

NEW 40
OBSERVATIONS

SQUAT THEATRE

Editors: Eva Buchmüller and Stephan Balint

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Klara Palotai
Jehnifer Stein

\$3.00



Eszter Balint and August Darnell from the film in *Dreamland Burns*. Photo: Roe DiBona.

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SQUAT THEATRE

Editors: Eva Buchmüller and Stephan Balint

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A Short History of Squat Theatre

SQUAT **EXPULSED FROM THE KINDERGARTEN**

Old rhymes in Peter Brook's poor but tidy "empty space." The suffering of archetypes in Grotowski's weathered gym. Secondhand political information, and for the holidays: a few forbidden, though somewhat stale fruits from the West. The Kindergarten Theatre. (Hungary, 1970.)

We could have titled our first original play, the "Skanzen's Killers," "The Kindergarten Killers." Here we started to throw our used toys into a heap, ready to waste them. Nothing feels better than the destruction of old toys. To preserve the reputation of the kindergarten, after some most serious warnings, the baffled nurses and guardians fired the "obscene and misunderstandable" children. Who after the Fall, found themselves in their own lives and theatre.

The place is an apartment on the fifth floor, where we played whatever we wanted to, but the danger played with us. The rules of the theatre were formed and changed by the taste, fantasy and personal relationships of the performers, and by the social and antisocial position of the group itself. Drama was born there from everyday's dramas, and private lives were changed by art. In that place, theatre esthetics was not an illustration of something else, but equal to life; the ignition point or the explosion of a situation, where we, the actor-hosts and spectator-guests lived and gathered in the apartment. Spectators in exchange provided immediate understanding, criticism and support. The personal fate, culture and gestures of the spectators became part of the theatre, just like ours. The result: a very selective and subtle communication system, a sort of symbolism, based on the realities of this "apartment theatre." But the intimate relationships, the never changing faces and the collective resistance against the outer pressure created another decadent game. A different one, but a game just the same. There we were, in the half-lit backroom of the official kindergarten with the sign on the door: "only for members." All the cards had been dealt in the "ghetto." "The kindergarten can't be overcome!" Then we said goodbye and left for America . . .

Stephan Balint
1976



Scene from *Andy Warhol's Last Love* with Stephan Balint, Kathleen Kandell and Eszter Balint. Photo: Roe DiBona.

SQUAT INVENTION AS OBSTACLE

On Andy Warhol's Last Love

A strong obstacle in the creation of our current play was the invention developed for our previous piece. The use of the street through the glass window allowed us to go beyond the performing arts, the show and the illustration, enabling us to integrate successfully the explosion of esthetic limitations into the esthetics of theatre, i.e. to create live events: without which there is no theatre.

In *Pig, Child, Fire* (1976-77)—which we created in Europe and also performed in New York for six months—the storefront window opened the theatrical space onto the street—a non-theatrical space, non-theatrical events. The theatre wears the mask of life and life wears the mask of the theatre, leaving each to interpret the other. The real policemen who put handcuffs on the wrists of the “duelling” actors in the street, the girl who was abducted from in front of the window, all became actors; the passersby and the peeping faces became the chorus of the Greek tragedy.

We hesitated to reuse the concept of a street-storefront theatre space, because repeating an idea means the loss of interest for us and death for theatre. But then again, we did not want to discard it either, because its importance to us is of great significance. We were uncertain how to re-create the closed space (for the first time we invented the use of closed space in our apartment theatre in Budapest) in order to achieve there the same openness as looking through the glass. Alternately being conscious of this and repressing it: this problem intruded into our imaginations.

Stephan Balint
1978



Scene from *Andy Warhol's Last Love* with Stephan Balint and Anna Koos. Photo: Roe DiBona.

SQUAT

MR DEAD AND MRS FREE: RAP SONG

Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck under/upon the christmastree,
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck the fish out of the sea,
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck the honey out of me,
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck your brains in New Jersey,
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck the fuckin' privacy,
fuck for nothing, fuck for fee

We got a super Baby
They say maybe
with a big hole in her heart, young lady
the fight was over the call was close
the night we spoke to Tokyo Rose
the rest is the best, the tune was right
to get Flash Gordon for a flight,
right . . . right . . . right on . . . right
right . . . left . . . turn on . . . left

We left you home but comin' bad
open shop between your legs,
so straight it up, it's comin' soon
a jewelry store on the moon,
We are the best to turn you on
and on, and on, and on, and on . . .
The tree sisters and the company
and Mr Dead and Mrs Free,

Here is the superlady
they say maybe
she got a tiger in her tank, drives crazy,
knock you out
an astronaut
who is the guest star here, the best you know
and makes you believe in the mighty Go-Go
Brooklyn, Berlin, Mexico, New Jersey and Tokyo
the red sail girl from west to east,
the spacy beast,
the only one who gonna make your top ten—the hip jam!
and takes a chance and makes a twist
and makes a mess, the specialist
the superlady everybody knowing
the Sugarcoated in the hot stuff going
not just you and not just me
Mr Dead and Mrs Free

Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck the fuckin' privacy
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck for nothing, fuck for fee,
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck for the chick agency,
Mr Dead and Mrs Free
fuck around the A, B, C.

Got a hole in the head
and the other guy
just takin' a shower
before you cry,
then he calls his friend
for a private walk,
take the body honey—don't talk,
and the lords are back
with a dog in car
and a bleeding guy
that's ready to die,
then a super priest
who can take the heat
takes a knife
and reads the beat
the goddamn super lady rocked the house
the soldiers squeeze the mickey mouse
then the super priest who got the job
to suck the dead man on the spot
to make him high
to love to die . . .

SQUAT MOVING OUT OF THE STOREFRONT

Through the storewindow, we opened the Theatre to the Real, inviting trouble and fun. In this unlimited theatre space, fantasy became real and accident became fiction. We enjoyed and exploited every bit of it.

But the street changed, it didn't look so real anymore.

And our fantasy land became a small storefront on 23rd Street.

It was time to move on.

The theatre became a building, an unacceptable burden, prison and refuge. Our independence became laziness and the friendship a tortuous relationship.

Socially, financially, personally.

It became an unreal place, and it was time to face reality again.

It was the most important period of our lives and to hell with it.

