
LIVE 6/7
$6
GLENN BRANCA

You are looking at the product of nine months of work after Reagan-inspired funding delays, a change of office address, some scheduling problems, and the sheer sweat involved in putting out such a comprehensive, re-designed double issue.

Performance now finds itself out of the gallery and into the world, and working in a creative art/theater cross-over area. As a result of these changes, LIVE has altered its format. Instead of individual reviews we're presenting broader-based features which locate performance in a larger cultural context. LIVE now also covers a wider range of performance activities—music, dance, video, installations, and performance-oriented theater—as well as "performance." And not just the New York brands; although New York-based (we do live and work here), there's coverage of Californian, Canadian, and European work because performance is a widespread international phenomenon. LIVE's new and exciting graphic layout gives a much better view of the show we've put together.

Over the last year it's become clear that performance and performance-related acts have only a few, marginal media homes. LIVE is the one magazine which is interested *only* in performance, covering work not written about anywhere else and/or covering it in a way more appropriate to a performance context. Why? Because performers continue to perform, audiences to attend, and people to talk. That activity needs a forum of documentation and analysis to continue to grow and to respond to public opinion, and to connect up with performance history. LIVE aims to be the place where opinions are put on the line—just like performances. LIVE needs to be fed as well, and your subscription will help LIVE to live and to serve both artists and audience. Subscribe now!

This issue is dedicated to the performers, LIVE readers, the patient publishers, the over-worked production crew, and to Tex for help and advice.

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LIVE 6/7

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MUSIC

PERFORMANCE

DANCE

ART ACTS

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FESTIVALS

GLENN BRANCA

PHOTOS: PAULA COURT

Glenn Branca studied theater at Emerson College in Boston. After moving to New York, he founded the experimental rock band* Theoretical Girls *with Jeffrey Lohn, then formed* The Static. *For the last two years, he has presented his music under his own name (current band lineup: Lee Ranaldo, Ned Sublette, David Rosenbloom, and Branca guitars, Jeffrey Glenn bass, and Stephan Wischerth drums. Branca has released two records, an e.p.* Lesson No. 1 *and an album* The Ascension, *both for 99 Records. In mid-July at the Performing Garage, Branca and an ensemble of sixteen musicians performed* Symphony No. 1 (Tonal Plexus), *a piece scored for unison tone guitars (four soprano, alto, two tenor, baritone, and bass), four octave guitars, three steel wire guitars, three electric organs, electric piano, trap set, seven brass cymbals, two dead cymbals, double bass drum, two 30-gallon oil drums, four tuned snared drums, hammered metal, trumpet, french horn, euphonium, and saxophone. Branca and I talked about his music shortly before that work's premiere.

John Howell

In Symphony No. 1 *you're using some unfamiliar instruments. What's an octave guitar?*

A guitar tuned in three octaves—the two bottom strings are tuned to a low E note, the two middle strings are tuned to an octave higher than that, and the high strings are another octave higher. That's the tuning I've used the most. It's the one I used first with *Instrumental for Six Guitars* and all the pieces I wrote in 1979.

And what are steel wire guitars?

Guitars strung with steel wire instead of regular guitar strings.

Why use them?

The harmonic blend is different due to the fact that they have no definite pitch. There's a wider variety of tone colors and the harmonic series is much richer.

Can you tune them?

Yes. There's a pitch that's dominant, but not as dominant as a factory-made string.

And unison guitar is every string tuned to the same note?

Yeah. So the soprano guitar is six high strings all tuned to a high E, the alto guitar is tuned to a B, the tenor is six middle strings all tuned to an E an octave lower than the soprano, the baritone guitar is six low strings all tuned to a low E note. Basically it's an octave guitar broken down into three or four separate guitars.

Don't all these special stringings and tunings mean that you and your guitar players have to learn special fingerings?

For most of these tunings there's a different fingering. What happens when you use a different fingering is that you start thinking differently about the instrument. You come up with a lot of sounds you wouldn't normally get if you always used the same tuning. When I was thirteen or fourteen I used to listen to Gabor Szabo. He would throw in little atonalities and play "off" rhythms. I read an interview with him where he said he spent a lot of time practicing and thinking about playing the guitar but when he actually got into a concert situation, he tried to forget everything he'd learned and just play. That's similar to what happens when you change the tunings because a lot of what you've learned about how to play the guitar no longer applies.

But you do learn to play in another way.

Yes but it keeps you in a constant state of change.

When you write a piece of music do you decide on a certain tuning at the start, or do you think about an effect and choose a tuning to get a certain sound?

In the past the tuning always came first. I'd get an idea for a tuning, then later an idea for a piece that could work better with this tuning than any of the others. But recently I've begun to write tunings almost as pieces in themselves where the tuning determined the specific nature of the piece. It's become totally integrated into the compositional process. The last five or six pieces have all had a tuning or combination of tunings unique to that piece.

Do these different tunings and stringings give you surprises after you've written out a piece?

I can write down what I want to happen and be sure that's what's actually going to happen when I've worked with a tuning for a while. But I don't always want to know what it's going to sound like. The idea is to cause a situation where something new can come up. I try to let the music invent itself.

How do you decide which one of your musical ideas you want to develop?

By the ones I'm drawn to. I think most people have a basic sensibility that can dictate the choice of ideas if you're willing to wait. I try to realize the music as closely as possible to the initial inspiration and not let myself get off onto little tributaries. The idea is to get to that immediacy, stay on it, and let it dream itself.

How do you tell when you're on the right road and not off on a detour?

When I know what the motivation is. The tributary thing in music is sitting around and playing with riffs. When I'm getting close to the core of what I want to project it's more about ideas, not technical musical games but a kind of primitive emotional structure.

Have you studied music formally?

No.

Can you read music?

No. Well, I learned to read music when I was fifteen. My mother had me take guitar lessons for a few months—after that, I didn't touch the guitar for a year. Anything resembling school was a drag. Eventually I picked up a chord book and learned how to play chords. But I don't really read music.

How do you write down your pieces?

In longhand. I don't have any kind of notation. It's like a personal shorthand. I haven't invented any special symbols.

So you teach pieces to your band by showing them what to play?

Yeah. Actually a lot of the ideas can't be written down anyway because so much of it is about the strumming technique and the

fingerings which are not in the conventional places.

Are any of your pieces improvised?

No but I work with structured improvisation. For instance, in *Lesson No. 1* I specified five notes which were played in different octaves and I specified certain fingerings and rhythms, but I didn't specify the exact notes the guitarists have to play at each moment. So I leave an element of spontaneity in the piece which is important because so much of my music is about the immediacy of a live performance. The band I have now has been working with me for a long time and they understand the emotional structure, the

dynamics, and how they work in the pieces.

Now you're talking about the tricky chemistry of what makes a real band.

Right. To me it wouldn't work if I specified what had to be played at every moment. There are a lot of very structured changes but there's also a lot of room for the guitarists.

Do you specify rhythms to your drummer?

When Stephan and I first started to work together, I had specific ideas about what I wanted, then there were sections where I would give him a general idea about what to do. Now I give him a very general idea and we work together from that. In some pieces he does anything he wants. I think he's a brilliant, inspired drummer. When he takes off there are moments where he just shakes the stage.

Can you explain how that happens?

Yes but it's hard. Maybe I can only talk about it in relation to other drummers. There are drummers who play a solid rock beat, drummers who play a solid funk beat, jazz drummers who do things with strange times, but Stephan can work with syncopation, subtlety, speed, and still keep it driving, almost danceable.

You're saying he doesn't play in a particular style but plays between styles?

That's what's so amazing, he can do something based on a 4/4 beat which doesn't sound like a rock beat but which also doesn't sound contrived or jazzy.

Do you think your music is more or less structured than other music you hear?

It's less structured than most. I'm not interested in lots of changes. I keep away from technical complexity, so the emphasis can shift away from almost story-like progressions of scenes or impressive displays of skill to a more visceral involvement with the sound itself for both the audience and the performers. This is really what the nature of rock is, you're not really listening to the music as much as involving yourself with it.

Your pieces seem to have the same general overall shape: they start out low and slow and build up and up . . .

I can't help myself.

. . . and go on with climax after climax. Sometimes I don't see how you get away with it, but as long as you keep getting it up, the piece gets off.

Well, most of the pieces have structures which are developmental. So as the piece develops and more ideas are introduced, the interaction of ideas will tend to become more dense, more frenetic, more fluid. In some pieces the whole first half will be a kind of introduction. I like the audience to be able to see the elements I'm going to work with in the piece, hear what the tuning is, get some idea of the structure. It's like priming the ears. When we get to the heart of the piece the listener should be ready to hear it.

How do you decide to end a piece?

I do try to have definite endings, I love to write endings. They're always the hardest part. I used to have this thing about not ending. It didn't seem necessary. Now, in some pieces, I like very obvious, definitive endings. I wouldn't say they're tongue-in-cheek but there's a sense of humor about them, they're so obviously *endings*. A few of the endings are almost as long as the rest of the piece.

Do you think of the title of a piece like The Ascension *before you write it or does the music turn up an image or association which gives you the title?*

I don't know why that title came about.

I ask because there aren't a lot of non-ironic religious musical statements around and The Ascension *is a furious, sincerely levitating one.*

I've had a few semi-religious experiences on stage—maybe not religious but other-worldly.

I mean religious as generally spiritual.

There's definitely something that goes on for me on stage, I don't know exactly what to call it. In this piece it occurs more often.

What does loud volume have to do with that feeling?

Well, after a concert we did in Munich one woman said she had an orgasm of the mind. I usually get one reaction like that after most concerts. I don't think it would happen at lower volumes. There's no doubt that some people who aren't used to hearing live rock music may be irritated. I've been playing loud music for over four years and it doesn't seem to have affected my hearing. I saw a Ramones concert where my ears hurt, but I've never played a con-

cert where anyone's ears were in pain and that's not what I'm after if it did happen.

Your volume is part of the theatrical effect as well as of the structure and texture of your pieces. What does your early theater work have to do with that flamboyance?

When Jeff Lohn and I started "Theoretical Girls" we had been working on theater pieces, but when we started the band we decided not to have anything at all theatrical on stage although people said we were about the most theatrical band around. I see my performances as being theater, but not necessarily as theatrical.

What's the difference?

What I'm trying to get to is the sensation that the performance is actually happening at that moment, that it isn't just the product of a number of rehearsals that we're showing. In some performances, it's really clear that the band and the audience are experiencing the same thing in the same place at the same time—it's my version of theatrical.

That's interesting because the other obvious quality of your music is one I can only call transcendent. In your music the way to get somewhere else *is to focus on* here and now.

