

"THE BODY ON THREE FLOORS"
SOME BACKGROUND

THE BODY ON THREE FLOORS is a collaboration for television between a dozen people with different professional skills, co-ordinated by film-maker Mike Leggett, and produced with the technical and financial assistance of Television South West in Plymouth. The 50 minute programme was commissioned as a project jointly by TSW and South West Arts as the 1982 Film & Video Award, selected from proposals submitted by people living and working in the TSW transmitter area.

The Award, worth £4,000, was to enable a professional artist or film-maker to prepare a script which the TSW director Kevin Crooks and his crew would complete through production and post-production stages in collaboration with the recipient. Working to a budget of £5,000, the schedule involved four days of filming and recording, and ten days of film and video editing.

THE BODY ON THREE FLOORS as a title comes from a line delivered by zoologist John Colvin in the programme, but originating from the 18th Century philosopher Georg Lichtenberg:

"A certain friend of mine used to divide his body into three floors; his head, his chest, and his abdomen. He often wished the tenants of the top floor and those of the bottom would get along with each other better."

The aphorism makes wry and witty comment upon a predicament pondered over by generations of philosophers: the animal instincts of the human race frequently being at odds with its aspirations to intellect. Recognising the 'enormity of the description' such a subject requires, the programme utilises the essay format; the essay of method and the essay of imagination. Though the form has its roots in literature, the programme draws on its potential for wide and sometimes disparate reference in a manner intended to be both serious and entertaining.

Television tends to separate subjects and their representation into 'specialisms' which, as a different 'types' of programme, occur in more or less the same spot each week. The natural history documentary, the variety show, the drama play, the music programme, the educational slot, the chat show and the dance programme all occur with THE BODY ON THREE FLOORS as part of the essayist's experiment. Furthermore, the sections concerned with dance are choreographed in relation to the visual space defined by image size on the TV screen, rather than the space in which the dancer performs.

Play behaviour in humans and animals is the rubric around which the 'enormous description' revolves. In the spirit of play, and often without literal explanation, the programme creates space for events contributed by the collaborators: people speak, make music, make gags, make believe, make dance and make play. In Part One, the familiar but unseen commentator refers to the meaning of the terms 'character formation' and 'play behaviour'. Captions and titles provide guidance and comment through the juxtaposition of scenes and sounds that follow.

Part Two provides a less frenetic space, without commentary, with fewer signposts. It becomes more serious about what is seen and said, allowing musician and dancer to appear on their own terms with a full 14 minutes devoted to a complete piece by the jazz pianist Keith Tippett, during which the dancer Helen Roberts performs the third and final Dance for Camera.

Three weeks of intensive research and rehearsal commenced in August 1983, followed by preparation of the first programme outline by Helen Roberts and zoologist Dr. John Colvin, working with Mike Leggett, the project co-ordinator. All filming and recording locations were to be in the South West. As further requirements were identified, other collaborators living in the West of England were invited into the project (now with the working title PRIMATE) contributing their skills in response to viewing the rehearsal videotapes and discussion of the mass of accumulated material. They included Keith Tippett, playwright John Downie, art historian David O'Brien, Sue Rickards and Daniel Mayer working with ethologist Leonard Williams at the Woolly Monkey Sanctuary, and of course the clown Dick Gerrish (alias Burt Hollocks)

Recording over two days that October at Dartington Hall, Totnes, was followed by filming at Paignton Zoo and in Plymouth. Filming was later completed at the Monkey Sanctuary in Looe, Cornwall. Edited film was transferred to video tape, which was then transferred to videocassette to enable the collaborators and others to comment on and contribute the process towards a rough cut version of the programme. This feedback took place at Production Meetings of Bristol Film Workshop. Final broadcast editing was completed at the beginning of October 1984, using the recently installed 3-machine edit-suite and dubbing facilities at TSW's studios in Plymouth.

Whilst confronting the problems of presenting other art forms like music, dance and drama on TV, the programme refuses to exclude (as is often the case) their sources and cross-references. Their implications and imaginative extension involve familiar languages (speech, gesture, etc.) unfamiliar languages (dance, movement, music, etc.) and the language of television itself, which has evolved over the last 30 years in amalgamation with the other forms to a state which, although familiar, still has far to go.

Some or less the same spot each week. The natural rhythm of the variety show, the drama play, the music programme, the news slot, the chat show and the dance programme all occur with THE THREE FLOORS as part of the secretary's experiment. Furthermore, the sections concerned with dance are choreographed in relation to the space defined by image size on the TV screen, rather than the space in which the dancer performs.

Play behaviour in humans and animals is the rubric around which the 'encrasse description' revolves. In the spirit of play, and often without literal explanation, the programme creates space for events contributed by the collaborators: people speak, walk, write, make signs, make believe, make dance and make play. In Part Two, the presenter but unseen commentator refers to the meaning of the terms 'encrasse description', 'formation' and 'play behaviour'. Captions and titles are used to add and comment through the juxtaposition of scenes and images that follow.