is seen by Bewes as "the enemy of ...the pervasive fear of violence in 'late' postmodernity." Bewes quotes Hegel's references to Diderot's Rameau as an example of the negative movement of dialectic thought. Rameau is then built up through the rest of the book, as a metaphoric example of the energetic power of Hegel's dialectic between philosophy and action.

Bewes attempts to build up an emotive argument for some kind of political action, and spirit of risk, not by analysing the reason for "postmodern apathy", but by stockpiling examples, and attempting to create a sense of frustration with it. *Cynicism and Postmodernity* is filled with impatience and frustration but never gets beyond the limits that are causing the frustration. Inevitably, what Bewes is looking for is not a realpolitick or politics based upon methodological analysis, but instead a spirit of political engagement, a temperament even. A new kind of energy with which to sweep away cynicism. A passionate "risk".

Until he has answered the much bigger question, this notion of "risk" within the political arena seems unformed, and un-informed: a call to arms without a cause to fight for, energy without direction. Bewes, it seems, is almost willing to risk another Auschwitz in the name of the creative violence of reason.

The book should be heralded for its detailed diagnosis of the intellectual impasse of postmodernity, through all aspects of contemporary culture, quoting as it does, from a breath-taking array of sources in literature, theory, sociology, media studies and contemporary politics. The pluralistic and eclectic nature of Bewes' references, however, serve to confuse and defer the difficult argument that was initially intended. Thus Bewes' mixing of references to the K Foundation, Tony Blair, Derrida, Rorty, Death Brand Cigarettes, Auschwitz and Dazed and Confused magazine, serves only to dilute his argument.

It is exactly this attempt to pull together so many reference points and to jump between genres and disciplines in a flurry of intellectual activity, which nonetheless obscures the very clear issue at its core. Having diagnosed the problems of postmodernity, Bewes is unable to find a direction or methodology which might lead to a solution. His method is itself, irrational and eclectic. The subject areas he attempts to span are too broad, and we have no grounds in either metaphysics, empirical fact or political theory upon which to judge any of his statements. The form of the book itself, is a product of postmodern pluralism in academia, the breaking down of boundaries between disciplines. The book partakes of the same retreat from method and discipline into subjectivity, that it attempts to condemn. Bewes is interested in the notion of re-instating reason without actually exercising reason in the form of a rationally structured argument.

Ironically, the postmodern culture of cynical self-awareness and apathy is only added to by this book. As a culture, our cynicism exists not because we are unaware of what is wrong with postmodernism, but because we are only too aware of our inability to get out of the impasse, our inability to take a risk, to commit to a cause. *Cynicism and Postmodernity* is then another attempted critique of our cynical postmodern culture which inevitably adds to the canon of self-consciousness but impotent knowledge. All diagnosis and no cure. Knowing that we are cynical, just makes our cynicism all the more profound.

Ewan Morrison

live review

Homage to JG Ballard

Diana

Cours Albert, Paris: Sunday August 31 1997

THE CONCEPTUAL ARTIST Diana, "Our Lady of the Media," at last unveiled her latest music action piece to a public positively salivating with eagerness and anticipation. Earlier works by this former pupil of Wolf Vostell and one time member of Negativland had been criticised as being guache, self-indulgent and politically inept. Under the canopy of a starlit Parisian night, *Homage to JG Ballard* for four voices, Mercedes Benz and motorcycle cavalcade once and for all silenced even her sternest critics—that fawning rat-pack whose presence she so often bemoaned.

It was a stroke of marketing genius, if not of aesthetics, to employ some of this parasitic entourage to serve as the chorus in her most mature and considered piece of urban theatre. Detractors will carp that she had merely noted the grilling received by Guardian critics when they directed plays at a recent BAC season, and cynically sought to turn the media on itself, but those of us who count ourselves her fans see a more profound and original mind at work.