It's no different than any rock concert. That's what's so exciting, it's the theater of rock. I can see what I'm doing as carrying it to an extreme. I've taken the visceral element and extended it to a . . .

Spiritual state?

That could be it.

What happens when you play a piece and that "something else" doesn't happen?

Then it's like *DNA*. It's worth doing for all the times it does work. The thing that's so great about *The Ascension* and the reason we play it every concert is that it's ninety percent sure to go. Halfway through the piece something starts to happen that has nothing to do with anybody in the room, some physical-acoustic phenomena. I have tapes where you don't even hear guitars, you hear choruses, horns, and orchestras.

What does that mean in recording? How do you capture that performance quality and the overall mass of sound you generate?

We're working on it. With *The Ascension* album we've put a lot of mikes into the studio and we're working in large rooms with concrete walls to keep all the sound in the room so that it can bounce around.

There is another problem: few people listen to a recording at the volume you play live.

Or listen in a room the size of Bond's or Irving Plaza, or listen through the amount of speakers we use. We have to use artificial techniques to approximate the live sound.

Do you still write pieces with lyrics?

I did with "Theoretical Girls" and "The Static" but not since I became obsessed with this idea of extreme harmonic density.

Speaking of extreme density, Symphony No. 1 *uses sixteen musicians.*

It's the first time I'll have a chance to realize some of my ideas the way I originally intended them. There are limitations in the band situation so to some extent the pieces are watered down. In this case I'm working with the same ideas but the music will sound quite different.

Are you saying your current pieces are like sketches for a bigger sound?

That's exactly what they are.

Some sketches . . . can't wait for the big picture.

Notes on Symphony No. 1

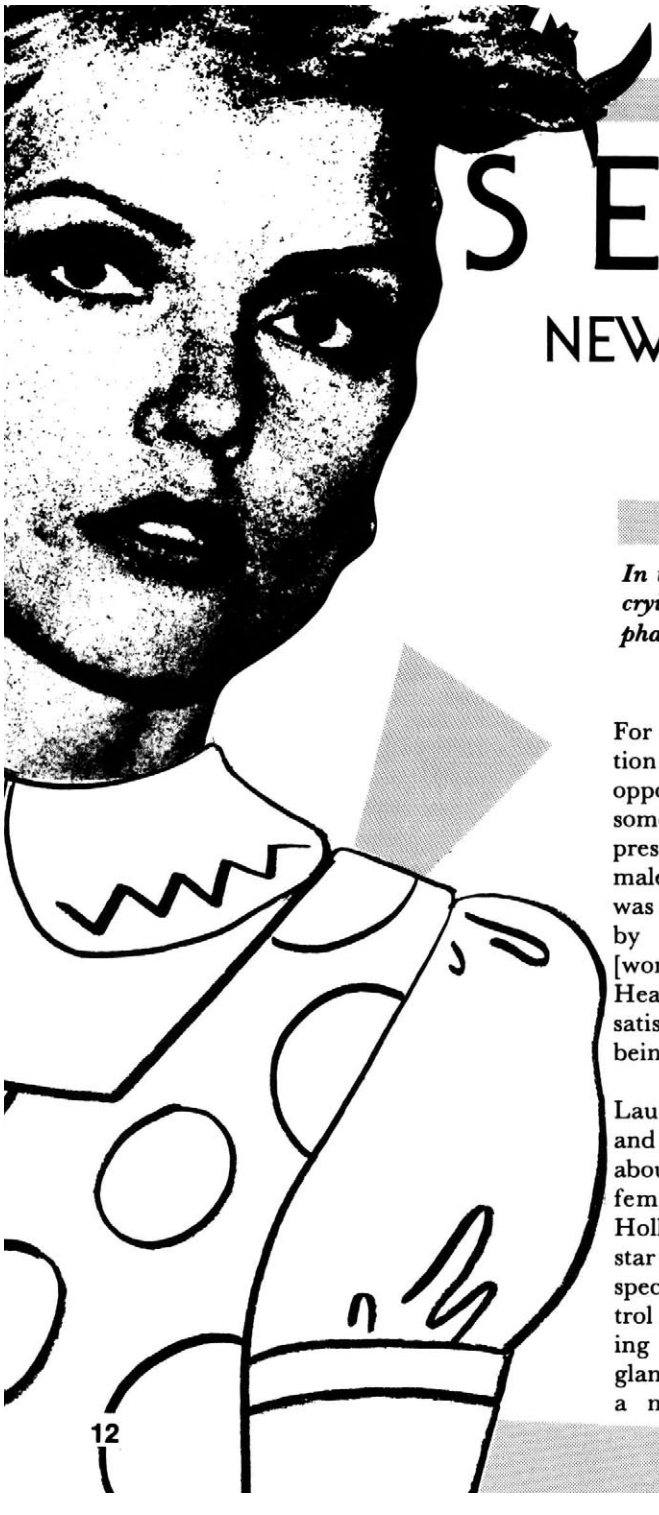
Surprise—the piece adds up to a real symphony, easily conforming to a classical scheme while extending Branca's original rock-derived ideas.

Part I, a prelude, features long horn tones swelling over sustained electric guitar and electric piano chords, thumping bass, and a rock beat. Moving from quiet to a sort of white noise driven by Wischerth's drums, it outlines themes—horn figures and chords—picked up again in the last movement.

Part II has a ricky-tick, metallic robot beat which accelerates to a Metropolis *assembly-line mechanico-rhythm. Guitar strings are "sawed" by sticks, a crushed cymbal is whacked, and tom-toms and other picked guitars add extra percussion effects until, gradually, the syncopated parts come together in a crecendo. It ends with a continuous strumming of the treble guitars after all other instruments drop out.*

Part III is a massed sonic inferno created by eight rapidly strummed guitars and keyboards. Choir-like overtones swell up out of its heaving chords. Wischerth's drums are mixed to pulse beneath the sound; another tricky musical/acoustic line: a two-note organ figure which sounds like a French police siren. This section's high intensity comes from an accumulation of structure and texture, not from dynamic shifts or changes. The din ends with bursts of guitar blasts punctuated by brief pauses.

Part IV is like a percussion factory run amok: Oil drums are clubbed with pipes, cymbals are hit with staccato smashes, guitars are strummed with percussive strokes. A three-note riff like the Kinks' "You Really Got Me" takes shape, then there's a drum solo interlude while the guitars strum on, and finally a reprise of Part I, played as a fiercer, all-out climax. Slow fade to ringing silence.



SEMIO-SEX

NEW WAVE ROCK AND THE FEMININE

DAN GRAHAM

In the late '60s women played the role of victim—in long skirt, sitting on a kitchen stool, crying into a strictly non-electric guitar. . . . Punk rock in 1976 was the first rock and roll phase* ever *not to insist that women should be picturesque topics and topics of songs.

Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons in *The Boy Look At Johnny.*

For two decades rock was a ritual affirmation of adolescent male sexual identity. As opposed to the heroic male rock star, the somewhat rarer female performer would present herself as a spectacle for passive male contemplation. Women's satisfaction was assumed to be that of being looked at by men: Men's "desire for the . . . [woman] to be a . . . spectacle." (Stephen Heath, *Screen*) Lacan also refers to "the satisfaction of a woman who knows she is being looked at."

Laura Mulvey's article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (*Screen*) speaks about the respective roles of male and female performers in the classical Hollywood film and suggests that the male star is more readily identified with by the spectator since he is the one who is in control of events and thus provides a "satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male star's glamorous characteristics are . . . those of a more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego." Contrastingly, "the meaning of women [to the spectator] is [that of] sexual difference" which presents a threat to the man's sense of ego wholeness. Due to her body's absence of a penis, the woman symbolizes, for the man, the threat of castration. Her potentially threatening look—her potentially castrating look—can only be sublimated in a performance by her fetishization: by her presenting herself as an iconic mask, or by her playing out the role of a satisfying and reassuring image for the male spectator to comfortably rest his eyes upon. "The castration that is posed . . . in the shifts of the eye/look of the man/the image of the woman . . . is . . . the symbolic . . . [representation] of sexual difference." (Heath)

The male gaze desires to *have* the woman (which is to be in the position from which the woman's desire emanates). Luce Irigaray has noted that the masculine

privilege given to the eye over the other senses downgrades "smell, taste, touch, hearing . . . [and] bodily relations. . . . It has contributed to disembodying sexuality. The moment the look dominates, the body loses in materiality." Whereas, for the woman, she says, "the emphasis is on the voice as against the look." (*f/m*)

With the advent of the '70s a newly liberated female with sexual and aggressive drives equal to the male was represented in the "macha" pose of performers such as Suzi Quatro and Patti Smith. "Macha" seemed a simple inversion of the male "macho" principle, basing itself upon male identification. "Macha" performers assert that they have the penis, or that they *are* the penis. *The Runaways,* four sexy-tough teenage girls outfitted in leather and packaged like Charlie's Angels and performing not uninteresting songs written by the leader, Joan Jett, took the image to a *reductio ad absurdium.* As a simple inversion, it lacked irony and was essentially exploitative which explains why later New Wave female performers scorned the role.

The irony resulting from an "unreal" self-parodying, early '60s sexually feminine pose is adopted by the lead singer of *Blondie,* Debbie Harry. The comic-strip character she plays is used by the group as a hook upon which to hang the group's early '60s rock imagery (which, like *The Ramones,* is actually a comment on the late '70s). Although in "real-life" Harry may be much like "Blondie" (or may not be), it is apparent that she is playing the character at a distance. Like the concept behind the early '60s all-girl group, *The Shangri-Las, Blondie* is a fabricated stereotype. But a difference is that whereas *The Shangri-Las* were created by Shadow Morton who wrote their songs and staged their act, "Blondie"—Debbie Harry—writes much of her material, and her persona may serve as a vehicle to express her real emotional identity (a reverse irony given the "distancing" the songs undergo by their stereotypical treatment). The character, "Blondie," is an example of a false fetishization, a decoy, put before the audience who are—to a large extent—in on the joke.

