

# EMERGENCY

gazette

#36

July 20 2001

an all new issue!

## Laughter Club

### FALLING IN LOVE WITH CLOWNS

"GARVEY & SUPERPANTS"

Presented by Chashama and The National  
Theater of the United States of America  
5c orchestra, 10c box, 1c balcony  
Through Sun July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Call 539-8493

The eyes are the killer, under all the paint and the stock gestures, the eyes shine out like calm still

jewels (fool's gold?). The distance between the autonomous eyes of clowns and their honest desperate intention of making you laugh is irresistible for me, always stops me on the street to watch. The irresistible spectacle is in the tension between giving it all away (the desperate attempt to induce laughter) and a center that cannot be bought or sold (the calm sadness, the eyes which look at you with the same attention as at a passing car).

This is also GARVEY & SUPERPANTS. I am in love with all of them because they are trying so hard, and inside the desperation of the relentless gags there is a seriousness that no one can touch. They are funny and outrageous, but the truly tantalizing and disturbing quality is the still center of it, their own dissatisfaction with the jokes, with your gaze, with each word and each gag. There is a joke and Garvey catches your eye while you are laughing. Silently his gaze bores into yours: Why are you laughing? says the imperceptible movement of his eyes locked with yours, Help me, says his gaze, No joke. And, as much as you'd like to help, both Garvey and Super-pant\$ know that you cannot help them. They look at you and at each other and at the footlights and all these things are equally isolating.

Not everyone can go see GARVEY & SUPERPANTS, although everyone should. So for those who can't and for those who won't, I will say this: the set is one tiny room, a tiny replica of a proscenium theater in the basement of -111 W. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Everything is pushed together and in miniature, from the box seats to the footlights to the velvet ropes. The room is three doors, one "real" and two "fake," though all the doors can open and all the doors can close. Most of the first act takes place with the performers running into one door and out another. The room is a shabby place of for-gotten farces and sweaty faux-velvet costumes, a place left over from the alleged giddiness and magic of Theater and cramped into a space that shrank as the skyline exploded upwards.



I am sitting in the sun. It is a beautiful Saturday afternoon. I am crabby and depressed. I just got home from Laughter Club.

I saw the listing in Time Out. Laughter Club takes place each week at the Laughing Lotus Yoga Center on Christopher Street. "There are more than 400 Laughter Clubs in India; apparently, laughing is gaining popularity as a movement," the listing said.

I have always wanted to go to India. I imagined what I would find at the Laughter Club in New York City: a room full of people, sitting on mats, facing forward, laughing until the tears were streaming; the yoga teacher sitting up front, beaming quietly; the air in the room turning thick and sparkly; a man standing on the

Garvey and Superpant\$ sit in the tiny room, leaning on a café table. A tight-lipped waiter enters and exits and Garvey hisses, "Fascist." There is a rare pause as we consider this. Then, very very fast, as is everything in this world, there is something else and something else again, and the married couple enters and the waiter comes back and Garvey hisses, "Fascist." The room is dissembled to reveal a speed metal band, playing full tilt, and an empty blown-out space behind them, but still there is the tired frame, the set, the shabby feeling of Theater or abandoned circus tents.

It is always the same room at GARVEY & SUPERPANTS, a blank room that you are continually in a state of entering or exiting on your way to the Real Experience. Yes, there is a metaphor here, if you're up for buying into that sort of thing, and it may occur to you that this is what we know: a badly constructed set, in an imitation of an artform. This is what we know: the thing that is always just missed. Or, this is what we know: the same room, where, for ever, someone hisses, "Fascist," where coercion and surrender snuggle in for a cozy meal of toast with cream cheese, where people come and go but the relationships (that is, the IDEAS) stay impossibly the same. "What if I'm sick of it already?" asks Garvey, and the answer comes back in the absence of an answer.

My friend Richard reminds me: if something happens once, it's naturalism. Twice, it's tragedy. Three times, it's comedy. In GARVEY & SUPERPANTS, everything exists in relation to repetition, the sense that history has swallowed its own tail and we are caught in the gall bladder, in an eternal return of the dingiest kind of vaudeville, caught in the intent to make us laugh and simultaneously crying for help within its own enforced buffoonery. When it has happened a million times, it is either disease or perfection. As Superpant\$ says, "It does represent to us some sort of perfection..." to which Garvey replies, "What is this shit."

corner of Christopher Street and Seventh Avenue, smiling and not knowing why.

Laughter Club meets at 9 AM on Saturday mornings. The instructor, Dana, said hello to me as I entered the pink-walled studio. We recognized each other from a very unfunny woman's self-help group I used to go to, where we sat around a big conference table and complained about our parents.

