

North

It would be tempting and understandable to quote the writings of Knut Ove Arntzen as an introduction and frame for the work of BAK-Truppen, a name that plays with two meanings – the runners behind a band of soldiers, opposite to the avant truppen, and also a troupe of performers. Many of the ten core members of BAK-Truppen studied under Arntzen at Bergen University's Institute of Theatre Science in the early '80s. His field was European and American avant-garde visual performance – Wilson, Living Theatre, Grotowski – theorised through post-modern and deconstructive strategies.

His writings spell out the principle of non-hierarchical composition, elements existing in a dramaturgy of equivalence where text is certainly not the dominant element. Structure becomes visual and spatial, acting becomes non-acting or acting the self, the space and time of performance become essential informing factors.

Following Arntzen we could say that BAK-Truppen's work is "more visual than textual, lying at the point of intersection between conceptual art, minimalism and multimedia". Their working method is workshop or group theatre, no single director dictating the material or aesthetic, they do not take on characters, but present text and action as though in a demonstration or lecture, as singers or reciters. Their movement material is simple, pedestrian, concerned with energy and visual/spatial composition. A dramaturgy of equivalence, then, where, in different projects, the elements will have different relations to each other, foregrounding the visual here, the textual there. But this is not the same as subordinating one to the other.

Part of the working success of the group is that each person has some kind of specialised skill – composing, lighting, text, dance, computing, electronics – and whilst they have developed an unarticulable group sense of what is "right", what "works" and what is "beautiful" they each have autonomy to produce material and effects and they can instruct each other when appropriate. Composition is collective. Music is carefully thought through. When should it be louder, softer, when melodic, classical, folk or electronic, and how does it help the other elements exist – giving a sense of space, underscoring or helping delivery of a text, providing atmosphere with a visual image and so on. Always there is a rhythmic or structural score that will dictate when changes take place, what material is to be played and so on. Perhaps the most interesting thing about them is how they develop those scores using sound, computers, lighting and other resources.

Since April '93 they have been working on the Peer Gynt series, *Peer, Du Lugst. - Ja* (Peer, you are lying. – Yes) which misquotes the famous first line of Ibsen's play. In the original Peer answers "No", compounding the lie, as he is a notorious "story-teller". Story telling appears as a constant throughout the series, descriptions of past shows nested into subsequent ones.

There have been five productions in the series, each with its own sub-title relating to its specific place and material, in Frankfurt, Bergen, Zurich, Berlin, Frankfurt again and Antwerp, where version five evolved to some extent.

The first Peer, *The Erotic Enlightenment Show*, had a pink painted floor and readings from medical books on how the body functions in orgasm. An interactive computer programme linked to temperature sensors at three points in the room controlled light and sound and at a crucial point the doors were flung open to drive the music to its own climax as the cool air sent the sensors into a dive.

For Bergen in June, they made Peer # 2, *Peer's Meeting With Boygen - The Car Salesman Snow*. They used the entire vast playing space of Bergen International Theatre Garage and filled it with cars. During the day they opened as a car showroom and sold

one Toyota for NC 39,000. The piece played with cop show shooting postures, spread eagles, with atmospheric road movie images, undressings and dressings in subtly lit car interiors. As usual, there were readings and dead pan recitations from the roadsters and and casual, gestural movement sequences lined up against a wall like the St Valentine's Day Massacre.

The Peer series continued with *In 1997 Hong Kong Will Be Incorporated Into China*, at Theater Spektakel in Zurich. The two weeks of setting up that particular version was a kind of holiday. There was so much swimming in the lake that the producers started to worry that there was not going to be any show. But that social element is important to them and their long discussions go on whatever they are doing. Discussion is an important part of their process.

Despite the seeming lack of work, Zurich proved to be an important event: pieces of material and concepts that continued through the rest of the series, and which also introduced to next year's Super Peer shows, were devised or introduced there.

They brought radar equipment with them and used a cannon bought in Zurich. There have been blue contact lenses (symbol of the inability to tell lies, BAK-Truppen love paradox) and explosions in every Peer. In Frankfurt's Peer #1, the explosions were gunshot pyros attached to the body. The explosions now came from the cannon. The main structural device in Hong Kong, was the cueing of the Hong Kong scene – songs, very static movement material, a long story about Peer so far, music, acting out the images in the story. The radar was trained on the lake, when something came into its "eye" and it beeped, the group went into the Hong Kong scene. When it was finished, they returned to the exact point in the show. Part of the long story was the beer joke. Trine Falch Johannessen, who told the story – that frequently seems to be her role – had her fingers in a pint of beer. Hidden tubes running to her fingertips were being sucked at the other end and the beer "disappeared into her fingers".

