

LANSLEY
JACKIE ~~LANSELEY~~ AND ROSE ENGLISH AT THE ACME

Jackie Lansley and Rose English made some dance at the Acme Gallery on the 4th March; I had not encountered much of the work that has been developing in recent years and which is beginning to define and describe itself in publications such as New Dance and Readings, is developing work centres at Butler's Wharf and Acme, and which is beginning to venture out further into audiences who are less informed, maybe even hostile to, but certainly is ^{ready} to be exposed to these new developments.

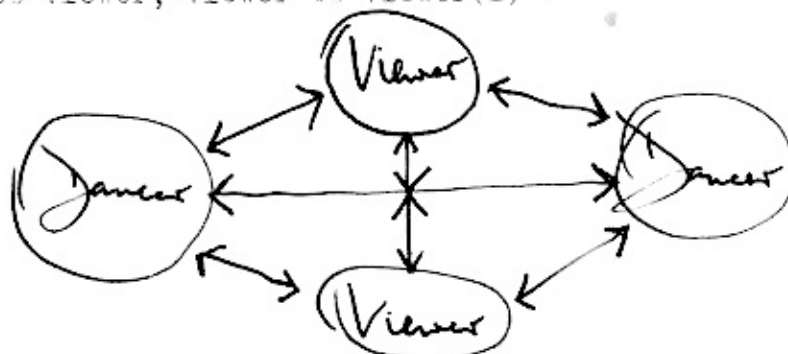
In what was performed there was made neither compromise with, or false distinction between, the dance they made and that which has emerged from ~~the~~ say, ^{the} hinterland of Southern Africa and ~~the~~ say, ^{the} stage of Covent Garden. It combined a definite, though not conventional, narrative structure with improvisation and traces of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the codes of classical ballet.

A slide projected large onto an end wall of the gallery space depicted a group of children clustered around a piano, apparently the members of a ballet class; black drapes excluded the external and internal SPACE of the room, the faces appearing out of the gloom and illuminating with their beams in the gallery space, the two performers, sat in canvas chairs to either side of the projected image. They began by exchanging anecdotes concerning experiences as children in ballet class, (perhaps like the one projected), as members of touring dance companies, as dancers on the professional stage. (One of these concerned the landlady of some digs who for weeks had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of two ballerinas and upon receiving them was instead horrified to find one with an arm in a sling supporting the other with a leg in plaster.) The anecdotes, related alternately, ended after some ten minutes with

the question one to the other, "Do you feel like dancing?". The slide projector was removed, the lights were turned ~~off~~ on and Bob Marley and some other rocking music boomed out into the space. For another ten minutes they moved, sometimes together, more often apart, sometimes quietly then suddenly in great rushes, up and down the room; sometimes with great regard being paid to the music, then apparently it being completely ignored.

The sounds suddenly changed to a continuous twenty-minute recording without any perceptible rhythmic base, other than that contained by ~~no~~ discrete quantities of sound bursts - it seemed to have something to do with water and animals, (and in fact turned out to be the sounds made by Beluga whales beneath the sea.) The physical movements scarcely altered - rhythmic movements on a small scale and arrhythmic movements on a large scale, (though at such times ~~natural~~ the natural movement of the body were irrepressible). The dancers' attentions however, were becoming more related ~~in one~~ ^{to the} ~~another~~; less to do with exuberant movement, more to do with directed concentration of gesture, rhythm and 'body-shape'.

The audience of fifty people strung around the skirting board were witness to this refining process ~~of concentration~~ and in their very proximity, became party to it. Not just from dancer to dancer and vice versa but from dancer to viewer, viewer to viewer(s) -



The movements became much slower, sometimes halting entirely in unison for several seconds. Gestures not unlike gymnastic exercises, or yogic postures, or relaxation positions would be adopted, individually apart, in close proximity and simultaneously. Interjecting,

classically graceful positions, some conclusively strenuous, poses clearly derived from a classical ballet training and having a meaning not just locateable in a time and place of the past but in their combined dynamism and gesture, placed firmly within the framework for improvisation that had been carefully constructed for ~~the~~ ^{the} performance, time as present.

In the same way as the intensity and concentration had determinidly formulated toward a point, it then quite rapidly receded, out the way it had come; a mirror-image construction which became apparent as the movements began to open up, began to re-animate in vigorous form, with a re-entry of the rushes up and down the floor witnessed earlier. The Black-based rock of before returned and as the group of viewers relaxed again, it seemed for a moment several would join in sympathy with the dancers and their music, but (thankfully) their preparation and work were respected enough for people to let it ^{instead with} ~~out~~ clapping.... The room was returned to darkness and another slide projected completing the otherwise submerged narrative. This image represented the prima ballerina of the classical stage, bristling with costume, lit as if by a thunderstorm, snapped from an angle accentuating her individuality separate from the herd, her innate superiority attained only after years of training and promotion - as an image, clearly implied.

