

**THE SCOTTISH ARTS COUNCIL**  
**ARTISTIC EVALUATION - DRAMA**

**Organisation/Venue:** El Periferico de Objetos, Edinburgh International Festival

**Title of Event:** The Last Night of Mankind

**Type of Event:** performance (at Royal Lyceum Theatre)

**Date of Visit:** 13 August 2003

This report has been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to evaluate the artistic quality of the production named below. It has been prepared by either a specialist Advisor, or a Council Officer, as indicated at the end of the form. The report will be circulated to the organisation which produced the work, to the management of the venue if the venue is core funded by the Scottish Arts Council.

The report may be made available to Scottish Arts Council Officers, Council and Committee members, and specialist advisors as appropriate. It will be taken into account in assessing the work of the producing company in relation to applications for funding to the Scottish Arts Council. It may also be used by the Council to report on the overall performance of its Core Funded organisations.

**Evaluators should enter their rating under each section, explaining briefly their reason for the rating with reference to their comments under each section. Ratings should be given in accordance with the following:**

**Very Poor** –standard falls well below what is acceptable

**Poor**- not attaining acceptable standards of conception or presentation

**Competent**– routine rather than especially interesting

**Good** –well conceived and executed.

**Excellent** –conceived and executed to a high standard.

## 1. Artistic Assessment

Please evaluate the **artistic quality** of the event

### 1.1 Vision and Imagination.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>This was an extraordinary production, a full-on theatrical experience involving physical performance, music/song, spoken text, and design. Its exploration of the last vestiges of humanity in a post-apocalyptic world was both deeply disturbing and completely gripping.</p> <p>The first act was particularly powerful – a mass of bodies in a pool of mud, with a handful of survivors amongst the dead and dying. Even from the relatively safe distance of the circle, the sight, sounds and smell of the mud was pervasive.</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

### 1.2 Clarity of Communication.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		<p>The production worked on a literal, as well as a metaphorical, level, with the post-war desperation, pathos and brutality contrasted by the apparently desirable white cleanliness of modern, civilised society (act 2). There were, however, a few times when the action dragged – and whilst I appreciate the connection between the relentlessness of the situation and the use of repetition, it felt slightly overdone in places. A minor weakness.</p> <p>The five performers were multi-skilled and highly effective at communicating a range of images and emotions – one moment ruthless, the next a moment of hope and humanity.</p> <p>On a more basic level, English surtitles were used effectively for sections spoken/sung in Spanish.</p>
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

You are also asked to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the event with specific reference to the following:

**1.3 Script** (particularly in relation to new work, or second productions).

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

As noted above, this was strongly visual/physical theatre, and therefore the script was one, but not the dominant, element. Spoken text was more prominent in the second act, where we see the survivors' gradual degeneration into chaos within the safe, clean security of the "big brother" house.

**1.4 Direction**

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good	✓	
Excellent		

As noted above, there were times when the piece seemed to drag, but overall the staging and direction worked very effectively.

**1.5 Standard of performers-** where performers are not trained, please reflect this in your comments.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

Skilled and committed performances – see above.

**1.6 Use of music** – in particular please comment on the quality and appropriateness of any original music composed for the production. Please indicate whether the music was performed live or recorded, in whole or in part, and what effect this had on the quality of the production.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

The first act featured a man, naked and muddied with the rest, playing accordion and singing about the demise of humankind. His strong, gravelly voice reminiscent of Tom Waits. This was an effective device for setting the context. He was eventually joined by others playing accordions, and music was used to mirror social disintegration and decline, moving from the melodic to dissonant.

**1.7 Use of Movement or Choreography**

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

Used effectively throughout – as noted above.

**1.8 Design** – including set, costume and lighting design. Please take into account how appropriate the design is in relation to the venue, and, where appropriate, the touring schedule.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

As with other elements, design was a strong and integral part of the production.

**1.9 Technical Standards** – please comment on whether the production was professionally presented from a technical point of view.