There were about 25 women and exactly three men at Laughter Club. To begin, Dana had us clap: two long claps, then three short ones. As we clapped we were supposed to chant: "Ha! Ha! Ho-ho-ho!" Then we raised our arms above our heads and inhaled. As we exhaled, Dana said, we could begin laughing.

Susan Sontag, speaking of the humor of 1970's Happenings, wrote, "I...often laugh during Happenings. I don't think this is simply because we are embarrassed or made nervous by violent and absurd actions. I think we laugh because what goes on...is, in the deepest sense, funny. There is something comic in modern experience as such, a demonic, not a divine comedy, precisely to the extent that modern experience is characterized by meaningless mechanized situations of dis-relation." But, as another friend said: You're gonna let Susan Sontag teach you how to be funny?

A book falls from the ceiling and hits the floor. Another rare pause; Garvey and Superpant\$ stare at the book. The book does not stare back.

I don't know if G&\$ fosters an understanding of comedy. More accurately, this very skilled and crafted event spins such a cloud of frenetic entertainment that you are faced with a loneliness and an emptiness that takes your breath away. G&\$ is like a slave auction where the slaves organize and run the sale, look you in the eye as you place your bid. In all its effort to please, to entertain and delight, there is something aggressive and awful, dead serious and, for all the energy and virtuosity, helpless.

A book falls from the ceiling. Garvey and Superpant\$ stare at the book. The book does not stare back. Garvey! SUPERPANTS? What about a theater that loiters, hangs around, walks down the street feeling loose and swinging its arms real wide? What about theater that wants nothing but a chiffon carnation in its button-hole? What's so funny about this, what's so funny about flesh stretching backwards exposing teeth and gums and throbbing throat veins and delicate webs of falling saliva? Yesterday the gap had been inside me, today I'm inside the gap. Garvey and Superpant\$ stare at the book. The book does not stare back.

Yelena Gluzman

And suddenly, the reality of Laughter Club dawned on me: we weren't going to laugh real laughs. We were going to go through the motions of laughing. But simulating laughter and being seized by laughter are not the same thing. Simulated laughter looks like laughter, yes, and sounds like laughter, but it is laughter that is missing one incredibly important thing: the joke. Meaning.

But I am a good student, and so I began to laugh when I was supposed to. Dana had already told me that, as a pregnant person, I should keep my laughter "shallow." I had no problem with this. As I looked into the eyes of a bearded guy in a tie-dyed tee shirt and laughed my fake laugh, I could feel tears welling up in my eyes.

I was disappointed, to put it mildly. I had thought that at last, I was going to find a religion that was built on an idea I could finally get behind: that the world is deeply, fantastically funny, and that recognizing this funniness can be a holy thing. But unlike the churches and comedy clubs I had made pilgrimages to, where the object of worship was really the talent of the preacher/comedian, Laughter Club as I imagined it, would sidestep the whole ego issue. It would be a place where the object of worship was not Robin Williams in particular, but Absurdity in general. And the way we would approach this God would not be through prayer, but through laughter. This last idea was particularly thrilling to me. After all, prayer is so unsatisfying. It sits there, it floats into the void, it goes unanswered. To pray is to spend a long time quietly asking a difficult question. Laughter, on the other hand, doesn't ask questions at all. Laughter is recognition. If prayer is Not Knowing, laughter is Getting It.

I realize that my Laughter-Club fantasy is ridiculous. I mean, how would a room full of people ever start laughing about Absurdity in general? How could this happen, without someone telling a joke? It would be like the comedy club with no comedian. I imagine us sitting there, like a bunch of UFO lovers on Devil's Tower, grimly waiting for laughter to seize us.

With this bleak scenario in mind, the next exercise at real-life Laughter Club—fake-laughing while strutting around the room like a chicken—didn't seem so stupid. Even if I did feel, as I was doing it, like an actor in a laughter-porn video. Like porn, it probably loo-ked fantastic. Imagine 28 people strutting around a pink room, flapping their arms, sticking their butts out, guffawing. But the laughter-porn actor feeling was also heightened by the fact that a guy from the local TV news was there, filming for the entire session. I caught his eye once. He smiled at me sympathetically as he recorded my chortling chicken-dance for the amusement of every resident of New York City.

Amy Fusselman

This investigative report was first seen on  
[www.surgeryofmodernwarfare.com](http://www.surgeryofmodernwarfare.com).



# THE HISTORY OF THE THEATER AND

# THE PROMISE OF BRITISH COMEDY

12 hours of sleep, which could have continued if not for persistent signals from what may be part of the digestive system, I'm not sure.