We don't want to use the street as a gimmick, a substitute to lean back on. We want to play everywhere, anywhere and for everybody.

At the moment, when we decided to move, to challenge and compromise the good old institution, the Theatre, we split.

And nothing changed, you just can't beat fantasy.

Stephan Balint

New York, March 1986.



Scene from *Mr Dead and Mrs Free* with Sheryl Sutton and Peter Halasz. Photo: Roe DiBona.

AN EXCHANGE

New Observations: Ciri Johnson, Lucio Pozzi

Squat Theatre: Eszter Balint, Stephan Balint, Eva Buchmuller, Jehnifer Stein, Lillie Stein (age 5)

S. Balint: It happened in Europe, actually.

L.P.: You had a storefront?

S. Balint: We were looking for a theatre space in Holland. They offered us a building and a theatre. But we hated that theatre space. The building had a beautiful storefront on the street. So we started doing theatre there. When we came to New York, we looked for something similar.

L.P.: Did you also do things in the street?

Buchmuller: Yes, we had a man walking, his arm in flames, with a big dog, for instance.

S. Balint: Cars pulling up, people getting out and walking. And the audience would be sitting inside and would look at the stage in the storefront, and as a background there was the street.

L.P.: But were these things announced like any other theatre, or did you just do things in the street without people being warned of what was going on?

S. Balint: No, they weren't announced.

Buchmuller: The storefront was a situation where fiction and reality could mix because there was a fiction on stage and there was a real life behind as background, and sometimes the real life intervened. I mean, people opened the door and came into the theatre and they were just gazing and standing between the two characters on the stage and that was a common unexpected addition to the fiction.

L.P.: And in the apartment in Hungary? Were you tolerated by the authorities?

S. Balint: It wasn't a big thing. The audience sometimes was just invited. Sometimes they paid to see.

Buchmuller: In Hungary we did theatre just for fun, just to make theatre. Most of the time we did not take money.

L.P.: How fictional do you feel when you are outside the theatre, and how real do you feel when you are inside it? Do you feel you are acting, when in real life?

E. Balint: Never. I really feel that in real life I'm living reality and in theatre I don't feel I'm living reality at all, and I don't try to—I'm creating fiction using elements of reality to add to it.

L.P.: And you, Jehnifer?

J. Stein: I feel very real in both places.

E. Balint: When Stephan writes about the ambiguity between fiction and reality, that's not an accident. It's a very conscious thing.

S. Balint: Well, it's hard to approach this thing from the side of feeling. It doesn't really help. Anne Bancroft or Elizabeth Taylor, anybody great or not so great who's doing theatre or film, they feel they live a kind of

real life, in the dressing room or on stage. At the same time, they go around in real life playing so many kinds of games that they almost find themselves acting in real life too. So this has nothing to do with "feeling."

What we, I think, try to do is not to get a limitation on what we call art. We don't give a strict limitation: "this from here to here is fiction and artistic, and from here to here is nature and real." We don't make this distinction. On stage we deal both with the real things we have gone through and with the fantasy we all have. We work at trying to present something in the most forceful and powerful and fun way we can. To present something to satisfy or dissatisfy the audience. And when you make this fantasy world powerful enough so that it looks and feels really real from the audience point of view, and when you can present something that happened to everybody a week ago, in a way that it feels really interesting and exciting like a good fairy-tale or a good fiction, then it's good.

L.P.: Many people at this moment are thinking that the possibilities of fiction are finished.

S. Balint: I think just the opposite.

L.P.: There is a fatalistic view that the world is dominated by the media which hyper-realizes things.

J. Stein: True. But it doesn't hyper-realize everything; it only hyper-realizes a certain strange part of our society that a lot of people are not interested in.

Johnson: I have a question in regard to collaboration. In an article on Squat by Gautam Dasgupta,¹ he brought up the fact that in Hungary it was better to remain nameless, and he mentioned the secretive nature of the "apartment theatre" which you had there. I wonder how this has affected the mechanics of your collaboration. In former pieces I didn't see in the program credits, or in the pieces themselves, the clarity of difference regarding who was fulfilling what role, which I did begin to see in *Dreamland Burns*. Were you once operating more in flow, switching roles flexibly?

S. Balint: We were almost like monks. We started in the late '60s, when many felt impatient with institutions in the arts, so we didn't really find it important to push the label, the name, the career. Yet it is not true that everybody is equal in all their talents, in all their positions and desires: different people have very different talents. Everybody pretty much did different things according to her or his talent.

The whole procedure is through conversation, giving and getting ideas, day by day.

C.J.: You live together and constantly call one another?

Buchmuller: We have regular meetings. But when we came from Hungary it was more than just being together. We were a group of alien people in an alien environment. Many of us did not speak English; all we knew was that we wanted to make theatre, so we were relying on each other with the understanding that each of us wanted the same. We agreed to share responsibilities according to every person's capability. For instance, there was one person who knew the best English, so we just trusted her to do the best she could with that.

C.J.: At one point you began to join forces with people like Jehnifer, who did not come here to make theatre.

J. Stein: I actually am from New York, and I had no involvement with theatre. They just asked me to be in the show.

L.P.: You are a family, like the people in the *commedia dell'arte* were.

S. Balint: More like vaudeville

L.P.: When Jehnifer and Eszter sit at the table in *Dreamland Burns*, was there a director telling them how to do it?

J. Stein: We talked about the "Free Conversation Scene" for a long time: what was it, how it could be done.

E. Balint: We experimented, improvising the conversation, forming it in our own words. But it could not really be so: in real conversation there are so many things that don't interest the audience. It had to be fresh and alive and entertaining to the audience and yet it had to be spontaneous.

S. Balint: It wasn't written before. They invented it, at times through a depressing and tormenting procedure. Somehow the Free Conversation eventually became fixed.

J. Stein: During the European tour, when the play wasn't completed yet, we were still experimenting with it, while performing it. Sometimes it was great, sometimes it didn't work.

Buchmuller: Theatre can give a chance to many sorts of creative people: music, painting, thinking, film, whatever.

C.J.: It's a collaboration. But is it more so in your case?

E. Balint: Theatre is a few valuable people that can draw the best from each other.

S. Balint: Even in the most romantic times, when the name was everything, if you made an opera, it was never one person who did the whole thing. There's no way this can happen. The theatre is not so much one thing. It's more like a centerstage or battlefield of many ideas from different arts and artforms.