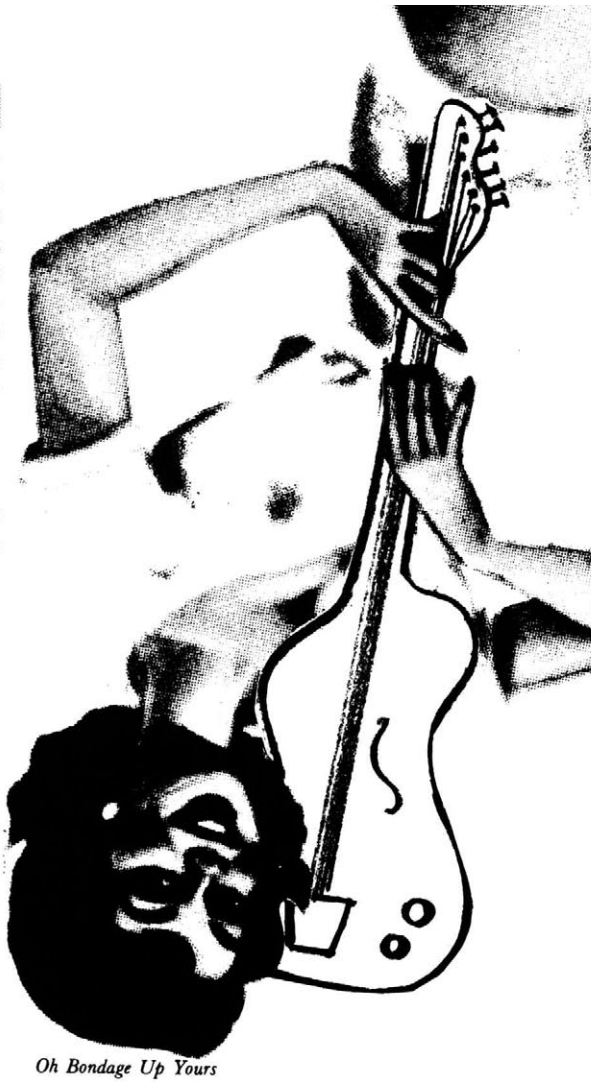
Some mainstream punk British groups, such as *Penetration, The Rezillos,* or *The Adverts,* employ the conventional female lead vocalist to express the otherwise all-male group's collective ideas. Punk rock in a general sense sought to eliminate the individual, "autobiographical" lead singer as hero; thus a female without individual ego was useful in downplaying the importance of the "front-man."

From punk several bands emerged which were fronted by a woman singer-writer whose other personnel were male. Some of these are Poly Styrene's *X-Ray Spex,* Siouxsie Sue's *Siouxsie and the Banshees,* and Lydia Lunch's *Teenage Jesus and the Jerks.*

Styrene's first song, "Oh Bondage Up Yours" was performed when she was eighteen. As she recalls:

> There were these girls that used to chain themselves together with cuffs and things. . . . I just used that kind of bondage to express repression. When people see these people wearing bondage they think they're *for* bondage—but they're not. Because by wearing it or singing about it, you're against it. You don't pretend that you're not chained up and everything. You admit you're repressed."

The English press, as in the case of other politically motivated punk, deliberately misread this song as pro-bondage.



Oh Bondage Up Yours

Bind me chain me to the wall
I wanna be a slave to you all
Oh bondage! Up yours!
Oh bondage! No more!
Oh bondage! Up yours!
Oh bondage! No more!
Chain store chain smoke I consume you all
Chain gang chain mail I don't think at all
Trash me crush me beat me up until I fall
I wanna be a victim for you all
Oh bondage! Up yours!
Oh bondage! No more!
Oh bondage! Up yours!
Oh bondage! NO MORE!

Where previously rock had been associated with the adolescent's sexual identity, Poly Styrene refers to punk as "sexless . . . it is sex, [but] . . . on the other hand it is not." Rock music is not equated, 100 percent, with sex. A performer, she asserts, "doesn't play off of sex . . . you don't use it." Rock no longer will be used as a signifier of sexual difference, of "male" identity in opposition to a "female" identity. The early '70s bisexual personas of David Bowie, Elton John, Gary Glitter, Alice Cooper, and Bryan Ferry had already prepared the way for the break-down of a fixed notion of sexual identity.

The Kinks' song "Lola" articulates this new ethos:

I met her in a club in old Soho
Where you drink champagne and it tastes just like Coca Cola
She walked up to me and she asked me to dance
I asked her her name and in a dark brown voice she said "Lola"
El-oh-el-aye-Lola la-la-la-la-la-Lola

Well I'm not the world's most physical guy
But when she squeezed me tight she nearly broke my spine
Oh my Lola la-la-la-la-Lola
Well I'm not dumb but I can't understand
Why she walked like a woman and talked like a man . . .

Well I left home just a week before
And I never ever kissed a woman before
But Lola smiled and took me by the hand
And said dear boy I'm gonna make you a man
But I know what I am and I'm glad I'm a man
And so is Lola

Siouxsie Sue, singer-songwriter of *Siouxsie and the Banshees* is called, due to her aloof, un-sexual mannerisms, the "Ice Queen" although she sings with hyper-emotionality. Perhaps her surface frigidity is a defense against the "psychotic" intensity of the words' contents. Her lyrics suggest the fragmentation of day-to-day self-identity, but a self which is ultimately absurd, filled as it is, in the words of artist Eva Hesse, with "contradictions and oppositions . . . the most absurd opposites or extreme opposites." (*Eva Hesse,* Lucy Lippard)

Jigsaw Feeling

One day I'm feeling total
The next I'm split in two
My eyes are doing somersaults
staring at my shoe

My brain is out of my hand
There's nothing to prevent
The impulse is quite meaningless
in a cerebral non-event

Kleenex

The Runaways

Lydia Lunch

So I sit in reverie
  getting on my nerves
The intangible bands that keep me
Sitting on the verge . . .
  of a breakdown
  of a breakdown
  of a result
Complete me . . . maybe . . . defeat me.

Could the place of "breakdown . . . reaction . . . impulse" be identified with what Julia Kristeva has termed the "semiotic chora"? Kristeva equates this prelinguistic realm of primary drives and feelings with the time when the child identified with the mother—before the fixed, social, "stable" ego necessitated by symbolic language and produced by the castration complex had forced conscious denial of these primary drives. The movements of the chora are not between positions of the speaking ego, as in rational discourse, but between the fragmented zones of the body, expressed in heterogeneous gestures and feelings—especially in vocal intonations like "the babbling of a child or musical rhythms." It is within the vocal expression more than the overtly comprehensible lyrics and melody through which the "feminine" is to be found. "Femininity [as] . . . a locus of enunciation [is] anchored in my tongue, my unconscious." (Helene Cixous, *f/m*) A musical example is the sibilant insertions the other members of the Swiss all-female group, *Kleenex,* enunciate between the interstices of the lead singer's vocal in "U": eh/ee/e/it/eh/ehh/ee/e/it/he . . ." Another example is the indistinguishable babble of the other members of *The Raincoats,* a polyphonic counterpoint which nearly cancels out the meaning of the lead vocal on "In Love." This lead vocal itself breaks down at the chorus phrase at the end of each stanza: "this is love," enunciating the line in this fashion: "This/is/es/ee/lo/la/love/la/ov/ov/oh/ho/ha/ha/ha/hey/this/is/one/ha/ha/ha . . ."

Lydia Lunch of *Teenage Jesus and The Jerks* (later of *8-Eyed Spy* and *The Devil Dogs*) uses a hysterical pitch which rises upward to place screeching emphasis on the tags of key lines. She says: "People never understand . . . [that] it's right in your throat. It's in your joints. It [annoys them] . . . because it's physically uncomfortable . . ." It is Helene Cixous' thesis that feminine pleasure is linked to the stage when the voice of the mother was seen as an extension of her flesh, for "the voice is very close to the flesh of . . . language," and the infant identified with the mother's voice, and later its own voice. "To write in the feminine is to put over what is cut off by the symbolic, the voice of the mother." (*f/m*) This repressed "feminine" has the power to subvert the logical and ego-centric categories of social speech. As the order of social speech is dependent upon the construction of a singular, unified identity for the individual subject, it must deny the shifting and heterogeneous impulses and feelings of the body reflected in Kristeva's "semiotic chora." An art which is "plurivocal . . . heterogeneous, [and] polymorphous" can liberate the level of the "chora" and "create a place where the social is destroyed." The danger of such art is its fissuring of the artist's ego which "unleash(es) . . . anarchic, unsocialized pleasure on the side of the 'death drives' . . . [which runs the risk for the artist] of psychosis." (Julia Kristeva, *Screen*)

Lydia Lunch formed *Teenage Jesus and the Jerks* when she was seventeen. Although its personnel have changed, they have always been all-male. The music is an advanced, "neo-Minimal" primitivism, her lyrics are about her flesh, a hint of "auto-affection" which hardly communicates to the audience.

Slouxsie Sue

I Woke Up Dreaming

My eyes are gripped
My fists are clenched
My brain open
My mouth rips
I woke up dreaming . . . My wrists are split
My elbows twisted
My shoulders bent
My knees arthritic
I woke up bleeding . . .

Across the window
Under the curtain
Break the glass
Feel the air
My guts in knots
I convulse
I fall on the floor.

Poly Styrene

On the label it states that Lydia Lunch's "Baby Doll" is published by "Infant Tunes" and recorded in "Biting Stereo." Lunch's desire is regressed to the time when, "the baby and the world were confounded in one chaotic intimacy which was too present, too immediate," and is an erotic which is close to "madness." (Michele Montrelay, quoted by Heath, *Screen*)

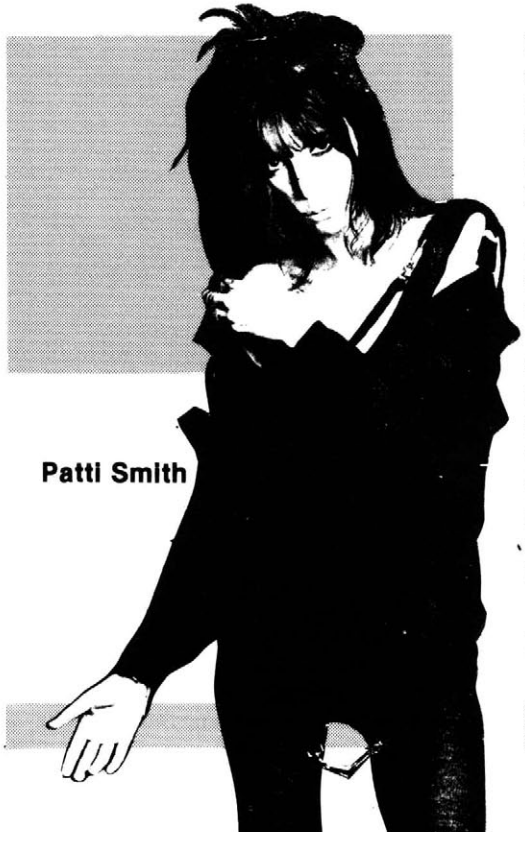
Little girl
In your little girl world
Just a baby doll
In your baby doll pram
Watch me babysit
I'm your little girl
In your little girl world
And I . . .

Love me please?
Can I please, just once
Once is not enough
Now your super touch
Daddy, clasp my hand
He's the only man
I'm his little girl
And he . . .

