

BEND YOUR MIND OFF



and welcome to Willie Lumiere, cousin and now editor along with the Bros. Lumiere

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BINDLESTIFF FAMILY CIRKUS

BEND YOUR MIND OFF, AGAIN

Feb 14 - March 3 at the Radiohole. Still running. See listings for details.

Self-destruction is a difficult thing to achieve, more than once.

Last May I saw BEND YOUR MIND OFF in its workshop form. Not much has changed. There is something intrinsic to this piece that will not let it out of the "workshop" stage, in other words, a stage of infinite potentiality. The play will probably change with each performance, and the audience's reaction is similarly unmappable. Even in the course of one performance, my reaction veers from laughter to queasy horror. BEND YOUR MIND OFF is open-ended, unfinished. However, its rough appearance is precise and well-considered.

We should all, at one time or other, be exposed to a different theater. It relieves me to know that someone has the impulse to make a performance so unfettered by aesthetic considerations, so eager to be frowned upon, considered crass or crazy.

This theater is not about talent (in the sense of craft, vocal or physical virtuosity, even endurance, though it contains them all), but just about power, the willingness to accept the power and subjugation implicit in performing. Eric Dyer, especially, has an impeccable sense of the simultaneous power and humiliation of performing and often forces himself from extreme to extreme. He reacts to the audience before the audience even has a chance to react. And it seems no accident that Jim Findlay looks quite a lot like Fassbinder in his leopard-skin suit.

Although the show is assaulting, the assault was never directed at the audience. Rather, it was an inner assault: the kids, left alone, tearing each other's eyeballs out. But make no mistake: it is ugly and it is extreme. These kids hit their heads with microphones, they throw their weight against walls, they force themselves into Nazi poses and racist stereotypes and humiliate themselves and each other with stupid sexual gimmicks.

From the first moment you are offered a beer, you are asked to be complicit with what comes next. Smoking and drinking during a theater show is only a small, quite pleasurable, transgression of our usual rules of behavior. There are more conventions to be thrown out. From the accepted notion of scene changes to the usual decorum about race and gender, all these conventions are regurgitated in a stream of destruction. The only thing left is visceral action.

It's easy to say that BEND YOUR MIND OFF is to theater what punk is to music, but it would be wrong to say that this kind of "punk" is original or organic. The participants are privileged and educated. If it is "punk," then it is a self-conscious

take on it. And, although something about it smells like slumming or fetishizing, it also makes sense. I mean, what form can you believe in when every form (painting, digital media, poetry, the avant-garde) is co-opted for commercial purposes even as it loudly proclaims its own independence? Answer: a form based in destruction.

I realize that this performance is lacking direction (call it anarchy?). In other words, I can see nothing that could be called the work of a director: no approval, no composition, and most importantly, no one in the role of audience during the creation of this work. Now, when we, a group of spectators, enter the world of the six people who created BEND YOUR MIND OFF, we do not fill the role of the audience (a role that never existed in this world). We are ourselves, a group of individuals who have come to watch and who each have their own reactions to this strange household.

Now that Foreman's naughty vaudeville behind glass and the pervasive use of video are commonly accepted as fulfilling the anti-mimetic requirement of distance, wherefrom this empathy I feel? In the post-wooster-group theaters of technological obsession and dehumanizing mechanization, the group of artists working at the Radiohole stands out as surprisingly emotional.

The subject addressed by multimedia is always the construct of theater itself, almost by default. Video in the theater has little metaphorical range; it mainly exists to focus the audience on what it means to watch, what it means to be watched, etc. Thus, a certain awareness of yourself as "the audience" arises, and the performers project that role onto you. I saw it in the way Kate Valk looked at me during HOUSE/LIGHTS. That look lets you know that you are "the audience" and all the smart observations follow from that point.