Buchmuller: Also theatre is bound very much to the present. Plays get old much faster than paintings or music.

L.P.: You didn't answer the question about there being a director.

Buchmuller: For certain aspects there is one. For in-

stance for the film included in *Dreamland Burns* there had to be one, and Stephan wrote and directed it as he thought it should be. In the theatre everybody can direct everyone else, though in this case he did most of it.

L.P.: Lillie, do you talk about acting in this theatre with your friends?

J. Stein: Did you tell Alexander?

L. Stein: Yes.

L.P.: How do they act in school?

J. Stein: They act out stories, but instead of having one person for each role, they have five kids for each role. Once, in Europe, Lillie fell asleep inside the carpet she is rolled in when entering the stage, and woke up just in time for her lines. The following day she asked whether we could place an alarm clock in the carpet with her.

C.J.: Where did the idea of the inanimate actors come from?

Buchmuller: From a show at the Mormon Center.

C.J.: And the furniture falling all over from above?

S. Balint: From nowhere . . . just an idea.

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1. Dasgupta, Gautam. "Squat: Nature Theatre of New York," *Performing Arts Journal*, No. 19 (Volume VII/Number 1), 1983.

SQUAT

DREAMLAND BURNS



Photo: Paula Court

Part I: MOVIE

Part II: LIVE PERFORMANCE

Some of the characters from the movie appear on stage in the live performance either in person, or presented as statues animated by super-8 projections superimposed on their faces.

Live Performers:

Alexandra—*young woman in her twenties*

Jehnifer—*Alexandra's friend*

Cabby—*Taxi driver, palmreader, etc.*

Movers—*Two movers, gangsters, etc.*

Woman in dark—*Other worldly . . .*

A kid (Lillie)

Bartender

A shadow

Statues:

Ray—*Alexandra's lover*

The Bum

Two young girls

I. MOVIE

The story of a day in Alexandra's life. She is moving into her first apartment, then breaks up with her lover, Ray. On her lonely journey through the city, she meets the Cabby, who reads her palm, and sings in the rain with a Bum. At the end of the day, dead tired by loneliness and the unexpected, Alexandra falls asleep, smoking a cigarette . . .

Transition from film to live stage: Closeup of Alexandra, closing her eyes,—behind the movie screen real flames shoot up,—the movie screen rolls up revealing the stage; with fire, with Ray (statue) standing in front of a tropical landscape (painted mylar), and the shadow of Alexandra, dressing herself.

II. LIVE PERFORMANCE

RAY:

I'm a killer, baby.
Wake up,
I'm a professional killer.

I love you,
You will be my white shadow.

Pack your stuff,
We are leaving tonight.

We're fun baby,
You gonna work with me.

Take the first plane to Mexico City
then fly to Belize,

I'm waiting for you in White Shadow,
an Indian place in the jungle,

Yes, the landlord is living in the mountains
hunting jaguars with his two grown up daughters.

We meet in the house,
You take a long walk with the women,
take care of the snakes!

I kill the man, and put the house on fire,
You'll see the flames, miles away.

You'll be running back
and we'll finish the girls if we have to,

A boat is waiting for us at the sea.

You sing my song;
I can only love you,
If you kill for me.

This is my last job,
And I'll take you places you never dreamed of.

Wake up singing,
you got a real nice voice,

I'm a songwriter baby,
I'll be your agent.

We are good,
I can make you a star,

If you are not successful,
better to be dead, or somebody else.

Wake up,
throw your heart to the sharks
before they get you.

We're fun, baby,
We are the show,

The star and his white shadow.

Scene 1:

(As the music starts—Das Rheingold overture—a red painted curtain backdrop slowly lowers, then is lit. Alexandra and Jehnifer enter and sit down as a chandelier descends over the table at which they are seated. First they are still, then simultaneously with the progression of the music they become more and more animated in their conversation which the audience can't hear. At the moment the singing starts the light of the chandelier becomes bright, lighting the table, and the two women break out into exaggerated, almost operatic, but believable gesturing. As the music fades out their voices become audible through radio-microphones.)

ALEXANDRA:

. . . And as I'm sitting in the bathroom of Macy's I hear these two old ladies talk about God and religion.

(They engage in a vivid natural conversation which shifts from a friendly to a private heated argument.)

JEHNIFER:

. . . I know you are embarrassed by me every time . . .

ALEXANDRA:

You know that's not true but you change your personality and turn into this shy little girl.

JEHNIFER:

That's a lie!

(Tense silence, then the Cabby—who we know from the movie—enters.)

CABBY:

Good evening.

ALEXANDRA:

(Shocked.) Hi.

CABBY:

(To Jehnifer.) I'm a friend of Alexandra.

ALEXANDRA:

Sort of . . . I guess. How did you find me?

CABBY:

It wasn't too hard. You left your door open. By the way I brought the reading I promised. *(Gives paper to Alexandra.)*

ALEXANDRA:

I owe you some money for that. Twenty five? Just a minute, I'll get that. *(She goes out.)*

JEHNIFER:

Where are you from?

CABBY:

What?

JEHNIFER:

Who are you?

CABBY:

Never mind. *(Sits down.)* Let me tell you your name. Give me your hand. No touch, just feel the heat. *(Pause.)* Jehnifer??

JEHNIFER:

(Surprised, laughing.) How did you do that????

CABBY:

You did it. You're radiating. Let me go further. You have been married, you have a nice little daughter. Here I feel some pain, it's about your marriage. You feel like you sold a little piece of your soul to the devil. *(Jehnifer reacts with amazement.)* You divorced, you divorced your evil . . . *(Alexandra enters, interrupting.)*

ALEXANDRA:

Jehnifer, do you have five dollars you could lend me? *(Giving Cabby the money.)* Thank you.

(Alexandra looks at reading, then at the Cabby, expecting him to leave.)

CABBY:

(Settling down, obviously planning to stay.) You don't have to read it now.

JEHNIFER:

I'm leaving . . .

ALEXANDRA:

(Anxiously.) No, please don't leave me alone now . . .

CABBY:

Please stay with us, you are very beautiful.

JEHNIFER:

(Sits back down.) Sure . . . it sounds like fun.