Michele Montrelay believes that "feminine" erotic drives somehow resist the process of repression (which befall the male drives at the time of the Oedipal stage). This means that they are not fully symbolized; the achievement of total female pleasure leads towards a regression to infantile eroticism. Lunch says that her music is "how I physically feel: that's how my body functions. . . . The [music's] impact is how I like to fuck. Bam. Bam. Bam." Curiously, Lunch's attitude to the audience is one of mask-like frigidity. She says: "I am frigid, but it's not a sexual frigidity, if you know what I mean. . . . It's not that I can't be touched, but it's that I can't be satisfied. . . . I'm . . . very naked. I do give everything, but it's going to hurt them more than it hurts me. . . . What I do is self-hurt, without the masochism." Her persona of frigidity, in psychological terms, serves as a defense to dissociate her conscious person from the *jouissance* which the music exposes; if she were to fully identify this "semiotic chora," she would be risking psychosis.

A second reason for her stage indifference is that she refuses to be a passive receptacle for the audience, preferring to contain herself within her *own* insatiable desire—a desire which will not be so easily satisfied by the audience's applause. Lunch: "The fact that I don't actually move is because I'm so selfish." She refuses to evoke the mystery, the sexual difference which reassures the audience of its own identity. She is only concerned with her sexual identity for herself: "I don't have to shake my hips to prove a point. . . . 'Why do I stand still?' . . . Because, rather than make a fool of myself . . . I stand still and try to maintain some dignity. . . . I refuse to fall to the floor and have some guitar player pick me up like some other female performers we know." Not allowing herself to be a visual spectacle for her audience allows a split between her outer self (for the audience, a non-persona) and the contents of her songs. The outward aspect of Lunch which the audience sees does not open itself for communication or autobiographical speculation. Lunch here takes a typical punk strategy in breaking with the convention of passive audience relation to performance showing her contempt for the so-called autobiographical, "heroic" singer-songwriters of the recent past. Figures such as Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, Bruce Springsteen, and others'

The Raincoats



Patti Smith

lyrics were equated to their self-revelation of personality. When they performed live, the "success" (convincingness) of their acts necessitated an exploitation of both the audiences's belief in their persona and their private lives.

But this "honesty" was more likely a dramatic quasi-fiction, invented as a hook upon which to hang their songs' narrative "I." More theatrically sophisticated performers such as David Bowie, Bryan Ferry, Iggy Pop, or Alice Cooper played with the artifice (or complexity) behind the device of the performer-songwriter's "I," making the entire pose dubious or unnecessary for punk performers, who in rejecting stardom, chose to give the audience nothing of their so-called "self."

Another obvious danger for the "autobiographical star" which the punk performer in his or her less "personal" approach avoids, is that when they choose to dispense with the quasi-fictional persona in order to fully reveal self-doubt, pain, or ego fragmentation (as was the case with John Lennon's famous album), the artist is placed in an untenable position; for the desire of the public is to know increasingly more about him or her so as to link this revealed "inner self" with the outer personality they feel that they possess—which becomes an impossible demand.

The "autobiographical" mask was sex-defined; females (or men) might identify with Joni Mitchell's personal lyrics as archetypically representing female experience, especially in terms of socially defined sexuality, and the reverse might be true of Bob Dylan. This stereotyping of the star as female or male sexual subject followed the projection of the audience's identification. Bowie and others proved, however, that an androgynous identity could equally project charisma for spectators of either sexual gender. Some female performers desire to eliminate the symbolic order of sex entirely, for when the audience projects a sexual identity onto the performer and the contents of her message, this symbolic classification of "female" experience places her sexuality in the predefinitions of the patriarchical order. But this presents another dilemma: if the "femaleness" of the rock performer is the content, then this only reiterates conventional sexual difference.

Dan Graham is a writer and artist who last exhibited at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.

NOTES ON NOTES

BY JOHN HOWELL

Airwaves (110 Records). A prescient (1977) 2 L.P. music/performance anthology. Brainy fun all around with tracks like Laurie Anderson's tape bow violin pun/sound songs ("Ethics is the Esthetics of the Few-Ture (Lenin)"), Terry Fox's tape collage of amplified cats ("The Labyrinth Scored for the Purrs of 11 Different Cats"), Julia Heyward's ululating vocalese ("Mongolian Face Slap"), solo and group sections of Meredith Monk's *Quarry,* and more, more. Good notes, good production.

Robert Ashley, *Private Parts, Perfect Lives (Private Parts),* and *Music Word Fire and Would I Do It Again (Coo Coo)* (Lovely). Different takes of Ashley's ever-evolving, ever in-progress performance "opera," a zany yet sincere '80s *Spoon River Anthology* about stream-of-consciousness life in the Cornbelt (see *LIVE 3* for details). The progressively de-constructed, colored-up cover art clues you to the changes. *PP* is brown titles and credits on yellow; Ashley speak/sings in a low, quiet monotone over Blue Gene Tyranny's drifty neo-cocktail/trance piano improvs. Effect: meditative. *PL (PP)* lays out white lyrics on deep blue with red borders; Ashley and chorus (Kroesen and Van Tiegham) sing with zip over the bigger beat of a full band and layers of prerecorded tracks. Effect: engagingly energetic. *Music* is purple and turquoise with torn-out newspaper titles and credits; these are 'lessons"—capsule versions—extracted from the opus and jazzed up with lots of electronically altered voice, synthesizers, synare and other burbly percussion. Effect: sci-fi/disco spacey.

David Byrne, *The Catherine Wheel* (Sire). The soundtrack to Tharp's dance is greatly altered in the mix—it's brighter, harder-edged—and edited in sequence: *after* you buy the album, a card *inside* says the whole score is available *only* on cassette. Although this isn't the sound heard at the Winter Garden, it's tough stuff—the collaboration with toughie Tharp cured Byrne's numbed Enoui. Byrne's open-ended structures, subtle shifts in tempo and layering, complex polyrhythms, and tightly controlled violence matched up perfectly with Tharp's style. Comes with Byrne's tasty jacket photos of the elaborate *Wheel* set.

NATHANIEL TILESTON

Just Another Asshole. #5 of Barbara Ess' punky boho mag is an album of 77 45-second aural acts by 84 artists of all types, known and unknown, who produced crude to sophisticated cuts. A true urban treasure: $5 buys a world.

Glenn Branca, *Lesson No. 1* and *The Ascension* (99 Records). Play *Lesson* loud enough and its accelerating drums and majestic guitars will take you out just as it does live. "Dissonance," on the other side won't—it's a real performance piece (seeing a guy swing a sledgehammer at an anvil in front of the band is better than the actual sound it makes). *Ascension* captures all of Branca's sonic overload; it's superbly structured, thundering transcendence, just like he says.

Y Pants, *Off the Hook* (99 Records). Three-girl band with tinny underwater/Japanese sound (ukelele, toy piano, bass, and spare drum kit), and stripped-down arrangements (Virginia Piersol's drums are bass/cymbal with little in-between, Barbara Ess' plucky bass and Gail Vachon's hammered keyboards stick to basics). Deadpan performers with occasional nod to flash (a Super 8 "Man Who Fell To Earth" projected on the wall). They're stranger than they seem, like schizy kids, and this E.P. gets the sound/picture right.

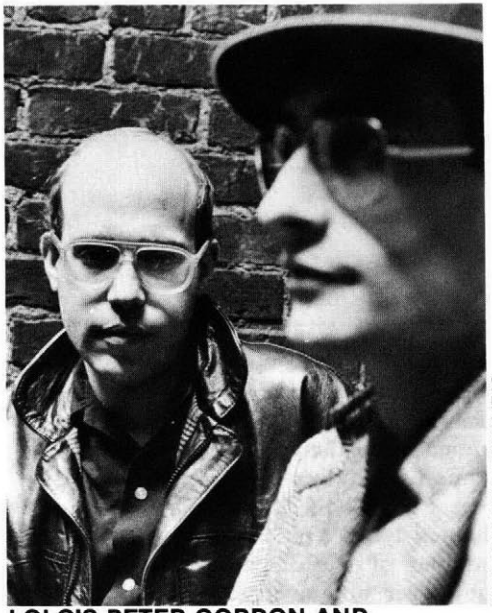
Jill Kroesen, *Kroesen, Jill: Stop Vicious Cycles* (Lovely). Upcoming L.P. blends moaning, wavering, alto Kroesen vocals (she digs into drawn-out vowels like a downtown Cher), and punny lyrics ("I'm

PAULA COURT

Sorry I'm Such a Wienie," "Secretary [Wayne Hays Blues]") with busy arrangements in several styles. "Ride Your Pony" is gritty rock, "I Am Not Seeing That You Are Here" is uptempo, rhythmic jazz, "Fay Shism Blues" is slow, densely layered blues. Live, much is lost in her fall-apart, giggly performances, but her recordings, like her solo shows and cracked, soulful voice are weirdly moving.

Laurie Anderson, *O Superman* (110 Records and Warner Bros.). A sci-fi political electronic statement that's really moving, and that's rare. Electronically altered vocal, soaring synthesizer lines, clever sound effects, and emotionally loaded lyrics ("When force is gone, there's always Mom") supported by a untold story about its Massenet source (see *LIVE 5*). Fun flip side, "Walking the Dog," is a free-associative tune sung in mock Dolly Parton voice. Excellent production by Roma Baran who also makes sure the same thing happens live—it does.

The Love of Life Orchestra, *Star Jaws* (Lovely), *Extended Niceties* and *Geneva* (Lust/Unlust). The music of Peter Gordon, composer and concept band leader (LOLO is an ever-shifting group of independent musicians), has been tagged as too smart to rock and too "popular" to Think About. Unfair, because his work is really good solid pop-rock. *SJ* sounds tamer now, five years later, but "Machomusic" still struts. The wider 45 rpm grooves of the *EN* E.P. let producer/engineer Kurt Munkacsi go wild with an extremely bright, treble and a dense bottom. The compositions alternate between repeated phrases and sudden tempo/shifts, soaring melodies and dissonant bursts, slices of cliches (bubble-gum, funk, free jazz) and all-star solos (Arto Lindsay, David Byrne). *Geneva* is more of the same with a tighter, smaller band and a less up-front production. At album length, its run-together, rhythmus-interruptus songs—all instrumental—make for too much fragmentation but the best parts linger on: the yearning horns of "Young Girls," "Cry Baby's" cut-up method, and the always inventive percussion of David Van Tieghem throughout. What you might hear live is another question altogether—LOLO has a concept which also has its good and bad nights.