To my surprise, in BEND YOUR MIND OFF, while real-time video is integral and TVs are being literally tossed around like nobody's business, I nonetheless feel like an individual. Here I am, and I am being offered a beer, and I am being addressed by sweaty, bruised and bloody performers with private parts not altogether private. BEND YOUR MIND OFF does not let theater rest at thinking. Its grotesque contortions leave a mark on the body of the performer, and also on the individual represented by the body. The performance is the body in transition and transgression. And that body is the self.

That is why the assault on the individual occurring on stage has such a great impact on me. This impact expresses itself through my grotesque laughter, the way I swig my beer, light a smoke, and after the show, in the desire to go AWOL, to thrash around, get arrested, go off the edge, binge, and in other ways (some perhaps more productive) to confront my own tepid boundaries.

Matvei Yankelevich
in dialog with
Yelena Gluzman

READ NO FURTHER JUST GO SEE THE BINDLESTIFF FAMILY CIRKUS CABARET AT THE PRESENT COMPANY THEATRIUM. You have no excuse except the consistently sold-out shows—reserve seats ahead of time. The show is brilliant and even better if you walk in with no preconceptions at all. But if you must read on and dirty your mind, a review follows:

More than any genre of theater, more than Greek tragedy or melodrama, more than Shakespeare or the Broadway musical, the genre of circus performance has a tradition and a reputation which every individual circus performance must contend with. Even more than the expectations for each circus act, there is an idea of what a circus is, and who circus people are: the circus is something you run away with.

Circus performers have abandoned everyday conformist existence for a world of performative freakdom in which your status is not judged by clothing or bank account, but by how many bowling pins you can juggle at once, how many backflips, how big a sword you can slip into your esophagus—and other such circusy feats.

Upon arriving at the BINDLESTIFF FAMILY CIRKUS CABARET I saw the performers indistinguishably mingling with the waiting audience. Audience members traditionally dress up as clowns (Getting a discount? No one seemed to know) and the costumes for the Bindlestiff Family looked much like costumes I and my friends wear for a night out. But rather than feel like I was being cheated of a true circus experience, I started thinking that maybe I and many of my close friends have already, without even realizing it, run away with the circus ourselves, in some slightly more obscure metaphorical way. It was a profound epiphany to have before the show even started. I was, however, disappointed that Smarty Pants the clown didn't make me a funny balloon hat, even though I was sitting pensively all by myself.

In the theater space, a lighted sign above the stage rates the cabaret triple-red-glitter-X. As we took our seats, a grungy clown on the stage jerked off (or pretended clownishly) to the centerfold in a magazine, while girls in leather bikinis sold programs and "lap dances" (not so much lap, nor so much dance, but all attitude) for a dollar. When Kinko, "the most well-hung clown in show business," started the show by strip-teasing off his gloves and overcoat, I was disappointed that he didn't go further. Besides being all riled up by the triple-red-glitter-X, Kinko was hot and I wanted to see him naked. The show is graced with a not only talented, but also smolderingly sexy cast. However, by the end of the night, all my desire for XXX Cirkus were satisfied, though more in a circus than a XXX manner. Really, if any of the members of the Bindlestiff Family need a date, they should contact me right away.

The strip-tease begun by Kinko continues in various forms throughout the show. Rollerblading Sensations Rosanna Tovi and Andrei Bannikov began by revealing their true and complete love for rollerblading in silver unitards. This was a revelation not without risk, possibly more shameless than any other spiritual nudity throughout the show. This may sound comic to you now, but in my theater seat I was literally brought to tears.

On the most mundane level of circus virtuosity, every act in the show was top-notch. But more remarkable was how affecting the performance was, so that even if there was one mediocre act, I would never dare admit it out of deep love and loyalty to the Bindlestiff Family. At intermission, I had been moved, awed, thrilled, educated in how to make music with feminine hygiene products, and personally selected from the audience to have evil worms removed from my body with subversive literature.