ALEXANDRA:

(To Cabby.) Oh . . . you want to make business with her too.

JEHNIFER:

Don't be jealous.

CABBY:

She is not jealous. She is sad. *(Turns to Alexandra.)* You built this for two, then your boyfriend betrayed you, he walked out on you.

JEHNIFER:

Oh god, don't scare me.

CABBY:

I know, it's frightening . . . to start a whole new life. But you are friends, you are beautiful, so what? . . . I want you to be in my movie.

ALEXANDRA:

What???

JEHNIFER:

What?????

CABBY:

It is in my head. I am going to write it down. I sell my cab, stop the palmreading business. I have a producer friend who promised me the money.

(Alexandra and Jehnifer are reacting with words, comments, gestures, often not believing the Cabby.)

CABBY:

He is an old man who had a young and pretty wife. Once I did palmreading for her but I didn't want to tell her what I saw. Last night I picked up my producer friend at a restaurant and he told me that his wife is in the hospital dying. She was raped by three men and then she committed suicide.

JEHNIFER:

That's horrible.

ALEXANDRA:

Jesus . . .

CABBY:

She was young, beautiful, sensitive . . .

JEHNIFER:

Like me, right?

CABBY:

Don't say that, bad luck . . . Last night we were driving, and he told us this, and there was another car in front of us. The producer recognized the men in the car, who raped his wife. We followed them, but they got suspicious and they started to go really fast. I gave them a good chase, but they turned toward the river from the west-side drive and we almost fell into the river. But the other car just hit a light pole and exploded . . .

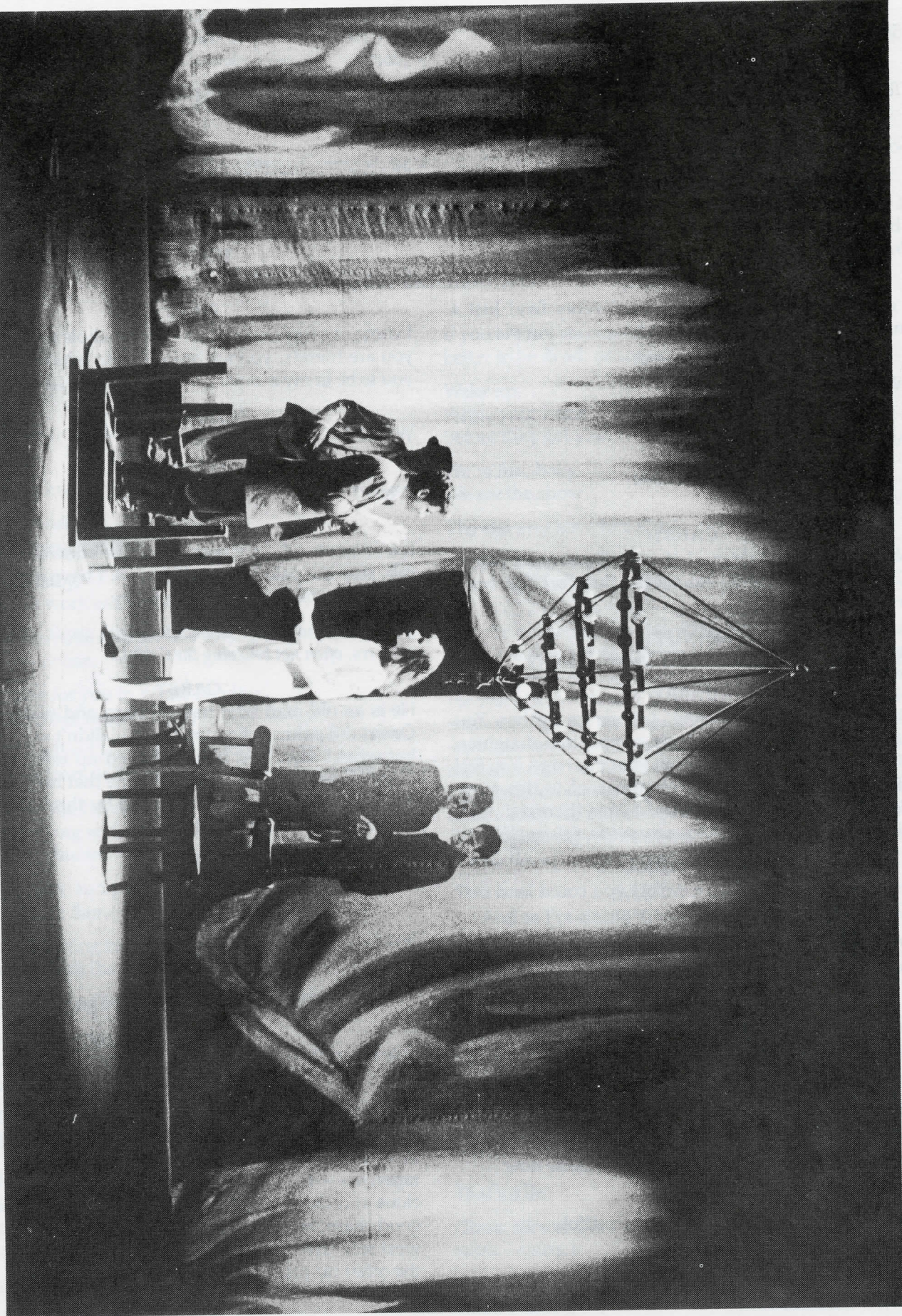


Photo: Korkun Tegmen

ALEXANDRA:

(Interrupting.) Tell me, is this true?

CABBY:

I don't know if it's true or not, it just happened. . . . The car burned down pretty fast and two of the guys were trapped inside . . . and died . . . But the third one somehow managed to get out . . . and he started to run with fire all over on him . . . And the producer wanted to go after him to kill him, or save him . . . he didn't know. I had to stop him and I said: "Man wake up, let him go. That's his damned fate . . ."

JEHNIFER:

Well that was smart . . .

CABBY:

(To Jehnifer.) Get out of here. I don't need you for this.

ALEXANDRA:

What?! Are you telling her to get out? *(Very angry, yelling.)* You get the hell out right now!!!