STEPHANIE CHERNIKOWSKI

LOLO'S PETER GORDON AND DAVID VAN TIEGHAM

Meredith Monk *Dolmen Music* (ECM). Side 1 is selected hits from shows by her and Ping Chong (*Education of the Girlchild, Fear and Loathing in Gotham*). In this solo music, Monk's repeated piano riffs create a ground against which her voice postures in abstract language which still "speaks" emotionally. "Dolmen Music," side 2, comes from *Recent Ruins* and as a group vocal piece, it's more controlled, more social, less stream-of-consciousness loony, and less fun. Live, the group sits in a circle wearing white clothing and sings with eyes half-closed, a neo-ritualistic solemnity which may be sincerely moving for the performers but is a bore to watch. Listening to her truly original techniques on record, you can close *your* eyes and dream along: these songs dance vividly in the mind with their lilting melodies, rolling broken piano chords, and eloquent language of abstract sounds.

The Raybeats, *Roping Wild Bears* (Don't Fall Off the Mountain), and *Guitar Beat* (PVC). This all-instrumental band of expert musicians with "avant-garde" rock credentials (The Contortions, 8-Eyed Spy) now works the tuneful turf of early rock in their original compositions: surf music, '60s guitar rave-ups, soulful instrumentals a la Booker T., and the syncopated R and B of The Meters. But their sound is their own, a thick blend of Jody Harris' twangy Telecaster reverb guitar, Danny Amis' low-necked, picky bass, Pat Irwin's screeching sax and swirling Acetone organ, and Don Christiansen's slung, thundering drums. And their songs are tricky: "simple," well-made things full of modulations, tempo shifts, and quick solo bits. A song like "Guitar Beat" starts out to a '50s stroll rhythm—a moodier "Rumble"—and ends in dissonant feedback. Live, they're an introverted bunch—the music's up-front—but the

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dense *band* sound becomes a highly-charged, moving object. *Guitar Beat* gets this main drift although it's a little too clean, while *Bears'* wider E.P. grooves hypes the overall sound, especially Christiansen's drums. This band is a best buy.

Suicide, *Suicide* (Red Star), *Suicide* (Ze/Antilles), *Alan Vega* (Ze/PVC). In this two-man performance band, Martin Rev pounds the electronic keyboards and twiddles the rhythm box while Vega takes the audience to the edge—where he comes from. Live, Vega dies for our sins, then rises to show how *that's* done; the "songs," chanted lyrics over repeated riffs, are his parables of truth: "keep your dreams" sung over and over to ascending organ chords. Minimal? Rather, like Coleridge said, a "contrast of a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order." Suicide doesn't stop until you're moved. The early *Suicide* (Red Star re-issue) says it all with presence and passion while *Alan Vega* translates the message to country/rockabilly land. *Suicide* (Ze/Antilles) is a glossy, slicked-up Idea of what Suicide

means, courtesy of producer Ric Ocasek (the Cars). The cover—*airbrushed* blood—unwittingly spells it out.

Disband. This performance/musical outfit has never recorded and never should. They're too good at funky, informal performance shots to undergo even the mininum polish a recording would require. Besides, without their live act, there's no real "song": you have to be there. Martha Wilson, Ingrid Sischy, Donna Henes, and Ilona Granet have dress-up personas, catchy action/word conceits, and a perfectly casual performance style—amateur vaudeville—which looks best in rough frontier outposts like Fashion Moda and Toronto's Cabana Room. Their numbers are cabaret/newspaper clippings of chanted, a capella lyrics with occasional percussion accompaniment (hammers, toys, pots and pans, a jump-rope). Big Topics are radiation, macho men, love, war—all from a fun feminist point of view. Disband is reverse Devo: low-tech, no flash, shout-in-your-face expressionism. Their message is a call for a return to humane evolution: hope, constructive anger, play-acting as serious work—you know, the old humanist stuff.

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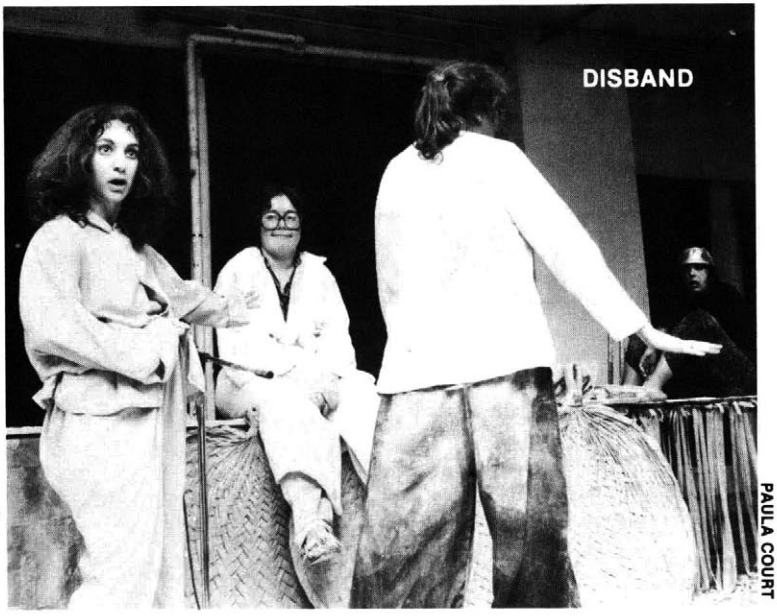


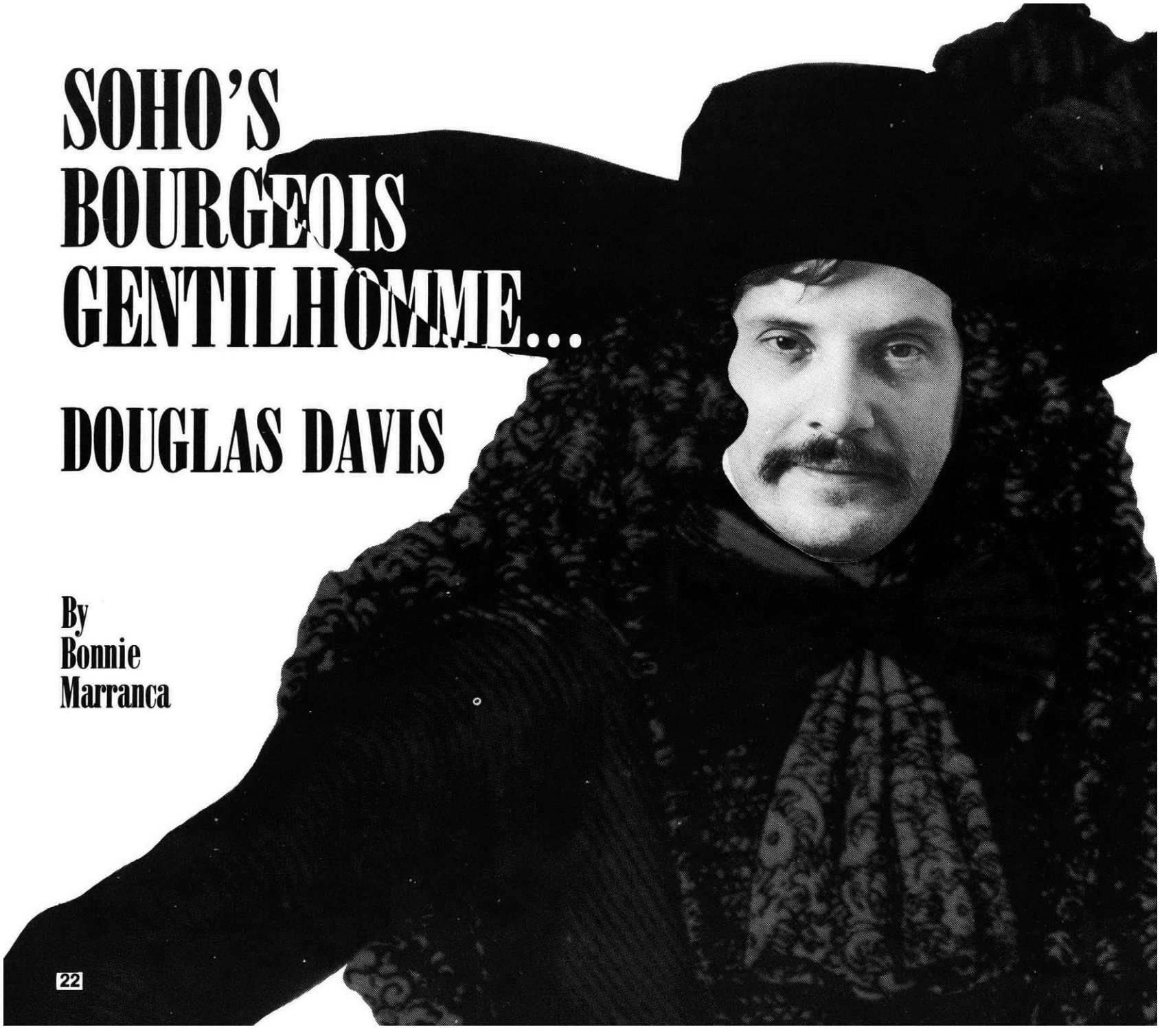
PAULA COURT

WANTED: artists' records for a monograph and international discography of artists' records by Peter Frank. Publication: mid-'82 (project funded by a grant from the NEA). Phonograph records only. AND artists' records, tapes, and cassettes for a complete international discography of artists' records, sound art, new music, text-sound and electronic music being compiled by B. George and M. Defoe of 110 Records. Direct all material and inquiries to: M. DEFOE / ONE TEN RECORDS / 110 CHAMBERS ST. / NY / NY 10007 / (212) 964-2296.

SOHO'S BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME...

DOUGLAS DAVIS

By Bonnie Marranca



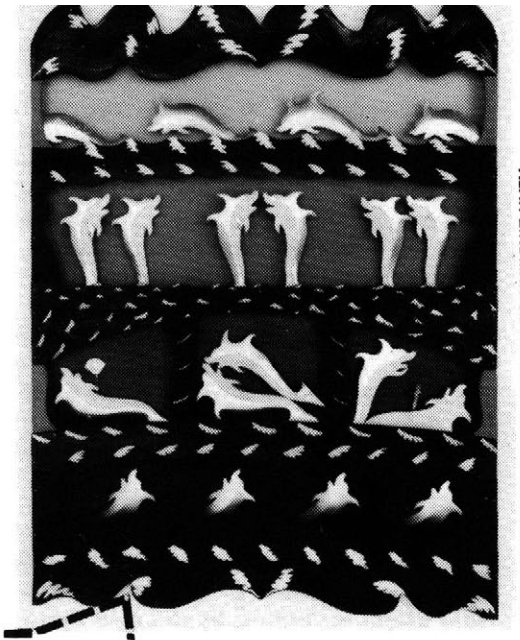
The art world has always had an ambivalent, even sneering, attitude towards theater. Just fourteen years ago Michael Fried was proclaiming in *Artforum* that presence, duration, and acknowledgement of the spectator obscured one's perception of the art work because they embraced the theatrical experience. This obsessive purist went so far as to claim that "the success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theater." I think the larger, unarticulated question has finally to do with property: who owns aesthetic space—the spectator or the art work?

