

I wish I could get to the heart of Chitty the way she can (almost indecently) to a pose, an attitude, a defense mechanism—call a gesture, she'll pound a stake in it. That's why I thought her black tights and T-shirt and the ghoulish make-up she wore for **True Bond Stories** was so appropriate: she looked like a vampire doing Edith Piaf. After half a dozen Chitty specials, I'm beginning to recognize a few common features in her work that help me get a hold on *The Lady and Her Unfollowable Acts* and, more to the point right now, help me talk about her recent *A Space* show.

Her rhythm is staccato—invariably. Nothing really follows anything else in a logical way in her works and the staccato underlines this. Sometimes the illogical is an unconscious element in a work, just part of her creative personality (though I wonder if Chitty ever creates unconsciously, or if anybody can); but sometimes it's used very deliberately to point up the mindlessness of a specific activity or attitude, as though Chitty were anxious for us to see its connection to the craziness all around us, to all the lives lived in stupid frustration. In **Extreme Skin** and **TBS** (and **Lap**, too), the mindless activity involves the performer's(?) wilfully setting up difficult—sometimes, painful—physical obstacles to conquer. (The only thing I didn't like about **ES** and **TBS** was the physical abuse some of the performers experienced. Chitty, too, sliding down that whitewashed post, landing with a thud on her hip or ass! Christ, that hurt!) And then trying to overcome them with a fixity of energy, of concentration, that is almost autistic. In **ES**, this fixity of effort was somewhat relieved by the colourful costumes (leotards, gym shorts, sweat-pants, etc.). The activity, performed in symphonic mass by 20 dancers, looked like a take-off on trust exercises or gym classes and though its rigidity and uniformity were a bit chilling, it was mostly, as in Danny Grossman's **National Spirit**, funny.

By the repetition of activity, Chitty can also emphasize its pointlessness, its meaninglessness—sometimes at the risk of numbing or exhausting her audience. Granted, the exhaustion and numbness don't widen our horizons or make us better people or anything, but, in Chitty's case, the consistency of her vision is its own reward. In both **ES** and **TBS**, the repetition of certain sequences achieved the potency of ritual and left me mesmerized.

These, for me, are the features common to Chitty's work. Add to them a fascination with push-pull, weight-

counterweight relationships and also with the tension created between an active or assertive body and a passive or completely submissive one (often an inanimate object like a wall, say, or a post or even a floor is used instead of a passive body). If anything does, this abstract concern for body constructs in time and space makes Chitty's work "dancey"—**ES** is actually the "danciest" I've ever seen Chitty get.

But she's also a real showperson—intellectual, yes, but no less theatrical for that. There are sequences in **ES** that could be allusions to other works. The way the dancers entered and exited through that small white door in the *A Space* studio, for example, made me think of Alice's rabbit hole and the nonsense world it led to; and, later, making forays from one side of the room to the other at different tempos and rhythms and going different distances before turning back, they looked like figures in one of Magritte's paintings—I can't remember what it's called. But the genius behind them is mostly unadulterated Chitty. That ritualistic cough that preceded and concluded each exercise drill, the charade delivered by 20 deadpan



she tied to a post, the other she pulled on, as though testing its strength, until it broke. That it broke came as no surprise to her; in fact, I got the idea that she (Chitty's persona, that is) was trying to prove to herself that escape was impossible (figuratively speaking) and that ties—emotional and sexual—could



performers to the audience—they couldn't have been anybody else's.

In **TBS**, the use of props—baby oil, capri pants, battered high heels, nylon stocking, and diary—was as funny, even funnier, than her deployment of dancers in **ES**, but funny in a more serious way. (Solos often seem to be more serious, even when they're not, because of their concentrated focus.) Chitty's activities (she was the solo performer as well as writer-director) seemed to make points in a more determined, less random way than **ES**. The middle section (I'm speaking temporally, not structurally), for example, saw Chitty concocting an escape ladder out of nylon hose; one end

always be broken, so why bother. This particular sequence was perhaps the best illustration of the "text", too—an unembellished account of "her" failed personal (bond) relationships which, in a flat, unassuming alto, she read from a black diary.

