



NEIL LIBBERT

The Alternative Miss World competition. Had we but world enough and time . . .

There is no alternative

AS Alternative evenings go, it began pretty normally. There I was, all dressed up in 'Ocean Gear' as Andrew Logan's invitation stipulated, buzzing with excitement at the thought of the Alternative Miss World competition. I'd read in this paper last week that it was the height of bizarre decadence. It sounded wonderful.

And there was a gentleman from a Swiss watch company, going on and on at greater and greater length about his company's sales prospects (I think they produce 13 million watches a year, or it could have been a month). His company was sponsoring the event, so he held a press conference.

It was a funny event for a watch company to be associated with, because time stood still on Friday night at the Brixton Academy, although the proceedings ran late. For hours on end I felt I was in a time warp while flamboyant extroverts, of the kind that have been around for years, cavorted about the stage in ages-old costumes.

A magazine, appropriately called *Time Out* informed me that the Alternative Miss World competition was like the Chelsea Arts Ball of old. The organiser, Andrew Logan, informed me that the flamboyant drag show was based on Cruft's Dog Show and not, as you'd imagine, the Miss World competition.

I saw what he meant. Most of the contestants were dressed up like a dog's dinner. The theme was 'Water' and Mr

Logan had brilliantly converted an old theatre into a giant swimming pool, complete with fountains and waterfalls. This caused some panic among the contestants who were unused to high heels.

These competitors all had names like 'Miss Ogenist,' and 'Miss Tery' (for understandable reasons, no one called herself 'Miss Stake'). They'd obviously spent hours, days, months, on designing and building their costumes. Every conceivable material, from chiffon to sheet steel had been used. Exponents of such trends as Street Credibility and Street Smartness were then exposed to a new trend: Street Porter.

Television personality Janet Street-Porter asked the contestants about their ambitions, etc, in a shrill voice. The contestants shrilled back.

Mrs Street-Porter performs like a reverse image of Mrs Thatcher. Whereas Mrs T will lower her normal voice when appearing in public, Ms Street-Porter raises hers several octaves, attempting to inject phrases like 'Good evening' with an element of hysteria. I don't think it's a trend which will catch on, although the contestants were infected by it on Friday night.

The judges, who included dress designers, radical lawyers, comedians, publishers and even a submarine commander (because of the Water theme?) were stuck into pens covered with netting, in case their decision was unpopular. In the end, with time running short, they gave the prize to a robot, rather than to a dummy. I looked at my watch and left.