There were not, I think, any dreams at the end. But earlier in the night there was an enormous old house in the countryside. It was night there too. We had just arrived, were just moving in. We began to notice animals outside. Amongst these animals were lions. And then we understood that lions know how to open sliding doors.

The lions were angry, had skin of worn velvet, and buttons for eyes. What was necessary, we discovered from a mysterious young man who suddenly appeared and began doing this, was to maintain certain shrines throughout the house, shrines dedicated to animals deceased. This learned and accomplished, I have the impression that we sat conversationally in the kitchen, and that the lions and their representative parted on good terms. This did not prevent us from locking the doors to disuade another intrusion, which, I remarked, gave the dream a very "British" character, though this observation, I now fear, may have been erroneous.

Conor Jack Heaton III

OPEN

## LETTER TO THEATER

Dear Director,

Just wanted to thank you for last night, mighty fine, as expected, wacky though, content wise, just between you and me (shameful confession), I do struggle with the absence of the narrative (very much enjoyed having it in the last play, a treat), which makes it only more impressive that the stage holds attention non-stop, no gaps, no falling through into the cracks of performance into the spidery basement of yourself, since no cracks, that you achieve so consistently!

see (another shameful one) generally am very cautious about going to the theater, danger of being trapped in someone's pitiful attempt of creativity, of grandiosity—another failed one you realize, despair immediately—and still another...oh horror 57 minutes to go, you are already so excruciatingly stuck-dull-embarrassed—want to have a nice cup of tea with a sugared scone somewhere instead while reading a good book, book that has established itself as good a long long time ago, has been acknowledged as good by many many intelligent respectable people, has proven itself to world, just give me that book, no more risks for me today with things unproven, with creativity gone south for lack of muscles and such... wash it OFF me! I feel sticky. now.

so, thank you (!!!) it was pure pleasure indeed and you are radiant again and must see you and should get my books too, time to re-read, and talk soon soon soon

kisses!

A THEATER GOER

The EMERGENCY Gazette

The Bros. Lumiere, eds

to submit text,  
please write us  
at 733 Amsterdam Ave.  
Sweet 21H  
New York City 10025

or at  
emergency@notnow.com

the gazette is a FREE  
publication of the  
ugly duckling presse

thanks to chashama (((

SAINT LATRICE  
Juliana Francis (of FLORIDA PROJECT and HOTEL FUCK notoriety) wrote and directed this.  
JULY 25th - 30th at 8pm.  
Collapsible Hole, Metropolitan Avenue, Brooklyn, for directions, reservations call (212) 769-6899.  
\$10.

Judson Kniffen's new adaptation of the play by Jean Cocteau, Part of the Blueprint Series at the Ontological.  
This may be the date play you were waiting for, Tuesday-Sunday, July 11-28 at 8pm. The Ontological-Hysterical Theater, in the St. Mark's Church at 2nd Avenue and 10th Street, 533-4650, \$12.

ORPHEE  
Judson Kniffen's new adaptation of the play by Jean Cocteau, Part of the Blueprint Series at the Ontological.  
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pass \$20

## SOHO REP SUMMER

Saturdays, July 21st & 28th at midnight. Flea Theater, 226-2407.  
\$20/\$15 rush.

By Alice Tuan. Brought back as a midnight show, now with air-conditioning and cold beer to tempt you. Simone White told us it was interesting, violent in an unusual way.

AX (por nobody)  
By Alice Tuan. Brought back as a midnight show, now with air-conditioning and cold beer to tempt you. Simone White told us it was interesting, violent in an unusual way.

## NEW THEATER

CATSKILL FESTIVAL OF

## THE BIOLOGY OF COMIC AESTHETICS.



### A Manifesto

In PRINCIPLES OF BIOLOGY, the 19th century philosopher Herbert Spencer defines life as a "definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external co-existences and sequences. Comedy arises when we perceive maladjustment in others to external sequences.

We laugh, zoologist Desmond Morris postulates, because we are relieved. We are biologically conditioned to expect disaster following any deviation from the patterns of identification which are our prime survival mechanism. Tension builds as one's body, perceiving an incongruity, prepares to cope with whatever is unknown. Upon learning that no exertion is required, the body must release the tension somehow. It does so through muscular spasm: laughter.

