

An aid to stimulation

This promenade event, in which the multi-media company Blast Theory explores Aids and surveillance, is experimental art with a scientific side. Throughout, the spectators — a little like hospital patients, perhaps — are bombarded by technology. There are television monitors in corners. Projected computer graphics imitate fibre-optic journeys through the body.

A questionnaire puts the audience on the spot in the middle of the show: "Have you had an HIV antibody test? If the answer is 'yes', go and stand under the red light." Pronouncements come over the loudspeakers explaining DNA and cell-cloning, or ordering the actors about: "Get up. Lie down. Turn over."

At one point, a man playing an Aids victim tries to keep up with the commands, mirrored by a woman, way off, tossing and turning on a pile of

Chemical Wedding Union Chapel, NI

scientific tomes. He climbs in and out of a bed suspended from steel cords. It swings about in all directions like a pendulum in a kinetic sculpture, a pawn in a complex network of knock-on effects.

The walls of his room — video projection screens — surround him in the swirl of psychedelic computer animation, adding to the feverish sense of nausea and powerlessness. Elsewhere, clips of *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* flash up images of romance and violence. Simultaneously, the four performers (crewcut men and women) body-slam exhaustively. They push each other to the floor: possibly lovers, possibly killers.

Some sequences drag on self-indulgently. The audience,

having obligingly come in close when shepherded to do so, were left to watch two women simply bouncing on the spot until they ran out of steam. These two, being regrettably fit, were scarcely even out of breath by the time I was at the end of my tether, searching for my safety valve and wondering if I was a guinea pig in an experiment concerning boredom thresholds and British politeness.

An added frustration was the under-amplified voice-over. Symbolic choreography without context can be obscure. Why was that man sticking little strips of gaffer tape on the floor while shouting "can you see him now?" The disco at the end seemed emotionally inappropriate, but at its best *Chemical Wedding* was stimulating, suggestive and energetic.

KATE BASSETT