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

The complete transformation from a substantial pool of mud and mud-soaked bodies, to pristine white set, props and costume in the space of a typical interval was impressive. Otherwise, this was not a particularly technically demanding production, and it was presented to a high standard.

**1.10 Overall production** – was the production successful overall in relation to any stated aims (e.g. in the programme or other printed material, and stated aims and objectives)

Rating for this section <i>(Please tick)</i>		Comments and key reasons for rating:
Very Poor		
Poor		
Competent		
Good		
Excellent	✓	

This was a powerful production that worked well on almost every level. I left the theatre feeling drained, and whilst I can't say I enjoyed it as such, I find myself continuing to think about it a week later.

The company aims to create theatre about major social and political themes. Although there seem to be layers of meaning that relate to the company's Argentinean context, the production avoids introspection.

**1.11 Was the performance appropriate for the audience?**

Yes – this was challenging theatre, but that is what an audience would expect from a major international festival.

**1.12 Estimated size of audience and reaction to the production.**

I attended a matinee performance, and the house seemed about 75% full. The audience response was appreciative, although understandably subdued given the heavy themes and disturbing images. I noticed much discussion during the interval and on the way out.

## **2. Management of Event**

Please evaluate the way the event was presented/organised by the organisation and by the venue. Please answer, where relevant, with reference to the checklist below adding any other comments/observations you may have.

### **2.1 Was the venue suitable for the event?**

Yes. Although the design/style of the production would have sat more comfortably in a black box theatre or more basic/industrial space, EIF is limited in its choice of venues.

### **2.2 Information/Interpretive material provided at the venue (e.g. programmes, displays etc)**

- range, quantity and clarity.

Programmes readily available from ushers, which includes an interview with one of the directors and an essay about the company. I would have welcomed more information about this production, and Karl Klaus, on whose work the production is based. The typeface for the biographies is very small, making it difficult to read. Although I appreciate the space limitations, EIF may wish to consider how this may be improved.

### **2.3 Publicity/Pre-Publicity for the Event (leaflets, posters, etc)**

- range, content and when and where available. Please be alert to the publicity available prior to your visit to the event. Please also view and comment on the company's website where one is advertised. Comment on the ease of use, and quality of content and presentation, and currency of information.

Excellent promotional materials and mechanisms for EIF as a whole.

### **2.4 Accessibility of the venue**

- ease of payment – through EIF/Hub box office. The addition of on-line booking this year is very welcome, improving access on top of EIF's efficient personal, postal, fax and telephone systems already in place.
- location - Fine. Easy access from public transport and car parking.
- external signposting – fine.

- internal directional signing – fine.
- access and provision for disabled people – not immediately obvious at this venue.
- timing of event - good (I appreciate matinee performances – when there is so much to see during the festival, evenings are not enough).

**2.5** Customer service

- quality and efficiency of staff (e.g. box office, front of house, bar and/or catering).

Front of house staff seemed slightly depleted, and the bar staff (circle bar) seemed unable to cope with demand at the interval. There's the additional challenge of poor circulation space at this level.

**3. Acknowledgement of Scottish Arts Council Funding** (if applicable)

Following is an extract from the Scottish Arts Council's conditions of grant for funded organisations:

*"The company should acknowledge Scottish Arts Council funding in press releases, at launches, on all published materials (including leaflets, brochures, programmes, posters, notices display and exhibition materials, websites and advertising). Acknowledgement of the Scottish Arts Council grant must also be made in any secondary or indirect products arising from the revenue funding such as recordings, publications, video, broadcasts, and computer programmes etc. "*

*Please comment on whether the above conditions of grant were met, including use and prominence of the Scottish Arts Council logo on the company's website.*

Conditions of grant met, with the Scottish Arts Council logo prominently displayed in the EIF brochure, as well as the programme for this event. The Scottish Arts Council is acknowledged on the website, although one has to look for it. EIF may wish to consider putting the logo on the homepage.

**Name:** Cindy Sughrue  
**Date:** 20 August 2003

**Advisor**  **Scottish Arts Council Officer**   
(Please tick above as appropriate)