Why has nature caused us to find these muscle spasms pleasurable? All species possess two main drives:

Becket's text, directed by Lauren Rosen. With Melody Bates & Aimee Phelan. July 24 and 25 at 8:30pm.  
Directed by the hardcore Hyunjung Lee, with Zishan Ugru and Alvaro Heinig. Sam Shepard wrote this play in 1971, passing a typewriter back and forth. Their careers were just beginning, they were in love and living in a world of their own. Aug 2 and 3 at 8pm. For the entire festival schedule, see www.here.org. At HERE, 145 6th Ave, 647-0202.

## AMERICAN LIVING ROOM FESTIVAL

HERE does this 2 month long festival yearly. 100+ shows, each made with love and showing for 2 performances. Highlights include: NOT I  
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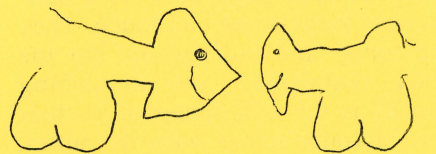
## HORRIBLE CHILD

Written by Lawrence Krauser, directed by Paul Willis, with Deron Bos, David Brooks, Mike Daisey, & Sydney Fine. I am assured that this is hilarious, really really funny, seriously rip-roaring gut-busting funny. As this issue of the EMERGENCY Gazette may or may not be about comedy, we, for one, are intrigued. Mondays, July 23rd & 30th at 8pm. TONIC, 107 Norfolk Street, \$10.  
reservations or late seating. \$10.

## THE SCANDAL!

Kristen Kosmas, usually behind the scenes at the monthly Little Theater variety show, is behind the text AND in front of your eyes in her one-woman show. As simple as any thing and sweet but not sentimental, the best part of Kosmas' dramaturgy is her beautiful use of time. Extended for 2 more performances. Mondays, July 23rd & 30th at 10pm. Tonic, 107 Norfolk Street, no reservations or late seating. \$10.

## LISTINGS!



to procreate and to survive. Nature's reward for procreating is of course the orgasm. My theory is that nature's reward for being alert to life-saving patterns is laughter. Therefore, the highest pleasure attainable in the aesthetic experience is laughter.

Comedy borne of such incongruity is the basis of all theatre created by my company MOUNTEBANKS. My plays strive to maintain a dual-level structure: an outer, which I call the centrifugal, which possesses all the sting and sweetness and wild chaos of life in all its detail; and the inner level, or centripetal, which expresses the eternal verities. The outer level is unfinished and heterogeneous: it is a delightful mess. The inner, finished, homogenous: it comforts us with certainty. The outer level expresses what Mikhail Bakhtin called Carnival, the power of liberating laughter. The inner level is grave, sermonizes, is tragic.

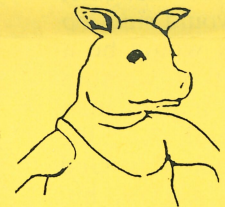
Incongruity between the "inner" and the "outer" is the essence of the MOUNTEBANK, indeed, is the essence of theatre. Harmless incongruity produces laughter. Laughter helps us survive.

Trav S.D.



You can pick up the emergency gazette, free of charge, at Labyrinth bookstore, at Chashama, at the Ontological Theater, at St. Mark's bookstore, at LaMaMa, at KGB/the Kraine, at Tonic/Soft Skull, at the Flea Theater, at Here, amongst other fine locations, some outside of New York City. For these and for archives and for information on subscriptions and/or submissions, please see our website - emergencygazette.com.

## DANGEROUS ASPECTS OR



Cruelty against the elderly and children is not only unwarranted, but is also one-sided and, we can

add, asymmetrical. The weak are on the receiving side; they can neither resist nor escape. Every gesture of violence aimed against them is already excessive. The most corrosive aspect of this kind of violence is precisely this excess, the total breakdown of the behavioral and moral constraints. It is reminiscent of the kind of humor that Artaud recognized in Marx Brothers' films, humor that goes beyond ordinary cruelties of slapstick comedy to reach that "poetic quality" that "would fit the definition of humor if this word had not long since lost its sense of essential liberation, of all reality in the mind" (THEATER AND ITS DOUBLE, 1958:142). And, as Artaud knew very well, this kind of humor does not provoke a benign comic effect, but precisely the opposite: an invasive sense of Danger.

The "dangerous aspect" of humor, writes Artaud, emerges in the exercise of "the poetic spirit" which "always leads toward a kind of boiling anarchy, an essential disintegration of the real by poetry" (1958:144). This is not some elusive demand for poetic freedom and poetic autonomy, and we should not take it lightly.

Humor, or more precisely, black humor affects realms much more fundamental than the rules of conduct observed by common sense! But, we are getting ahead of ourselves.

This is an excerpt from a work on Daniil Kharms by Branislav Jakovljevic