

Richard Eder on Squat Theatre

Richard Eder: ... They /SQUAT/ had been holding up in a storefront in Manhattan for the past ten years and doing some of the best avant-garde theater of the Absurd, seen anywhere

...

"Dreamland Burns" is on the face about the ostensibly ordinary day of a young woman, named Alexandra. But it's sample device is as you say, the change from film to stage-action about half way through. The film is dark and grainy and oddly hesitant, and it follows Alexandra through moving into a new apartment, reassuring her worried parents, having a house-warming party, breaking up with her boyfriend. But there is a funny sense of tension, of bare control ... bare control, as if this was the life she thought she was living and is trying to get gold of it.

And absurdities keep undermining it.

The movers turn out to be intellectuals who talk about life and death; in her break-up scene with her boyfriend, she finds herself holding a fish in one hand and a lobster in the other. A cabdriver gives her a ride and stops to read her palm; she gets home, exhausted, naturally and lies down.

A scrim comes down over the screen, catches fire, disappears and suddenly we are on stage, in full living colour, with real people. It's a marvellous sense of release, and as if absurdities we're about to see, are the true, the real life.

/On the videotape: Alexandra's close-up, as she is falling asleep at the end of the black & white film. On the stage, in juxtaposition with the film, the double of Ray, Alexandra's lover, becomes visible. His face is animated by a Super 8 projection. With a guitar in his hands, he stands in front of a painted landscape with palmtree and the sea.

... " I'm a songwriter, baby;
I'll be your agent
We are good, I can make you a star.
But if you're not successful,
It's better to be dead, or somebody else.

cont. Ray: 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 "

/the end of videotape/

Richard Eder: /on live stage/ her boyfriend is just a dummy,
you see, sings a love-song to her, than he is taken away
and cut up by two gangsters /who are the movers in the film/
she has a childish argument with a friend, the taxidriver comes
back and insists, /that/ the two women are part of a film,
he is making; the plot changes from moment to moment,
all of a sudden, furnitures start falling from the roof:
chairs, tables, lettuce-leaves, scarves; it's a kind of curious
reversal, as if "un-moving"; The un-moving, you see it, as a
kind of mirror image of the moving, that went on in the film.

....
/but/ I would say this about SQUAT, and it's a subject, that
interests me considerably; with all their lack of resources,
with their occasional crudity and some point this absolutely
marvellous play is still a bit unfinished, they are working on it,
why is it, that Squat and other European companies manage to
catch the spirit of absurd so much better, than anyone else does.
I do have a theory about it, if you bear with me.
I think, that to make theatre of the absurd, you have to really
believe, that life is absurd. We have certain trouble with it
here. It's an effort for us, we think, that the absurd is to
express anger or estrangement. Eastern Europeans make a different
calculation. They say, if life is absurd, than the absurd is
also alive, and that's why they, and particularly Squat
in "Dreamland Burns" can put so much of their living ability,
their charm, their humor, their grace, their exubarence and
this is what makes "Dreamland Burns" an absolutely unique
example of theatre of the absurd, that is funny and sad,
and very, very human, indeed.
And ultimately not absurd.