The show took on a more intimate tone in the second half. We had already met most of the Bindlestiff Family, now we had the opportunity to see more of their secret selves. We saw competition between performers, we heard about Kinko's educational background, we saw how the trapeze artist looks when she goes to sleep at night, and we saw some naked boobs and pubes, courtesy of the most genuinely weird dance interlude I have ever seen on the stage. The show's climax—a kind of pas de deux with fire performed by Kinko & Philomena—was the most deeply erotic live performance of anything anywhere ever I have ever seen ever. The sexuality of the show, like its other aspects, seemed profound in a way independent of any narrative or symbolic content. The simple fact of a person dragging fire over their own body offered more in terms of sheer depth than any of the short narrative bits of comic political commentary included throughout the show. As true circus performers, Philomena and Kinko in the fire-dance achieve something far more, by doing something incredible and meaningless, than most theater performances achieve by pretending to do something credibly which is intended to then be charged with meaning, ideas, symbolism.

As the cast took their bows, I was left with a sense of intense longing, akin to how I felt after the Nine Inch Nails concert I saw when I was 15. In other words, I was in love. I left that night spent, with an experience I can neither understand nor forget, with a new faith in the power of good theater, and with a tampon I caught as it was tossed from the stage. Truly a great fucking show.

Eli Rarey



Gecko and Ball a Ball, a Gecko

GECKO SUITE and BALL
Edwin Torres and Friends
The Kitchen. Closed.

February 14th through 17th at the Kitchen, Edwin Torres presented **GECKO SUITE**, "an opera in three colors," a staged performance of poetry utilizing music, projections and dance.

Torres, who came out of the **NUYORICAN POET'S CAFÉ** in the mid-nineties, has not limited his poetry to the page nor to the constraints of slam-style showmanship, as this work testifies. In five acts of three colors (red, white, black, white and red), Torres embodies Gecko, himself a whole spectrum of personas, constantly reborn. Accompanying his effusion of jangling Spanglish word noise was Gina Bonati as the **VISION**, and bass and sax players Marc Dale and Ladislav Czernek as **WIND** and **GROUND**, respectively.

Fragments of the libretto, a small cluster of vagueness, reappear in new colors, changing with the tone of the speaker. A poem which seems playful and silly "white" is reborn glowering and intense "red." This ability for things to transcend themselves is carried into all aspects of **GECKO**, best exemplified in the central and powerful "black" in which the lines of a poem projected upon the wall transform into literal white lines, and then into stars which the dancing Vision

wraps around her body. The work is incomprehensible enough to not seem heavy-handed, and graceful enough to avoid seeming like pretentious nonsense (a risk in such abstract performances). With sparse beauty, **GECKO SUITE** brings poetry to life, and demonstrates that a single text, with some imagination, can live many lives.

Double billed with **GECKO** was **BALL**, an improvisation between Torres, Mark Dale and Gen Ken Montgomery, who also designed sound for the previous work. For this performance, four microphones were hung from the ceiling, a few inches above the floor. Balls of various types were then bounced around, under and against the microphones which ampli-

ROBOTS ON STAGE

Jon Schumacher, founder of **SINGULARITY**, draws his theatrical inspiration from the medium that he says "privatized the communal experience of theater." Rather than attempting to delineate the impact of television, **SINGULARITY**'s upcoming project is the impact of television. And in being the impact of television, it is its reversal: robots on stage.

For their upcoming project, **SINGULARITY** will create performances based on interviews with the actual scientists involved in artificial intelligence. The theatrical context is also relevant in that the issues "scientists are dealing with are the

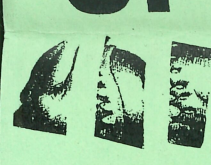
same ones that have dominated critical discussion of the acting process since antiquity; issues of consciousness and duality between body and mind."

The characters do not end with the scientists; Schumacher points out that robots themselves are "extremely simplified people, basically."

With the dotcoms crashing outta television-grey Gibson-ian skies, who knows what's gonna go down next. "Like most of society," Schumacher says, "I am in a phase that could be called a technological rapture."

