last installation, was shown at the Serpentine Gallery in 1988 — is all wall-mounted. It uses the same kinds of materials and employs techniques similar to those seen in the later installations, but it is, on the whole, much simpler. Metal grilles, mirrors, tessellated and continuous surfaces, differently treated, make reference to walls, doors, windows, security devices. As signalled by the deliberate ambiguity of their titles — *Sufficient to Provoke*, *Territorial Imperative*, *Double Cross* — they operate in two ways: they are works *on* the wall and works *of* the wall. Each one is a resistant surface, the representation through imitation of a barrier or protected opening. They are objects of contemplation and 'slices of life', excerpts from a larger reality in which one is confronted with the limitations, both physical and mental, to existence. They resist and yet they look familiar, amenable, and because they don't altogether deny the viewer, they are able to reflect back onto the adequacy or otherwise of inner defences.

Some of the elements one associates with the feel of the classic Masi installation survive in individual works — a caged rat trap in *Seemingly Humble*, a protected spotlight in *Make it Known* — but they are not employed in all cases. Masi's careful method of working involves developing an idea through a number of stages before making something which, although highly finished in a technical sense, still only functions as a study for the work proper. In contrast to his installations, the scale of the new wall-mounted work allows it to be exhibited within a supportive context provided by these test-pieces; and in such an environment, the studies often stand as versions of, rather than models for the final form. Props do not appear in the studies and as a result one is able to confirm that their use has been wisely restricted: over-employment might lead to portentousness and an unnecessarily didactic tone.

There are two things which strike one about this new work. Firstly, its relationship to painting; and secondly, its uncannily human presence. The second grows out of the first. On the face of it, the invocation of painting is easily explained. These pieces are all wall-mounted panels and as such are some distance removed from Masi's earlier installations. Although they give the impression of being excerpts from, or details of larger, more extensive surfaces, their proportions are manageable. That they should represent walls, barriers, mirrored windows impenetrable to the gaze seems, paradoxically, to intensify this feeling rather than otherwise. For example, the top third of *Territorial Imperative* is wire mesh screwed over a corrugated panel. The smoothness of the lower two thirds is interrupted by two small, square air vents which sit on either side of a cylindrical flue running vertically up almost the entire height of the work. Undoubtedly we are witnessing something to which access is restricted. But this thing we cannot penetrate is not inanimate; it takes in air and pushes out exhaust; it breathes.

That we are facing not things but intelligences is most graphically demonstrated

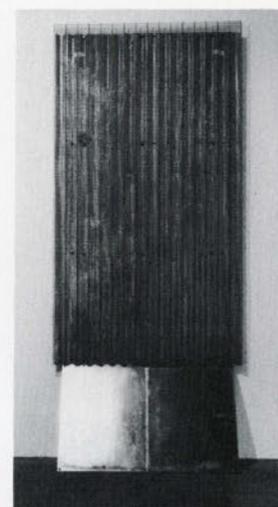
**Denis Masi, *The Ethos of Misinformation*, 1989**, mild steel, weld mesh, louvres and mixed media. (Photo Peter Mackertich)



here, in *Territorial Imperative*, but it is no less true of the other works. Where the earlier installations and tableaux led one to participate — both physically, by entering the space they occupied, and mentally, by projecting oneself into the role of one or other of the absent but implied protagonists in the scene — the new works, because of their form, lead to engagement of a different kind: they invite dialogue. The ambiguity which is so much a feature of the large-scale pieces persists but is transformed. Where previously one employed a variety of polarised personae — judge/defendant, legislator/transgressor, captor/captive, ruler/subject, and so on — as a means to explore a situation, one is now placed in the notionally more conventional position of having to address an object. But this is done from ground undermined by the continued operation of these oppositions. Power, its lineaments and its effectiveness, remain Masi's subjects, and the baseline uncertainties from which any analysis of the work develops are these: is one inside or outside the wall, and why?

The shift to wall-works was signalled in Denis Masi's last London exhibition, held at the Serpentine in 1988. There, alongside his most recent installation, *Enclosure*, he showed *Border no.2*. There have been several versions of *Border*, but the format is consistent. The upper half is a matt black grille screwed over a thick black canvas cover. Rotating clips on the sides of the piece's framework pass through eyelets in the canvas and hold it in place. Below this the rest of the frame is covered with panels of brushed metal. This lower half bulges out from the wall, encroaching upon the viewer's space. The situation is deliberately unclear. It might be intent upon annexation or protective inclusion, or it may be that it is unhealthily distended, bloated with unwanted matter which it is about to extrude into our domain.

That we should bear in mind the continuity between this, the subsequent work shown concurrently at Edward Toteah and Anderson O'Day, and the preceding installations, is signalled by the inclusion of an illustration of *Enclosure* in the catalogue. For this work the walls of the gallery have a high fence applied to them, making the space into a large cage. A canvas groundsheet covers the floor; and a chair, surrounded by the feathers of game birds, is placed somewhere in its central area. Barbed wire crowns the fence and the whole is lit by strong halogen lamps while sound issues from high-mounted loudspeakers. Following this in the catalogue is a photograph simply entitled *Belgravia*. It shows the corner of a high brick wall decorated with more than the usual amount of razor wire and other deterrents to access and, to the side, the end of a neo-classical façade. One presumes, without visiting the place to check, that this is the back of Buckingham Palace, seat of our titular, though in executive terms thoroughly impotent, power, and a fragment of the Victory monument at Hyde Park Corner. One thus reads the interdiction signalled by this prohibitive array in two ways: the occupants are being protected *from* us; and they are also being protected *for* us. On the domestic



Denis Masi, *Border no. 2*, 1987, mild steel, corrugated steel, weld mesh and zinc-plated cladding.

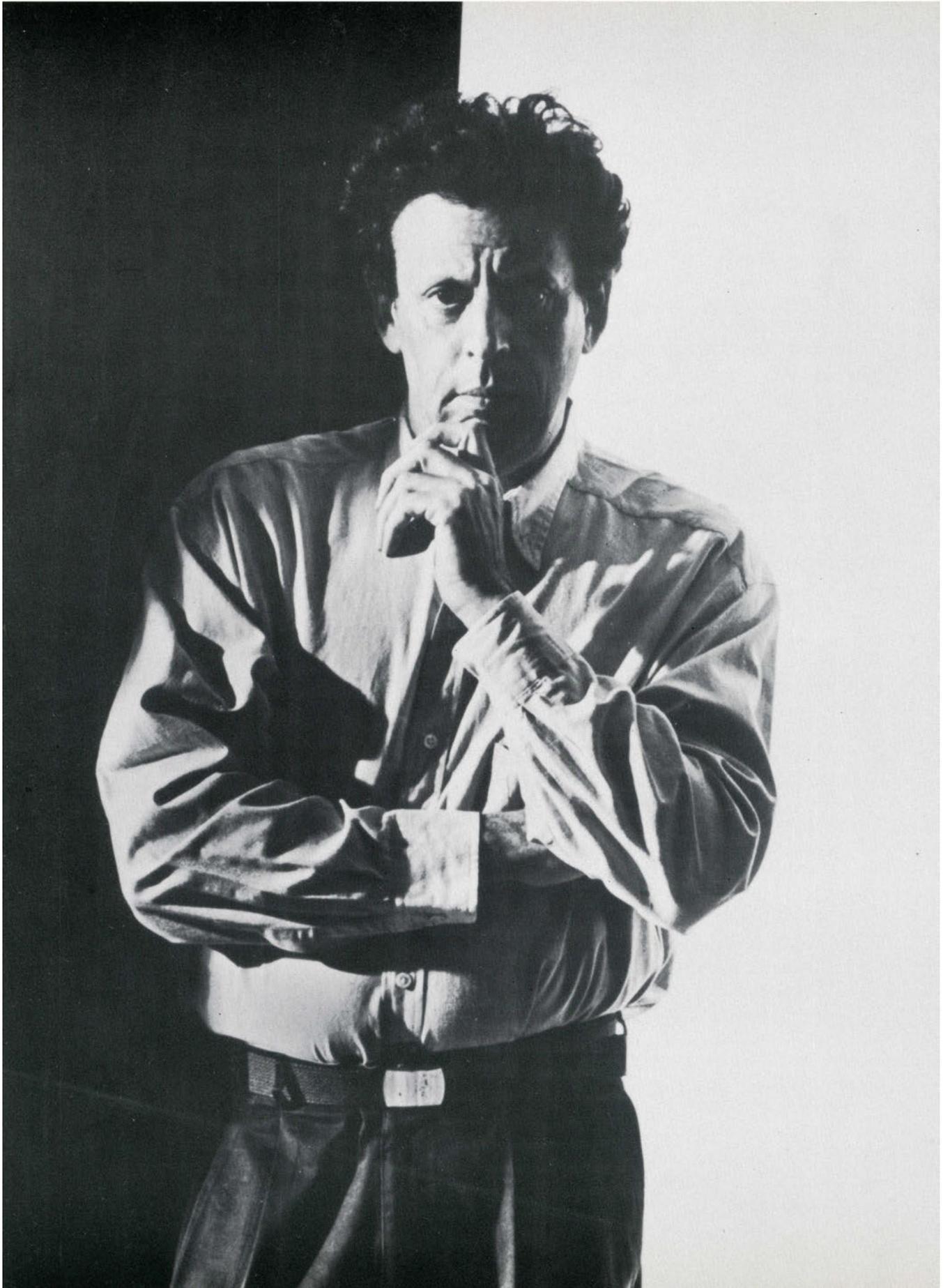


Denis Masi, *Enclosure*, 1980-87, mild steel, canvas, game feathers, barbed wire, tape loop, spotlights, etc. (Photo Peter Mackertich)

level this might translate as 'this hurts me more than it hurts you' or 'I'm doing this for your own good'; but Masi is less concerned with power as it is manifested in interactions between individuals than with the individual's negotiations with abstracted, social power. The strip of mirrored glass set at eye level in the plated metal surface of *Seemingly Humble* leads us towards oppressive mass-observation rather than the reflectiveness attended upon intimate conversation.

During the year he spent as artist in residence at the Imperial War Museum in the early '80s, Masi developed the use of variously patinated surfaces in his work. The major construction, *Shrine*, which came out of that stay, incorporated a number of objects whose exteriors were made to bear upon the complex of relationships between beauty and death in our culture, and which the existence of such an institution as the Imperial War Museum highlights. Masi was interested in how the degree to which we are able to indulge in aesthetic evaluation of objects whose primary function is destructive, depends upon their technological obsolescence. We appreciate the quality of the forging which went into making a sword, admire the filigree-work on its gold handle and, if we think of it at all as anything other than a beautiful object inviting aesthetic contemplation, we categorize it as ceremonial. Compare this to the terrible beauty of a cruise missile finding its target. The wall-works continue to employ a range of variously-treated surfaces, but now their qualities become symbolic of truth as hostage to power. This is most clearly seen in *The Ethos of Misinformation*, a three-part work. The gridded and grilled panels are identical in structure, but have not been finished in the same way. The first is matt black, the second rusted, and the third treated to suggest verdigris. There is an ideal, a sort of unattainable, 'total' picture; a flawed and imperfect rendition of this; and a version over which time has thrown a cloak of substance and respectability. Nowhere are we given something which we might consider to be the unvarnished version of events.

Masi's vision of power is a pessimistic one. Power to do always involves a reciprocal power over, a state of affairs understood when we use words like 'agent' and 'subject'. An agent can *do* things but only under licence from a higher, controlling authority; while to be a subject implies both self-possession and subjugation. It is not the inevitability of corruption which concerns him, but the continual necessity for compromise. 'Misinformation', far from being the kind of transparent governmental spin-doctoring guaranteed to excite feelings of righteous indignation, is another word for the human condition.



**Nicholas Zurbrugg**

# COLLABORATIONS

**An Interview with Philip Glass**

**Facing page:  
Philip Glass**

**N**icholas Zurbrugg: I believe you've been working with the poet Allen Ginsberg on an opera entitled *Hydrogen Jukebox*.

*Philip Glass*: Yes, it's a chamber opera for six voices and a small ensemble. It opened in Spoleto in May 1990 and it travelled round North America last Fall.

NZ: How did you put this opera together?

PG: Well, we combed through his *Collected Works* — covering a period of forty years — and picked out about twenty poems, and those became the libretto. With *Howl* we used the middle section, and I also used sections from another large poem, *Wichita Vortex Sutra*. But many of the other poems like *Aunt Rose* or *Father Death Blues* were used intact. *Hydrogen Jukebox* is really a collaboration, in the sense that the music and the words are at this point inseparable for me. Now, Allen can still read the poetry, but you couldn't do the music without the words. In a certain way, it's a return to the non-narrative pieces like *Einstein on the Beach* and some of the early theatre pieces like *The Photographer*, in that it falls into that vague category of abstract pieces. In *Hydrogen Jukebox* there isn't much of a story there, and there's not much of an attempt to create one. In a way, we leave the poems as poems, and don't try to act them out in some way. The staging of them is done by a young woman called Ann Carlson. Jerome Sirlin also did some of the visual material.

NZ: Did you find your musical settings of the poems contained or constrained by the patterns of Ginsberg's intonations?

PG: No, I didn't. Allen recorded all the poems for me, and I made a point of not listening to them. There was no point in doing that. Allen said, 'I want you to hear how I read them, so you'll know how the poems go.' But the point is, if I'm going to do that, then there's hardly any point in my writing music. What Allen had always done in previous collaborations with other composers was to take the music and retain the metre exactly as a spoken metre. So the music was a kind of a window dressing for the words. And I had no intention of doing that. So when Allen gave me the tapes I simply did not listen to them. I could imagine how Allen would read it, but I did not follow his way of reading it.

NZ: How did you first come to collaborate with Ginsberg?

PG: Well, I had been asked to perform in a benefit to raise money for VIETCO, which is a Vietnam Veterans theatre group. And I said, 'Well, maybe I'll have my friend Allen do this with me — I've known Allen for some time — we live in the same neighbourhood, and we run into each other all the time.' They liked the idea very much and suggested I do something from *Iron Horse*, because it's about

Vietnam. A week or so later I ran into Allen in St. Mark's Bookstore, and he said, 'Oh, what a nice idea.' He sent me a tape of *Wichita Vortex Sutra* and I worked with the tape — I wrote music for his reading and we performed that together, as a duet as it were. That turned out so well, that I said, 'Let's try to do another work.' About that time I was doing *1000 Airplanes* and I wanted to do a second travelling piece — a chamber work that could be taken around the country. So I got the idea to do this piece with Allen. It's a very satisfying work artistically. Ann Carlson and Jerry Sirlin both made beautiful contributions to the work, and it became a kind of four-way collaboration in the end — you have the words and the music and the staging and the visualization — the four things together. It's one of these extremely happy collaborations where each part is a kind of unique contribution that the other contributors were not able to do — or even to imagine. I mean, I didn't have any idea what Ann Carlson would do or how Jerome Sirlin would approach this work. It turned out to be a very successful collaboration.

NZ: Are you primarily interested in that kind of four-way collaboration now?

PG: Well, basically that's what I've been doing for years — it's usually three or four. With *The Voyage* it's a collaboration of four. Now it changes somewhat — with *The Voyage* it's my story, and I invited the other people to work with me, and I have a kind of overview of what else is going on. In a sense it's my piece on which other people are working. But with *Hydrogen Jukebox* it's much more of an equal collaboration. The style of the collaboration changes a lot depending on my role as a composer. *Henry IV parts one and two* really is a director's play, and I supply music where Jo Anne Akalaitis wants it, and have very little other contribution to the whole thing. So my role tends to change. With *1000 Airplanes* I was really the director and the composer, so I had a lot of input into that.

I'm working with Bob Wilson on a new piece — it's called *White Raven* — and in this piece we really are equal collaborators. He does the staging and the design, and I do the music. *White Raven* is commissioned by the *Teatro S. Carlo* in Lisbon in commemoration of the ten years of discoveries between 1490 and 1500. This is the time when the Portuguese went around the Horn in Africa, went to South India, China and Japan. Later, they were in Brazil. The theme of it is basically the Portuguese discoveries, and among the main characters is an explorer that we're calling Vasco de Gama.

NZ: What is the relationship between Wilson's staging and your music? When I saw him rehearsing the Cambridge production of *Quartett*, in 1988, he repeatedly modified performers' positions, perfecting gestures and lighting. It seemed to be quite a laborious and continual operation.

PG: Yes, it's very detailed.

NZ: He was presumably changing his notion of how people should be on stage. Does your music vacillate as well?

PG: No, it doesn't. With *Einstein* the music was done first, and I didn't change it very much throughout the staging. But with *the CIVIL warS* he had done the staging first, and then I wrote the music, so it wasn't necessary. In this case we're doing it that way again. We conducted a workshop together in Lisbon with about twenty actors playing the parts in the opera, and we more or less made a dry opera — an opera without music. We'll do the opera 'dry' first, and then when it's staged we'll do a video-tape of all the staging. And then we'll do all the timings from the video-tape. And so, there, it's not necessary to rewrite the music, because I'm fitting it to the action that's already conceived.

NZ: Do you ever have problems in terms of the timing, or in terms of matching your music to Wilson's variously prolonged or variously accelerated actions?

PG: Not much. Not really. Things can be made longer or shorter without too much trouble. I've now done three pieces with Bob — two *CIVIL warS* operas and *Einstein*, so this is our fourth work together. Besides that, I've seen quite a lot of his other pieces, so it's a style of work that's very familiar to me, and I know how to work with him.

NZ: Do you find that there's a substantial difference between the operas that you've directed — like *1000 Airplanes* — and the effects that you like, and the effects that he likes?

PG: Oh yes, certainly. If Bob had done *1000 Airplanes* it would have looked nothing like what I do. My own way of working as a director — though I haven't done that much — is in a certain way much more traditional than what Bob does. And one of the reasons that I like working with people like Bob or like Richard Foreman is that they are very innovative directors, and they bring something very fresh to the work. In my own field, which is composition, I can be innovative, but in the field of directing — when I do direct — I'm not inventing theatre language.

NZ: But presumably you share the same very similar aesthetic, and your approach is compatible?

PG: Obviously, clearly it is. When I direct a piece it's just for my amusement — and not just that. With *1000 Airplanes* I more or less had to direct it because that was the only way to put the words and the music in the right place. With *Hydrogen Jukebox* I was interested in finding another director — someone to bring a very fresh and different way to think about the staging. And that's what Ann Carlson did. It did not occur to me to be the director of that piece. Though

I've been asked to direct *The Fall of the House of Usher* in Germany, and I'd like to do that. I have ideas of how to do that, and I'd also like to direct *Akhmaten* some time. There have been three productions of it, one in Germany, one in America that went to London, and one in Sweden. But I haven't seen a production of it that is true to the music in the way that I conceive it.