Fried's project for saving modernism, now so dated, so High Art-infested in its trembling good intentions, was turned upside down in the last decade when artists embraced both "low art" (as he would have called it) and the theatrical.

Enter Douglas Davis, again in *Artforum,* writing a "post-performancism" manifesto, telling everyone it's alright to do theater, to mix high and low art, to be someone other than yourself. "To hell with medium-as-medium, structure-as-structure, New Wave-as-the-next-thing. . . . Let us have instead a reliable verbal umbrella: 'Post-Performancism.'" I wouldn't trust that patchwork umbrella on a rainy opening night.

Wherever he looks Davis finds "performance-film-television-radio, sources in the popular as well as the visual arts." He's like Moliere's upwardly mobile "bourgeois gentilhomme" (Davis is fond of alluding to Moliere in his article (who is startled to learn that he has been speaking prose all his life. In Davis's recognition scene he discovers that the arts influence and feed into each other, and that the theatrical, in particular, absorbs all temporal arts.

Davis is not alone in his sudden acceptance of an expanded notion of performance. The art world in general has little by little become more accepting of theatrical experience. It was inevitable that this should happen because art and art theory cannot sustain artists' prolonged inquiries into the nature of performance and audience. Likewise, as performance art moves toward theater, dance moves toward narration and emotional content, painting toward representation, the installation toward setting, photography toward drama, and theater toward opera. The arts are moving toward the exploration of time or narration, after many years of an obsession with space. The mistake of the art world was to believe in the first place that performance is an *art* form when in fact it is a *theatrical* form with its own set of imperatives. One cannot circumscribe performance within modernist doctrine which, as Davis relates, denounced revivalism and objectified all phenomena (surface-as-surface, self-as-self). The theatrical impulse lives its own aesthetic cycle outside of faddish art talk. And if "performance art" is to have an ongoing life, it will have to be saved by theater. I think many artists and critics now realize this.



ALAN ZINDMAN COURTESY NANCY HOFFMAN GALLERY

Porpoise Opera,
Alan Siegel

Performances have been referred to as "sculpture action," "events," "actions," "happenings," "non-static art," and "art performance," among other things. Everything but theater. Artists have always exhibited an anti-theatrical impulse, from the classical avant-garde movements of dada, futurism, et al., up to the present. Even in the last decade or so, visual artists

have moved closer to performance while trying to avoid theater. They haven't fully taken into account the elements inherent in using a form that evolves in time and before an audience, a form that is really not about the use of materials, autobiography, or getting out of the gallery system, as artists have wrongly supposed. And they've ignored the matter of skill which theater is based on. If artists accept anything as a "performance" then anyone can be a performance artist, but not everyone can be in the theater because every "act" is not theatrical.

Davis's article, one of a growing list of inane pieces on performance that *Artforum* is known for publishing, demonstrates to what extent art critics, in this case Davis, lack a theatrical vocabulary and theoretical base. Besides being ignorant about theater—he mentions no contemporary theater work—Davis's ideas are so old-fashioned they predate Stanislavsky. His art talk is all veneer: you can see all the cracks just below the surface.

One cannot talk about performance exclusively in relation to art history: Davis writes as if all changes, trends, and preoccupations in performance grow out of an evolving art theory—modernism or late modernism—not out of cultural forces. Of all the arts, theater is the most sensitive to society because language, gesture, and the performer are central to it, and theater encompasses every single other art form as it transforms itself through time and history. It is understandable that, in the art world's earliest dealings with performance, writing about the form was naive and shallow, but art critics and artists have now had twenty years of contemporary performance work to study and expand upon, and their ideas about theatrical form are hopelessly unsophisticated.

COURTESY METRO PICTURES

***Untitled*, Cindy Sherman**

Finally, when the media has given everyone the possibility of being a performer for a world audience, when the creative expression of self through acting out has been encouraged in all formal expressions of American culture, performance as a human activity—probably the first, most religious, most celebratory of acts—seems less to do with art theory and everything to do with how individual life is lived in the community and in the world.

Individuality was initially preserved through the solo performance; it is a form anyone could use because it is totally self-centered. But in the long run, the solo performance form leads to a dead end because it is based exclusively on the personal experience, and with that as the sole resource, one can hardly expect it to be more than a brief phase, even exercise, in the life of an artist. Solo performance cannot create a "world" in the space as theater can. And dialogue (theater) is more complex a way of thinking than the monologue (solo). Performance art tends to talk to art history, theater to history itself.

Certainly Davis seems unprepared to think deeply about the implications of performance activity for the individual in society, and for audiences, too. He brings up the subject of comedy but the discussion goes nowhere because he has no resources with which to analyze comedy as a form, nor to speculate on why it is a dominant form in performance today. Comedy is not popular simply because we are nostalgic for old movies and TV, or because it's a reaction to the "seriousness" of the modernist stance, as he suggests. Rather, comedy's popularity may have to do with the fact that it is a conservative form, one that

celebrates the individual's capacity to endure, to preserve the individual spirit in a universe (even if it's simply the "world" of the performance) of disorder. Unlike tragedy which is based on rebelliousness and longing, comedy is more interested in survival—comedy shows a disinterest in aspirations toward greatness.

What can one do with a critic who states, ". . . we are peculiarly barren in theoretical depth when it comes to issues like parody, reference, comedy, imitation, irony." "We" have no less than two thousand years of writings on these subjects, available to whomever takes the trouble to get to a library or bookstore and do some research. The point is, there is a rich theatrical heritage to draw upon, if only as a starting point.

Davis has so little knowledge about the theatrical experience, and the range of emotions and forms it engenders, that it is not so much a case of his giving the wrong answers about the topics he raises as it is of asking the wrong questions. He mixes up architectural terms such as "direct recall" and "revivalist" when he should be discussing the use of quotation and rehearsal technique. "Rehearsal is the modality of revivalism," he proudly announces. Nonsense: rehearsal has nothing to do with revivalism, it's an attitude toward performance, a value placed on skill.

Where Davis is most confused is in writing about *performing* which he doesn't distinguish from *acting*. (He also should rethink his definitions of originality and authenticity, imitation and representation.) He uses Michael Kirby's 1965 definition of "non-matrixed" performance—a definition no one in the theater except people writing dissertations has used in years—and tries to assert that "the matrixed actor stands at the center of Post-Performance." First of all, in the art world there are performers, not actors; secondly, matrixed (to use this silly term) acting has generally to do with naturalistic acting in a play in which setting, character, and dialogue contribute to a unified whole. The context of Davis's manifesto is so ludicrous—he simply doesn't speak a theatrical language—that one is tempted to believe it's really a comedy act he is writing to spoof manifestos.

Davis obviously doesn't see much theater, so his ideas about the form are oblivious to twentieth century experiments. When he quotes actors on acting he quotes Coquelin (1887) and Sarah Bernhardt (1924). If he were writing about new painting would he quote a nineteenth century realist painter to define the form? Finally, why does the art world consistently tolerate mindless thinking about performance while it upholds standards in writing about visual art? This kind of writing is both unhealthy and dangerous in its influence on artists and their public, and on performance itself.

Oh well, what does it all matter to someone who says Post-Performance "gladly risks recall and thus courts the false charge of imitation. If this be Neoclassicism, [another case of mistaken identity—Neoclassical theatrical theory is directly opposed to the hybrid mix of forms Davis embaces] we stand or fall on that ground." No thanks, I'll sit this one out and, with Coleridge (another of Davis's quotable notables), suspend my disbelief. Perhaps it's been a performance all along, with Davis simply acting out a new vision of the comedy of manners. After all, hasn't he said that in the Post-Performance era it's okay to be yourself and not yourself?

