

# The Play's the Thing

## Claudia Boulton

Theatre Director, Producer and Actress. Claudia lived in and helped manage October Gallery in the late '80s, before returning to her stage career.

I would never have become involved with all the marvellous projects that the Institute of Ecotechnics (IE) initiated if they did not have theatre as a thread running through all their work. This gave me a vital link to working with everybody living at October Galley, and even to running Lundonia House while Chili was away in Australia for a year, in 1988.

I first met Corinna through her cousin Didi who was part of the all-woman theatre group I was in, Beryl and the Perils. We went to Nepal and though I was only meant to stay two weeks working with Sabine Lehmann, who had trained with the Berliner Ensemble and ran the Vajra Hotel, I ended up staying six months! Then I went to an IE Conference in Provence and was invited on a Theater of all Possibilities (TAP) tour of Nigeria, but that's another wild story! Someone suggested I stay at the house until we left, so, in 1986, I spent my first few nights at October Gallery.

The first Studio 8 show I was in was *Doña Juana* by Molière (we just changed 'he' to 'she' with few other changes required) where I played Scanarelle, the knowing side-kick, to Chili's *Doña Juana*. Then, José Férez did a series of plays written by artists, among them, Picasso's *Desire Caught by the Tail* with a wonderful cast of Corinna MacNeice, Elisabeth Lalouschek and Diana Mathewson, who was visiting from Quambun Downs. Another production, Samuel Beckett's *End Game*, encouraged me to branch out and play Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days*. I would never have been able to focus sufficiently without the space the Gallery afforded. My first performances, at the Gallery, had a poster generously provided by Ralph Steadman, who was showing at the time. In 1990, a World Tour beckoned, and I performed *Happy Days* at many venues including all the different IE projects: Hotel Vajra, Kathmandu; Birdwood Downs, Derby, Western Australia; Las Casas de la Selva, Puerto Rico; the Caravan of Dreams, Fort Worth, Texas and even in Arizona, at Biosphere 2, just before closure. I've also performed theatre with the RV *Heraclitus* crew in several ports.

Since then I've directed and produced many memorable shows with Studio 8 in London. They include, Robert Anton Wilson's *Wilhelm Reich in Hell*; a hilarious pantomime *CinderAlladin*, where I crashed the two fairy tales into each other; *Marouf the Cobbler*; and, latterly, *Deconstruction of the Countdown*, an original TAP play based on William Burroughs' writings. I hope that won't be the last, and am looking for another play that will expand the parameters of the *Transvanguard*. I feel incredibly privileged to have had such a close relationship with October Gallery, almost since its inception. It is a space uniquely open to explore and create together, and welcomes artists from all cultures. Theatre is such a fantastic way for people to work together - on a meta-level - rather than just in the mundane world. It gives a shared space where you can leave your 'self' behind and inhabit other beings, making them your own. Long live October Gallery and all the wonderful people who play there!

London, 2019