When they played Berlin in September with Peer # 4, *Peer is Sent on A Mission For The Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Trine offered the audience the chance to see the Hong Kong scene, minus the radar, from Zurich and they accepted. As the story was told the other performers showed actions from the previous version behind her. "Behind", here, is not accidental. They are intensely aware of the dimensions of the space, of frontality, perspective, focus and depth of field. A problem in Berlin involved the inclusion of a traditionally trained actress from "a generation of acting" where it was the convention to stare deep into your co-performers eyes on delivering a line in eager anticipation of a response. That is not the way with BAK-Truppen. They continued to deliver their lines in off-hand, down-beat, recitative and direct address modes. Having to work so fast on things with only two weeks to prepare any of these versions, there was less time than usual for discussion, for sharing premises. It proved difficult for their guest, but proved to them that a deep, shared understanding has evolved over the last seven years.

It was in Berlin that they found the right way to use a tape they had found behind some bushes whilst in Palermo, they call it the Zibilina Tape. It is contemporary music for brass and voice, but the magnetic tape was old and in bad condition. Jorgen Knudsen took it home, cleaned it up, edited it and rerecorded it. It was haunting, sad, spacious. In Berlin during a sweaty scene where bodies were slapping the floor with their backs, the tape was panned to other, nearby rooms and the mix of sound and action seemed perfect to everyone.

Their return to Theatre Am Turm, Frankfurt's, Probephone space was the first of the shows sub-titled *The Opening of the Institute of Happiness Research*. The show was opened in the foyer, the company mingling with the audience, winking and licking their lips at them.

At Antwerp the piece developed considerably. A separate room filled with fireworks provided a sustained suppressed explosion, Knudsen is particularly interested in qualities of suppressed sound. The technician was almost killed when the whole 700 unexpectedly went up at once. Eventually a very shaken technician walked out of the adjoining room and the show went on.

During the work period, Worm Winther had a dream about badminton. They put it into the show with miked up racquets, and they tried to find a "shrink" to interpret the dream. In the phone book they found an advert for an English speaking hostess to "make you a very nappy client". They hired Nathalie, one of the hostesses, to do a TV promotion on an

arts programme. Her English was dreadful and the piece was pretty much cut. She had performed the beer trick and story which had become a staple of the show by then. In the live performance there were many kinds of treatments of openings: flower arrangements and rearrangements, cutting ribbons, making introductions, moving close to the audience as though to invite someone to dance, whilst other actions went on deep back in the space. The windows had festive lights outside which played across the rainbow spectrum throughout the show. The notion of celebration was consistently twisted. Fireworks, for example, might be part of an opening ceremony or celebration, Bo Krister Wallstrom told me, but they would ordinarily be outside. BAK-Truppen bring them inside and make them a kind of suppressed threat. Suggesting a kind of demolition rather than an opening.

The theatre was cold and Jorgen invited the audience to a heat break, to warm up. Everyone danced, they warmed up, the show went on.

In Antwerp the structural formula was to be based on the changing stock market rates read from the *Financial Times*. As the price of the dollar changed each day, so elements of the show would change each night. But the interactive programme did not have enough parameters and they had to abandon this idea. Instead, Knudsen cut together Beatles songs, the sections with lyrics edited out, leaving long gaps of silence with occasional bursts of entirely instrumental music. This provided a rhythmic structure.

Peer, the character, of course, never appears, the notion of working with the events in the play is a pretext for the development of very personal and site-specific material. Eventually those ideas have their own momentum separate from the play. The idea of "Super Peer" kicks off from the idea that Peer can see everything, introduced in Zurich. The idea of using the *Financial Times* will be more thoroughly worked out and integrated into a computer programme to provide a strong structural cueing system. A sequence where Hans Petter Dahl, who trained as a doctor, spoke through helium in Antwerp, has suggested that maybe the whole of "Super Peer" will be "on helium". Subtitled, *The Famous Bullshit*, "Super Peer" will use sophisticated surveillance equipment. A development of the show will probably see the group on a long Norwegian tour with a rock band version in spaces that allow the audience to dance. With so many skills and interests in the group, any piece could go anywhere and the group dynamic, articulated as an aesthetic or not, seems to ensure the continued dramaturgy of equivalence.

DOSSIER

OSLO

FLUXUS

The Norwegian Fluxus Collection is held at: Henie-Onstad Museum, N-1311, Hovikodden, Oslo, Norway. Phone: + 47 67 54 30 50. Fax: + 47 67 54 32 70. Ken Friedman and Ina Blom are both closely connected with the archive, and can be contacted through the museum. The museum also stages performance work.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Jan Brockmann, Director, Museet for Samtidskunst, Bankplassen 4, Postboks 8191, DEP., N-0034, Oslo. Phone: + 47 22 33 58 20. Fax: + 47 22 33 57 90. Mixed programme

including video installations, painting and sculpture. Hybrid can be bought here.

PRIVATE GALLERIES

Gallery Riis. Espen Ryvarden, Director; Mette Spendrup, Manager. Kr. Augustsgt. 21, N-0164 Oslo, Norway. Phone: + 47 22 11 10 76. Fax: + 47 22 11 57 65. This is an important small gallery showing international painting, sculpture and installation.

Galleri Wang. Kaare Berntsen, Director. Kristian Augusts gate 11, N-0164, Oslo. Phone: + 47 22 11 51 70. Fax: + 47 22 11 59 91. Another modest but important gallery.