NZ: What is the particular problem here?

PG: Well, it's getting a director that will do what you want to do. And they don't. The real problem is that most directors think of themselves as collaborators with an author, but most of the time the authors are dead, so there's no one to argue the point, and they can do what they like. Then when you give them a new piece, they're quite likely to say, 'Oh I'll just do it as I like.' And you'll say, 'Well, I didn't write it that way.' And invariably, they'll never see it your way. Which means you'll never see it your way. But if you only work with directors that are compliant, you often may not get anything that's interesting. So in order to get the interesting directors who'll bring something new to the work, very often there'll be certain aspects of the work, which you've cared for, which won't appear. That ideal director that'll be both completely innovative and obedient to the author — I don't think that he or she exists! So, in the end, I've always chosen to go with the director who simply doesn't pay any attention to my ideas, but follows the music in his own way, and does something quite original. In the end, I think it's been more interesting to work that way.

But on a few occasions — for example, for *Akhmaten* — I would like to see the opera once done in the way it was written, just in terms of following the libretto! If you look at the libretto of *Akhmaten*, act one ends with the funeral of his father, act two ends with an image of that funeral, but seen at a greater distance. And act three ends with the funeral procession entering the kingdom of Ra, the god of Egypt. So the theme of the funeral was a very fundamental concept for *Akhmaten*. In fact, I saw the whole opera as being contained in the funeral of his father. It's never been done that way. That idea was simply dropped.

Well, it's an interesting idea. It's about fathers and sons. Many of us are sons and some of us are fathers, and of these some of us are both. So for at least half the world it's quite an interesting subject. Like mothers and daughters too. I had come across the subject of *Akhmaten* through the Russian-American writer Velikovsky. He wrote a book called *Earth and Upheaval* and *Worlds in Collision* — he had a lot of ideas about the ancient world. Many of them have proved to be correct, but he angered many traditional scientists by being very speculative. He doesn't come over with much proof for his ideas, he just spins them out. Well, he had the idea that the story of Oedipus was based on the legend of Akhmaten, and that the Greek myth of Oedipus was really based on the historical fact of *Akhmaten*. He

has a book called *Oedipus and Akhnaten*. There's a bit of Freud in here too, needless to say — Freud was also interested in Akhnaten. Anyway, coming to the material through the eyes of Velikovsky, and seeing Akhnaten as a precursor of the legend of Oedipus, the interpretation of the funeral becomes central to this vision. But it's never been done.

NZ: This suggests yet again that your interest in content, and a particular kind of mythological content evoking many things, contradicts the prevalent critical conviction that postmodern culture is somehow superficial or vacuous.

PG: Well, I don't consider myself a postmodernist, as I understand that term. You see, I have an anti-historical approach, but it's not a postmodern approach. They're different ways of leaving history behind. There's a kind of postmodernism that simply equates history and style as though the two were the same thing. Isn't that so? Historical materials are mixed very freely — that's one way of doing it. I don't believe my work is a part of that. Because I think that if you look at what I've done, I think my work — if I can be candid about it — had a real individuality to it. It's not a borrowed language. In other words, it's not a collage of other styles. Would you agree?

NZ: Sometimes there might be riffs which remind me of other things that I've heard.

PG: Well that's not the same thing as quoting — being reminded is not the same thing as literally quoting.

NZ: I'm thinking of *Glassworks*, where there seem to be some references to little bits of Dvorák.

PG: There was actually a literal one to Sibelius. I actually quoted a theme of Sibelius. But, we've always done that. Composers and artists have always done that. But the postmodernist idea where musical styles can be somehow intermingled meaninglessly, and where a composer doesn't have an individual language — I think that's where the difference is. I think if you listen to *Einstein* or *Satyagraha* or *Akhnaten* — if you take those three operas — there's very clearly a musical language involved. And if you compare that with *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* or *The Voyage*, you'll see an evolution of that language. I'm still of that generation of composers who begin with the language, and then evolve the language, rather than giving up the idea of individual language altogether. Generally speaking, the large-scale pieces, like the operas, involve the development of one aspect of a musical language.

NZ: Thematically speaking, your work also seems to have explored large mythological references.

PG: Yes, that seems to have been a prevailing interest of mine, and I think it serves me well. I think that in terms of large-scale music-theatre, the grandness of characters seems to hold the stage well. I've not done a simple story, though I come close in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It's hardly a simple story, but it is a story of a brother and a sister and a visitor, so it's a compact story, if a complex one.

NZ: Is it possible for you to guess which direction your work will take or continue to take over the next decade?

PG: No. But I'm interested in these collaborations that I did with Ravi Shankar and Foday Muso Suso, so that's one. That's been interesting. And I have a new project with the filmmaker Godfrey Reggio, that will also involve world-music.

NZ: Do you have any new projects for video or television?

PG: No, I don't like it very much for music. It seems to me that opera is not good on close-ups, and that's what television is. Television is all about close-ups. And opera is not about close-ups — it's about big scale things. And for me, when I look at opera on television, it doesn't work very well. So I don't do it. I mean, there are plenty of opera productions on television. I don't think the lack of mine will be missed very much. I'm not interested in documenting on television or on film in that way. I'm interested in film, but not films of music pieces — I mean films like *A Thin Blue Line* or *Powaaqatsi* or *Koyaanisquatsi* or *Mishima* — I am interested in those films. But the idea of making a film out of a theatre work doesn't interest me. I think there's something — to me — jarring and fundamentally at cross purposes about bringing these mediums together.

NZ: Very finally, could I ask what it is that you find most exciting in your work?

PG: The collaborative process is still the most exciting one. And each theatre piece I do has a different team of people. Bob Wilson is an exception, but I rarely repeat the groups exactly in the same way. For example, with *Hydrogen Jukebox* I'm using Jerome Sirlin, but I didn't use David Hwang, and I used Allen Ginsberg as the writer. With *The Voyage*, I work with David, but not with Jerome. So — I'll work with different people.



**Nick Kaye**

# MASK, ROLE AND NARRATIVE

**An Interview with Joan Jonas**



Above:  
**Joan Jonas, *Upside Down and Backwards*, 1980**, videotape, 28 mins, colour, sound. (Photo Gwenn Thomas)

Facing page:  
**Joan Jonas, *Mirage*, 1976**, performance. (Photo Allan Tannenbaum)

**N**ick Kaye: I'd like to begin by asking you about the changes in your work. What was it that took you from the early work, the dance and outdoor pieces dealing with space and discontinuity, to the more theatrical presentations dealing with mask and role?

*Joan Jonas:* Well, in the first place, even before I started doing these outdoor pieces and the mirror pieces, and while some of my inspiration came from art, because my background is in visual art, it also came from literature, myth and ritual. Although I didn't use so many images or references to it in the earlier pieces, these influences were underlying. Then, when I went to Japan in 1970, where I bought a portapack, I saw the *Nob* Theatre. I went with Richard Serra, we both went and looked at it a lot. And that had a really deep effect on me. It was the first theatre I'd seen that I felt really related to my work, because it was ritualistic and abstract. When I came back, the way I started working with the portapack was to sit in front of the TV screen or the camera in a closed circuit situation and work with myself and try on different disguises. I wanted to get away from minimalism, to really step away from minimalism.

*NK:* Do you feel that the sensibility of minimalism underlay the performances you were doing before that?

*JJ:* I think so. I was very close to the whole group of the minimalist movement. My early work was very simple. I kept it very abstract. I was very interested in the materials, the movement and the space.

*NK:* How did your interest in myth and ritual inform those performances?

*JJ:* Well, the early mirror pieces were actually inspired by Borges. I mean, it came from many different sources and there was always some kind of content that was in my mind. The early work came out of poetry, too — American poets — very consciously. It wasn't poetic, but I structured it like poetry. Like William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. Just the idea of how to structure an image and the use of images. The outdoor pieces were composed of a series of images, even though they were based on issues of space. They were imagistic in a very minimal way.

*NK:* So at the time did you feel close in your work to other performers?

*JJ:* Yeah, at the time I was. When I first started performing it was at the end of the Judson period, although I was not a part of the Judson situation.

*NK:* You'd had contact with some of them.

*JJ:* I knew them all. Coming out of art history I felt that I had to know the history of performance. I saw Claes Oldenburg, Robert Morris, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Simone Forti. So I could say, in particular, Yvonne Rainer and

Simone. Then I studied with Trisha. I knew the whole group and I did that purposely because I wanted to learn what they had done so I could go on.

*NK:* It's interesting, because although Simone Forti was concerned with game and task in the early '60s, she soon seems to depart from a focus on found movement. She begins doing these animal pieces, doesn't she? I can't remember exactly when it was, but it was a departure from the address to performance as object.

*JJ:* She did, yes. She went more into dance. The early pieces were related to sculpture, then she became more involved in this kind of poetic movement. And inner spirit. I found the work she was doing around the early '70s, when I got to know her, very poetic. She made up songs — she's Italian — so she made up these Italian songs that were very beautiful. She worked with Charlemagne Palestine and they did very simple pieces. I think they're very beautiful. Of all the dancers, I can feel most relation to her.

*NK:* Was there a particular way in which this concern with ritual and myth came out in the early performances?

*JJ:* This is the way I can put it. I had no background of performance, so when I started performing, even before I started working with the idea of persona and making video pieces, I had to see myself as some kind of persona. Now, in between the time I got the idea I wanted to do performance and when I actually started making performances, I went to Greece because I was very interested in Minoan art. I spent a year there. And they have these little seal stones in which there's an engraving of the mother goddess. That was something that attracted me; the idea of this goddess. Not that I saw myself as a goddess. You know, I was not involved with feminist art in that sense, although I was involved in the idea of feminism in searching for my identity as a female and whether there is such a thing as specifically female imagery. Then I was very affected by *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and the idea of Icarus and Daedalus, and the way that myth is incorporated into literature. All I can say is that I had these things in my mind. In my very first performance I made a mirror costume. Peter Campus and I went into the snow and made a film (*Wind*, 1968). I thought they were kind of shamanistic characters, these two figures, the man and woman in the mirror costumes. And it did turn out that way. I mean, you can have these things in your mind and you wouldn't purposely think of it being that, but then somehow it would come out that way. That's all I can say. So I entered into this kind of idea of shamanism without really saying, I am going to be this or that. It was just that it was there and it happened naturally.

*NK:* One of the things that interests me about this is a certain coming together of interests in ritual and identity and a sensibility from the visual arts, from



Joan Jonas, *Wind*, 1968, 16mm film, 5½ mins, black and white, silent.



minimalism or a formalism. It seems to me that throughout the work the theatrical languages that you use are always self-conscious. When you take a fairy tale, in *Upside Down and Backwards* (1980), for example, you collage it in such a way that the viewer doesn't easily become absorbed into the narrative.

JJ: Yes, when I started working with fairy tales, for instance, I more or less took them apart and analyzed them. Not intellectually, but visually and in a sculptural sense, so that I could extract all the elements.

NK: It seems to me that to set up a fairy tale or a mythological framework is to do something very powerful, but to collage it in the way you do is to get a distance on it, to refuse to allow it to completely unify the piece.

JJ: Yes. It's about different forces and how these forces affect individuals. Well, not individuals — I use the word archetype, the archetypal elements in fairy tales. *The Juniper Tree* (1976) had all kinds of references. I mean, red is blood and white is snow is a kind of fairy tale cliché, but I would relate that to blood and female and so and so forth. I tried to free associate with all the elements. I'm not a *structuralist*, but I made my own structure around the fairy tales.

NK: This kind of association seems important in the earlier mask pieces, too, even though they would appear to be concerned with identity and role. In *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), in particular, there seem to be a lot of oppositions coming into play around your use of the mask and the idea of a role, but as the piece develops the relationship between images becomes more and more complex and any straightforward oppositions become displaced.

JJ: I think that I was playing, you know, it's like playing with theatre. I worked at night always. I worked like a child would work, sort of pretending I was a sorceress. I didn't think of myself as a goddess, but I did think that I could be a sorceress, for instance, an electronic sorceress. And in dealing with this electronic imagery I'd try to create a magical atmosphere. So these masks and disguises would enable me to enter into this world in which I wasn't saying anything that would be verbal, you know, I couldn't verbally tell you except in these few words what that identity was. It was really taking all these different elements like the female imagery, for instance. And also trying to make this erotic landscape that a woman would inhabit. Of course, nobody talked about that because there were hardly any critics, and they were all formalists.

People also called my pieces autobiographical. I mean, they weren't explicitly autobiographical but I think that you reveal things. When I started doing these imagistic pieces, the *Organic Honey* pieces (1972), I'd let anything out. I just did whatever came. It made some people very uncomfortable. They thought I was exposing myself in a very . . . but it didn't bother me because I was protected by

Joan Jonas, *Upside Down and Backwards*, 1980, videotape, 28 mins, colour, sound.

my distance from the audience.

NK: By the fact of the mask?

JJ: The mask, yeah. I masked myself, but I revealed myself in ways that I don't care to even, I mean, that I don't know. I think the mistake some people make when they look at performance art is to think it's you. Of course, it is you, in a certain sense, but it's not, also. *Volcano Saga* (1990) is based on an Icelandic myth in which there are four dreams. Everybody thinks that I wrote the dreams, but they're not my dreams, you know. Well, they are in a certain sense. So, I have a hard time with that because you choose the material because you identify with it but also there is a distance.

NK: You said a sense of playfulness was important.

JJ: Well, there were lots of things I was dealing with. After all this use of the mirror and all those group pieces dealing with space I felt this tremendous freedom to make images. Then when I got into using the video in a closed circuit situation, all of a sudden I'm by myself. So I wear the mask, I hide myself from the audience, because it wasn't about my individual personality. I was only interested in these characters, these disguises, all of which had to do with, all I can say is, a kind of magic, different magical characters. Also, of course, all the objects that I used, and still do, are objects given to me or objects I had from my family, like the fans and the little dolls and the silver spoon. That created a certain kind of aura or atmosphere — a language, a visual language. Then, as a child I liked the circus and magic shows and the musical, those are the three theatre forms that I saw and that I loved. All these things were behind my motivations for making this non-narrative, poetic structure.

At the same time, I was involved with mysticism, especially in the middle and late 1970s, although I've never expressed it directly in my pieces. I mean, I was involved in a very practical way. I was very attracted, for instance, to the imagery of, say, Tibetan Buddhist rituals. When I first saw those I was immediately drawn into it because I felt my work had something to do with it. And I suppose Artaud, for example, would be somebody I could relate to.

My concern was with a complex layering of elements. My body was only a vehicle for these. I never thought about myself as involved with Body-Art, for instance, even though I did that *Mirror Check* piece (1970). I don't think we even called it performance, then, you know. I called them pieces or concerts. I did think about theatre and about layers of meaning and making things complex. I was involved with art history and looking at paintings and always seeing an iconography.

NK: Wasn't it this consideration of meaning that made your work different from



Joan Jonas, *Delay Delay*, 1972, performance: stick dance. (Photo Robert Fiore)

that of most other artists involved in performance?

JJ: Yeah.

NK: Doesn't it also open the work up to all kinds of usually distinct languages?

JJ: Well, that's why I wanted to do performance art instead of being a sculptor. I could use all these different things at the same time; music, movement, imagery. That's still what interests me and keeps me in performance. I think a lot of theatre has been influenced by performance of that kind. It's not so uncommon now.

NK: To what extent were you concerned to make an address to the audience?

JJ: I think that in all my earlier pieces I would spend a certain amount of time drawing the audience into the work, into the atmosphere. At the beginning of my pieces, there would often be this kind of space that in various ways set things up.

NK: In the earlier pieces, things like *Delay Delay* (1972), there's this aspect of the piece which lies with the audience, isn't there?

JJ: Well, actually the audience was always in the space of the piece. In the mirror pieces they would be reflected in the mirrors, then in the outdoor pieces they would be in the space. In all those early pieces the audience is part of the piece.

Also, the mirrors had a lot of connotations of narcissism — and I was interested in narcissism because it was such a taboo and I knew it made the audience uncomfortable. When I did that *Mirror Check* piece it was like the culmination of the abstraction of all the mirror pieces. It was about voyeurism and — it's hard to express. My relationship with the audience was in, really, making them uncomfortable.

NK: Does that then become different when you start to deal with mask and this more overt layering of elements?

JJ: Maybe lately, because maybe I've gotten too professional or something — but not really, no. When I started doing those video pieces I still passed a mirror in front of the audience at the very beginning. I kept that little signature. Then the way I would draw the audience in became a little bit more theatrical — through the atmosphere. Then I would draw the audience in by addressing it. Not directly, but through the video.

NK: It becomes different, I suppose, when you start performing inside. The space becomes much more demarcated.

JJ: Well, many people have said to me that they feel like the pieces are very private. And that when they look at them they feel like they're looking into a private space.

NK: It's quite a complex space, isn't it?

JJ: It's a very complex space with complex relationships with the objects and then the closed circuit television. That was just because I was honestly wanting to communicate to them something about my perceptions about things.

NK: Claes Oldenburg describes his happenings as a 'pressing of his vision closer to the audience'. They're not objects, they're not finished, they're not perfect. So it was about a process, a way of looking.

JJ: I'm sure I was influenced by process. I know I was because to me the most important show that I saw in the late '60s was the process art show with Bruce Nauman and Eva Hesse and Richard Serra. I found that work the most interesting. And I had friends like Robert Smithson, who was a minimalist of course. Although his work was minimalist his mind was very rich, literary and interesting.

NK: I'd like to talk about *Upside Down and Backwards* (1980). There's the use of the various narratives, there's the two descriptions of landscapes, there's the music, which is collaged from various sources, then, the most difficult thing to get hold of from reading the script, your place within this. It seems to me that there are many kinds of narratives within the piece, each one being broken down by another. As a spectator, you're not drawn into a narrative, but become aware of the promises made by the various elements precisely because of the way they're played against each other.

JJ: I'm not really interested in just telling a story, I'm interested in the different ramifications of it.

NK: But so many performance artists don't use narrative.

JJ: Oh, why do I use narrative, is that what you mean? Because I love stories, actually.

I mean, the reason I started using narratives was that I was commissioned to do a piece for children (*The Juniper Tree*, 1976). So I chose a fairy tale, as I thought that would be the best thing to do. Then, when I started working with fairy tales, I realized that it wasn't so different from what I'd been doing before. It was like the same poetic or mythological imagery, but with a structure. It drew me into characters and a richer kind of imagery that was given to me from the outside, that I could then deal with. So I got interested in this double-track: the sound-track and the image-track. That's why I stopped doing video for a while in my performances, because I wanted to concentrate on another kind of a double-track. In *The Juniper Tree*, I had the story going all the way through the performance of a sound-track, while I represented the story visually. Then I felt like it would be



Joan Jonas, *Volcano Saga*, 1989, videotape still, with Tilda Swinton.

interesting to try it another way so that the audience wouldn't have to make a connection between the words and the imagery — so they could get more into what was going on instead of trying to figure out what it meant. I also got interested in shifting away from a kind of esoteric concern for the tradition of poetic language. I wanted to use the same kind of poetry but tell stories so that maybe I could reach a different kind of audience. By storytelling, even though I deconstructed it or pulled it apart, I felt that I became linked with a different kind of tradition.

