

Change Through Exchange

John Malpede and the Los Angeles Poverty Department, *lecture-demonstration performed at Center Stage Theater, December 2.*

The term "lecture-demonstration," which was used to announce the recent appearance of John Malpede and members of the Los Angeles Poverty Department at the Center Stage Theater, is vague enough to include a wide range of expectations. Far from being scholarly, linear, straightforward, dry, and academic, this lecture-demonstration explored the boundaries of performance and reality, fiction, and nonfiction in a highly informative and thought-provoking manner. The manic anti-format became apparent halfway into the session with marvelous results. Malpede and company interwove sober tales of their involvement with L.A.'s Skid Row community with schizophrenic enactments of real and imagined street dramas to paint a riveting picture of homelessness.

Two overarching themes helped to link up the disjunctive and seemingly impromptu vignettes: "change is about exchange" and "you have to be able to get outside of your own pain." These two ideas, introduced matter-of-factly by Malpede before the controlled chaos of the evening began, seem to be part of Malpede's philosophy about the complexities of contemporary urban life. To change the desperate and explosive conditions that exist in a crowded metropolis such as Los Angeles (and in diminutive Santa Barbara), channels for emotional, cultural, political, and financial exchange must be opened. The second tenet of LAPD's approach to social activism involves a reassessment and rejection of one's position as victim to free up the potential to make a positive impact. The overlapping voices of Malpede, Rick Porter, and David Hallander brought forth these concerns in an inventive and profound fashion.

Sometimes syncopated, sometimes discordant, the improvisational interweaving of monologues, dialogues, and reconstructed scenarios imparted

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John Malpede, director of the LAPD (Los Angeles Poverty Department)

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a multidimensional view of homelessness, mental illness, poverty, and the vicious circle that keeps it all in motion. Stabbings, welfare scams, drug dealings, legal counseling, and city politics are all part of the whirlwind of issues raised by LAPD's poignant guerrilla poetry. In the midst of the performance, the apparently structureless format was a bit disorienting, but over time each dramatic incident built upon the others with cathartic and lucid significance. In their timely performance, Malpede and the Los Angeles Poverty Department indirectly deflated the consumerist hype of the holiday season and gave the select few in attendance serious food for thought.

—MICHAEL W. DARLING