The general implications of the entire piece could not be avoided in ~~THE~~ basic and ~~more~~ ^{more} oppositional position taken toward the notion of Dance as institution - ~~more~~ ^{from} the conditioning of children ~~from~~ ^{an} early age, through some equally conditioning ~~and~~ ^{and} further depriving training into the capillaries of a dance expression, and then on into almost complete ossification with the Companies, with their specialists, primas, corps, choreographers, conductors, directors, management structures and grades, an industrial approach remarkably similar to ~~that~~ ^{that} of

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the Cinema industry, another institution closely guarding the borders of a public art form, both gearing toward an Audience whom they feel they must please at all cost, an audience whose expectations are equally conditioned by the dictates of meaning given, rather than meaning made.

Even those dance groups emergent in the States in the '60's and their present day ~~xxxxxxx~~ exponents, (claiming naturally to be contemporary), have achieved little other than offer some alternative to classical codes replacing the straight spine with the curved one, sublimating grace at the expense of simple physical presence, ^{apparently} emphasising the group/corp and de-emphasising the leading dancer (whilst retaining and exploiting that focussing point), and providing meaning thematically implied, (conveyed impression/expressionalistically), as reason for the obvious pleasure and enthusiasm the dancers derive from presenting a show.....the spectator is left with simply observing ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ as a voyeur, others stylised means of pleasure, the competence of its execution by dancers and the other concealed exponents of stagecraft, hiding behind the procenium.

The performance made at the Acme gallery in common with recent work in other of the plastic arts, the emphasis is turned toward the role of the viewer or as a group, the audience. The appeal being made to the dance-viewer is where there is the possibility that dance becomes something other than just a physical response to sound by the Dancer; less to do with a ~~long~~ (long) tradition, a consistently defined space, a handful of narratives with a set of codes to convey meaning; more to do with meaning being made by the audience in responses to immediate physical factors within the space they help to define ~~with~~ with the dancer(s), who ~~use~~ use a combination of music and movement determined either by themselves in practice, or occurrences in performance identified by dancer

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and viewer simultaneously. ^{APPEAL TO THE VIEWER} In its non-illusionary use of space and sound, its ~~may~~ to be constantly alert and working with all the faculties, (with its implied and sometimes direct criticism of traditional/commercial dance), the development of new dance forms ~~can be~~ can be seen in parallel with the improvised music centred on the London Musicians Collective, some of the performance artwork evident at, among other places, Butler's Wharf and the Ayton Basement, and some of the filmwork that has emerged through the London Film-makers Co-operative in recent years. ^{NOW} The discourse that the films have generated and contributed to can be clearly identified,

~~now~~ in retrospect, ~~now~~ some years ~~now~~ since it became clearer to most of the film-makers what function the work was fulfilling; initially and in unison with several other groups and individuals in other parts of the world, it was sufficient to distinguish between commercial film (and non-commercial film) - film which was seeking an audience as an end in itself ~~and~~ film which simply sought its own existence, either as an ~~object/artifact/art~~ object or as the residue of the making process or more simply, as something to be shown to friends and interested parties who recognised the films' existence as either a conversational initiator or the logical extension of 20th Century art practice. A parallel, or often used alternative ^{DESCRIPTION} ~~description~~ employed was non-narrative, ^{MORE SO} ~~now~~ of the films' intent if not actual state; in later years with ~~now~~ more rigorous inspection of the films and their material functioning together with some of the advanced ^{THEORIES} ~~now~~ being ^{DEVELOPED} ~~now~~ by the semioticians, ~~has encouraged for most~~ a closer, more consistent way of looking at film, ~~now~~ responding to it in discussion and writing, ~~and feeding back into~~ besides feeding back both consciously and instinctively into the up-coming work. ^{HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED.} Looking back for instance to some of the earlier work claiming to be non-narrative, ~~now~~ ^{content} narrative ~~thread~~ can now be clearly distinguished, acting as a thread onto which ^{HAVE BEEN HUNG} ~~now~~ various tricks, manipulations and obsessions, far more the stuff of the commercial Cinema ^{WITH} ~~now~~ its complete reliance on the narrative form, ^{EVEN} ~~now~~

though the inscription of the film-maker as artist, as poet, as individual may be present. Though these distinctions can in hindsight be seen to be false,

false it is hard to see how such small oppositional movements to the vast and dominant context of true commercial Cinema could have otherwise survived - there has to be unreasonableness, the unreasonable and pure enthusiasm for any chance of survival against such odds. Improvisation, innovation, re-definition, the functional approach, being the means of mobility by which enthusiasm and the imagination ~~WERE~~ further stimulated to further action, rather than toward the institutionalisation of either the films' content, or the means by which it ~~WAS~~ made, **THE MALADY WHICH IS LARGELY PREVELANT NOW.**

Almost by definition the dancers do not have the same problems as the film-makers - they need no heavy or expensive equipment or industrialised raw materials and processes; they produce no product and therefore have

no need of a distribution apparatus; there are fewer pre-conditions for a canonisation of the work. Like the medium itself, mobility is its elemental form, the co-ordination of that element raising the main problems. With many of these ~~SE~~ initial problems apparently if only partially solved, the new dancers have now quite literally created a space. If their didactic working base can be enlarged through the use of workshops and open performance without getting caught up in a rhetorical theory of dance or organisation (beware of arts subsidy), then in the same way as happened at the Acme, the act of viewing dance will replace the consumption of an outworn social ritual and return dance to being a meaningful experience for both the viewer and the dancer.

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15.3.78.