GEOFFREY CLEMENTS, COURTESY PAULA COOPER GALLERY

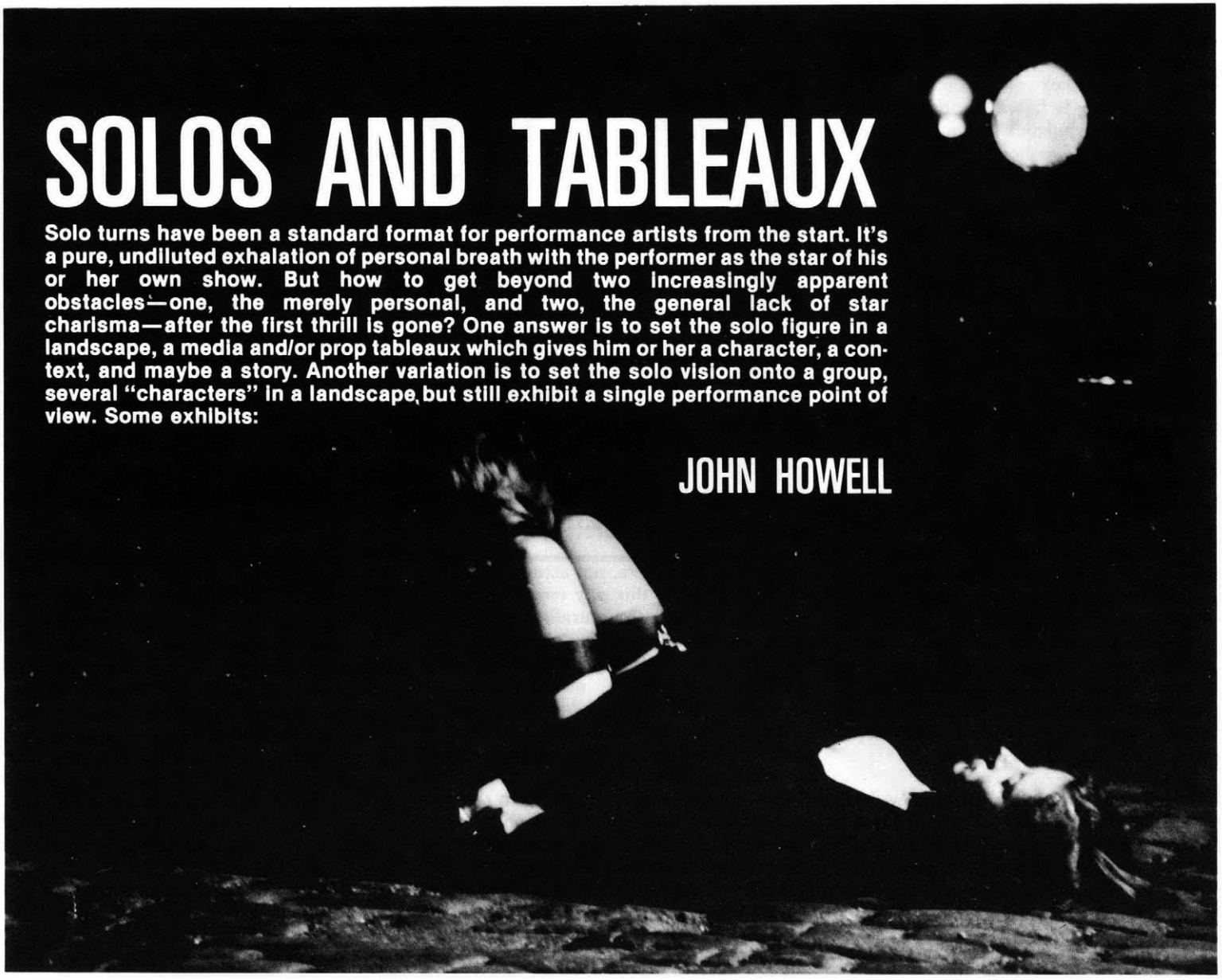
Installation, Jon Borofsky

Bonnie Marranca is co-editor of *Performing Arts Journal.*

SOLOS AND TABLEAUX

Solo turns have been a standard format for performance artists from the start. It's a pure, undiluted exhalation of personal breath with the performer as the star of his or her own show. But how to get beyond two increasingly apparent obstacles—one, the merely personal, and two, the general lack of star charisma—after the first thrill is gone? One answer is to set the solo figure in a landscape, a media and/or prop tableaux which gives him or her a character, a context, and maybe a story. Another variation is to set the solo vision onto a group, several "characters" in a landscape, but still exhibit a single performance point of view. Some exhibits:

JOHN HOWELL

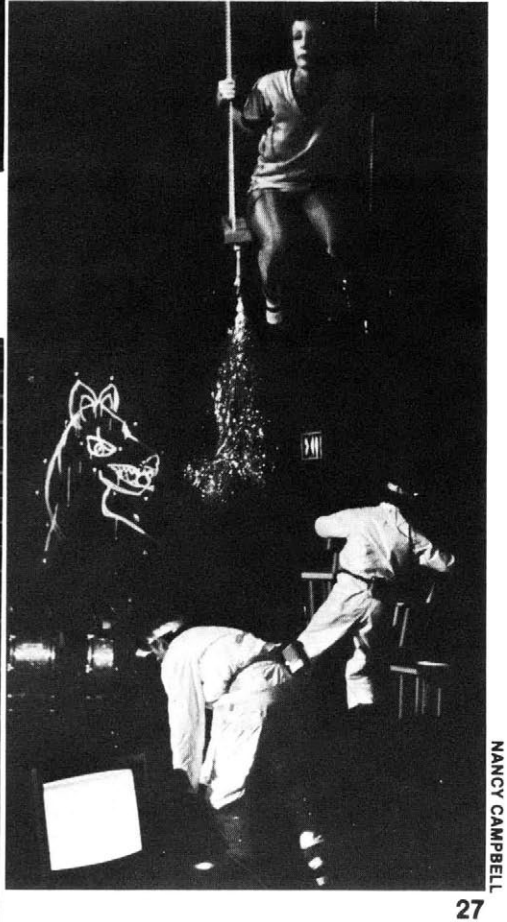


Le Groupe, *Les Indicibles*, Franklin Alley. A *presentation noire* outdoors. Warner Bros. crime film as filtered through Godard and Robert Wilson and returned, live, to the scene of the crime in a New York alley. A '30s gangster car, motor idling, two thugs in trenchcoats, shots in the dark, a love/death dance followed by a red-gowned singer's liebestod (*Carmen* I think) and the car pulls away, leaving behind exquisite corpses. Very French (*Les Indicibles* means "the inexpressibles").

COETOE BIRNBAUM

Stephen Wischerth and Bradley Wester, *Transport*, Inroads and The Kitchen. Intense, thundering drum trip with flashy travel film overlay (projected on front scrim) and neon lights. Short Inroads version (performance poem) best, longer Kitchen one (two-part story) added busy epilog. Clean, simple, moving piece.

Joan Jonas and Co., *Double Lunar Dogs*, The Performing Garage. Sci-fi *Peter Pan*, the garage a spaceship full of an all-star cast of cut-ups: Jonas and Jill Kroesen as girls on the loose, David Warrilow as "The Authority" on stunning video (by Michael Oblowitz), and Spalding Gray as a new-wave Prospero, play-acting to droning music (by Richard Teitelbaum) and NASA films. Best visual moment: Jonas swinging above the audience. Best action moment: Gray quizzing the two women, "Do you remember this?" and holding up in turn, a red oar, a horn, a dog mask, a book (Oz by Baum), a rock, an oriental helmet, a black rubber glove, an apple, a toy car, an extension cord, some matches, and a globe.



NANCY CAMPBELL

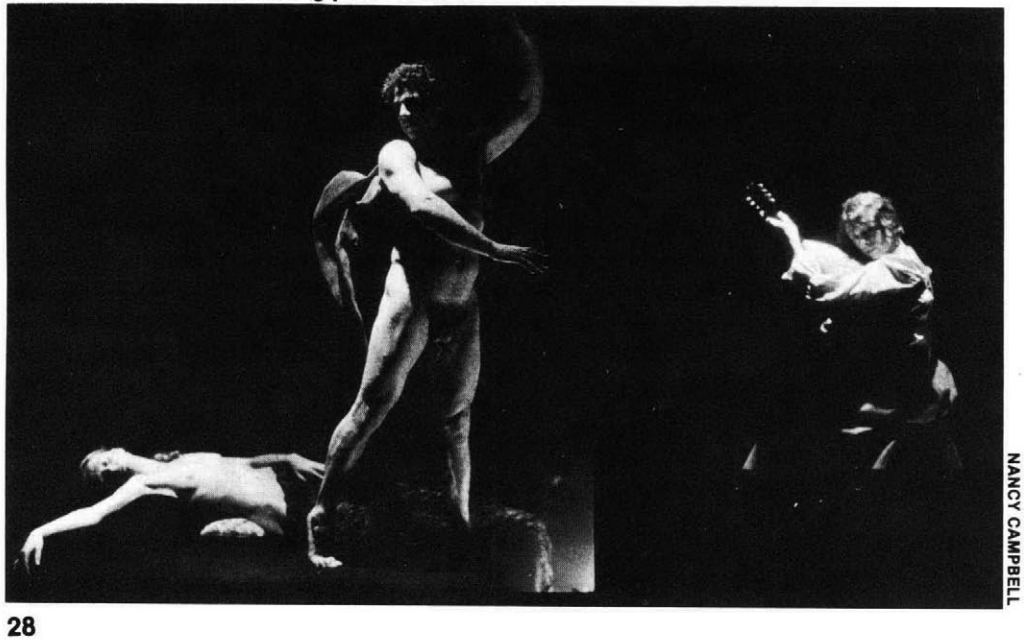
Cindy Lubar, *119 Comments*, Braathen Gallery. Hobo rummages in trash, finds index cards, and reads them aloud: They're remarks by visitors to the MOMA Picasso show (Lubar was a guard) which are curious,sometimes funny, and run-on. So was Lubar's performance/picture.

KIRK WINSLOW

Fiona Templeton. *Thought/Death,* Downtown Whitney, and *Cupid and Psyche,* P.S. 122. Wordless solo of thinking and dying/dead poses: *Thought* is what you'd guess—trying to remember with finger to forehead, wrinkling brow and smacking the hands in frustration, holding the sides and laughing quizzically. *Death* was more intense: snapshots of the final moment taking place (falling, coughing, grabbing the chest) and later, of the leftovers—a corpse. At first humorous—playing dead is fun—*Death* got serious with some nasty images (woman sprawled on bed, skirt hiked up over her waist) which took the piece to a pointed point: we're dead. *Cupid* was a crowd performance with bodies as sets defining space as well as "story." Precise, cleverly organized, abstracted movements playing out programmed actions. A disjunctive, cold curiosity.

KIRK WINSLOW

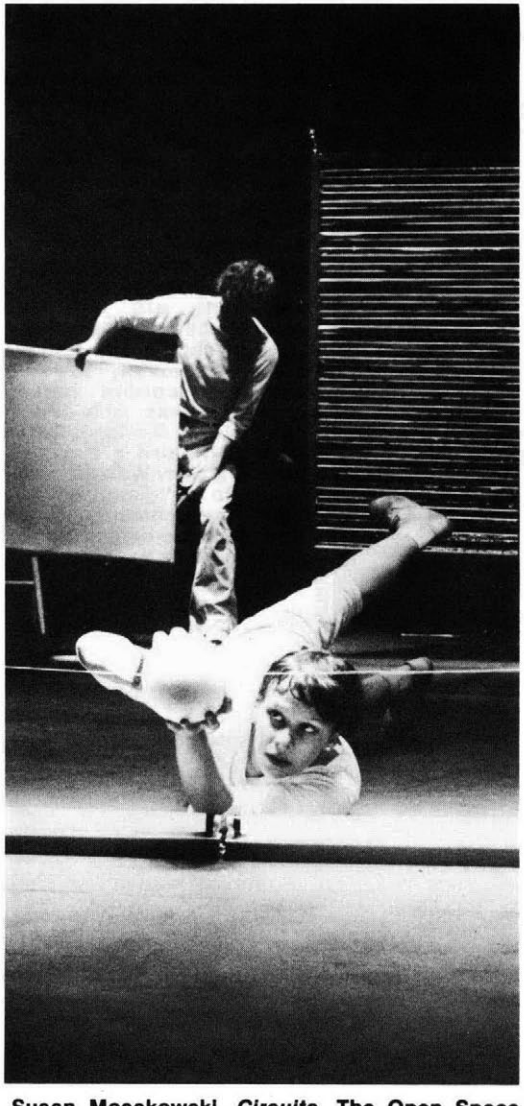
Talking Band, *Giaconda and Si-Ya-U,* DTW Economy Tires Theater. Living paintings, choral text, and stylized movement from gifted Open Theatrealumni. Fanciful story about the abduction of the Mona Lisa by her Chinese lover based on Turkish poem by Nazim Hikmet. Visually impressive, rhythmically erratic, musically flat-footed ("Paris calling, Hallo? Hallo?"), and finally, a collaborative work with no strong point of view.