CABBY:

I lost my temper . . . You see, the movie is really on. And I want both of you to be in it. I got the idea how to start my movie. With me putting my car on fire . . . and the music would come up . . . *(soft fade-in of Rheingold overture)* . . . and then the title, and I'm just running and running . . . like leaving everything behind, my old life, the life of crime. I would be just running on the street, and then cut!

(Music out. Through all this and the following, Alexandra and Jehnifer are making comments and reacting, alternating between ridiculing him, showing great curiosity, and occasionally getting bored.)

CABBY:

(Continuing.) We are in a department store . . . and we see two women, beautiful, well dressed . . .

ALEXANDRA:

That would be us?

CABBY:

. . . right. They would be behaving a little strange . . . they are stealing things there . . . And they would come out on the street, trying to act relaxed, but they notice that a man is following them. They start to walk faster, but the man would catch up with them . . . he would even grab your arm *(he forcefully grabs Jehnifer. Both she and Alexandra look very nervous.)* He would whisper: "I saw everything . . . come with me and don't make a fuss." *(Holding on to Jehnifer's arm.)*

ALEXANDRA:

(Scared.) Hey!

JEHNIFER:

(Scared, upset.) Let go of me, you're crazy!

CABBY:

Shhhh! Relax. And the man would lift up your long dress . . . *(He pulls up Jehnifer's skirt and pulls out a long silk scarf from under it.)* . . . and there are the things you stole.

JEHNIFER:

(Amazed.) Oh my god . . . It's beautiful . . .

ALEXANDRA:

I can't believe it . . . let me see.

CABBY:

And the man is really nice to you . . . he is not a security guard, he is a rich Spanish man from the Caribbean, and he would invite you to his private island . . . and cut. *(Spanish guitar music, and ambience of crowded restaurant and the sea.)* We are on the island in a restaurant . . . there is the sea, palmtrees and you are with your Spanish man who is the lover of both of you . . . *(Jehnifer and Alexandra exchange warning glances.)* You are very happy and careless . . . there is a giant red sun on the blue sky above you, and your Spanish man, he would be in a state of quiet ecstasy, and he would be staring at the sky . . . and he would say something like: "Look. God must be blue!" *(Jehnifer and Alexandra laugh.)* *(Turning to Alexandra.)* That's too much . . . you would say to the Spanish man: "Listen Signor, my God is partly cloudy and is getting stormy, so you better take your raincoat and get the fuck out of here." *(Sound of wind storm.)*

JEHNIFER:

I'm leaving.

CABBY:

And your Spanish man who is hurt, would leave in a hurry with Jehnifer . . . *(Turning to Jehnifer who gets up.)* Nice to meet you. And the sky would turn gray, and there would be running clouds . . .

(Alexandra walks Jehnifer to the door, trying to convince her to stay. They watch the Cabby from the door, who is continuing his animated story-telling. They kiss goodnight and Alexandra returns to her chair, meanwhile the soundtrack of the storm is getting louder.)

CABBY:

. . . And everybody in the restaurant would leave . . . and you would stay there alone waiting for the hurricane . . . but you notice that there is one man sitting there, watching you. It would be me . . .

ALEXANDRA:

(Interrupts.) Wait I missed it, how did you get there?

CABBY:

No details, please . . . who cares? I'm the man, it's me, who burned my car in the beginning, who was running on the streets, and I came here for this moment, to watch you, when the first tremendous stroke of the

wind would turn over the table!

As he is saying this, the Cabby picks up the table and throws it over. At this moment the sound of the storm, which came to a climax, suddenly stops.)

ALEXANDRA:

(Terrified.) Hey, what are you doing?

CABBY:

(After a tense pause.) You feel happy and free now . . . *(Alexandra starts shaking her head, like she has had enough of this.)* . . . You feel your life has just started . . . But you need me, you will never return without my help . . .

ALEXANDRA:

Listen, this doesn't make any sense. I think you are an immigrant who doesn't fit, and you're trying to get high off me . . .

CABBY:

I know who I am . . .

ALEXANDRA:

Goodnight.

CABBY:

I don't understand. I just want to finish what I have started.

ALEXANDRA:

(Angry.) I don't want to hear this movie or whatever. I have had enough.

CABBY:

. . . The reading . . .

ALEXANDRA:

(Getting up, almost screaming.) I don't care. Just go!!! You ran out of tricks. *(Sits back down.)*

CABBY:

. . . Alright. Just one more thing, don't leave your door open, come close it behind me.

(Cabby walks to door. Alexandra tries to get up but she seems incapable. She is paralyzed in her chair. Cabby returns to her, as she keeps trying.)

CABBY:

What's wrong? You can't get up? C'mon, it's nonsense. Try harder. *(She can't.)* You see . . . this is an old trick. A click here, a click there . . . that's the glue. And now I am going to finish what I have started. First, I want to show you something.

(At that moment the chandelier falls on the ground with a loud crash and with a small electrical explosion all the lights go out. Storm sound fades in again. Alexandra lights a match in the dark.)

CABBY:

What are you doing? You lit your cigarette on the filter side. Listen to me . . . *(They get up and start walking out in the dark.)* I see the face of a man in a bloody mess . . . I see two holes where the eyes should be . . . But it's not all bad, not at all . . . Because the bloody face of the man is changing . . . Now it's turning into the face of a beautiful woman . . . with her lips open. Not bad at all . . . *(They are gone.)*

Scene 2:

Storm music . . . and things start to fall from the ceiling; furniture, objects, silverware, plants, etc. . . . scattered around all over the stage . . .

Scene 3:

(Storm dies down.)

YOUNG GIRL (statue):

"Ouch,
that was close,
It's scary,
I just can't figure out what's going on,
You see the guy in the back? . . .
He is so slick, I can't believe it,
And got a great body, too,
Not that I care, *(laughing)*
Anyway, he looks like a real pain in the ass,
. . . Better watch out!!!!"

BUM (statue):

"The fun is over girls,
come next time, the show is over,
two millions dollars chicken,
what are you waiting for?"

YOUNG GIRL:

"But I want to find out the rest, dummy. . .
He's starting to act strange again . . .
(Laughing.)

RAY:

(Starts to sing the "Serenade" from Don Giovanni.)