I've been thinking a lot, especially since *Volcano Saga* (1990), that I want to go back and reincorporate some of my early concerns, because I didn't develop them. I mean, for instance, now, working with the Wooster Group, they're using TV. In a way, what they're doing now is an extension of the things that I started, but I

would take something then drop it and go onto something else. Matisse said something which I've always remembered from the very beginning, which is that if you feel stuck you just go back and look at your work and look at the threads that run through it. So, what I'm doing now is, I've been commissioned to do a performance this Summer, outdoors in Riverdale. I'm going to have some of the piece take place indoors and some outdoors. And I'm going to do it with the light changing at dusk, and the sound and the landscape and so on. I'm going to go through my book and find old images and try and develop them a little bit, put them together. It's sort of an experiment. I'm going to try and make a piece that's very free-form, open, with people doing lots of different things in the space, using some of my old images. I don't think it's necessary for me to constantly look for new ideas. I did think so.

NK: Have you found working with the Wooster Group on *Brace Up!* very different from making or performing your own work?

JJ: Actually, it's so close to my work. Right now they just happen to be doing a piece with a lot of video, so it's really strange. The main thing that I like about it is that I get to perform in a different way and somebody directs me. It's a slightly different style of performing.

NK: *Brace Up!* uses Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, doesn't it? Is this the first time you've worked on a dramatic text?

JJ: I worked with them on a piece called *Nyatt School* (1978), that used Eliot's *The Cocktail Party*, and I was one of the characters. It was just a section of that piece, though. This is much more, because I'm one of the sisters.

NK: With Richard Foreman or Robert Wilson, and to a certain extent in the Wooster Group, isn't there a way in which individuals enter into a piece for the qualities that they have rather than the qualities that they can portray? Isn't it at this point that the languages of performance art tend to differ from theatre, through a certain concentration on presence and what is there?

JJ: Oh, definitely, that's true. We had some open rehearsals and Peter Sellars introduced the group. He said that technically, the Wooster Group is really good, and it's true. It works like a machine, almost. It's really about this movement and energy. After a while, you don't think about the character. It's more important that you think about the breath and words and energy. So that's why they ask someone like me to be in it, because I'm not an actress. I can't represent emotion or anything.

NK: Yet it's still different from what you're doing when you take on a mask in the *Organic Honey* pieces.

JJ: Well, the thing that's different is that my pieces, although they are rehearsed and planned, have a kind of looseness about them that allows me to move in them. In this work, though, it takes months of rehearsal. I'm really interested in a different kind of construction.

NK: Karen Finley has talked about the differences between the pieces that she does which she says are performance art and pieces which she says are theatre. The difference seems to be that the theatre pieces are rehearsed monologues, with perhaps some interaction with the audience. The performance art is something that she prepares herself for mentally.

JJ: Oh, and then she just does it.

NK: She just does it.

JJ: Right. For me, the main thing I don't like about theatre is the endless mechanizations and the props and the setting up and the getting everything perfect. You know, all the things that you have to do to orchestrate. And I do love different things. I want to keep performing, but I also want to make visual pieces and make my video tapes. And I can't spend so much time on a theatrical production or a performance production.

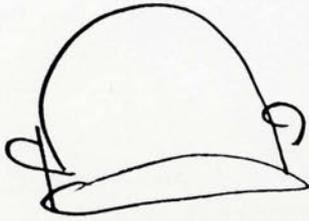
The difference between my rehearsals and, say, theatre rehearsals, is that my rehearsals are just about working the piece out. I don't really rehearse. I work it out and I try and get the moments as I want them to be. I try and work the piece out and then I perform the piece.

NK: Despite these differences, there is a great deal of continuity, isn't there, between your work with the Wooster Group and the concern with role in your own performances?

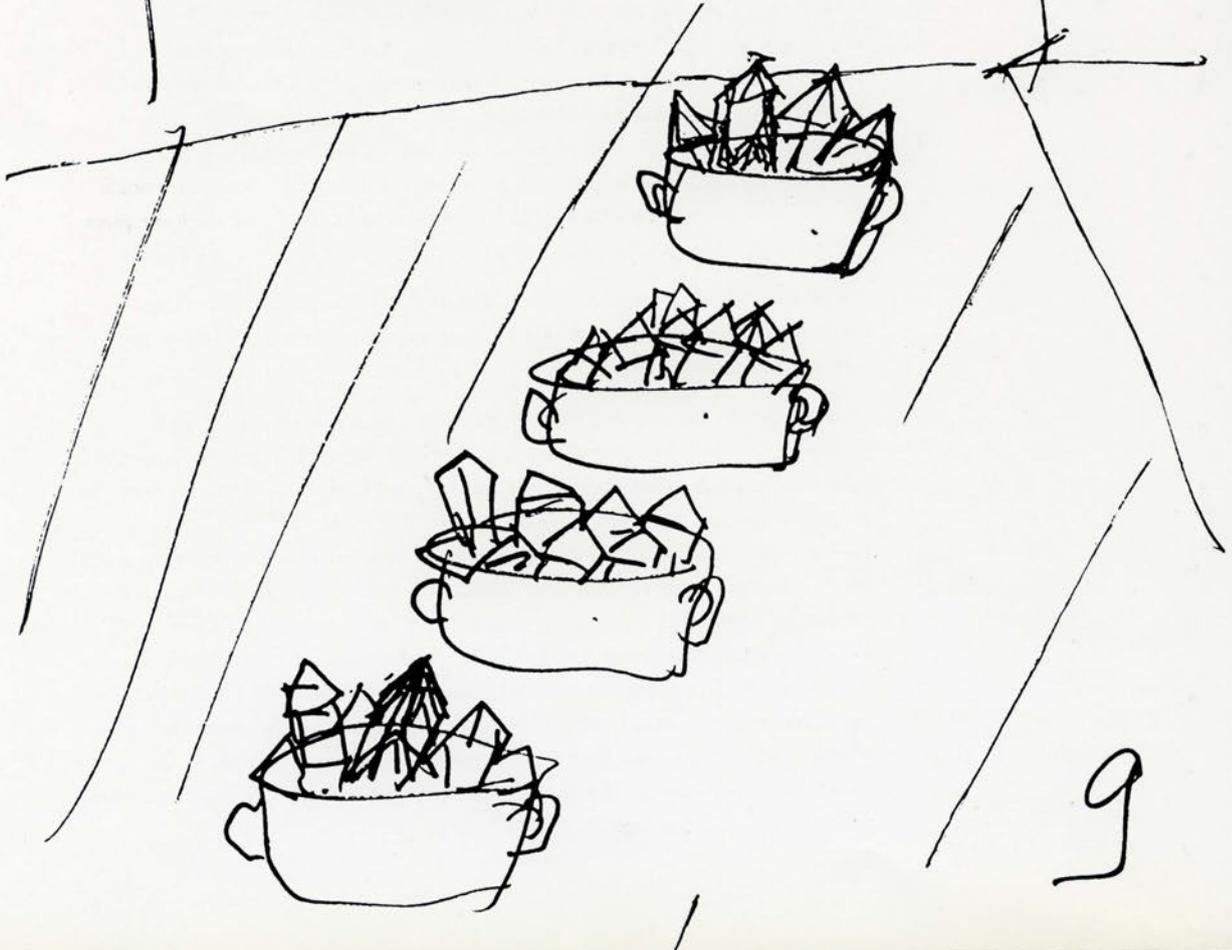
JJ: Yes, it's very close in that sense. I like it because it's more like the way theatre-people deal with roles. There's a separation. When I do my performances I enter very much into the world of the material, and in this I'm not doing that. I'm keeping a distance, because I don't want to get that involved in their work. So I'm finding myself getting more and more separated from the character, which is really good. It enables me to represent the character in a more objective way and not be submerged within it. I think that's what Liz (LeCompte) wants. In a way, working with them is giving my performance and my performance style — the one thing I can think of is *muscle*. I don't know if that explains what I mean, but it's like exercising, in a way. I feel that I'm getting stronger. I enjoy very much working with other people, and those people in particular. It's giving me a dimension of performance that I really like, and that, if I'm going to go on making performance art, I feel I need.

what about carpet pots ?

(neberiti M. Fren  
cipkaps)



carpet pots  
puni kristob  
u prestoku  
na zemlji



9

**Demosthenes Davvetas**

# DEPARTURE

**The Brazilian Project of Marina Abramović**



Above:

**Marina Abramović** at the amethyst mines, Santa Catarina, South Brazil, 1991. (Photo Paco Delgado)

Facing page:

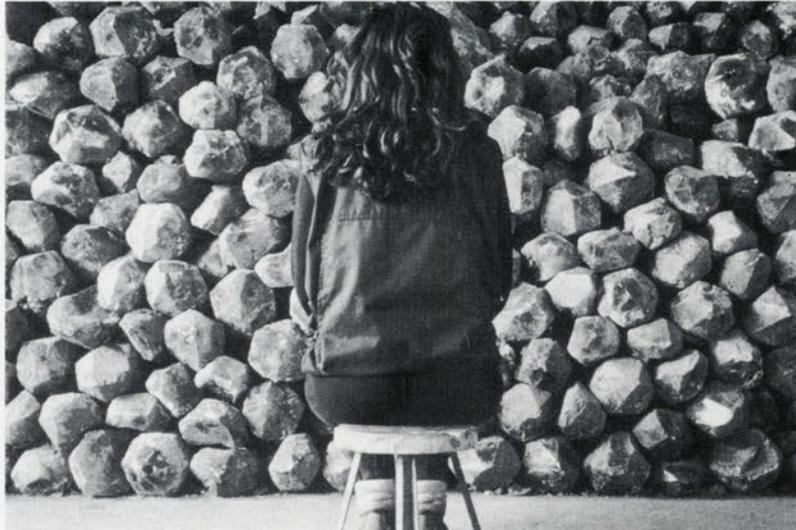
**Marina Abramović**, untitled drawing for *Departure*, 1990-1991.

Since severing her links with painting in 1974 with *Metronome*, an installation exhibited at the Galerie d'Art Contemporain, Zagreb, Marina Abramović has used performance, actions and sculpture to embrace a working method which rejects traditional artistic and aesthetic constraints. Within this more expansive context her work has consistently dealt with extremes of physical and intellectual danger, which she uses to probe both her own and the viewer's physical and mental responses. These extremes were explored both alone and through the performances she made with Ulay, her collaborator and partner for fifteen years. In the performance *Light/Dark* in 1977, for example, both performers knelt facing each other, naked, slapping each other's faces with increasing speed and force, for three hours. The previous year, at the beginning of her exhibition at the de Appel Gallery in Amsterdam, she changed places with a Dutch prostitute, sitting in a shop-window in Amsterdam's Red Light district whilst the prostitute attended Abramović's opening at the gallery.

Abramović's most recent Brazilian project embraces danger on a physical and geographical scale similar to that of her Great Wall of China Walk with Ulay, not by moving across the land but by penetrating down into it. The beautiful photographs, videos and films of the landscape and its people produced as a result of her and Ulay's work in the Australian outback, the Amazon and South America are replaced here by physical substances of the earth — crystals — which she brings back to the surface and uses as material.

Brazil is a country of vast physical expanses and rich mineral deposits. During the project, Abramović spends one out of every two or three months working in the crystal mines. The idea for the project developed out of seeing photographs of miners searching for gold in appalling conditions in Brazil. She took on the ancient quest for the philosopher's stone and made it her own, choosing amethyst as her material. In the hazardous environment of the mine Abramović puts herself in the path of danger by working alongside the miners without taking standard safety precautions, believing this risk to be a pre-requisite for intense interaction with her material. In order to achieve maximum concentration she becomes motionless beside the materials for hours at a time. As in her earlier performances with Ulay, this intense concentration shifts her consciousness onto another level, transforming the body into a 'receiver' of the material's energy and intrinsic charge. It is the absorption and transformation of this intrinsic energy through the binding of body and mind into a single harmonic entity which forms the core of Abramović's work.

Abramović's artistic discourse is determined by her relationship with the viewer, and her work demands our active participation and engagement. It is precisely because the objects she creates have a presence and identity beyond their corporeal form that this participation can be accomplished. Her crystal forms are abstract objects, which expand and contract within the context of their creation.



Marina Abramović sitting in front of the amethyst puntas, 'waiting for an idea', 1991. (Photo Paco Delgado)

## THE MATERIALS

**Amethyst Puntas** are amethyst crystals which are found only in two mines in the Marabá region of the Amazon. They are the largest amethyst crystals known on this planet.

The size can reach up to one metre and the weight up to 80 kilogrammes. I look on them as the wisdom teeth of our planet.

**Geodes** are amethyst minerals which resemble rocks on the outside and are hollow on the inside with a thin layer of small amethyst.

They can be found when the basalt rocks are cut open. If an opening is made in the Geode, inside one discovers water which was captured there 35,000,000 years ago.

These Geodes can be found only in the south of Brazil and in Uruguay. For me they represent the womb of the planet.

I spent a long time just in contact with the raw minerals. After I had established contact with them, it became clear to me what form the work would take.

This stage of the work I call 'waiting for an idea.'



**Marina Abramović, *Departure: Amethyst Shoes*, 1991.** (Photo Paco Delgado)

*In my work, I am interested in establishing a relationship between my body and the body of the planet.*

*My body  
(human body)*

*Body of the planet*

*Eyes*

*Quartz Crystal*

*Wisdom teeth*

*Amethyst Puntas*

*Womb*

*Geodes*

*Blood*

*Iron*

*Nerves*

*Copper*

*Starting from this point of view, I build transitory objects which the public can use to establish contact with the body of the planet.*

*The Brazilian project took approximately two years to realize. In this period, I travelled to Brazil six times, visiting different mines in search of minerals. All works were constructed and produced in Brazil and then shipped back to Europe. This took about eight months.*



Left:  
**Marina Abramović, *Departure: Geode Helmet*, 1991.** (Photo Paco Delgado)

Right:  
**Marina Abramović, *Departure: Inner Sky*, 1991.** (Photo Paco Delgado)

## THE WORKS

### Amethyst Shoes

*The shoes (six pairs) are carved from the large amethyst Puntas and placed on the floor in the position of steps in motion. The public are asked to enter inside the shoes with naked feet and to stand motionless, close their eyes and depart.*

### Geode Helmets

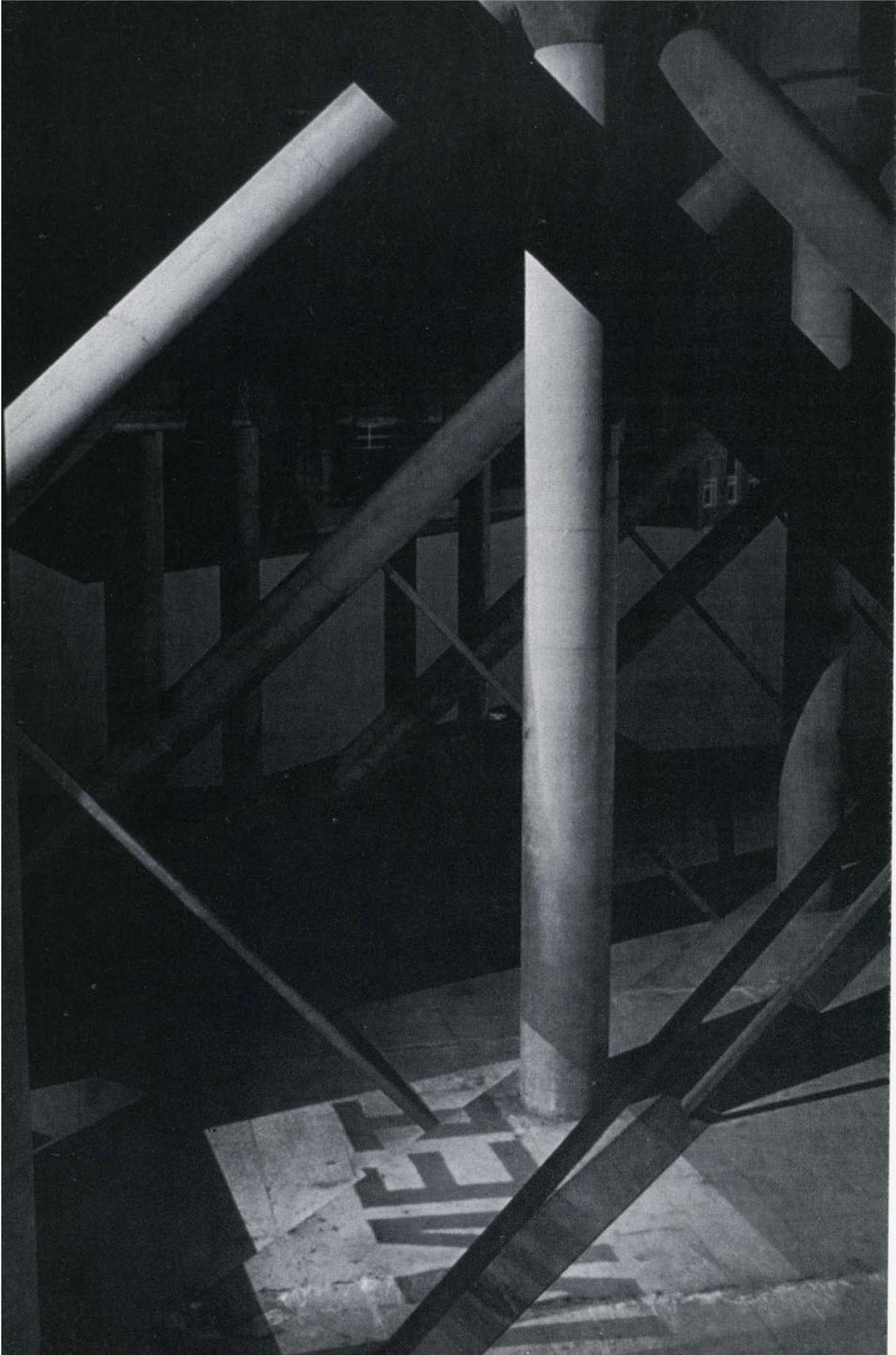
*I construct the iron chairs and fix on them the small Geodes in the shape of a helmet. The public are asked to sit on the chair under the helmet without moving — depart.*

### Inner Sky

*These are the large Geodes cut at the base and elevated above the ground on three iron legs. The height is 2 metres. The public are asked to stand under the opening, close their eyes without moving and depart.*

*I am interested in the idea of mental departure and am offering the public these transitory objects which they can use to make this departure possible.*

Marina Abramović



**Jeffrey Collins**

# THE FINE RATS INTERNATIONAL

**Performance Art and Post-Industrial Society**

**Fine Rats International, *Under the  
M5*, 1991: Ivan Smith, 'Meltdown'.**

**A**t the moment, any performance art that deals with new techniques, industrial processes or related social changes seems to invite the adjective 'post-industrial'. The term is gaining currency in the arts.