Nick Jones

Susanna Speier



UP YOUR ASS

Finally everyone is talking about Valerie Solanas for the right reasons. In many ways the first modern radical feminist, Solanas made news in 1968 when she shot Andy Warhol in the chest (nearly killing him) after he and his staff lost the only copy of her script **UP YOUR ASS**. The script was finally discovered over 25 years later by researchers working on **I SHOT ANDY WARHOL**. Now it has been revived by the San Francisco Company George Coates Performance Works. After touring for a year, it has opened at P.S. 122, where it will be up through February 25.

Let me begin by saying that if I'd written **UP YOUR ASS** and somebody lost my only copy, I'd shoot them, too. What a pity and what a loss that this woman spent the rest of her life as an "assassin" instead of a "writer." Nobody's fault but her own, of course, but then isn't that the definition of tragedy?

While somewhat raw and formless (faults that presumably would have been corrected by any subsequent production or publication during her lifetime), the play is not only still cutting edge (35 years after having been written), but massively entertaining. When Ms. Solanas wrote this play in 1965, theatrical audiences had been exposed to very little that today would be considered "shocking." Four letter words were used rarely. Those who employed them used them sparingly. The seamier aspects of urban life were almost never depicted at all; the sole exception that springs to mind is Lanford Wilson.

Yet even Wilson never dreamed up this world of Bongi Perez (Solanas' alter-ego, played here by Sara Moore). Perez is a homeless, homo-

sexual prostitute who drifts in and out of a bar to turn tricks so she can eat. Along the way, she meets transvestites, a woman who eats shit, a number of men only too happy to negotiate for back-alley handjobs, a cub scout with glue on his penis, and his mother, who strangles him to death. Binding all of this together is Solanas/Perez's hatred for men. (As a psychology student at the University of Maryland, Solanas cooked up a theory that the Y chromosome is defective—all men are botched women, and are responsible for every ill that has ever befallen the human race.)

As one of God's mistakes myself, I am the last person to ever sympathize with such a theory, although, let's face it, there's plenty of empirical evidence to back her up. Fortunately, in all of her work, there is the considerable palliative of her humor. To say that it is a saving grace would be an understatement. The woman expresses herself through the epigram, the highest means of expressing ideas in the theatre. Invented by the Romans, it is a way of communicating the truth through a shocking and humorous juxtaposition in one or two pared down sentences. Oscar Wilde revived the form to enormous advantage. Shaw employed it as well, although less memorably. Joe Orton virtually built his plays out of them. Camille Paglia uses it repeatedly in **SEXUAL PERSONAE**. It is a demanding form. I can't think of a better indicator of a first rate intellect or a first rate heart than mastery of the epigram. Solanas uses them throughout.

I couldn't write fast enough to catch them all, but here are a few:

GINGER: Everybody knows men have better judgment than women.
BONGI: Yeah, they dig women!

GINGER: I need a man to protect me.

BONGI: From what? Other men?

RUSSELL: I'm a good conversationalist, but it isn't fair to judge it by what I say.

RUSSELL: There are some advantages to marriage.

BONGI: Like widow's pensions

RUSSELL: Women are as good as men in every way.

BONGI: I've had enough of your insults.

BONGI: I'm so female I'm subversive.

Someone who writes this well and this incisively knows how good (and how rare) she is. The galling fact that her masterpiece was lost by a bunch of fashion models and poseurs who had dismissed it as a dirty book surely drove her out of her mind. It would anybody.

Now is the perfect time to revive this play. Not only is there an entire generation of radical feminists now in existence, which cut its teeth on such texts as Solanas' own **SCUM MANIFESTO**, but the climate of the entire nation has changed. The idea of woman's equality is a given; the thought that all a woman should aspire to is motherhood or a menial secretary job is an abhorrent detail of history. There is infinite and universal sympathy for an independent woman (however hyperbolic in her pronouncements), swimming against a chauvinist tide. The level of graphic language, sex and violence on stage and screen has steadily risen over the past 30 years as well, gradually spawning an audience that can contemplate it without outrage. The British Nihilists -- rumored to be the apogee now of such free expression, have helped pave the way for a play like this. So there is a receptive audience where there wouldn't have been when the play was written.