A small but select band of Diana's most ardent followers gathered at midnight to witness this crucial benchmark of late '90s art. The piece would be in three parts, the press release told us, starting at the fabulous Ritz Hotel, lit by one thousand chandeliers and emblematic of all that is tasteful about contemporary life, and ending at the rather more gloomy but undoubtedly hip underpass of the Cours Albert. Specuation was rife as to the myriad influences that this penetratingly perceptive, even cheeky, mistress of postmodernism would absorb, reconfigure and claim as her own. Some saw hints of Hans-Peter Kuhn; others argued that Diana was "the original Spice Girl". Others still protested that she was first and foremost the high priestess of post-kitsch, while a few cynics sneered that she just provided "Virilio for lounge lizards."

When you look into the void for too long, said Nietzche, the void starts looking into you. Diana was saying much the same in this elegant and powerfully visceral meditation on the trappings of power, fame and her own role as a creature of the media. The performance began with the quartet entering their vehicle, moving off at a steady pace, joined—with a clear nod to Fellini—by the drove of paparazzi. So far, so much traditional modern opera, the socialist realism of the outside environment alone hinting at anything radically new, but still within spitting distance of Jonathan Miller or Robert Le Page. Gradually, subtly, the pace shifted and the audience settled into watching, enraptured and absorbed, a kind of flight and pursuit as first one figure, then another, drew towards the artist, then withdrew, in a teasing foreplay that for some spectators was more than a little risque. The simple elegance of this opening movement, delicately bathed in the soft light from half a dozen car headlamps, did not, however, offer more than a hint of what was to come.

The second and penultimate movement was surely the culmination of a life's work by this gifted young artist (who has been compared favourably to Tracy Emin and even humorously dubbed "Scanner in drag"), at once calling to mind the Lettrist notions of derive, contemporary chaos theory, and wickedly—in the kind of whimsical gesture that has made her the "Queen of the people's hearts"—the famous Papa/Nicole car advertisements (allegedly scripted by one of Diana's mentors, Raoul Vaneigem). The almost balletic grace which the Mercedes Benz (deployed in reference, no doubt, to Diana's favourite Japanese noisecore group Merzbow's notorious edition-of-one CD, sealed into a car of the very same model) leapt and bounded across the Cours Albert literally took the breath of this critic away. The sense of abnegation on the part of the players, akin to the vertiginous feeling of oblivion encountered in the work of the most extreme of today's isolationists, was (it was generally agreed) singularly impressive. A chorus of delighted mews of appreciation rose from the spellbound audience. Who could fault Diana's biting critique of bourgeois mores, her mercurial speed-reading of the contemporary urban landscape, her quicksilver deliniation of neo-classical hubris in the figures represented (the artist herself daringly foregrounded) in this most alluring and, it must be said, sexy masterpiece?

It was only with the so-called Epilogue that Diana could be accused of letting her fanbase down. Nowadays who among us has not grown bored of the endless screenings of so many interchangeable hospital dramas, the tedious Casualtys and ERs, chocabloc with cliches—the alcoholic surgeon, the wounded eccentric, the inevitable hackneyed recourse to (one one thousand, two one thousand) cardiac machines? Diana's attempt at a supra-ironic positioning of the artist (a la Orlan) at the centre of the operating space came across merely as inapposite and pandering to the demands of hoi polloi. The smorgasbord of mangled metal, the heady cocktail of petrol and bodily fluids, the positively electrifying incorporation of police and ambulance sirens—son et lumiere sans pareil, indeed!—was already more than enough, and this over-long and frankly dull conclusion to the music, until then so full of futurist sound and fury, was a major miscalculation. Nevertheless, the critical response was overwhelmingly positive, and both public and professional scribes agreed that this would be right at the top of their Hits of '97 lists. So much for the "Silly Season."

Although a repeat performance seems out of the question—Diana insists on the aesthetic priority of public art performed in real time and is barely interested in documentation, dissing it as at best a halfway house—the rave reviews that this new work has already attracted seem destined to keep it in the public mind for some considerable time to come.

Ed Baxter