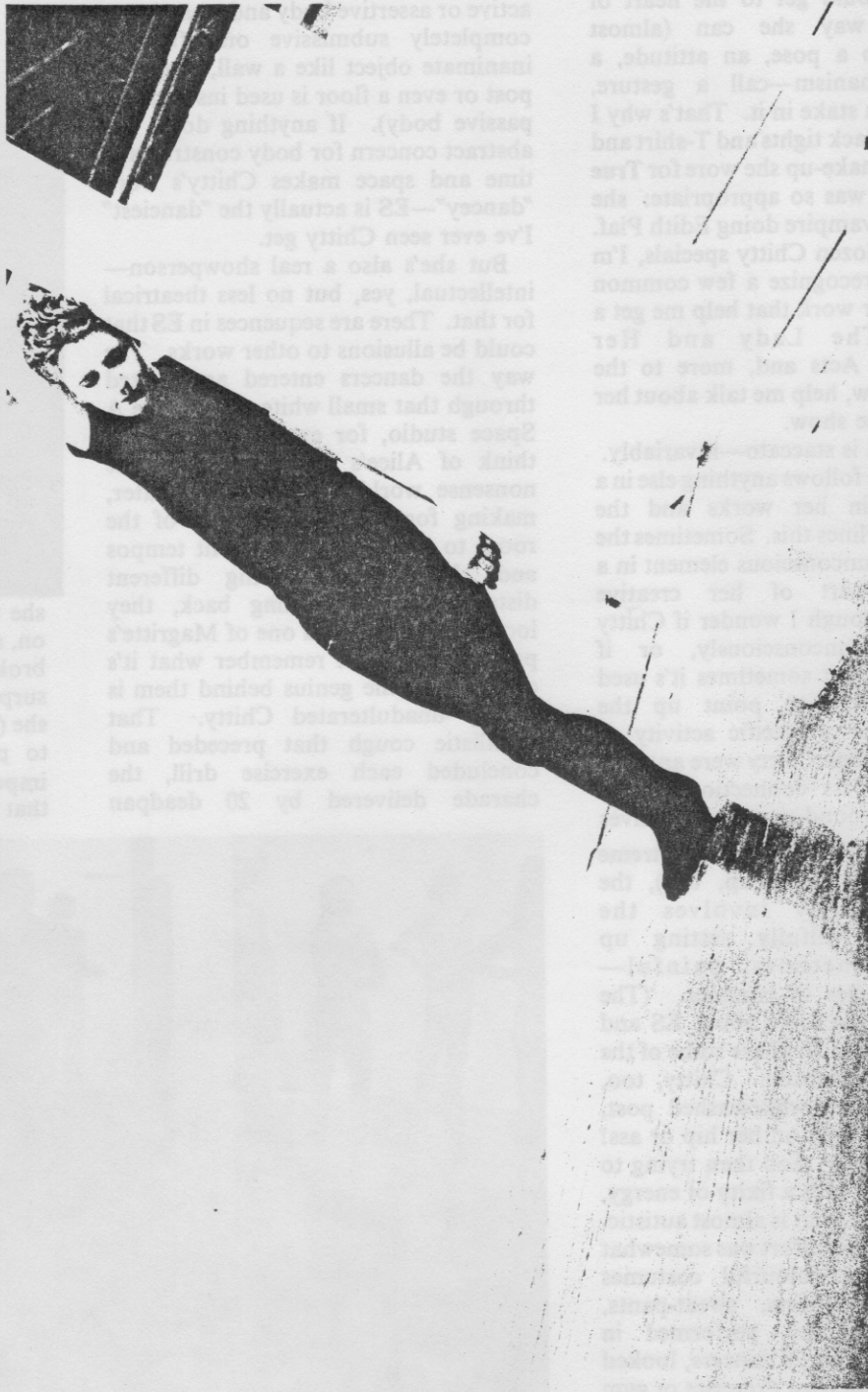
The test itself made **TBS** funnier, in a different way, the **ES**, partly—obviously—because words communicate more directly to the mind than physical activity and require for maximum effect a different kind of suppleness, the suppleness of a good actor or comedian. If **TBS** didn't work for some people, it at least showed them

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that Chitty is a supple comedian with a keen sense of timing. Without it, she couldn't have pulled off that marvellous sequence in which, interrupting a "story" in mid-sentence, she stuck the diary in her mouth, pulled on the canary-yellow capri pant, buttoned them, zipped them, and then returned to her story at exactly the breath-point where she left off. It was vaudeville with that slightly surreal tinge that's Chitty's speciality. And just a tinge, too. She's too smart for overkill. Sometimes I think Chitty's too smart, too cerebral, for dance altogether and that texts are bound to play a greater part with each work. TBS made me realize just what a steel-trap mind she possesses. And realizing it, I promptly allowed myself to get caught—again.