UKS

UKS, Unge Kunstneres Samfund (Gallery for Young Artists), Rodhusgt. 19, 0158, Oslo, Norway. Phone: + 47 22 42 66 66. Impressive town centre gallery for young artists. A kind of union. Shows are selected by an artist jury. Hybrid can be bought at the counter, here.

GALLERY F 15

Gallery F 15. Gertrude Sandquist, Director, Postboks 10321, Alby, Jeløy, 1501 Moss, Oslo, Norway. Phone: + 47 69 27 10 33. A very important modern art gallery that houses performance, installation and exhibitions.

Gallery Information Service. KIK Kunstnerenes

Informasjonskontor, Kongensgt 3, Oslo. Phone: + 47 22 33 59 93

VERDENSTEATRET

Although Lisbeth Bodd has taken on, in some sense, the mantle of Bausch, Fabre, Vandekeybus and de Keersmaeker, it would be wrong to suggest that Verdensteatret is simply a copy of those precursors. It makes ironic use of many of the icons of that work, the panicked women talking directly to the audience with gestural movement sequences, chairs piling up and crashing down, microphones, but produces convincingly original hybrids of dance, opera, drama, installation and architecture. In *Thursday 14th October*, she and her collaborator, the visual artist Asle Nilsen take on Norwegian culture and European aesthetics through a vast painting which forms the backdrop and texts from Strindberg and Beckett. Contact: Lisbeth Bodd, Verdensteatret, Marselisgt. 27, N-0551, Oslo, Norway. Phone: + 47 22 42 17 12/22 35 79 49.

PASSAGE NORD

Passage Nord under its director Kjetil Skoien is definitely a performance art company, working from a point of departure in the visual. Movement, texts, music, light come out from the visual concept. Some works are part of installations, art works or exhibitions, whilst other work is made as performance for theatres, galleries, art museums and for outdoor sites. Contact: Kjetil Skoien, Passage Nord, Stensgaten 32 C, 0358, Oslo 3, Norway. Phone: +47 22 69 44 28

BLACK BOX

Part of Teatersentrum this is the premier venue for new live art, performance and dance work in Oslo. Passage Nord are

there with a repeat of their *Evigheten* from 11 - 14 January 94. They co-produce many projects with companies and other venues. In February they present a work for the Winter Olympics, *The Dance of Life* by the Japanese choreographer Min Tanaka. Contact: Kathleen Marchant, Black Box Teater, Stranden 3, 0250, Oslo, Norway. Phone: + 47 22 83 61 71. Fax: + 47 22 83 73 47.

LYSVERKET

Caspar Evensen and Inger Johanne Byhring run Lysverket, a multi-media workshop and techno venue at: Maridalsveien 87, Port C, Bygg 9, 0461, Oslo. Tel: +47 22 71 56 11. Influential programmers of work on the borders of rock, techno and performance. Presently almost the only outfit properly documenting work.

BERGEN

The main performance promoter, Bergen International Theatre, emerged from the Bergen International Theatre Festival, and has brought an impressive list of European performance, dance and theatre companies to its converted warehouse space, Theatre Garage. The director, Sven Age Birkeland, is probably single-handedly responsible for the burgeoning performance scene in Norway, having administered, produced and co-produced BAK-Truppen and Verdensteatret amongst others. They make many international co-productions each year. Now BIT is developing the idea of a family of groups that it encourages, supports, co-produces with other European and Nordic partners and which provides the basis for its performance programme. The groups include: Theater de Radeau (France), Societas Raffaello Sanzio (Italy), Remote Control Productions (Sweden), Ingun Bjornsgaard Prosjekt (Norway). The Theatre Garage is two enormous rooms that are totally flexible.

A current project is designed to encourage new writers. Each new text is given a production with the highest production values possible.

New writing performances can be seen at various venues around Bergen on: 11, 12, 18 December and 15, 16 January. Call + 47 55 23 22 35 for details.

In 1994 BIT are producing a mammoth open-air event to celebrate their tenth anniversary. It will involve rock climbers, musicians and performers working on a pyramidal fish-drying rack 50 mtrs long by 10 wide and 15 high. Sven Age Birkeland, Bergen International Theatre, Strandgt 18, N-5013, Bergen. Phone: +47 55 23 22 35. Fax: + 47 55 23 18 15

TRONDHEIM

Kunstakademiet i Trondheim (Trondheim Art School) is housed in two adjacent warehouse conversions on a town centre quayside. It has the finest media department in the Nordic countries and attracts students from all of them.

"People don't just stop off at Trondheim", Klaus Jung the incumbent rector told me, "so we organise a regular visiting lecturer programme". And the list is impressive: Roddy Bell, Brian Catling, Jan Groth, Nan Hoover, Steve Littman, Bill Woodrow, Breda Beban and Hrvoje Horvatic amongst dozens of others.

Although intermedia was the best known department, the success of the school depends on the dialogue that is systematically opened between departments (painting, theory, sculpture, printmaking and intermedia). Students might enrol for one course but end up having worked across the whole range. It is very much about finding the skills to