Symptomatically, the American art bibliography *Art Index* included 'post-industrial' as an abstracting term in its computer database in 1989. There is already a substantial literature addressed to designers, planners and architects, but publications on 'post-industrial art' have emerged recently, including Margaret Rose's *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial*, and Richard Loveless' *The Computer Revolution and the Arts*.<sup>1</sup> In November 1991 the Newcastle 'Blue Skies' conference on art and technology included performance artists and writers whose work was explicitly framed by the term.

But what can be meant by 'post-industrial art'? One work that invites this label will be discussed in the following sections. First, though, some of the problems of the term need to be outlined. The main difficulty lies in its appropriation from economic and political sociology, where post-industrialism has been debated since the late 1950s. These debates have been concerned with economic and social changes in western societies, especially those connected with the decline of industrial manufacturing and the growing use of new information technologies; Utopian futures have also been extensively discussed. Given this, some important questions arise for the arts. Can engagement be made with these debates, and if so, with which aspects, in what ways? Responses so far have been mostly negative or negating. In the arts, the term 'post-industrial' has largely excluded economic and political evidences, theories and arguments, the main constituents of post-industrial sociology. On one level, this removes all substantial grounds of debate about possible or desirable futures, and makes it difficult to characterize the present. But it also removes the grounds for any useful relation of art to present or emergent economic and political relations.

How then has the term been used in the arts? In one current sense, 'post-industrial' is a periodizing term denoting present society. But if, as often happens, the socio-economic nature of this present is not examined, specific meaning is deferred. Another usage follows Jean-François Lyotard's remark that postmodernism is the culture of post-industrial society. Here a simple equivalence is established: 'post-industrial art' is postmodern art. But this assumes that existing models of postmodern art are the only possibilities for a post-industrial society. There have been more specific uses, especially in denoting two quite different art practices. 'Post-industrial art' can apparently be art which adopts and explores new computer technologies, as familiar in, say, the pages of *Leonardo* recently.<sup>2</sup> Equally, it can be art which represents, critiques or comments upon the social changes brought about, for instance, by declining manufacturing industry, as in Raymon Elozua's 'Post-Industrial Landscapes' — commentaries on Pittsburgh and its steel industry in the late 1980s. But these are very different concerns. Here

again the adjective 'post-industrial' is a problem: it imposes a false unity on artists' attitudes and strategies.

Provisionally, I suggest that if the term 'post-industrial art' is to be valuable it will refer to that art which addresses post-industrial concerns; and that these 'concerns' are well established in the literature of post-industrial sociology. One possible agenda has been suggested by Boris Frankel in his book *The Post-Industrial Utopians*.<sup>3</sup> Frankel poses one main question: what types of future social formation can be both feasible and desirable? Economic debates are central to his discussion. Is centralized economic planning preferable to decentralized and possibly stateless formations of communes and co-operatives? Are markets major or essential structures, or could they be replaced by either central planning or self-sufficient autarchies? Is economic class-conflict irrelevant, because class divisions have already disappeared into an irresistibly-rising 'service sector'? And if economic changes are to be made on the principles of greater social equality, tolerance, environmental conservation and democratic rights, how are these to be effected: through alliances of movements for social change, or through traditional concepts of revolution?

Frankel adds some neglected questions: how social welfare could be sustained; how 'defence' might be conceived; how, given a present north-south divide, global relations might be structured; and how post-industrial law, education and other cultural practices might feasibly develop. Though concerning futures, these questions are predicated on perceptions of the present. Even from this one agenda, it is clear that the term 'post-industrial' is a site of major disagreements among theorists of different political allegiances. New-right models of a radical deregulation of high-tech free-enterprise capitalism are significantly different from the 'small-is-beautiful' alternative-tech visions of reform democrats like Schumacher and Illich. Neither of these models can be simply assimilated to those of left-socialists, or to anarchist proposals such as Rudolf Bahro's 'industrial disarmament', with its dispersed stateless communes and barter economies.

It is too early to say how much of this agenda might be adopted by the arts, and in what ways, with the demise of post-modernism. Nor is it possible to predict the precise patterns of interaction that might develop between practices as different as art and sociology; no simple translation or transposition of agendas is possible. But if post-industrial art does indeed address concerns about post-industrial society, these concerns will overlap to some extent and in some ways with those of sociologists. These concerns will also be wide-ranging, probably heterogeneous, and not simply co-terminous with the established agendas and concerns of postmodernism.

New technologies have a special place in these arguments because they are a factor in changing socio-economic relations. One point needs emphasis: many theorists of post-industrial 'information society' have discussed new technologies

*within* their wider discussions of economic, political and social change.<sup>4</sup> The opposite is so far true of most 'techno-futurology' in the arts, which has segregated technology from social relations and considered its audiences and users as class-less, gender-less, un-placed abstractions. This inherits from modernism the use of new *technologies* as reified signifiers of new *societies*, as for instance in Toyo Ito's environment in the recent 'Visions of Japan' exhibition.<sup>5</sup> The label 'post-industrial' is difficult to sustain for such practices. It is now easy to imagine a post-industrial future in terms of virtual realities and wall-to-wall cybernetics; it is less easy to imagine guaranteed minimum incomes, 'defensive defence', self-sufficient autarchies, democratically-decentralized states. The former has been widely imagined for us; the latter have not.

The representation and meanings of technology are certainly on the agenda, but are best explored in relation to particular art practices. This will also show that 'post-industrial art' is not a question of somehow bringing back into art a missing 'economic base', nor of performance artists being called to illustrate sociological theories. Just one example is taken here: a performance by the West Midlands-based Fine Rats International. This is a group of five artists — Francis Gomila, Colin Pearce, Mark Tate Renn, Ivan Smith and Tom Smith — whose work has specifically addressed post-industrial issues.

### UNDER THE M5

The Fine Rats International gave their first performance in 1990 in the former Birds Custard factory in Birmingham. They described this work as a 'site-specific sculptural *son-et-lumière* using found materials and low technology lighting and sound': a work therefore which took the risk of turning sculpture into performance. It was far from dourly sociological, choosing spectacle, wit and irony as its major devices. Similar approaches have informed their recent Telford performance, *Vacant Possession*, and an intervening work called *Under the M5: Dreams and Desires*, performed in Smethwick in June 1991. This is examined here.

*Under the M5* used an environmental site and consisted of a number of semi-independent pieces with their own relatively powerful 'focalizing' and framing devices: sculptural objects and assemblages, film, music and live performance. It took place at night and exploited high-contrast lighting, and sound. The site was inescapably a major locus of meanings. The M5 at Sandwell is an elevated motorway intersecting a main-line railway and the junction of the Birmingham-Wolverhampton canals. Under its arches is a territory neither totally waste nor fully-exploited industrially, a space created where transport design stopped. It invites readings of the Romantic-sublime, but the group exploited other possibilities. The site traces specific industrial histories: early sub-rural canal transport, nineteenth century industrial concentration, modern corporate

engineering design. These traces are present in the site simultaneously, as in a museum without chronology, enabling the performance to refer to past and present, old and new, in constant oscillation.

The embedded texts played on these conflicts. Several extended the site's antinomies of old-tech and new-tech, low-tech and high-tech: familiar axes of meaning for technologies. The film and slide projection pieces operated a kind of electronic graffiti on the site — media technologies against cast concrete — and Ivan Smith and Mark Renn's 'Penthouse' exploited the opposition of electronic stereo systems and an environment of scrap-metal heaps. On the other hand, waste industrial materials were inserted into a motor way site that remains very much in use and of-the-present. Francis Gomila's and Ivan Smith's assemblages used the kind of scrap which now seems characteristic of machine industries — a tin kettle, metal industrial workers' lockers, discarded wooden chairs, machine parts made effectively unidentifiable — setting these against the motorway structures. Other works questioned our sense of the present. For example, Colin Pearce's triple-projection film 'A Cubic Mile of Ocean' connected capitalist investment logic with exploitation of natural resources, montaging a 1950s educational documentary on 'ocean development' with more recent material. Documentaries with obsolete conventions can no longer be read as naturalized authoritative truth. Projecting the film on to the M5 re-coded the motorway, offering it as a symptom of a similar investment logic, open to naturalization by similar authoritative voices but now contemporary ones.

The major effect of these oscillations of old and new was to make a modernist history of technological supercession difficult to sustain. It also challenged the notion of a post-industrial society as simply 'dominated' by all-pervading computer technologies. Being site-specific, the work was able to ground conflicts of new and old technologies in a particular place, with particular histories, addressed to an audience largely familiar with the region. These are elements usually evacuated from techno-futurological art.

#### *HERITAGE NOSTALGIA, ASSIMILATION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES*

*Under the M5* has to be read within a field of cultural 'anxieties' about technological and social change. In media representations, popular culture and the arts, there have been three prominent symptoms, each offering their own 'solutions': heritage nostalgia, assimilation of new technologies, and anti-rationalism. Each can be considered against the Fine Rats' approach.

The most familiar move has been to replace what is perceived as lost with its cultural representation. This is heritage culture, the construction of a nostalgic public memory in which old-technological objects are used to signify valorized



past social relations. A recent account by John Urry suggests that there are now over forty heritage centres in Britain, and that their growth has been especially prominent in industrial areas like the Midlands and the North.<sup>6</sup> Industrial sites are being used to represent industrialism: in Lewis Merthyr by a planned 'coalmine' centre, in the Rhondda by a heritage park, in Lancashire by the planned preservation of the largest slag heap in Britain. Traditional museums, too, play a part. Urry reports that some 464 museums possess items of 'industrial archeology', out of a survey of 1750. And this is business: between January and June 1988, £127.2 million was *invested* in museums and heritage centres in Britain.

Heritage is also a business of desire. As popular historiography, it excites especially a fetishistic substitution of text for past. The Fine Rats' approach was precisely to work on this annexation of desire. They addressed the audience as tourists, offered a narrow-boat trip by nineteenth century canal and a quarter-mile guided tour of the performance. On one level, this solved a textual problem: how to construct a time-based performance in which the principal elements were, like set decor and props in theatrical drama, relatively resistant to narrativization. But on another level, it located the performance site and embedded texts as objects of a tourist gaze, appropriated in leisure-time looking and not far distant from the post-closing-time aura of a good night out. But this address was disrupted. The audience lacked tourism's 'drama-text', the more or less formal pre-established itinerary; looking was not a safe confirmation of what was already known. And the embedded texts refused the sense of loss and celebratory replacement which structures the heritage gaze. The experience was ironized, tourism represented in a performance which otherwise refused the framings and definitions of tourism. In this respect, *Under the M5* approached heritage nostalgia by producing a parodic critique of it.

**Fine Rats International, *Under the M5*, 1991:** Tom Smith, untitled projection piece (1).

There are however media responses to post-industrial change which were not as fully addressed. One is the familiarization of new technology in television science programmes, computer and electronics advertising, and indeed techno-futurological art. In these, new technology is a realm of specialism, segregated from other social relations, removed from conflicts, and offered as a field of potential conquest or mastery. Another response, less overtly colonialist, has been to articulate such social relations and conflicts, but to offer fictional resolutions. In film for instance, new technologies have been assimilated to present orders of value by offering 'solutions' in narrational closure. Ridley Scott's *Alien* is paradigmatic, and the success of both *Terminator* movies might be attributed even more to their account of post-industrial concerns than to their exploitation of the film industry's star system.

Oppositional narrativization is of course possible, and so is the 'defamiliarization' of found texts; such strategies may prove useful to post-industrial performance. But the Fine Rats adopted mostly a quite different

approach, one found in media comedy genres but especially recurrent in art: celebratory anti-rationalism.

### *ANTI-RATIONALISM*

Technologies can be represented in ways that invert or subvert the rationalist basis of their design and economic functions. This approach operates against what post-industrial theorists such as Daniel Bell, Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Roszak have variously identified as a 'technological rationalism' in modern industrial society.<sup>7</sup> Bell's account locates this rationalism sociologically and relates it to economic interests: 'techno-rationality' is a mode of thought which sees economic, political and social problems as technical problems with technical solutions, and its dominance is coupled to the rising influence of scientists and science in government and industry since the 1950s. Its principal goal has been capitalist economic efficiency measured ultimately in increase of production and therefore increased surplus value.

Technological rationalism can be naturalized, unquestioned, removed from the sphere of criticism. Or, as with Bell and other conservative Christian moralists, it can be deplored, blamed for the decline of work ethic, and replaced only by 'new' old moral values as the basis of post-industrial social cohesion.<sup>8</sup> A quite different response from critics like Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas is to see it as a mode of discursive power, its discourses being ideological — in the sense of operating in identifiable class interests — and highly exclusive of alternative or oppositional modes of thought. But here a choice arises between critical analysis and celebratory anti-rationalism. Habermas insists on the former, extending the project of Enlightenment rationalism. But the latter has had a long history in post-industrial debates, marked initially by Theodore Roszak's advocacy of gnostic mysticism, on the model of William Blake, as a 'counter-cultural' opposition to technicism. And it has been the impulse behind many artists' responses to industrial technologies, from Dada to the 'Blue Skies' conference.

It is also present in the Fine Rats' work. They celebrated 'not-designed' performance elements, for instance in the use of improvisatory textual structures with multiple framings and random image juxtapositions: relatively unplannable types of text. Some well-worn techno-rationalist values of modernist design failed to survive the sculptural assemblages by Gomila, Renn and Ivan Smith: forms were independent of functions, and functions absurd. A shower head in a factory locker could become, in this world, a rococo fountain on a canal bank, and a bath a place for storing dead fish. Mundane functional objects were given spectacular uses: towers of metal bins set on fire, scrap heaps lit like an operatic stage. Designed objects were treated as essentially reusable, recyclable, multi-functional: the antitheses of a still-dominant capitalist industrial logic. High-tech, low-tech

and no-tec were freely combined, and none of these given primacy. Such tactics disallow the notion of industrial sites and materials as subject only to techno-rational appropriation.

Contrasted to the engineering design and industrial management of the M5 and of British Rail, such attitudes to industrial objects are aberrant. The Rats constructed a world of objects and processes in unexpected collisions and in disphasure, and disavowed a supposedly normal world of organized, harmonious industrial production and consumption. In the anthropologist Mary Douglas' sense, this is unclean: a dirt outside the system of techno-rationalist discourse. But in this respect, the work may come closer to articulating consumers' lived experiences of technologies than most professional designers would dare to acknowledge.

#### INVERSIONS AND COMPLEXITIES

There are however two difficulties. First, rationalism and anti-rationalism might be seen as two totalized mentalities, mapped on to a simple dualism of science and art (or as in Bell's case, science and 'culture'). Science is rational, art anti-rational. As Simon Penny has pointed out in *Performance* [no. 56], this homogenizing and totalizing impulse conceals complex interactions of modes of thinking between cultural practices. It also conceals the precise ways in which social power is exercised through discourse. If technological rationalism is seen not as a set of meanings but as a set of operating norms and values, its accrual of meanings has still to be explained. As Zygmunt Bauman has suggested recently in a discussion of modern nation-states as 'anti-ambivalence designing powers', these meanings are produced in a diacritical opposition of order and chaos.<sup>9</sup> Indefinability, incoherence, incongruence, incompatibility and illogicality are produced by the system of order; they set the limits of order; and they show the necessity of ordering. Technological rationalism establishes its meanings against anti-rationalist speakings of technology, against those discourses which deny, subvert or negate the drive towards a dominant techno-economic logic. This indicates especially the mutual symbolic interdependence of order and chaos; techno-rationalist design creates and needs categories of chaos and impropriety.

That these are allowed in art raises the second difficulty, pertinent to *Under the M5*. Celebrating in art a discourse of technological and design disorder is a licensed practice which entails no necessary dislocation of existing industrial ideologies. This can limit its potential as a force for post-industrial change. We can celebrate a carnivalesque inversion but still assume that tomorrow our trains will run on time and indeed that our letters will arrive at their destinations. In the inversion, we are not asked to consider other ways in which such rational and maybe desirable objectives might be achieved. This is not simply to dismiss

strategies of symbolic inversion and negation, but to indicate that their effectivity in a post-industrial art is a matter of calculation: how far can shifts in the hierarchies of discourses be made? In this type of performance, a great deal depends on what else the work offers.<sup>10</sup>

*Under the M5* had many aspects which cannot be reduced to an anti-rationalist view of technology. I have mentioned already its approaches to history and heritage, and its grounding in the particularity of a site. In addition, the group combined reference to industrial technologies with reference to other social relations which were suggested by the site. For instance, the notion of occupation in the site was articulated in several works, especially in Mark Renn's parody of a political summit meeting and his planned 'post-industrial anthropology of a lost people of the M5'. The performance as a whole was premised on a sense of vagrancy and dispossession: being under a motorway on a Friday night is aberrant to normalized bourgeois social conduct. This was counter-pointed in Tom Smith's work, a reconstruction of a home in a field which used fridges and televisions as projection screens for images of commodity consumption and colonialism. The insertion of this work under the M5 connected capitalist industrial processes and domestic consumption, questioning the coding of home as a separated site of sanctified private leisure.

Strategies adopted by other pieces, for instance the graffitiist impulses and the celebration of waste and aberrant expenditure, were inversions of consensual social proprieties, not just technological anti-rationalism. Ivan Smith's dramatization of road accidents in a sound-tape and tableau montage was a metonymic re-speaking of the M5 as social process, not a celebratory inversion of its technocratic discourse. Perhaps most importantly, Gomila's work on iconographies of masculinity was a reminder of the gender demarcations of technological 'achievement', a dimension lacking especially in most techno-futurological art; and gender difference is not simply assimilable to a dualism of rationalism and anti-rationalism.

#### POST-INDUSTRIAL POSSIBILITIES

These features do not, of course, simply follow or illustrate the kind of post-industrial agenda offered by Frankel and others. They do however indicate the importance of considering 'post-industrial society' as a site of conflict over many concerns, not reducible to displays of new technology or indeed 'new subjectivities' considered independently of social relations. If there is a major question posed by this kind of work, it is how the complex overlap of these concerns can be explored and articulated. In *Under the M5*, the Fine Rats have suggested that it is possible to combine a celebratory inversion of technological and design rationalism with quite different orders of speaking about social

relations.