Scene 4:

*At the backdrop entrance, in the dark, a mover appears, lighting a cigarette, looking inside *(onstage)* and disappears behind the backdrop . . . loud whistle . . . then music . . . and the two movers are coming on stage, carrying a carpet and placing it on front stage. They hang around, checking out the stage, the scattered objects, the statues, then walk up to Ray *(the statue)*. They start to pick on him, provoking him, then punching him in the face with a beer bottle. Ray stops singing. They stab him with a knife. They carry him front stage and cut him up with an electric tool. They open his back, searching inside, take out a rope, a piece of lingerie, a red toy fish, a gun, money and jewelry. They split the loot and leave the stage carrying Ray's body with them . . .*

Scene 5:

From the rolled up carpet, left on stage by the Movers, a little girl four or five years old, climbs out, searching the stage for candy and listening to the Bum, who starts to speak:



Photo: Korkun Tegmen

BUM:

And I told my wife, sugar, worship your man,
you throw out the garbage but I find gifts in it for you, honey.
God hates me, he is jealous, of course,
but I'm free and happy if she is looking after me.
I don't have a wife, sugar,
you are lovely but I'm lonely.
I'm for real.
Drop your smile on your man, honey,
you look like my sister, I'm serious!
She came home the other night screaming:
"My man put his hands inside me, brother!"
You lost your privacy, baby,
join the soul sisters and get a cold space for black widows,
or stay in the neighborhood, honey.
Forget it, listen, I know,
it's hard to find a man pretty and smart like me.
Man fucks man to suck his fantasy (you know);
the uptown man is too busy licking the sky,
the downtown man is too quiet.
Don't get nervous, you got a live body, babe,
love your man, and be glamorous!
You got great legs, but you lost your shoe for a moment.
And he is the only one who cares;
kiss your man, before he goes down the drain
and takes the neighborhood, honey.
The fun is over girls, come next time, the show is over.
Two million dollar chicken,
what are you waiting for?
We are close to perfection, that's it!
Last year was the end of the world
and we are not doing it anymore,
we undo it.
Creation needs recreation.
Forget the smoke and sleep with the arsonist,
he is hot and fresh and dirty.
Worship your man, sugar, or pick another one!

I'll be late for dinner tonight, honey.

*When the Bum gets nasty, the little girl makes a face at him,
and runs off stage.*

*While the Bum is talking, bar music starts and two red neon
lights descend in front of the backdrop curtain . . .*

Scene 6:

*The music and noises of a bar are taken from the movie's bar
scene. There is red light behind the backdrop curtain, spilling
out on stage through the entrance hole. People, actually all the
characters from the play, reappear "in the bar" (which is be-
hind the backdrop), crossing the lit opening. The Cabby leaves
the bar, walks on stage angrily shouting, cursing at somebody
inside the bar. Alexandra leaves the Bar just in the moment
when the Bartender closes the shutter.*

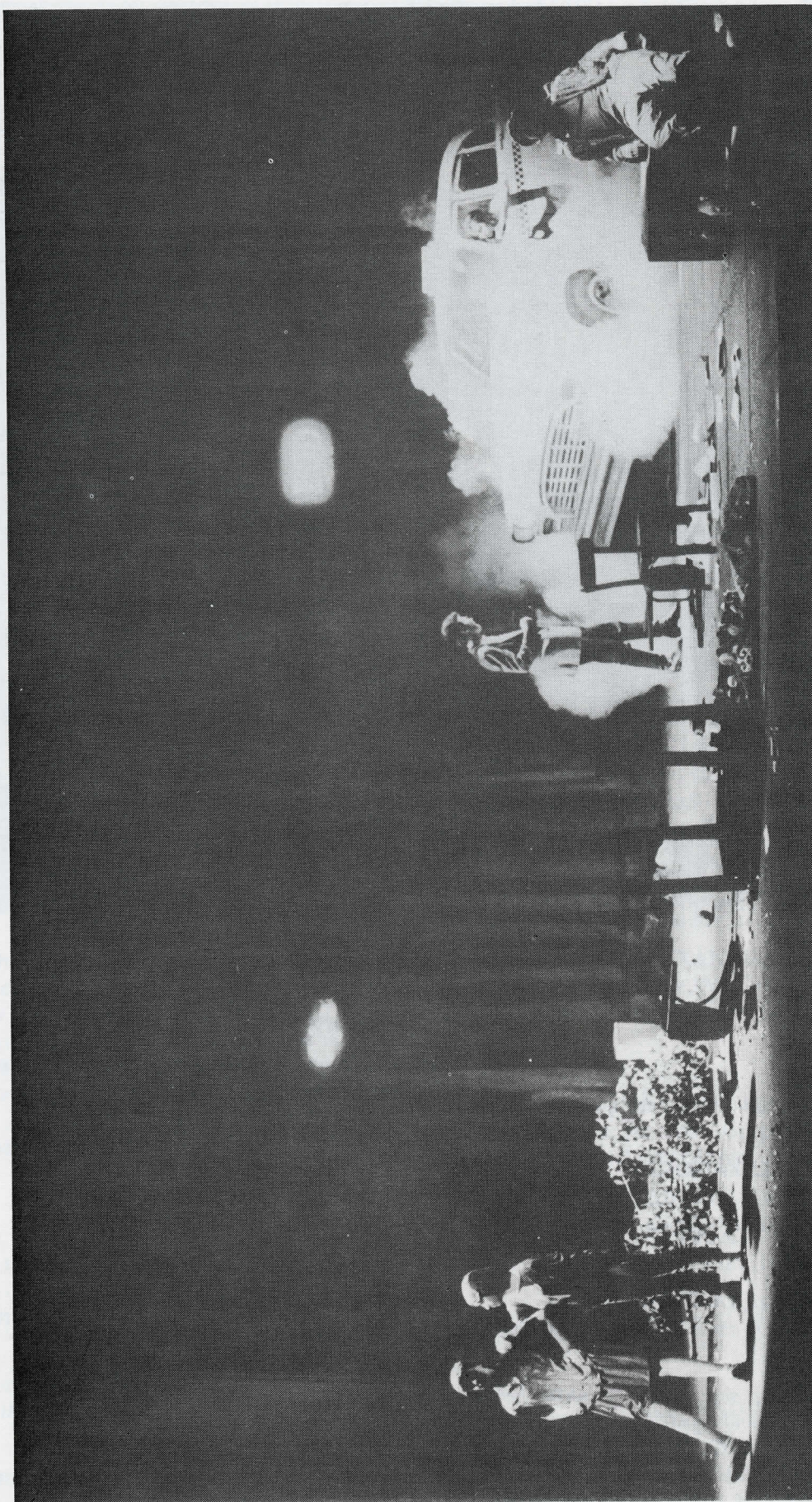


Photo: Korkun Tegmen



Photo: Paula Court

(Alexandra enters stage from bar, a bit unbalanced, drunk. With exaggerated gesturing.)

