

BAK-TRUPPEN**Peer, Du lugst. - Ja.**

Theater Am Turm-Probebühne,

Daimlerstrasse, Frankfurt

10 April, 93.

The model of jazz has always been useful in the field of criticism, the act of criticism itself seen as a kind of improvisation on a theme. The theatre of Bak-Truppen, however, makes us think of a theatre of jazz comparable to the cool jazz of Jan Garbarek which at any moment may slip into primitive wailing. The only live jazz is played by Erik Balke, who ironises his ecstatic solos by playing a child's saxophone.

Bak-Truppen are cool. They sit directly in front of the audience on a long row of black leather and chrome seats, lit in a direct and even light that effects simple illumination, yet they can talk to us in earnest and intense conversation, giving us direct stares and seductive half smiles and eye-lid flutters. Moving into animated speech or dance, dissembling all the while, we feel we are at a seminar or technical demonstration, that if we are here involved with the act of theatre at all, it is the dissection or analysis of the conditions of theatre we are witnessing.

Here is no simple lack of linear narrative, here is a negative space, a space we can only, somehow define negatively, cleared of all traces.

The piece has come together entirely from a measurement of the studio space at Theater am Turm's Probebühne, Daimlerstrasse, a converted factory in one of Frankfurt's light industrial suburbs. The dimensions of the space have given all the parameters of the show, except some notion of letting the computer programme take the responsibility for the show. The sound is linked to the lighting states, and both are controlled by computer. The sound is generated in real time by monitoring the fluctuating temperatures at three points in the laboratory space, setting those readings into a formula which contains certain tonal constants on the computer, and the resulting computation generates the specific tones, intervals, pitches.

Bak-Truppen have, in a very pragmatic and concrete sense, set up a philosophical laboratory through the simple expedient of allowing us to sit for a good ten minutes listening to and watching the sound score, forcing us to watch the monitors and see the sound represented as rising and falling

skyscrapers as time sweeps and scans away, and forcing us to look at this bland open space slowly turning atmospherically theatrical as the sun sinks over the factories and the birds sing on the canal and a cool breeze prepares itself to sweep over us when the doors and windows are finally thrown, pulled and dragged open. The changing temperatures at that point send the sound scape into a soaring ecstasy of its own. So the work includes its own aleatory (improvisatory?) moments, its own reflection on its means, for its means are its meanings also.

As they sit and watch us, turning our constitutive gaze back on ourselves, there is an interaction of triggers on their seat touch pads with computer controlled lighting, an interaction of the fixed and the unfixed, the written, the scored and the improvised. Bak-Truppen perform both this invisible buttock dance on their touch-pads and visible spatial dances. The backward falls and airborne spins are movements in their own continuum not synced with the lighting or sound, indeed, out of sync, the spaces lit for dancing are on a timed sequence that the performers sometimes manage to connect with and at others, not, performing in increasing darkness.

As though informed by pulp gore movies, they self-consciously and coyly self-trigger explosives attached to their bodies: gunshot pyros - stuffing, sawdust comes out. The self-triggered plays along with the triggering/cuing mechanisms: scores of cues and cue scores. And these scores overlaid: lighting, sound, gesture, song, seemingly base material, almost unreadable. And this is what is so striking about Bak-Truppen. They are working with material, the materials of a theatre, in their non-theatre, and the space they have allowed to open in the event keeps those materials separate, stratified, separate building blocks like those sound skyscrapers.

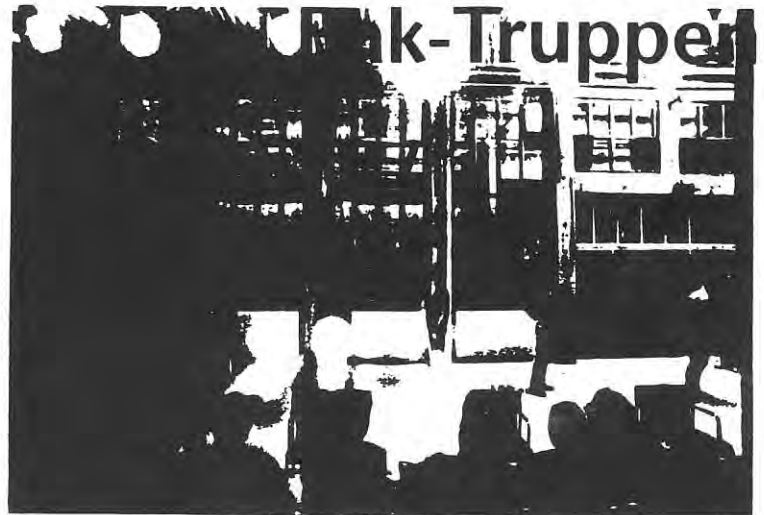
Bak-Truppen have a philosophical interest in truth. Their only costume apart from their own clothes worn in performance, are sets of blue contact

lenses: one set for each performer. The blue-eyed never tell a lie, they say.

The title of this first show in the "Peer Gynt" series takes its name from the famous first lines of that play: "Peer, you are lying", says Peer's mother. "No", replies Peer, confirming the lie. Bak-Truppen's title, with its "Yes" instead of "No", opens out one of the paradoxes of theatre. The paradox of replying yes to the accusation "you are lying". To respond "yes, I am lying" is to tell a truth. Truth and untruth at once. The state of their performance. And isn't this the truth, the state(ment) of theatrical performance? And this philosophical conundrum is truly unresolvable.

The work comes from a desperation and necessity, having a space and time to fill, a sublime pragmatics of performance, of poesis.

No characters, but performance per-

37

sona crystallise. Clarity, purity, inexplicably poetic (unutterably beautiful) moments are produced in an atmosphere of utter rationality and instinctive necessity which can cut and bite and strike at the solar plexus taking the intellectual breath away. Moments when we seem to grasp the ineffable.

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