Carnavalesque inversion has its pleasures and advantages. As performance, the work offered some unusual textual strategies, and for a visual art show it had a surprising degree of overlap with 'new circus'. If this comes as an equation of art-spectacle and leisure-entertainment that too can be useful. This kind of work has a wide audience address and unlike much art can accommodate use of the spectacular and the comedic — more familiar though these are in continental Europe than in Britain. But no-one goes to even 'new' circus with the expectation of having to think about economic and political structures, about what possible or desirable futures a post-industrial society might offer, and to whom. The Rats have indicated some possibilities for this in performance art. In doing so they have posed the important question of what kinds of discourse might be used, what degrees and types of celebratory inversion or informative critique might be adopted, in any work that claims the label 'post-industrial'.

#### NOTES

1. Cambridge U.P., 1991, and Florida U.P., 1989, respectively.
2. see Vilem Flusser, 'The photograph as post-industrial object', *Leonardo* vol. 19 no. 4, 1986.
3. Boris Frankel, *The Post-Industrial Utopians*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.
4. see Tom Stonier, *The Wealth of Information*, London: Methuen, 1983; and Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.
5. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Sep 1991-Jan 1992.
6. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, London: SAGE Publications, 1990, pp. 104-5.
7. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York: Heinemann, 1974; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, London: Routledge, 1964; Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends*, London: Faber, 1973.
8. see Margaret Archer, 'Theory, culture and post-industrial society', in M. Featherstone (ed), *Global Culture*, London: SAGE Publications, 1990.
9. Zygmunt Bauman, in Featherstone, op. cit.
10. An extended discussion of carnivalesque inversion is given in Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London: Methuen, 1986.

# Reviews

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

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## LONDON

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### Alighiero e Boetti

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Edward Totah Gallery

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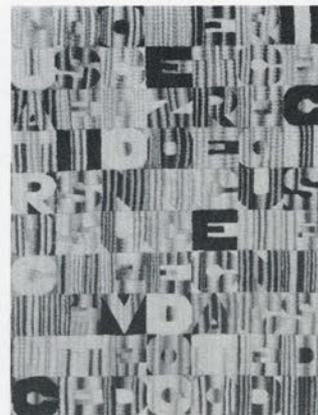
*Reviewed by Astrid Schmetterling*

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*Between Horizontal and Vertical, The Certain and the Uncertain, Order and Disorder.* Titles reflecting a search for structure and harmony, for a balance in the complex labyrinth of the present.

Alighiero e Boetti's works — such as a book containing technical data on *The Thousand Longest Rivers in the World* (1970-77, not included in the show) and *The Natural History of Multiplication* (1975) — are an attempt to distil the world into a logical system. Boetti's belief in the 'manifestation of a *disegno* behind the things' led him to Pythagorean philosophy, at the heart of which lies the science of numbers. To Pythagoras numbers were the principle, the source, the root of all things. The first to have used the term 'cosmos', he believed that the harmony of the world was based on an unchangeable law determining the numerical relationships between the elements.

The *Pythagorean Table*, a tapestry consisting of twenty panels, is the most intricate work in the exhibition. Rows of numbers starting from one in twenty different languages are woven in Roman, Arabic, Hebrew and Greek letters. Embroidered in different colours,



each letter is set against a contrasting ground creating an infinite variety of combinations. Echoed by a similar work in black and white, it is both vibrant and quiet, mathematics being, as George Steiner once wrote, the language of silence. 'Each colour expands and stretches out / into the other colours / To be the more alone if you look at it.'<sup>1</sup>

The tapestries were hand-embroidered by craftswomen from Afghanistan, where Boetti spent part of his time until the Soviet invasion in 1979. Since then he has employed Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan, to make the tapestries. Boetti treads on the sometimes narrow path between the genuine admiration of another culture, the affirmation of its importance as a source of learning, and the appropriation of the 'other' torn out of its social context and turned into a mystical stereotype. By using the Afghans' traditional skills, he might be accused of ignoring the war-worn country's present-day struggles. At the

'Magiciens de la Terre' exhibition in 1989 in Paris he showed a tapestry on which he collaborated with the Sufi Berang Ramazan. Berang had prepared a selection of his poetry to be embroidered into the work and to be passed on by Boetti to a Western audience 'especially at this time of Afghanistan's history full of blood, tears and resistance.' The fact that Boetti has lived in Afghanistan for several years suggests an awareness of the political implications inherent in the use of another culture's vocabulary.

Originally associated with the *Arte Povera* movement, Boetti has employed different approaches, themes and materials in his attempt to expand the boundaries of art. He has used everyday objects such as stamps, lamps and watches, and has created works with political contents, such as an embroidered map indicating all the areas in the world at the time in a state of war, and a group of copper plates listing territories occupied by other countries. A series of works exploring linguistic issues and writing as a means of consciously controlled communication are part of Boetti's investigations, as are the tapestries and drawings touching upon Pythagorean and Sufi philosophy. Some *Untitled* collages in the exhibition containing photographs, newspaper cuttings, geometrical forms, colour compositions, drawings, stamps and writing in Italian and Arabic trace the scope of the artist's concerns.

Alighiero e Boetti. The

insertion of the 'and' in the name, the duplication of the artist's persona, alludes to a desire for equilibrium. Yet it also implies polarity, fission, dismemberment. It reflects the artist's voyages between Italy and Afghanistan. It signifies a questioning of reality by both confronting and attempting to systematize and transcend it. It suggests a movement between logical systems and intuition, between numbers, words and images. It stands for the artist, or rather for the individual, wandering between the different worlds of our interwoven reality.

1. This is a translation (by Patrick Creagh) of Giuseppe Ungaretti's poem *Tappeto* (Carpet).

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### Jane Mulfinger

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#### Lost for Words

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#### Flaxman Gallery

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*Reviewed by Richard Dyer*

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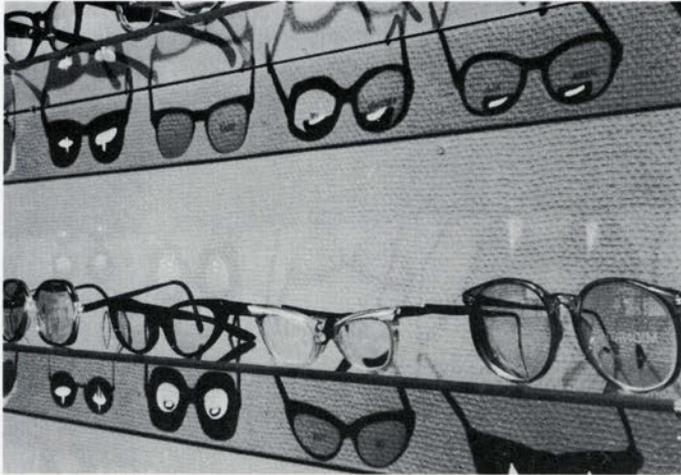
The exhibition falls into two distinct bodies of work: firstly a set of found photographs carefully chosen for the archetypal quality of their images of people, and secondly two installations using second-hand spectacles.

The photographs, snapshots as opposed to professional studio pictures, are of the most ordinary people posing self-consciously for the camera: a young couple standing arm in arm in a suburban garden; a double exposure of a family of

four; a man buried up to his neck in sand on a beach, eyes closed; a couple on a train. Mulfinger succeeds in engaging our curiosity as to their unknown histories, chronologies and geographies — we almost know this person; that must be Los Angeles? 1930s? are they lovers, or brother and sister? The sense that we can almost, but not quite, read the signs in these black and white images is underpinned by the surrounding of embossed Braille, some of which is actually punched through the photograph; we can almost decode its meaning, imagining the unknown text. The desire to touch the Braille focuses our desire for a closer connection with these almost-known, intriguing moments of mundane history.

Photograph and Braille surround are set in a large expanse of plain card, inviting the viewer to re-do the work of finding and isolating the image. We have the uneasy sense of intruding on these people's lives, the voyeurism which is inherent in image-based art being intensified in the case of these pieces by their particular intimacy.

On one wall of the gallery which has been painted a lush green, pairs of spectacles are lined up on glass shelves, one above the other, in three groups. From a distance the impression is of pages of text, the sentences and paragraphs being delineated by the placement of the spectacles; and in fact when one approaches closely, words are actually etched into the lenses of



each pair of spectacles. The words are in mirror image, to be read backwards from top right to bottom left, together making up a composite text drawn from first hand accounts of Hiroshima, a solar eclipse, a first view of the Swiss Alps and the visions of Bernadette of Lourdes.

These are experiences of great power and emotion, epiphanic and ineffable. The various narrators' attempts to translate essentially inexpressible mixtures of vision, revelation and emotion are etched into the glasses as if the magnitude of the events has burnt a lasting memory into the lense/retina/mind.

Because all of the glasses are second-hand and of different makes and styles, they refer to specific individuals; and as with the Braille photographs, the content of the work concerns private lives and experiences made public. The theme of voyeurism is indeed implicit in the use of spectacles, aids for viewing closely and in detail — we are also looking through the

lenses as we read the text, at the unknown wearer made partially present by the words. The three 'paragraphs' are lit by one spotlight each, creating archways of light which conjure up associations with ecclesiastical architecture, thereby reinforcing the reference to mystical revelation. The light also causes the reflections of the lenses to fall on the wall just behind the spectacles, looking unnervingly like the ghostly eyes of the narrators.

On another wall are three small glass shelves, each of which holds a differently etched pair of spectacles in its open case; one is covered in musical notation, one in Braille and the third in Morse code. Because these codes are to most people indecipherable, not only is attention drawn to the interplay between medium and message, but connections are pointed to between comprehension and mystery, and between vision and blindness, both at a physical and at a cultural level.

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### Gaby Agis and Shelley Lasica

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Interim Art / Chisenhale

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*Reviewed by Andrew Renton*

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Intimacy and spectacle are for the most part, and almost by definition, at odds. More used to working solo, both Gaby Agis and Shelley Lasica are choreographers; a simple point, not to be underestimated when looking at this brief collaboration. It is without dominance. And, indeed, this is hardly a collaboration in any conventional sense. Evolving in part from intuition and in part from the self-generating patterns of the body, the dance becomes an exercise of cutting and repairing, venturing and securing.

There is no dialogue as such, but a sort of dialogue which, under less successful circumstances, would fade into a disunity of non-narrative elements. At times, it appears that one has no need for the other. At others, the spatial configurations and dynamics are very much about interdependent balance. The performance consciously establishes disunities, and making the breaks in the self-generating motion achieves paradoxically active moments of stasis. These are turning points where the piece renews itself from itself.

The performance opens with a kind of harmony — not one of musical timing, but rather of intuitive reasoning. Movements are close but not identical to each other. Things mutate quickly yet

gently. Bodies move apart but come together with a kind of intimacy that is disarming and, quite literally, touching. They support each other, and trust each other to let each other fall and rise again. The tension of the unspoken is, at times, overwhelming.

Part of the achievement of the performance is a complicity with the audience, which is enforced in a paradoxically non-assertive way. At Interim Art, in particular, this feeling became heightened by the appropriation of context. The inevitability of embodiment itself is emphasised within quite restricted parameters of motion. More used to gallery space, rather than conventional theatrical or dance arenas, Lasica's solo work leads off seamlessly from the duet. Without music, it becomes a negotiation of a body within an intimate space of other bodies. Fixing upon the spectator, as if he or she would centre her motion, such intimacy places both sides of the spectacle on trial.

There are also parallels between this process of centering and what might be called a rooting, or binding to the ground. Developing from earlier pieces such as *You*, the newer *Believe* (from which these extracts are culled) projects movements from the specificity of Lasica's own gravitational centre. The sequence becomes about the cross-motion upon which the body insists for any sort of progression. She works from the ground upwards, raising and impeding herself at



the same time. What remains, at extreme moments, is the most minimal flex, or sway, as the body seeks its own centre, whilst rooted to the spot. It is the least the body can do, given its inevitable presence in space and time. By contrast, assertive projectile movements within the space do not refer to the classical or modern pirouette, for example, but the centrifugal necessity established by the simplicity of setting into motion. The work becomes non-metaphorical rather than abstracted. There is no need for more than this.

The ultimate resource for understanding this work folds back onto the spectator: to work without metaphor is to leave an always already evacuated determination of meaning by the negotiation towards the impossible evacuation of space. What is on offer is a barely mediated physicality which, of course, generates a self-individuating centre. That centre

is both rhetorical (or virtual) and graphically visible (as a residual, plotted trace). The achievement of this joint venture is that while moments of stasis enforce acts of faith on the part of the two performers, and of their spectators, the centre — or what is in fact a paradoxically *still* centre — of the body, is only visible, ineluctable yet indeterminate as it is, in its perpetual flux.

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**LIFT: The Damned Lovely; Mayhew and Edmunds**

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ICA

*Reviewed by Sophie Constanti*

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Two women sitting on the pitched roof of an alpine chalet share a picnic, oblivious to the din caused by items of crockery crashing to the ground. A man wearing a mortarboard-style hat topped with a large banana loosens his clothing, reclines in awkwardly seductive fashion and describes the physical attributes of a sunbathing male object of desire he once encountered. At the end of *The Damned Lovely's Neglected English Monuments* we are invited to attend a funeral. That the wake, complete with human tap to provide liquid refreshment, takes place prior to the death (by ritual suicide using a pair of garden shears) comes as no surprise. The woman's grave, ingeniously created from a couple of the chalet's façades, is the final neglected monument of the title, and the synthetic grass



surrounding this tomb a biting parody of our green and pleasant terra firma.

Writer/director Christopher Heighes recreates a past era: an upright, imperialist Britain, which he deconstructs with a mixture of nostalgia, bemusement and ruthlessness. The female characters, for instance, could have stepped straight out of Forster's *A Passage to India*; the male out of Stephen Spender's *The Temple*, an account of hedonism and homoerotic friendship in Weimar Germany. Heighes also seems fascinated by the way in which the English of this era conducted themselves abroad: the myths which painted England as the most civilized place on earth are embraced tongue in cheek and then shattered. In *Neglected English Monuments*, he sets up charming incongruencies between dress (sensible, classic, schoolmistressy), environment (makeshift and complicated with everything on a system of ropes, pulleys and hooks), and personal

relationships (frosty yet intense and sporadically out of order).

In this flawed but amusingly prankish theatre work, the suspension of real time and the heightened sense of free association lend a schizophrenic bend to the proceedings. At such inspired moments, *Neglected English Monuments* offers us bizarrely entertaining images. Less magical is the continual erection, dismantling and transformation of the set by the performers themselves. Although their actions reflect a pertinently English strain of fastidiousness, the delicate body of text and movement is reduced rather than enhanced by such prosaically task-based work.

In *The Devine Ecstasy of Destruction*, (Michael) Mayhew and (Becky) Edmunds bring us de Sade — in the form of period costumed Peter Faulkner — and a selection of his theories on the processes of sexuality and pornography. While past works have, perhaps, been calculated to offend, *Devine Ecstasy . . .*

expresses its subject matter so brutally and, at times, cack-handedly, that it is almost reduced to untamed burlesque. And during the work's most frightening and dangerous moments — Mayhew staggering around with a polythene bag over his head, gasping for air; an exhausted, dehumanized de Sade, strapped in a harness, objects rammed into every orifice and raw onions pressed over his eyes — the thought that it could all go terribly wrong frequently outstripped the perverse thrill which these acts were capable of generating.

If the main weakness of *Devine Ecstasy . . .* was due to Mayhew and Edmunds' overworking of the rasping cruelty of erotic violence, or what Angela Carter defined as de Sade's 'diabolical lyricism of fuckery', its most subtle accomplishment lay in the duo's handling of that malleable relationship between performer and audience. Through this they explored mechanisms of sex and power, activity and passivity, and the connections between physical and political oppression — issues at the very heart of de Sade's writing. But by making the spectator (voyeur?) feel threatened, intrigued and in and out of control, Mayhew and Edmunds also left one wondering whether *Devine Ecstasy . . .* was a serious examination of pornographic terrorism or just a gratuitous lesson in dying of pleasure. Whose pleasure?

*Illustration: The Damned Lovely*

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**LIFT: Nancy Reilly**

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ICA

*Reviewed by Tony White*

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Part of Lift '91, Nancy Reilly's *Assume the Position* was originally shown in the U.S. at the Maryland Arts Place as part of their Diverse Works programme. Both the U.S. and U.K. versions of the work featured North American performer Wortham E. Tinsley III, as an extravagant M.C.-come-art-dealer who welcomed us to 'bourgeois banter about art' and promised to share with us 'the blessings of spiritual materialism'. He then introduced us to the four indigenous performance artists (Anne Bean, Anne Seagrave, Stephen Taylor-Woodrow and Robin Whitmore) whose work he would attempt to sell, or at least to render saleable, by locating it in the discourse of the market place.

Suspended above the stage, on a trapeze, were two actresses, rather than *performance artists*, a distinction signalled by their initial telling of theatrical tall tales. Following this introduction, the spotlight would periodically come to rest on the actresses who then proceeded to recite familiar speeches from Shakespeare, Chekhov, Wilde or to sing *Beautiful Dreamer*. These episodes always interrupted the performance beneath, much to the comic exasperation of Wortham E. Tinsley III: 'You're reaching maximum piss-off level now, ladies!'

Tinsley then drew our attention to each of the artists, who were seated around a large oval table. They responded by performing small actions which were perhaps representative of their own work. Anne Seagrave performed an edgy dance/text work. Robin Whitmore revealed erotic drawings made with invisible ink by heating the paper over an electric bar fire. Stephen Taylor-Woodrow applied an elaborate prosthetic which transformed his head into a gilt-framed portrait of some moustachioed Dali-esque gentleman. The most enigmatic work was shown by Anne Bean, who projected a slide (of a baby lying between two dead rabbits) onto a sheet suspended from helium balloons and choked herself with honey. In what was the climax of the first half of the performance, Bean tied her hair to luminous braids that stretched from the walls and made a skirt from the tablecloth which twisted around her legs as she slowly turned (creating a powerful and compelling image slightly reminiscent of Mae West) while uttering Lady Macbeth's speech: 'Come, you spirits that tend on moral thoughts, unsex me here . . .'

These actions were also commented upon in a series of conversations between the artists and Wortham E. Tinsley III which took the form of little marketing pep-talks, with Tinsley envisaging enormous money-making potential in their work. He would always, however, recoil in mock horror

when he saw the actual performances: 'Anne, the honey thing? We can't use it!'

