

## **SUSAN MELROSE**

Barry Edwards' OPTIK explores ways of performing and spectating which are at the same time minimalist, dense, dramatic and sexually charged.

There's something like a dare operating here: take away almost everything a professional performer has learnt and can do in a theatre conventionally dominated by either naturalism, a residual avant-garde, or the current version of the multi-media event. Then add in, within a controlled space and time, a precise number of movement based options, three transparent screens and a drummer. Set these free before an uneven rectangle of spectators: what will emerge?

There are two side doors in the theatre space in London leading to a corridor at the limits of one spectator row. The space is lit, but without inflection. The performers can run, walk, stand still, drop and roll - and when each one feels it is appropriate. It is a decision making process which is literally in their hands and on their feet. The drummer, similarly, makes decisions in the moment.. This is not just a dare.

This is a great leap of faith in the performer. It pays off. These four performers are professional. What this seems to mean is that whatever they're given they use in terms of their own agency, and not one imposed by anyone else. This is mysterious stuff. It looks like it must have been choreographed or orchestrated, but this is an impossible choreography. Its heightened conjunctures are fortuitous, seized rather than developed. Bordering on the accidental, rather than programmed or given in advance.

If you like 'reading' the stage as the logocentrist gives it, you'll have problems here. There is a ceaseless practice going on, and no doubt a grammar exists and is compiled in the pre-performance rehearsals. But there's no semantics given in advance. What happens cannot have happened before, and won't ever happen again. This is performance as controlled process of unpremeditated seduction. It offers us a privileged and almost

naked gaze on the sometimes stilled and sometimes moving and almost meshing faces  
and bodies at work. Curious and sexy. But don't take my words for it!