Mr. Coates' production—and his talented all-female cast—set just the right tone of brazenness: an alloy part comedic and part just plain angry. The drag-kings in the cast are delightfully subtle. Mantra Plonsey does double duty as Russell (a Tony Bennett-esque male pig whose humiliation by Bongi sheds light on the play's title) and Mrs. Arthur

LISTINGS

LAPA

Matvei Yenkoevich's new translation of Daniil Kharm's play. Featuring Secret Theater Salomés and music by Dave Reaboi. **ONE NIGHT ONLY!** Thurs, Feb 22 at 8. Clemente Soto Valez, 107 Suffolk, off Delancy. \$5/\$10.

HEADPHONE FOLLIES

Some of NYC best downtown performers try to, in real time, imitate vocal sounds they hear over headphones; each night has a different cast. It's all Josh Fried's idea. Thru Mar 10, Saturday nights only, 10:30pm. **HERE**, 145 6th Ave, 647-0202. \$12.

BEND YOUR MIND OFF

See the review in this issue. With: Erin Douglass, Eric Dyer, Iver Findlay, Jim Findlay, Maggie Hoffman, Amy Huggans. Thru March 3, Wed-Sat at 9. At the new Radiohole: 146 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn (L to Bedford) 718-388-2251. \$10.

POETRY PLASTIQUE

34 poets and artists push poetry off the page. Ongoing events, exhibits, and performances. Marianne Boesky Gallery, 535 W.22nd Street.

BINDLESTIFF FAMILY CIRCUS

See the review in this issue. Thru March 10, Thu-Sat at midnight. Present Company Theatorium, 198 Stanton St, 420-8877. \$15/\$10 for clowns in make-up.

AVE. A CONSPIRACY

Collective Unconscious' midnight variety show. Fridays at midnight of course. 145 Ludlow, 561-9740.

VALERIE SHOOTS ANDY

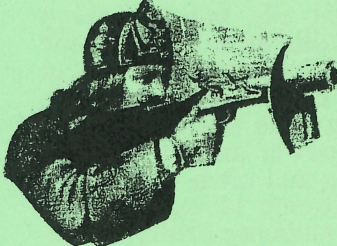
Randy White directs Carson Kreitzer's play about Solanas' 1968 attempt to kill Warhol. With glitter, guns, and girls. Feb 10-Mar 4, Thu-Sat at 8pm. Present Company Theatorium, 198 Stanton St., 420-8877. \$15/\$10.

UP YOUR ASS

See review in this issue. Ends Sunday! Wed-Sun at 8pm, Fri & Sat at 11pm. PS 122, 150 1st Ave, 477-5288. \$20.

VITO ACCONCI & ANA MENDIETA

A gallery exhibit of films and photos by two of the 70's most influential body-based performance artists. Open Tues-Fri 10-5:30, Sat 11-5:30. Lelong, 20 W 57th, 315-0470.



Hazlett (a hilarious shrew who persists in getting pregnant because she likes conventional sex, but despises and is cruel to her children). Also impressive are Annie Larson and Chantel Lucier as a pair of transvestites...women playing men playing women.

All of the women are terrific singers. Though the play is not a musical, Mr. Coates has set portions of the text to pop tunes from the last 40 years, with the premise that we are in a karaoke bar. The results are often amusing due to the shock effect of hearing vulgar lyrics to familiar tunes. Examples:

"Why should I dress to give men hard-ons?" ("Because the Night");

"That's a mighty fine dick" ("Tears on my Pillow"); "Scratch your own crotch" ("Bobbie McGee"); and "T-turd" ("Surfin' Bird"). This provides a wonderful showcase for the cast's talents as singers and dancers and makes for an entertaining evening, but it also makes one wonder if it doesn't distract from Ms. Solanas's original intentions.

While I'm not about to castrate myself or jump off a building as Ms. Solanas might have liked, she has my undying respect as a writer.

Trav S.D.