In the second half, the oval table was drawn apart to reveal hidden sections which each artist then used to perform further actions. Stephen Taylor-Woodrow draped his wheeled and hollow section in a red velvet cloth, atop which was placed a bowl of fruit and from which protruded his head within its picture frame prosthetic, thus creating a bizarre item of drawing room furniture, which wheeled itself stupidly around, asking audience members dully persistent questions. This was like Taylor-Woodrow's *Living Paintings*, writ small, but with all the power reversals (subject becoming object) of those earlier works. Within *Assume the Position* Taylor-Woodrow's actions were marginal but they focused a feeling of frustration which attached to Riley's project as a whole. The problem was, in fact, that the whole was significantly less than the sum of its parts. If, as was suggested in the accompanying publicity, the message of *Assume the Position* was that avant-garde performance art is unsaleable, and furthermore that it is different from theatre although the two do have something in common, this is hardly very revealing. As it was, one kept finding that one was watching tantalizing fragments of high quality work from performance artists and wondering why it should have to be filtered through a mediocre piece of theatre.

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**Phyllida Barlow**


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**Museum of Installation**

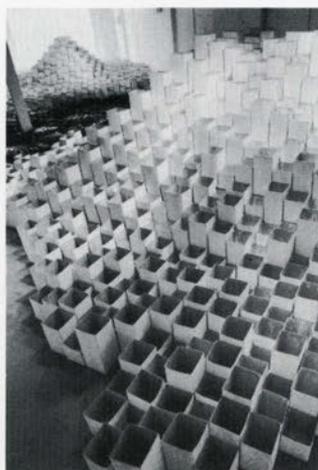

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*Reviewed by John Jordan*

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Entering the depths of the Museum of Installation's basement, we are greeted with a huge yet delicate work. The piece has no title, so that our imagination roams unobstructed in between the thousands of small handmade cardboard boxes that shimmer under a cool blue light, as they rise and fall across the space. Phyllida Barlow's installation is supposed to be a rough three-dimensional model of topographical information from the ocean bed, as relayed by an orbiting satellite. An edition of seven meticulously drawn maps also accompanies the show.

In using maps and map-making as her points of reference, Barlow has chosen objects and activities which provide fascinating mirrors of culture and civilization. Making maps once required a balance between intuition and science. Lands that the surveyor had not walked and measured were left blank for the cartographer to fill with images of wondrous beasts and mythical figures. Now there are no blanks, and maps are made from the 'God's eye view' of satellites. We can make maps outside of experience, without ever seeing or touching the land. In both the installation and the seven maps, which resemble the erratic scribbles of a shaman's trance, Barlow is attempting to return the distant science of



topography to the realms of the imagination and corporeal experience.

The boxes are crudely stapled together and paint has been splashed across their sides; while between the two mountains of boxes lies a sea of flat shapes roughly wrapped in black plastic. Everywhere, the activity of making is explicit; nothing is concealed, there is no artifice. The presence of the artist's body and actions still resonates through the space. According to Marshall McLuhan, 'the things that hurt one do not show on a map'; yet this space and these drawings are maps that speak of an obsessive and lonely activity, perhaps that of a child, surely an activity that sometimes hurts. What remains from these actions is a luminous landscape with a certain stillness, broken only by the occasional sound of trickling water emanating from the museum's plumbing. Barlow has managed to evoke the sublime by using only the most simple of

materials: cardboard, paint and black plastic bin liners.

These seductive forms have the power to conjure up a myriad of images — icebergs, the giant's causeway, lunar landscapes etc. — but the most memorable and striking image is that of the city. Two cities seem to face each other over a dark chasm; Calvino's extraordinary book *Invisible Cities* immediately comes to mind, especially the Great Khan's atlas which 'reveals the form of cities that do not yet have form or name . . .'. Barlow has indeed created imaginary cities; and unlike the heavy one that sits above us in this quiet basement, these are fragile cities, cities that are simultaneously monumental yet ephemeral, cities that are containers of rich and fragile memories.

Without effect or theatricality, Barlow's work conjures up a place where we can touch the disincarnate manifestations of our technological culture, a haunting place which sits gently in the mind.

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**Théâtre Repère**


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**The Dragon's Trilogy**


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**Riverside Studios**


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*Reviewed by Peter Church*

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Over the past hundred years the director has emerged as central to our theatrical experience to such an extent that, at least according to British theatre critics, it is the director who conceives the ideas which the performance then

transubstantiates. The director becomes the author whose work we read in the dark. Inevitably, therefore, what we tend to see on stage is directorial concepts rather than real people performing; we deduce theorems rather than experience a singular event. This lie is exacerbated in the avant-garde by the execrable quality of many performances. Since nothing happens on stage we look behind the backcloth for 'ideas'.

The success of Théâtre Repère may well rely precisely on its rejection of the traditional directorial role, but most critics have totally failed to understand this. At once mesmerised and mystified by *The Dragon's Trilogy*, an epic with narrative whose first concern is not storytelling, they have fallen back on the notion of the 'genius' of Robert Lepage, referring to him as a 'magician' who is 'rewriting theatrical language'. They assess and dismiss the actual performers — some of whom co-authored the script — as no more than the 'brilliant cast of eight' used by the 'new Peter Brook'.

Such critical concepts are alien to Théâtre Repère. Even a cursory reading of the programme would reveal that Repère's work is derived from the Lawrence Halprin Dancers' Workshop RSVP system — Resource, Score, eValueate, Perform. Any piece develops from the performers' encounter with Resources — particular effects, music, setting — and not from a Director's concepts. The director scores these reactions



into a montage which is eValuated. Lepage sees his job as 'making an interesting playground for the actors' to perform 'a collaboration between the creative imagination of the audience and the imagination of the actors'.

One of the critics' problems with *The Dragon's Trilogy* has been the sheer size of the thing. How do you convey anything of six theatre hours in a few hundred words? They also had trouble with a trilogy in four parts, even though it deals with three cultures — European, New World and Oriental — three generations and action taking place in three Canadian cities.

The plot is confusing, melodramatic and the resolution smacks of '69 but the plot is not the performance. Far more important is the way in which Théâtre Repère both contract and expand their Resources. By using a limited number of items in many different contexts, they make each object glow and hum with meaning. Even the set is a

Resource: a rectangle of sand reminiscent of the playground Lepage refers to, something shifting, to be dug into, excavated to reveal the past. The actors leave impressions in the sand like the patterns in the gravel of a Zen Garden. They also leave impressions in our minds. More than any visual *coup de théâtre*, the hard won ability of the performers to transform themselves into so many different characters is what burns in the memory.

Realizing that Marie Brassard who plays Yukali and also appeared in *Polygraph* with Lepage doesn't have a drop of Japanese blood in her came as a real shock. Robert Dellefeuille's English accent may not be quite technically correct but is emotionally true to our reticent nation. The moment that burns most of all is the transformation of Helene Leclerc from the bright brittle nun who will accompany the mentally impaired Stella to the asylum into the dear dumb child herself during the

second it takes to lift a surplice over her head. This is not a gratuitous display of virtuosity but a route to our understanding that life is buried inside the wound. It is not an 'idea' served to us but a genuine encounter between the performers, ourselves and a singular object.

Théâtre Repère is a theatre of experience. It is this which is Lepage's achievement: not forging a 'new theatrical language' but finding a fresh methodology out of which a new theatre arises. He is midwife to the performers' abilities, furthering a practice which respects both them and the audience.

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**ALSTON**  
**Cumbria**

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**The Last Weekend**

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*Reviewed by Louise Wilson*

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For 'The Last Weekend', a number of artists from Britain and continental Europe were invited to make work for the rural setting of Alston, which stands on the Pennine Way and claims to be the 'highest market town in England.' The event was timed to coincide with the Summer Solstice; although, as it turned out, the bonfire celebrating the shortest night had to be put off till the following day so as to make way for an opening disco at the town's CIU club.

The irony of this was gleefully seized on by the Neo-Naturists;



and it certainly fitted well with the sight of the four women adorning each other with symbolic body paint against an alpine backdrop, as they conjured up successively sheep dog trials, a mountain bike rally, a flower show and the Solstice itself.

The Friday of 'The Last Weekend' also coincided with the Victory Parade for the Gulf War in London and, with this in mind, John Jordan presented his powerful *Bury Them and Be Silent* on an exposed hillside site nearby. This three-day piece involved the digging of forty-two graves, one for each day of the conflict, whilst a continuous tape of the Parade was broadcast. Turf was first cut away and stacked by hand to form a barrier wall, after which Jordan completed the trenches with a mechanical digger: the low-technology quality of this operation, in relation to the

sophisticated precision bombing carried out during the War and witnessed on television, seemed poignantly anachronistic. An earth-filled bag was then placed in each trench, printed with the names and stock exchange ratings of companies who had profited from the war. The work itself culminated, late on Saturday night, with the immolation of these bags, the smoke illuminated by a strong beam of light from the abandoned digger. Its reverberations, however, carried on further, owing to the violent denunciations of it for anti-patriotism made by, amongst others, the local vicar, and the sensationalist treatment to which it was subjected on the front page of the *Daily Star*.

Jordan's gesture of finality was echoed by other works presented during 'The Last Weekend', along with a marked tendency towards object-based performance.

The young Spanish artist Nieves Correa, for example, attempted to brick up a portable (unconnected) television set in a cobbled driveway. The title *Wine, Bread and Cheese* referred to the communal picnic she had set down and offered to the audience before embarking on somewhat suspect bricklaying. It was a slight piece, however, which never achieved any momentum. Similarly André Stitt's *Cairns*, comprising two aggregate constructions of impacted personal refuse and organic material respectively, failed to attain resolution since plans to demolish these cairns with a jack hammer for a

dénouement were considered unsuitable for the river-bed site.

The relationship to site was more satisfactorily explored in Nick Stewart's *Tree Line Poison Well*, where a lead-lined oil well constructed inside a derelict mill provided the starting point for a performance linking Alston's industrial history with the Gulf War. This latter concern, as with Jordan's piece, was expressed through the palpable use of low-level technology: in this case relevant newspaper pages, stuffed into recesses in the mill wall, were combusted by gas burner.

The apparently frequent UFO sightings on this stretch of regular flight path over the Pennine Way galvanized Anne Bean's nocturnal performance. For this a large circle of illuminated balloons slowly appeared, barely visible in the field below the gathered audience. These balloons were released one by one to sail off over the town, literally breathing as they rose and creating a rare spectacle of reverence for the landscape.

The appropriation of rural pursuits in some of the artists' work met with differing degrees of success. Stefac Gec, for example, collaborated with two local falconers to present a beautiful display of falconry, which attracted a casual audience and successfully inhabited both worlds, in contrast to the self-conscious references of *Customary Ways* by Gillian Dyson, who incarcerated the audience in a darkened barn and whose repeated commands when rounding up the 'Edge party'

only served to underline the rift which developed between 'The Last Weekend' and some members of the local community. Since part of the professed aim of the festival was to try and build bridges, it is a pity that there was no official platform for discussion of these issues.

*Illustration:*  
John Jordan

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## BIRMINGHAM

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### Miralda

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#### The Honeymoon Project

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#### Ikon Gallery

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*Reviewed by Ann Cullis*

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Miralda has been working on the *Honeymoon Project* since 1986. The statue of Christopher Columbus in Barcelona and the statue of Liberty in New York are to be 'married' in 1992; and the artist sees this event as marking historical links between

the old and new worlds, Europe and the Americas, colonizers and colonized.

Several major cities have already participated in making the bride's trousseau. A frighteningly large and sexy petticoat of cerise cloth and black lace and a pair of 15-metre-long stockings were made in Terrassa, Spain, big enough to fit the Statue of Liberty and surging through half of the Ikon's downstairs gallery.

Birmingham's involvement in the *Honeymoon Project* came about after Miralda made a presentation at last year's major public art conference held in the city.

Skilled craftworkers in the Jewellery Quarter made the massive Eternity Ring, studded with twelve diamonds for each of the members of the European Community. The hollow ring, filled with human-sized rings, travelled down the canal on a decorated barge from the Jewellery Quarter to Centenary Square and was carried by four Strong Men dressed in gold sequined body-stockings. With children from local schools carrying presents and crowds carrying balloons and throwing golden glitter, we followed the procession of cars festooned with tin cans and streamers down New Street. The atmosphere was marvellous and there was a genuine sense of involvement and enthusiasm, with casual passers-by joining in as well.

Concern was voiced by some feminists that the marriage theme was being used uncritically and that, as a result, an opportunity

to question this so-called 'institution' and provide alternative images was lost. But an analysis along gender lines alone blinds itself to the complexity of what Miralda was addressing and forgets that one of the best ways to make viewers critical is to invite them in, involve them, and then pull them up sharp. As Brecht put it: 'In order that the familiar can be recognized it must lose its unobtrusiveness; there must be a break with the habit of thinking that the object in question requires no explanation.' What then might at first appear to be a simplistic and uncritical use of marriage to illustrate imperialism and the abuse of power, is in fact a great deal more sophisticated. A wedding focuses on two actors, but in reality it is the uneasy union of two families, tense with suspicion, expectation and doubt. The *Honeymoon Project* poses enormous questions about cultural inheritance and representations. The initial catalyst, the wedding, is soon forgotten in the subsequent long years of negotiation, intermittent harmony and frequent conflict.

A 'honeymoon period' is often referred to in the sense of a calm before a storm. This would appear to be Miralda's intention: to seduce us with the trappings of an idyllic wedding into checking ourselves with the remembrance of what comes after. Following the exultant 'discovery' of the Americas by Columbus were centuries of plundering, rape of resources and slavery — some marriage, some honeymoon.

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## BRIGHTON

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### Brighton Festival

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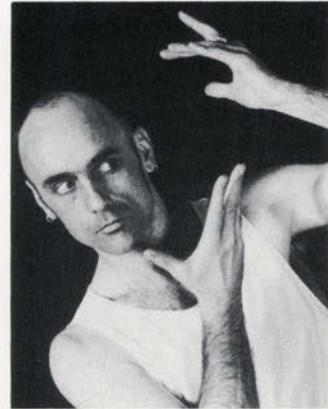
*Reviewed by Ariane Koek*

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Brighton has long been associated with experimental artists such as Liz Aggiss, Bill Cowie, Helen Chadwick and Laurie Booth. However, it is only this year that the Brighton Festival has at last, with British Council support, devoted a whole weekend to British performance.

The Performance Showcase weekend featured artists from a wide spectrum of performance — from the rigorously challenging group Forced Entertainment with their piece *Marina and Lee* to the comic zeal of Natural Theatre Company with their farcical, almost pantomime-like production of *Scarlatt's Wedding*.

Undoubtedly what gave the weekend its kick and drive were the performances of Laurie Booth's *Spatial Decay I and II* and his latest work, with words by Deborah Levy, *Nu Text, Nu Kingdom*. Like most of Booth's more recent work, it explores the notion of space, through movements which seem to pierce and punctuate the place they are performed in. But in *Nu Text, Nu Kingdom*, the idea of time is also challenged. Levy's spoken text, to which the piece is set, is taken from the Egyptian ritual of weighing the heart before it is decided whether the deceased has the right to continue his/her life in the after-life. The text is endlessly repeated — to the point



that it becomes almost like a litany.

Booth's movements are as ever derived from Tai Chi and from everyday actions which have a ritualized quality of their own. But what he does with these movements in his latest piece is to transcend the notion of fixity — whether historical or representational — the movements becoming like hieroglyphs, going back and forth between past, present and future. This willingness to tackle the history of dance and representation both intellectually and instinctively confirms Laurie Booth's reputation as one of Britain's most original and thought-provoking dancer-choreographers today.

But if Laurie Booth's work represented the challenging side of the Performance Showcase, the rest of the weekend, except for perhaps Forced Entertainment and Snarling Beasts, illustrated the near impossibility of making performance more popular with a wider audience while retaining its revolutionary impetus.

The Nottingham-based group Dogs in Honey illustrated the dilemmas of this debate by making it the theme of their latest work, *Architecture for Babies*. For Dogs in Honey, the answer is that with popularity and sponsorship, the drive of performance gets thrown out of the window. As one of the performers says in the show, the company has received £19,000 from the Barclay New Stages — more funding than they have ever had before. And with that funding comes compromise — in this case compromise in the form of a TV chat show which Dogs in Honey put on before the audience live.

The three-strong group perform repetitive robotic movements as chat show hosts to bland music, interspersed with pseudo-intellectual asides to (the video) camera. The whole effect of the show is one of tedious repetition and slapstick comedy, as the group fall over one another and try to squeeze under a tiny coffee table so as to appear on video monitors. The message of the show may be that money corrupts, but this point is repeated *ad infinitum*. *Architecture for Babies* never gets beyond the cliché of being a send-up of the TV chat shows which it seeks to satirize.

Natural Theatre Company's farcical *Scarlatti's Wedding* shows pressure on performance to create a wider audience, not in its theme (as with Dogs in Honey) but in the manner of its production. The piece is described as being about 'a musical mafia', resetting part of

the rivalry between 'Tony' Vivaldi and 'Don' Scarlatti in 1920s American Gangland. At one point the audience is encouraged to crouch behind their seats, wearing masks, pretending to be guests at Scarlatti's wedding. Predictably when Scarlatti comes in the audience reveals itself and shouts surprise.

Annie Griffin's new performance piece with Franck Loiret, *Skylark*, was no less disappointing. A typist and her boss seduce one another in his office; a man and a strange woman make love in a downtown bar; in between which there is a black and white film of a curious nappy-bound figure trying to find love by almost literally sucking up to strangers. *Skylark* appears to be questioning just how far sexual fantasy constructs society but again the piece never seems to get beyond its own theme.

Two of the most popular shows with audiences proved to be Dogs in Honey's *Architecture for Babies* and Natural Theatre Company's *Scarlatti's Wedding*. Both shows were packed out, the audience obviously visibly enjoying it to the hilt — yet two pieces further from the idea of performance representing any sort of challenge one could hardly imagine.

Perhaps the only ray of hope that there can be inventiveness with box office draw was provided at the festival by Graeme Miller's *A Girl Skipping* — which is swiftly becoming a 1990s classic — and by Lindsay Kemp's as ever outrageously

camp production of *Onnagata* — the tale of a male Japanese kabuki dancer in which notions of gender, fantasy and myth dissolved in a swift and intoxicating succession of visual tableaux.

*Illustration: Laurie Booth*

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## EDINBURGH

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### Cricot<sup>2</sup> — Tadeusz Kantor

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Today in my Birthday

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Empire Theatre

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*Reviewed by Astrid Schmetterling*

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A shabby room with a bed, a table and chair, a stove and an oil lamp. In the back three large picture frames on easels. We are in the artist's *Poor Room of Imagination* — Tadeusz Kantor's own room as he left it the night before he died.\* The empty chair symbolizes his presence. His *Shadow* is still on the bed, his *Self-Portrait* in the picture frame on the left.