ALEXANDRA:

Taxi!!! Taxi!!!!

CABBY:

(Almost simultaneously.) Taxi!

ALEXANDRA:

(She looks at him, takes off her shoe and swings at him.) You can't do that!

(Before she can throw her shoe, the cabby catches her wrist forcefully, but not rudely and is watching the taxi a bit hypnotizingly, which pops up. Alexandra at first doesn't notice this and makes a face at the cabby, then she turns and sees the cab which is already standing.)

I'm sorry.

(She kisses the cheeks of the cabby while dropping her shoe on the floor.)

I didn't really want to hurt you.

CABBY:

Good.

ALEXANDRA:

You know, you are lucky... we're going to the airport... C'mon... my man is waiting for me... I fly to him! *(She jumps up and demonstrates flying, like a bird, then stops.)*

CABBY:

Oh. I'm off duty.

ALEXANDRA:

(She is almost whispering.) Listen, I tell you something. I'm a little drunk. *(Laughing.)*

CABBY:

I didn't notice.

ALEXANDRA:

I know. Nobody can tell when I'm drunk. Let's go. I'm late already.

(He is taking polaroid pictures of her as she is walking unbalanced between him and the cab, always forgetting what she wanted to say, sometimes posing for the pictures.)

ALEXANDRA:

I like your car... it's so yellow... it's beautiful. That's my color, actually. *(She turns serious.)* But you know, it's good to change your color sometimes.

CABBY:

Maybe blue?!

ALEXANDRA:

(Posing with the car.) You know what? Let's have another drink here. *(She stops at the bar entrance.)* I think it's closed... I know the girl inside, you know... *(Imitating Sandy.)* "Man makes them happy, 'cause man makes them toys"... C'mon man, my friend can't sleep without me, he is addicted to me and if you don't move your ass he is going to kill you...

CABBY:

Who?

ALEXANDRA:

You... and me... and my father and my mother and my boss... and Jehnifer. *(She pauses, contemplating the idea.)* No, maybe not Jehnifer!... What do you think?

CABBY:

What can I say? The transmission is broken.

ALEXANDRA:

You know what? I tell you a secret, my innermost secret, if you stop doing this shit and move the car. You think you are the only one who can drive??? I love to drive. Let's go, I'll drive you anywhere you want to. *(She gets into the front seat. She thrusts her head out of the window.)* I'm so happy, it's not raining today and we are on the way... Remember, I'm drunk... but I can park you in the smallest, tiniest space in the world. *(Showing it.)* Please...

CABBY:

The smallest, tiniest space in the world... Sounds great! Let's do that.

(While talking, he brings her the shoe, giving it to her through the window. Alexandra sticks her feet out, through the window. The cabby puts it on. He lies down under the car, smoke starts to come out of it, and he takes a last photo of Alex's feet, sticking out of the window.)

ALEXANDRA:

... let's go, friend! Don't make me sick in the happiest moment of my life. *(She is singing.)*

CABBY:

(He gets under the car, whistling. Smoke comes out as Alexandra starts the car, and it blows up. Lights fade out.)

Last Scene:

Street, with street noise and a Manhattan skyline at night. The Bum is talking.

BUM:

Hi, sugar. How you doin'?

ALEXANDRA:

Fine. How about you?

BUM:

I'm okay. So you just moved in. That's great.

ALEXANDRA:

Yeah, it's pretty good. Would you like a cigarette?

BUM:

Thanks honey, I don't smoke. If you had some juice though, I'm pretty thirsty.

ALEXANDRA:

No, sorry. I don't have any juice on me right now.

BUM:

That's okay. So what's the matter? You don't like the place?

ALEXANDRA:

No, the place is nice. But you know I have a ghost. I'm serious, every single night he makes such a mess. I can't even find my face in the morning.

BUM:

No kidding. I know the guy. He shook down the whole city last night. There was fire all over.

ALEXANDRA:

(Smiling.) Shut up! *(Pause.)* You know what's funny... I always wanted to have my own place and now I sort of hate to be alone.

BUM:

I'm looking for a place myself. Listen, can I sleep over? *(Laughs.)* Serious. Just for a couple of days, till I find something. What do you think?

ALEXANDRA:

(Laughs.) Yeah, sure, and take all my expensive jewelry, right?

BUM:

(Laughs.) Me? Not from you baby, not from you... *(Pause.)* I know. I know how you feel sugar, you lost your man.

ALEXANDRA:

I don't want to talk about that.

BUM:

Yes, crazy stuff.

ALEXANDRA:

No. The usual stuff.

BUM:

Yeah, sure it is. But you know, the way they did it, really crazy. It's weird.

ALEXANDRA:

Please! (*Angry.*) I don't want to hear it. Shut up!

BUM:

You know, sugar. Anyway, I gotta go. Take care honey.

ALEXANDRA:

You're not going anywhere. (*Pause.*) I loved him.

BUM:

The man didn't go fishing. They cut him up real bad with some electric tool. Stupid business.

(*Alexandra storms out, keeping her ears covered with her hands.*)

BUM:

Yes. He is dead.

ALEXANDRA:

(*Enters, carrying three boxes of orange juice. After a long pause.*) You know I can live without love pretty long. I've practiced it, believe me. But there are only assholes, everywhere you go. And when you find somebody who is fun, he is bloody crazy or he dies. I'm scared to go to the movies, to get involved . . . Once I was with this guy when I was really young, and he was really beautiful and talented and we had all the fun in the world . . . and then he started to get paranoid of me and he started to burn everything I touched. The books, the furniture, the bed . . . especially the bed. Then when he started to burn himself where I'd touched him I just called the ambulance and split . . . Maybe I should go away.

BUM:

I know what you mean. Europe is nice.

ALEXANDRA:

(*Smiles.*) Actually, I like Italy. Maybe I could stay there for a while. Though the pizza is pretty awful.