The *Infanta* in the right-hand frame is a quote from Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas*, which plays with different points of vision and reflections, with reality and illusion. While Velazquez's *Infanta* is dressed in white, Kantor's is wearing a black dress — as if she was a shadow, a memory of the original. Tango music is playing and a voice begins to tell the story. The *Self-Portrait* repeats the words, describes them with gestures

until he falls out of the frame. Illusion and reality merge.

*Today is my Birthday* is an image, many images, of Kantor's life and work. The family members who come to celebrate his birthday are an evocation of his Polish childhood. Earlier plays are referred to by the appearance of characters from *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980) and from the *The Dead Class* (1975). Artistic and spiritual mentors are conjured up, such as Maria Jarema, one of the leading artists of the Polish avant-garde and a co-founder of Cricot<sup>2</sup>, and Vsevolod Meyerhold, the reformer of modern theatre who was indicted as a traitor and killed in a Soviet prison in 1940. Kantor's personal memories are interspersed with events of Polish history, the battlefields of two world wars, the adjustment to Soviet Communism and the resulting censorship. The atmosphere of repression and hopelessness is echoed in the greyness and sparseness of the stage set.

The work of Cricot<sup>2</sup> — a reaction to the official repression of avant-garde thinking and radical artistic innovation in Poland — is based on the idea of 'autonomous theatre', the creation of situations on stage which are emancipated from the literary text. Fragments of texts in Polish, French and English and relics of personal and general history are combined with fragments of meaning. Rather than with a plot, the audience is confronted with a wealth of memories and powerful emotional states. Kantor created



the (stage) room to provide a space for the 'individual to be master of his fate' and to 'defend himself against destruction by public mechanisms'. Scenes of violence, ecstasy and pathos convey a feeling of disintegration and imminent catastrophe.

Death has always been an important element in Kantor's plays. Death as a mirror to the journey of life. 'Life', Kantor once wrote, 'can be expressed in art only by means of the absence of life, by way of references to death [and] emptiness.' In the last act, grave-diggers with crosses enter the stage while cages with locked up soldiers are brought in. The family members are carrying a wooden board like a coffin above their heads. The same board was used before as a table for the birthday celebration. To the sounds of Beethoven's *Eroica*, birth and

death become one. It is as if Kantor has created a requiem to himself.

*\* Kantor died on 8 December 1990, the day after the dress rehearsal of the production.*

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## OXFORD

### Signs of the Times

#### Museum of Modern Art

*Reviewed by Edith Decker*

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The art of the '80s, so it would appear, was shaped by the requirements and laws of the art market. Performance art, film and video — indeed, all those art-forms which need time but are less than resilient to its envious tooth — were ill adapted

to such an environment. Artists who failed to take this fact into account were to experience some lean years. The sole exception was the art-form known by the self-explanatory term 'video-sculpture'. This flourished, no doubt on account of its 'sculptural' component and its tendency to generate something like an aura of profitability.

All this notwithstanding, the Museum of Modern Art at Oxford specifically chose to investigate the decade 1980-1990 by looking at the installations it produced. The result was an exhibition entitled 'Signs of the Times', which had to be shown in two successive parts because of the lack of space.

In selecting the exhibits, the curator Chrissie Iles considered every possible type of more or less non-permanent installation, including a number of acoustic works which were accessible by way of headphones. There was a striking preponderance of women artists, who outnumbered the men by eight to six.

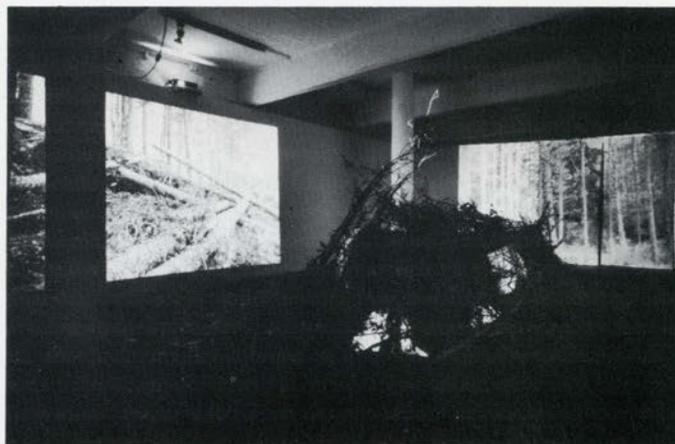
However, the 'signs of the times' that thus manifested themselves were entirely heterogeneous. The video artists included pioneers such as David Hall and Tamara Krikorian. Tina Keane, likewise, is not totally unknown outside Britain. Her space-grabbing installation *Escalator* (1988), in which pairs of monitor screens are arranged to form a flight of stairs, uses the escalator as an obvious metaphor for the Thatcher era's world of upward social mobility. While the monitors on the left show the glass façades of palatial office

buildings and the tinsel world of soap operas like *Dynasty*, those on the right allow us to see the losers in this unequal race. All that is left for many of them — often pre-programmed by the colour of their skins to be losers — is to scrounge, beg or steal; and the stations of the Underground, with their endless escalators, provide them with occasional shelter.

Such contrasts are more acute in Great Britain than on the continent; and a critical and political element is correspondingly more common in British art. Stuart Marshall's *A Journal of the Plague Year* was created in 1984, the year in which the first great waves of information about the new pestilence, AIDS, broke over the country. Marshall compares the defamation and stigmatization of homosexuals with the Nazi persecution of the Jews and homosexuals. Viewing the whole business from the insider's angle he confronts us with accounts of the fates of some of his friends and with pictures from the Nazi

era. The subject is handled with great restraint, and there is not a hint of cliché.

Not only society but also the mechanisms of the art market were subjected to critical scrutiny. Thus Rose Finn-Kelcey's mixed media installation *Bureau de Change* (1988) reproduced Van Gogh's famous *Sunflowers* as a large-scale floor mosaic composed entirely of small coins. The illusionistic effect was further enhanced in an image of the mosaic picked up by a seeing-eye camera and displayed on an adjacent monitor screen. The interest aroused by the masterpieces of modernism today is solely related to the record prices they fetch: the art gallery has degenerated into a bureau de change. There was throughout this exhibition a general absence of self-importance and pretentiousness; the women artists in particular allowed themselves to be seen as vulnerable. Jayne Parker, for example, in her black and white film *Inside Out* (1990) has as it were turned herself inside out:



she uses her fingers to knit a web out of intestines. The coloured photomontages of Roberta Graham showed the female body with superimposed anatomical illustrations, using this bizarre and curious method to expose its internal structure. The only artist who appeared to have succumbed to the lure of advertising agency aesthetics was Holly Warburton, whose tape-slide installation *Viridus* (1990) was an intolerable piece of kitsch. That, no doubt, is the price she pays for earning a living by means of her work.

Markedly 'formalist' artists were also represented. Chris Welsby's atmospheric film installation *Rainfall* (1983) for instance simply showed a sheet of water being struck by raindrops. It was done with the utmost economy: in the dark room, a square surface stood out above the bottom of a mass of water, while a bright light shining down from above crackled with energy. Cerith Wyn Evans and David Hall dealt with the structure of television viewing. Evans' untitled 1990 installation consisted of a number of TV sets standing high up. Each of them had its rear panel illuminated by a lamp, and displayed a patch of light of exactly the same size on its screen, as if the lamp behind were shining straight through the set. It was a severely analytical work that dealt with the subjects of image and reproduction, light and perception. David Hall on the other hand turned back to the early days of television. *A situation envisaged: The Rite II* (1988) consists of a wall of TV

sets, all of them facing the wall of the room, so that the only use made of their various programmes is to provide a source of flickering illumination. One set alone is turned towards us; on its screen there can be discerned what is evidently meant to be the moon. The image is made up of thirty vertical lines, just like the original television picture which John Logie Baird was able to create in 1925. To produce the videotape Hall used exactly the same technology as Baird himself.

'Signs of the Times' was designed as a touring exhibition. It was later shown at the City Art Gallery and Polytechnic Gallery, Leeds, and it will be shown again in February 1993 at the Hôtel des Arts, Paris.

*Illustration: Jeremy Welsh*

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## PRESTON

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### Chris Meigh-Andrews

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Eau d'Artifice

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Harris Museum

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*Reviewed by Catherine Elwes*

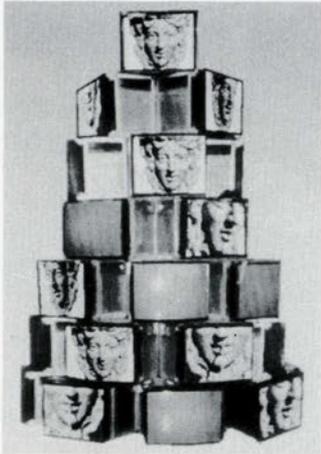
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The Harris Museum in Preston dominates the town's central square with a confident display of Victorian classicism. All that is missing in this perfect example of civic pride is a municipal fountain to soften the severity of the museum's splendour. In December the citizens of Preston were able to enjoy the

contemplative pleasures of a fountain — inside the museum.

Chris Meigh-Andrews' video fountain *Eau d'Artifice* rose up through seven circular layers of stacked monitors beginning with a row of eight, and tapering pyramid-fashion to a single monitor at the top. The classical proportions of the structure were reflected in the regular features of an androgynous Hellenic face out of whose mouth the fountain began its journey. The water dropped through each monitor, passing invisibly through the gaps in the construction to splash into the row of 'pools' that constituted the bottom row of monitors. Two park benches were strategically placed to encourage visitors to slow down their usual pace of life and allow the calming effect of the sound of running water to combine with the mesmeric quality of the video image and let their own thoughts and feelings go with the flow . . .

The flow of life, and the cycle of life and death, are familiar themes in the work of film and video makers who observe natural phenomena: the tides, rivers and streams, the patterning of snowflakes in a relentless wind. The British landscape tradition exemplified by artists like Chris Welsby and William Raban has seen itself as a recording agent respectfully mirroring these cyclic natural events. Ironically these are threatened by the very technological advances that made film and video possible. *Eau d'Artifice* denies any possibility of 'pure' nature. Nature is man-



made both as a concept and as a physical entity. The fountain too is man-made, but it aspires to a more harmonious interrelation of technology and nature. Perhaps the ultimate eco-sculpture would be a solar-powered video installation. But in terms of its materiality, Andrews regards the flow of electrons through cables, the scanning of images through the screens and the flow of the illusory water as analogous to the natural continuum of thought processes that tell us we are alive. He makes a further link between the technology and the forces that determine the cycle of death and regeneration in nature as a whole.

In her recent catalogue essay for the 'Signs of the Times', Chrissie Iles discusses the use of video as a means of projecting or externalizing the artist's own thought-processes, his or her internalized and repressed emotions. This may well be characteristic of most non-functional artifacts, but what

Andrews is offering us is an aural and visual stimulus, a temporal space in which to experience our own interiority. The fountain doesn't tell us what to think, it doesn't map out the artist's subjective experience, but like a real fountain it interacts with our senses setting up a flow of perception, interpretation and projection in which we are the main creative protagonists. This is true, at any rate, insofar as *Eau d'Artifice* produces the effect of an actual fountain. However, running water is significantly absent from the work. The artifice of the title reminds us that apart from its technological base, the work is a complete fiction. Like the reflexivity of much videowork in the '70s, *Eau d'Artifice* refers constantly to its own means of production — the aggregation of monitors, the cables that carry the signals, the flatness of the screens that pulls against the illusion of depth. But this in no dry lesson in truth to materials, no anti-narrative, anti-pleasure principle. We can enjoy the perceptual game of suspending disbelief and read the work back and forth as a fountain or technological trick, monumental pyramid or tower of stacked cubes. A child pointing at a cloud will delight in its ability to construct faces, animals and stories out of what it knows to be a fleeting pattern of water-vapour. Similarly, Chris Andrews' installation allows us to play with our perceptual processes and reflect a little on the daily stream of illusions emanating from the box which we accept as objective reality.

There is a story of sorts in the electronic fountain too. A narrative that only reveals itself if the viewer gives it the twelve minutes it takes to unfold. An illusory day is compressed into the twelve minutes. The 'sun' moves across the stony face and the light changes slowly from early morning blue, through the white light of mid-day to the yellow and golden reds of dusk. The water finally stops flowing and the face's reflection gradually settles like a moon in the pools below.

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## SHEFFIELD

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### Forced Entertainment

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Welcome to Dreamland;  
Marina and Lee

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### The Leadmill

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*Reviewed by David Hughes*

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In a recent television documentary the Elvis impersonator fronting a hick southern band spoke with endearing candour: 'The three most important things in life are family, friends and the ability to make dreams come true. The band and I aren't in the music business so much as in the business of making dreams come true.' The work of Forced Entertainment, whether *Marina and Lee* or their trilogy 'Welcome to Dreamland', suggests a paraphrase of that hick Elvis's philosophy; they're not in the theatre business so much as in the business of making dreams

come true. But whereas the hick band really couldn't hack it, Forced Entertainment are an ensemble who adopt an inept performance style as a matter of strategy.

Forced Entertainment's dreams are day-dreams constructed on pop or rather, lager culture — ectoplasmic manifestations which float above the tawdry selves that are their mediums, never quite covering over and making new. Video angels, the corporeal revenants of lovers from Japanese lore with their ill-fitting skeleton costumes, roam the stage. The uncertainty of the dream world's authenticity is registered in the angels' uncertainty about themselves: 'Are you sure we're angels?' one asks in *200% & Bloody Thirsty*. 'Yes, pretty sure,' is the equivocal reply.

The relationship between the players and the dream characters they take on suggests the playing of amateur actors in Church hall nativity plays or scout pantomimes. It is not Elvis we see impersonated in *Some Confusions . . .*, but an Elvis impersonator. It isn't the glamour of showbiz and cabaret, but the tacky world of the cheap act which is itself aping the style acts. They show us entertainment which is extremely forced. There is no Platonic ideal here, only progressively tackier shades. There is no existential authenticity in any of these cheap masks.

Kung Fu fighters, paranoid thrillers, shoot outs and hard core porn gone flaccid: like monitors tuned across the wavelengths, they pick up the

fuzzy images of a media suffused with sex and violence. But within this wavy texture strong, subliminal images condense. The North of England we construct from their work is depressed and disaffected. Native culture confronted by the American dream embodied in the fast food mall, the entertainment arcade, television and film culture. The text weaves these references into a new form of poetry, magnificent for its cadences and for its multi-layered plays on meaning.

There is a distancing effect in the use of the deadpan style and the monotonous Northern accents which suggest Northern surrealist poets reading, projecting the text as text, forcing us to listen, to engage with the poetry. But what settles in the distance opened up by the lethargy of performance in the boredom zone? There is a sense of pointlessness, of never reaching the end or the goal, if one was ever identified. A pointlessness indicated by pointing the way to someone who is asleep. Perhaps there is a purpose, but the eyes of these people can't see it. Perhaps they can't even imagine it; perhaps playing with the roles, killing time, is all they can aspire to. It is as though they all know at some level that there should be meaningful ritual in a life, but all they have are spent, empty rituals and mundane actions.

If the character, or the centre, will not hold, their stories will not hold either. If there is a doubt about playing a role or life character then there is also

serious doubt about the telling of stories in theatre. Forced Entertainment force apart the grafts, highlighting the gaps and illuminating the fragile constructions and dislocations of the self; and at the same time they force us to question the visual, textual and narrative pleasure we associate with theatrical entertainment. In so doing, they give entertainment a refreshingly bad name.

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## MADRID

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### Madrid en Danza

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*Reviewed by Lucinda Jarrett*

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Now in its sixth year, the Madrid Dance Festival has been subject to some cuts in funding, compelling its organizers to concentrate more on local talent. They have, however, still managed to maintain their commitment to bringing an interesting mix of international companies to Madrid.

*Tratado de Pintura* by Francesc Bravo, one of Spain's leading young choreographers, paid homage to Leonardo da Vinci, using his sketchbooks as inspiration and source material for this series of nine short pieces. Disappointingly, however, Bravo represented the sketches in a somewhat over-literal manner. In *Caballo* a mask of the torso of a horse was used to cover the head and torso of a dancer who then staged the horse mimetically; and in general bodies became two-dimensional

frozen images. It was the supplements to the choreography, the costumes and the mechanical devices reproduced from the notebooks, which kept the performance in motion and gave new dimensions to the stage space.

The lighting designer, Juan Gomez Cornejo, also took his cue from Leonardo, translating his mirror writing physically: a huge mirror hung above the dancers, tilted at varying angles to give an alternative perspective, thereby emphasizing the power of watching as a creative process. Spotlights were placed all round the circle to reflect off the mirror, while the dancers moved across a floor of Leonardo sketches. The dancers became the space over which light was manipulated, the light becoming the moving subject of the performance.

In sharp contrast, the Jazz Tap Ensemble challenge the primacy of the eye. Calling themselves instrumentalists or percussionists, they invite us to engage in the dance not just with our eyes but also, and more particularly, with our ears. In keeping with the traditions of jazz, the rhythms of the '40s and the movement of Jimmy Slide, music and movement are developed organically. This enables the lead drummer and musical director, Jerry Kalaf, to take choreographic decisions.

The result is quite extraordinary. In *Autumn Leaves*, danced by Sam Weber and Jerry Kalaf with dazzling technical virtuosity, notes reverberated through the trade



between feet and drums, and the heard relationship between feet and floor became as sensual as that between bodies. The Ensemble used improvisation in radically innovative ways, enabling each individual to expose his/her own strengths, juxtaposing the spectacle and presence of Sam Weber with the lyrical interiority of Lynn Daley and the rough-edged energy of Mark Mendoca.

At the forefront of the renaissance of tap, the Jazz Tap Ensemble are creating new directions for music and movement collaborations, and opening up audio and visual space. Their staging remains fixed in the language of the impresario and the star, but the ear is prioritized, questioning the primacy of the eye as a channel of communication.

*Puntos Suspensivos*, performed by Monica Valenciano and her company, was one of the most exciting pieces of dance theatre I have witnessed in a long time. Valenciano has had a chequered

training, symbolizing the problems facing current developments in performance and dance. Whilst training in theatre in Barcelona she was penalized for using too much movement; training in Madrid she was penalized for being too theatrical. This piece was a coproduction between Teatre Obert in Barcelona, Teatro Pradillo in Madrid, and the Klapstuk festival in Belgium. Influenced by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Valenciano now makes performance out of the process of extending and transgressing limits.

Throughout the performance Valenciano moves fluidly between roles, continually reproducing herself in varying forms, each reproduction a glide between 'suspension points'. As Lolita, she explores the patterns of seduction, attraction, rejection and fascination. She stands still, directly addressing the audience, daring them to openly accept her sensuality. As a baby, she seeks to free herself from the limits: 'I try to liberate myself from fear and from the fear of my body.' She now wipes her bum, now screams, now falls and tips off balance in dance which totters between stumbling, crawling and falling. Moving in the transition between silence and speech, she uses only the five vowels to explore the freedom of language before it is punctuated by consonants.

The three dancers play with children's toys, continually subjecting them to transformation: rubber dice are now a game of chance, now

stepping stones, now precariously balanced towers in between which the dancer balances, and now a means for learning times-tables. Of the two other performers, Juana Cordero is Valenciano's negation: modest and fearful she is ever trying to overcome inhibition. Norma Kraydeberg beats a salsa rhythm on the floor with her hands, creating music out of all the corners and crevices of the stage with the free inventiveness of a child. The three women create out of their disjunctions; rarely speaking directly to each other and always asking what is the relationship between these three bodies? Rewriting each other's steps they create paths of desire between their disjunctions and misrecognitions.

Questioning voyeurism, while inviting it, Monica Valenciano's company have constructed new channels for engagement with performance.

*Illustration: Francesc Bravo*

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## OSNABRUCK

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### European Media Art Festival

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*Reviewed by Nicholas Morgan*

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This year's EMAF saw extraordinarily eclectic programming, moving away from the film/video format division and taking content/sensibility as its organizing principle. Luckily the approaches of artists remained divergent



enough to allow the presentation of strong contrasts within thematic programmes. Typical were the pieces dedicated to Nicola Tesla (the inventor of alternating current), including a conventional but unreliable documentary *Tesla: the Zenith Factor*, Peter Downey's *Energy and How to get it* (1981) (with William Burroughs as the Energy Czar) as well as Peter d'Agostino's *Transmission S* (1985-1990), which addressed the history of twentieth century communications technology and its cultural impact; along with more predictable promethean/apocalyptic visions in Erotic Psyche's *Electra Morphic* (1987).

As it does perennially, the struggle to expose dominant images and to replace them with empowering, or at least more truthful ones, formed a central concern. Penelope Buitenhaus' *A Dream of Naming* (1990) showed, through its own disintegrative Romanticism, the impossibility of the construction of self-identity through the

affirmation of a multiplicity of mutually contradictory archetypal identities. More successful were K. Daymond's piece on female ejaculation, *Nice Girls Don't Do It* (1990) and *Boots, Boobs and Bitches* (1991), a documentary piece on G.B. Jones, a self-styled women's pornographer. They were as much assertions of women's rights to create what images of themselves they choose as explorations of the chosen images *per se*, perhaps looking less towards a better definition of identity than to the claiming of a space in which to exist undefined.

Jaap de Jonge's installation *Horizon* (1991) was an elegant representation of the constricted, programmed nature of dominant images of the world; a computer-generated landscape passing by on its tiny monitor while the monitor itself moves along a rail on the wall, the two movements not quite synchronized. Consequently the impression mentioned in the programme of

'looking out of a train window while a fantasy landscape passes by' is undermined as soon as one physically steps back from the work. The much talked-about *Paula Chimes* (1991), Michael Saup's interactive sound installation, used a computer to transform the movement of tubular bells into the rather uninteresting pulsations of an amorphous blob on a video monitor, but remains strangely memorable, perhaps because its portentously formal sculptural style and trivially formal content locates the piece in the realm of high kitsch. Elsewhere in the Dominikanerkirche the viewers of eddie d.'s video-sound installation *eddie d. presents . . .* (1991), informed that they could control which tape was playing by hitting, twisting or stamping on various objects, happily banged, twisted and stamped away in the belief that the piece was responding to them. However, as once a tape began it always played to the end further intervention by the viewer was in vain except in so far as the piece was the surreal spectacle of the futile activity taking place in front of the monitor. More satisfying interaction was possible with Wolfgang Schemmert's *Videoschlitz* (1991), which registered moving objects or people clearly on a video monitor but distorted a still subject to the point of imperceptibility.

EMAF's only performance was possibly the best received piece of the whole festival. In his *Beat-Re-Beat* (1991) Adam Boome provided a live completion of

video sequences, his use of music and rhythm inviting comparisons with Laurie Anderson. At times he came close to sound poetry, but his interpretation of his video text was always in the form of articulate sounds, letters if not words, constantly exposing their ambiguity and the multiplicity of speech patterns that can be constructed from them. At other times he worked with the vocabulary and visual codes of performance itself, physically alphabetizing them, while on screen he mimicked iconographic images of Elvis Presley. The physical and mental endurance he showed in maintaining the exact timing of his interaction with the images was thrilling and one hopes he will present a work in England soon.

*Illustration: Adam Boome*

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## POITIERS

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**James Turrell**

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Confort Moderne

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*Reviewed by Fiona Dunlop*

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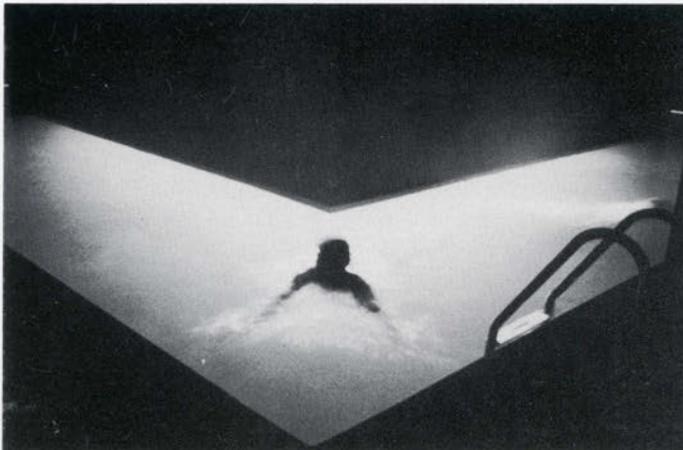
Pilot, psychologist, aerial surveyor and finally artist, James Turrell is in many ways a typical product of the West Coast, late '60s vintage. His concerns are sensorial and spatial while his media are perception and light — both in constant flux. But few can compete with the scale and sophistication of his projects which, since the mid-'80s, have

received increasing attention in Europe. This summer at the Confort Moderne in Poitiers, both the artist and the art centre surpassed themselves in staging two installations which inspired an unusual exodus from the seasonal inertia reigning in Paris.

For the first time Turrell included water as an element in an extraordinary installation, *Heavy Water*. Imagine a large and lofty hall infused with a misty grey light. Wide steps lead to a raised level which contains at its centre an illuminated square pool. The water-level, flush with the floor, occasionally overlaps. Out of the pool a monolithic 5.3 metre high cube rises to the ceiling. Dive in to what resembles a moat surrounding the cube, swim under its thick walls, and reemerge a few seconds later in a luminous white enclosed space. You've reached the inner sanctuary. Float, look upwards and through a square aperture observe the sky, its changing hues, movements of clouds or, if you are there in the evening, its nocturnal transformations and constellations.

A wide ledge surrounding the inner pool gives visitor-swimmers observation/rest points at will, and if it's hot they can chase the sun's shadow. White light, white heat. Ever conscious of aesthetics, specially designed navy and white striped swimsuits are obligatory apparel, while only six observers are allowed at a time. A far and exclusive cry from the municipal swimming-pool.

Exhibited at the entrance to



the exhibition is a model of Turrell's masterwork, *Roden Crater*, an ongoing project since 1977, which helps to explain the philosophy behind his work. This extinct volcano standing alone in the Arizona desert is gradually being transformed into a celestial observatory. Its central crown has now been dug out into an even bowl, a 'viewing' site for visitors who, prostrate, gaze at the hemispherical dome of the night sky. In years to come a complex network of tunnels, galleries and lightshafts will riddle the volcano and provide numerous viewing points to observe different lunar phases or have a concentrated and fluctuating perspective of the sky in all its states. This could occasionally include a vision of Turrell himself sky-diving or parachuting above.

But completion will not be before . . . 2001. Meanwhile, at Poitiers in 1991 Turrell also drew spectators into a cosmic trance with another major installation, *Earth Shadow*. Entrance is via a

totally dark corridor which leads to a 140 square metre space, lit only by a large bluish rectangle on the end wall and two spotlights on the perpendicular walls. As the retina adjusts, the intangible rectangle (in fact a concave opening) assumes denser pulsating tones, transformed by the barely changing intensity of the lateral spotlights. 'Normal' perception is thrown in the balance and the viewer is tipped into a new, mind-expanding dimension where rationality and fixed reference points have evaporated.

In both pieces Turrell has achieved a rare aim — the spectator is no longer a spectator. He or she ENTERS the works: in *Heavy Water* actually physically; in *Earth Shadow* psychically. And in both cases Turrell's games of perception are all-enveloping and inescapable.

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## PRAGUE

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### All Colours Theatre

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Celetná 17

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*Reviewed by Lucy Nias*

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All Colours Theatre is a young all-Czech theatre group, not so much in the tradition of the *Laterna Magicka* as a product of the same circumstances — that peculiarly Czech brand of censorship and control. Forced into obscure allegory until 1989, their particular style now has great appeal to the millions of non-Czech-speaking tourists who pass through Prague each year in search of the great Middle European cultural revival, by virtue of the non-verbal quality of their multi-media performances. With the change in the political climate in Czechoslovakia, companies like All Colours Theatre and *Laterna Magicka* have inevitably turned their attentions from the evasion of censorship to the pure visual development of their themes.

Drawing on the techniques of 'black theatre' (much used by companies such as Philippe Genty's and the American mime troupe, Momix, and involving the combined arts of on-stage puppetry and light tricks on an essentially black stage) and a very Czech brand of pantomime, All Colours Theatre traces an old shopkeeper's life from his youth to its dreary and depressing conclusion, through an elaborate dream sequence. The performance is lent a peculiarly

filmic quality in that the isolation of the particular elements of the stage and action by highly focussed spotlighting enables the director (and author), Ivan Holecek, to manipulate the audience's perception of events on stage in the same way that the camera is able to direct the eye.

The dream through which the old man's life is exposed can be seen as an allegory of the Communist dream, though in its unfolding the analogy makes reference to the impotence of other ideological options, western capitalism and Christianity amongst them.

Two key figures appear throughout the old man's dream — the one a tall magician-like figure, the other a fragile fairy in a tutu — both of them erstwhile window mannequins in the old man's bric-à-brac store. The dark magician carries a wand-like torch with which he is able to point out life's attractions and opportunities, but with the closed focus of his wand, he distorts the reality of perception. He highlights only the disembodied, tempting symbols of life that the guileless dreamer wants to believe in — chance, ambition, wild and multifarious sexual encounters, and wealth — objects which when scrutinized in a larger light are flabby with the boredom of their reality.

This larger light is thrown, or rather insidiously spread about, by the luminous fairy figure. With stiff imitations of sensuality, she betrays no hint of promise or reward, but rather the embodiment of a powerful awe-inspiring principle. The

Victorians might have called it morality; the Communists of post-war Czechoslovakia called it loyalty. The fairy appears in the wake of the magicians's promises, on the verge of the old man's decisions, spreading light just sufficient to force him to re-think his next step. But she does not represent impartial wisdom, and the old man is no submissive innocent; so that each step into the dream is a battle of will and prejudice, seduction and farce, supported by a group of dancers and puppeteers who variously perform the whores, gangsters, gamblers, crew of a sinking ship, pieces of machinery and animate matter, and the entire contents of the old man's shop that make up the context of the dream. At times the stage teems with fluorescent life, or whirrs and spins with fantastical mechanical components without so much as a glimpse of their operators.

All Colours Theatre must, I think, be considered a passionate and honest expression of the political and ideological disorientation felt by many in Czechoslovakia since the Velvet Revolution. However, their work must also be seen as a new and interesting development in visual theatre. Moreover the audience's partial vision of the activity on stage which is the trade mark of black theatre is an ideal vehicle for these ideas since it forces the audience to experience the same helplessness in not being able to predict the source and direction of sound and motion — those links that are crucial in order for us to establish some orientation in life.

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## NEW YORK

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### Bob Flanagan

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#### Sick

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#### Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage

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*Reviewed by Simon Anderson*

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Bob Flanagan suffers from cystic fibrosis, a disease which should have killed him years ago. At forty — an age at which some performers consider renouncing live art — he has combined his medical condition with a penchant for extreme masochism and, in his own phrase, 'turned it into art'.

As an event, *Sick* is an oddly unsatisfactory compromise between performance, pornography and lecture-demonstration. The evening was divided into four disparate segments: introduction, demonstration, video/installation, final act. These were preceded by a collage of video pieces (work with adolescent fellow-sufferers, interspersed with media coverage of his art), whilst Flanagan's initial entrance was heralded by theatrical darkness and a tape loop of painful coughing.

His introductory speech was an anecdotal, jokey explication of the genesis of his illness, his long-developed erotic interest in pain and his difficult relationship with the medical infrastructure which has kept him alive for several years past his expected expiry date. He then introduced the ominous installation which acted as prop and video bank — 'the auto-erotic scaffold' — and, after dressing in a classic

ensemble of S/M leather and chain, helpfully pointing out the numerous mutilations and piercings which decorate his body as he did so, he launched into a prose-and-pain performance of self-torture, aided by his dominatrix/assistant, the rubber-clad 'Mistress Rose'.

The clothes-pegs, weights and patent reality of the abuse proved too much for some members of the audience, who, obviously unused to such excess, staggered — or were carried — out. To this reviewer, hardened perhaps by past issues of *Re/Search* or some slight knowledge of the 1960s, this performance had the air of an amateur magician at a children's party: both embarrassed and embarrassing; admirable for the honesty of the intent, but marred by unprofessional and inappropriate staginess.

Once released from this cradle of exquisite agony — that is, when the pegs sprung from his skin under the pressure of their enema-bag counterweight — the

video screening began. Seven monitors, suspended from the scaffold in a cruciform pattern to mimic the human body, featured permutations of perversity relating to the appropriate part (two hands, two feet, head, torso and groin). Whilst occasionally weak or repetitive with regard to the extremities, which relied too much on found footage, such a device almost guarantees fascination, as each screen vies to gain attention. The central three monitors provided a surfeit of obscure and intentionally shocking imagery; from scrotal sewing exercises through whipping and beating to enforced coprophagy. As the room got hotter and more airless (somewhat improbably, given the impressively massive and cavernous spaces of the Brooklyn Anchorage), the climax — if the word is not too ill-advised — was a scene in which Flanagan nailed his penis to a table, releasing it to allow blood to splatter over a glass screen above the camera.

And there was more: for his finale, Flanagan spoke again; this time suspended by his ankles from the unfortunately unco-operative scaffold. His texts throughout had amounted to an apologia for his perversity, in which he managed to explain and justify his enjoyment of pain and the almost cynical manipulation of this as subject-matter. Since birth he has been poked at, prodded and pierced by hi-tech medicos: presentations such as *Sick* provide him with his own brand of pleasure, with the attention which he admits to craving, and additionally with an opportunity to regain control of his body — using the same methods and materials as his life-saving adversaries.

What he couldn't explain was why *we* were there; nor did he attempt any justification of this display as 'art'. He proved that there is sick and there is 'sick', but, as he said — suspended on multiple points of pain — 'the art aspect is the sickest thing about it . . . '.

Bob Flanagan's presentation is aptly titled: sick it is, and so is he. More disturbing is that we, as an audience of horrified spectators, are drawn into this sickness and somehow render it complete. Completely sick.



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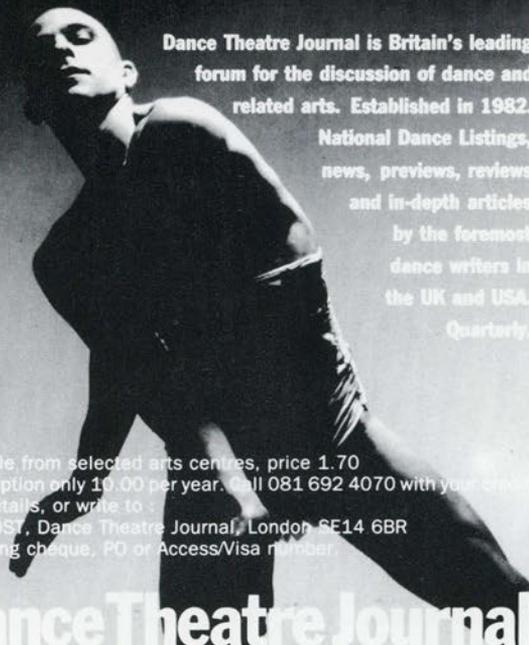
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	<i>19-22 Mar</i>	<b>Art London '92</b> London, England tel 071-486 1951
	<i>27-31 Mar</i>	<b>Art Frankfurt</b> Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany tel (49) 69-440226
<b>April</b>	<i>7-12 Apr</i>	<b>World Wide Video Festival 1992</b> The Hague, Netherlands tel (31) 70-364 4805
	<i>9-18 Apr</i>	<b>Brouhaha: 2nd International Youth Arts Festival</b> Liverpool, England tel 051-709 8478
<b>May</b>	<i>1-9 May</i>	<b>International Festival of Modern Dance and Movement</b> Utrecht, Netherlands tel (31) 30-332032
	<i>1-23 May</i>	<b>Mayfest</b> Glasgow, Scotland tel 041-552 8000
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<b>June</b>	<i>13 Jun-20 Sep</i>	<b>Documenta</b> Kassel, Germany tel (49) 561-777500
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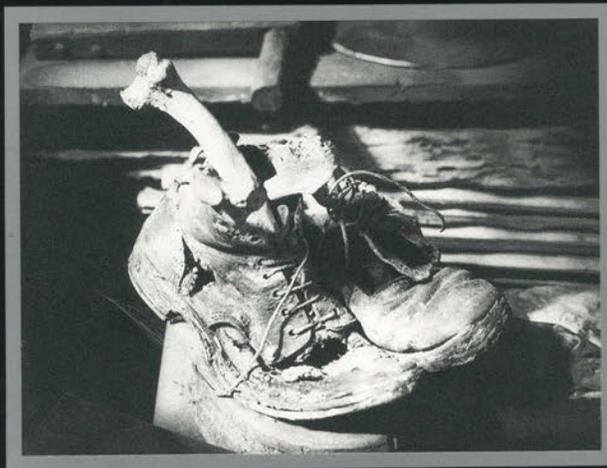
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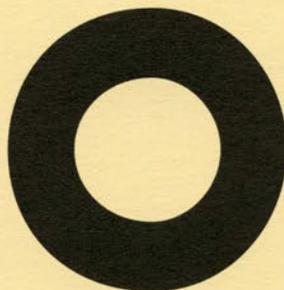
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