BUM:

Yes. I was in Italy. I stayed there for two years. It is nice.

ALEXANDRA:

What, you were in Italy???

Yes. I played music. I was in a band, it was great.

ALEXANDRA:

I didn't know you played music. That's great. What instrument?

BUM:

Drums. I'm a drummer. I played with some pretty big people, sugar. I want to start again, I just need a drum set.

ALEXANDRA:

You should. What big people did you play with?

BUM:

Me? With Jimi Hendrix, honey.

ALEXANDRA:

Get out of here, I don't believe it.

BUM:

Sure, I'm pretty old you know.

ALEXANDRA:

That's incredible. You're amazing. (*Laughing.*) I love you.

BUM:

I know how you feel.

ALEXANDRA:

That's so great. He's one of my favorites, his music is so beautiful.

BUM:

Yes, that's right. I know.

ALEXANDRA:

You're crazy man. I'm jealous, that's like the best thing in the world. Just to make beautiful music and forget the shit.

BUM:

I know what you mean, forget the shit.

ALEXANDRA:

Music is my favorite thing, but there is this piece that I'm in love with now. It's the music to a TV commercial, Petland or Petworld. There are fish in a tank and the music goes . . . pa, pa (*Sings.*) It's so great, you've got to hear it.

BUM:

That's real good. Listen, can you get me a couple of dollars? I need some money. I want to buy something for my girlfriend, she's sick. Some guys beat her up when she refused them. She walked home late last night from babysitting and they thought she was a prostitute.

ALEXANDRA:

I don't have any money on me. Shit, that's horrible. How is she?

BUM:

She'll be all right. She's a nice girl. She's okay.

ALEXANDRA:

I used to babysit too when I was young. I get along with kids real well. But you know I want to have my own. While I'm still young.

BUM:

Yes, my mother was real young when I was born. Fifteen years old. Real young.



Photo: Keri Pickett

ALEXANDRA:

Actually, I want one right now. But you know, I have to find a father somewhere. A good one. What do you think? A man, a woman, and a child. Real oldy stuff, right?

BUM:

I know what you mean. A nice life.

ALEXANDRA:

What? Hey, that's a good idea. I do. I want to have a nice life. I like that. Actually, I want to be happy. What do you think?

BUM:

You will be sugar, real soon. Don't turn around. (*Laughter.*)

(Alexandra turns around and sees Virgin Mary descending with a neon halo, holding fire in her hand. She is the "woman in dark" from the movie.)

ALEXANDRA:

(Faintly.) I can't believe it.

(Finale music, a mix of Rammelizee and Gotterdämmerung) and one by one all the characters enter stage surrounding the smiling Lady (Virgin Mary).

END

Written by: Stephan Balint

With: Eszter Balint, Peter Berg, Jehnifer and Lillie Stein, Klara Palotai, Kuba Gontarczyk, Stephan Balint.

Special appearances: August Darnell, Bobo Shaw, and Alexandra Auder

Set design: Eva Buchmüller

with: Kuba Gontarczyk and Jim St. Clair

Neon: Rudi Stern

Super-8 camerawork: Theo Cremona

Film: Stephan Balint—Director

Frank Prinzi—Cameraman

Anna Koos—Film editor

With: Shirley Clarke, Ricky Leacock, Eszter Balint, Peter Berg, Eric Daillie, Kuba Gontarczyk, John Lurie, August Darnell, Ivan Jakovits

A SHORT HISTORY OF SQUAT THEATRE

1969: Three people from the University Theatre of Budapest created an independent theatre group called Studio Kassak.

1972: They were censored by the Hungarian authorities for political and esthetic radicalism. Banned from performing in public, they set up their theatre in apartments. In the next four years 36 different plays, sketches, improvisations were to be seen in apartments, staircases, streets, beaches, countryside, etc.

1976: Six people with four children, the majority of the group, decided to leave the country for the West.

1977: While living in Paris and waiting for their immigration to the U.S., the group, called the Squat Theatre, created their first play for the Western audience: *Pig, Child, Fire!* The play was set in a storefront in Rotterdam, a setting that became a Squat trademark for the next nine years. After touring Nancy, Shiraz, Baltimore, Paris with it, Squat settled in New York, renting a building on West 23rd Street, where they both lived and worked, and performed in its storefront *Pig, Child, Fire!*. They received an Obie award the same year.

1978, summer: *Andy Warhol's Last Love* opened on 23rd Street. It went on tour to Hamburg, Rome, Milan, Florence, Belgrade, Rotterdam and Brussels. It won a Grand Prix in Belgrade, and the Italian critics' award for the Best Foreign Performance of the Year. In the fall there was an attempt for a new piece out of the storefront (*Cool King Kong*, Amsterdam).

1979: Squat opened a nightclub. It featured great music: jazz, blues, rock, new wave in live concerts through 1981.

1980: A revival of a 1975 adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* was performed in Pittsburgh as well as New York.

1981: *Mr Dead & Mrs Free's* premiere in Cologne. The show had a long year and a half run on 23rd Street, N.Y. It was awarded an Obie for the Best New American Play. It also received a *Villager* award. An open-air version of the show, *The Battle of Sirolo*, was performed in August.

1982: The Golden Age of Squat Theatre, a retrospective festival of the three major pieces was shown in October in the 23rd Street building. It also featured guest artists who hosted their own programs (painters, filmmakers, musicians).

1982: Two related painted installations were shown in the same year: *Mr Dead & Mrs Free's Cafe* in April at P.S. 1 and *The Moments Before the Tragedy I, II, III* in October at the Kitchen, both using theatrical effects.

Between 1983 and 1985 Squat ran a movie theatre with a revival movie program.

1984: Two more installations were exhibited: *Suspense*, in Hallwalls, Buffalo, in March, and *A Painted Show* at Postmasters Gallery, New York.

1985, May: *Dreamland Burns*, a work in progress, Squat's first show set in a traditional theatre space, was shown in Montreal and then went on tour to Munich, Zurich, Polverigi, Frankfurt, Boston. The same summer Squat lost the lease of their home and theatre of eight years on West 23rd Street. Two of the group's founding members quit.

1986: The finished *Dreamland Burns* had a successful three-week run at the new Kitchen in New York City in March, and then toured Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington from April through July.