NANCY CAMPBELL

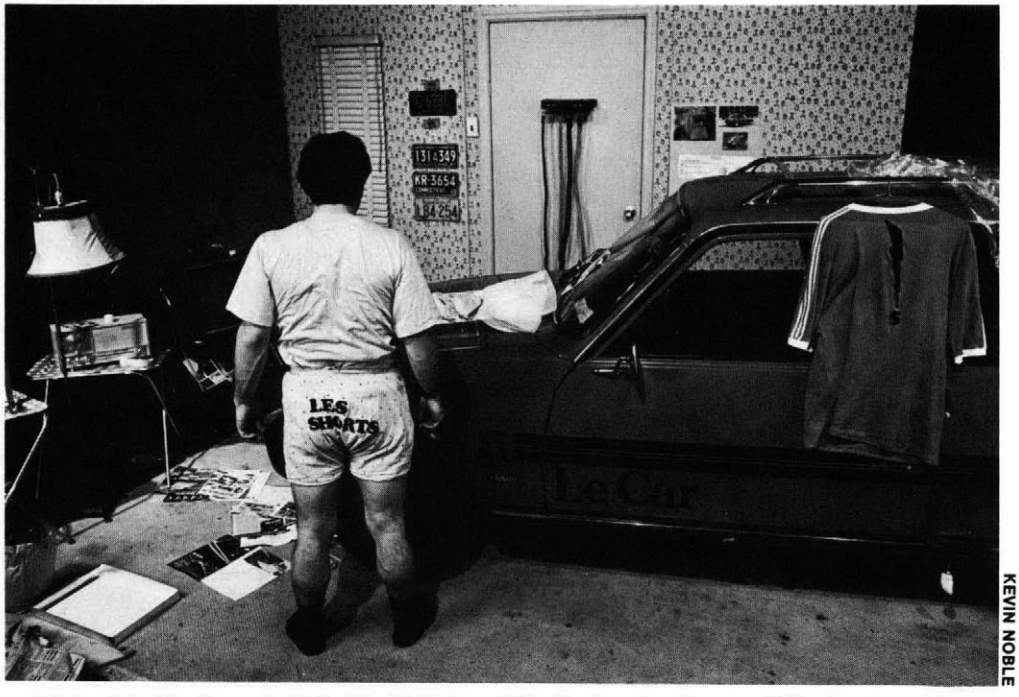
Cupid and Psyche

Thought/Death



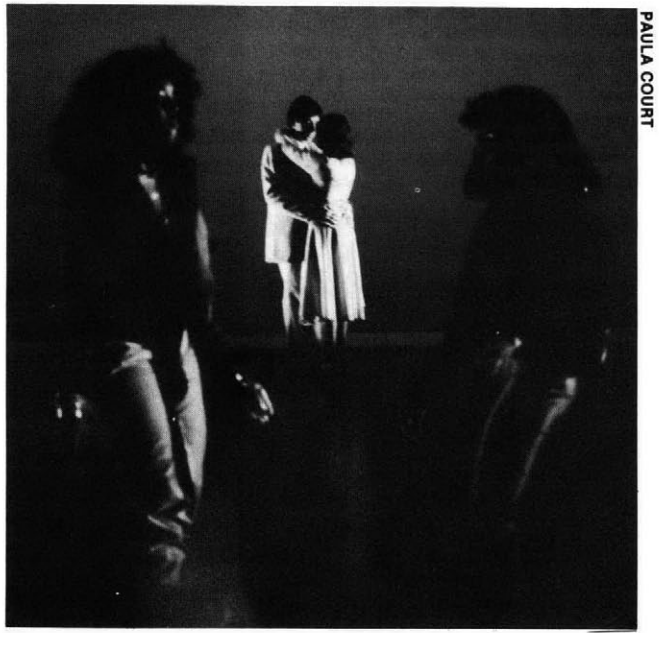
NANCY CAMPBELL

Susan Mosakowski, *Circuits,* The Open Space. Theater of abstract choreographed movement with weird props, visually elaborate sets, burbling electronic music, and a fragmented interior monolog as voice-over. The narrative is like a cut-up female Watt's account of her world; "Joule's" universe is one which keeps her in constant motion with no stable resting places, no fixed points-of-view, no real direction except a labyrinthian straight line. Guys—"Watts" (Matthew Maguire) and "Switch" (Jeffrey Jones) lurk around the edges. Formally beautiful, emotionally elusive.



KEVIN NOBLE

Michael Smith, *Comedy Skits,* Mudd Club and The Performing Garage. "Mike" sets up his sad sack self in sitcom sets "Honeymooners" style: cheap environments which sketch in the cliche. "Le Car" shows his gauche un-savoir faire. Drop dead humor for repressed gigglers.



PAULA COURT

Eric Bogosian and Co., *The New World,* DTW Economy Tires Theater. The urban landscape with Bogosian as a Rod Sterling narrator, snatches of Glenn Branca's music as ominous color, and a series of unconnected, nightmarish episodes with *Twilight Zone* twists. Acting was naked naturalism, thin TV gestures and emotions Stylized acts worked better, especially scenes with characters whose "natural mode" is highly codified with sass: a taunting Puerto Rican street punk and some lippy black prostitutes gave *The New World* some classy humor.

PAULA COURT

Nam June Paik, *A Tribute to Andy Mannix*, The Kitchen. Andy Mannix, a stage carpenter, converted the kitchen of the old Mercer Arts Center into The Kitchen. For his "Tribute," he put together a stage platform while Paik wandered around eating rice cakes. As a classically-trained/Cage student, Paik always wanted to work a burlesque house and so he played—smashing old victrola records, banging out snatches of chords and scales and Beethoven, broadcasting recorded tapes backwards—as only Paik can "play." Onstage, Lois Welk performed a discreet strip to a Sony Walkman (so as not to be "disturbed" by Paik's cacophonous, less-than-rhythmic score). Not a pretty picture, but mild fun.

Fernando Doty, *Term: Oil*, Re.Cher.Chez, and Inroads. A poetic interior monolog about an American mercenary, "Wounded Dog in his high-tech jet," crash landing while on a secret mission. As pilot, Richard Spore stood and fell (nowhere to go in either tiny space);he writhed like a sci-fi Fagin in a desert landscape of slide projections. Off to the side, Doty did the commenting chorus voice-overs and played a breathy synthesizer. The eyes and ears traveled through its layered vistas (text overlaid on projections to the accompaniment of electronic drone and spoken dialog) while the mind time-tripped with the piece's "voice." This "poor theater" with pizzaz created a tableaux ne plus ultra: a temporary total world.

RICKY MCKAY

J. JEFFREY BURK

Michael Smith

RIOT ACTS

MICHAEL EARLEY

Comedy is the medium of the solo performer. The best comedians go it alone. Even the straight man blends into the background. As performance art of, say, the last five years moves further away from being self-consciously serious and arty (the self as abstract piece) and becomes more comfortable with the notion of acting out and fooling around (the self facing reality), we've begun to see comic performances proliferate. It's fair to say at this point that comedy in New York is a small industry with a whole club system and audience to serve it. This has, no doubt, partly to do with the shift of performance from gallery spaces to more theatrically intimate ones. And yet at the same time, comedy is being recycled into the gallery as the *Not Just For Laughs* exhibition at the New Museum demonstrates.

What gives the work of so many comic performers and visual artists today such appeal and interest is the way they work within

and *against* the traditions of comedy. Few forms are as rigidly codified as humor and comedy—there are patented routines, jokes, and gestures. Every good comedian knows them and steals them. It's a hard medium in which to be original. Being at performances by Michael Smith, Eric Bogosian, Spalding Gray, and Bill Irwin proves these basic rules to be true over and over again. Their performances, however, also prove something more: that the fields of play still contain room for experimentation. Just as comic visual artists are forced to contend with caricature, cartoons, satire, and the juxtaposition of objects, making each common gesture into something bold and new, what we see in these four performers is naive artistry setting itself against tradition.

In the work of Smith, Bogosian, Gray, and Irwin basic comic gestures and bits are slowed down and submitted to careful scrutiny. They're not just doing comic performances but doing "takes" on comic performances. And like all good comedians they expose the serious conditions—anger, frustration, confusion, metaphysics, danger, and even sadness—that lie just beneath the surface of humor. Most of these performances, in one sense or another, are about being in the world and about being forced to reckon with the unexpected.

PAULA COURT

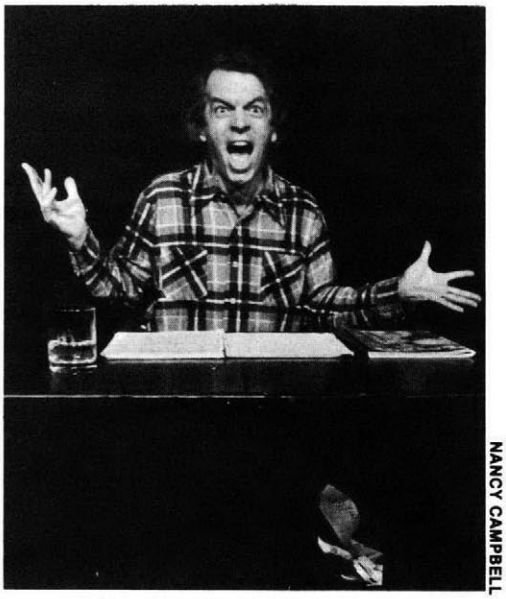
Eric Bogosian

Michael Smith's performances tell us something about the "out-of-placeness" of the performer. His life, he seems to be saying, is dedicated to the uneventful and to loneliness. The "Mike" character in his *Rec Room* piece waits for a party that never takes place because the guests forget to show up. It's a piece about waiting and preparing, and a certain kind of uneasiness. Inevitably, for the comic performer, the joke is on him.

Smith's special strength as a performer is the practice of what can only be called "pug grace." As a presence he's a mugger and a muddler. He practices the art of physical cartooning on himself. He uses himself to display indignity, whether standing before us slouched and slope-shouldered in his underwear or in a ridiculously mismatched sports jacket and tie. He's Sad Sack come to life. So elegantly lumbering are his movements and so deceptively dull-witted is his thinking and speech (we can almost see the captioned balloon bubbling up from his head), that Smith transforms himself into a study in feigned gracelessness. But at the same time he has grace, perfectly executing a dance routine to a Donny and Marie Osmond TV variety act. In the privacy of his rec room, Smith's a star.

Like all good performers, Smith establishes a special relationship to his space. The rec room of his piece is a flattened out replica of the real thing; like all such suburban rooms, Smith seems to be saying, this one lacks depth. For all intents and purposes his set is a canvas upon which objects, like a hanger, a belt rack, or a room air freshener, stand out in relief so that we can pay attention to these silly objects. Like a good cartoon, Smith himself stands out in relief to the context that surrounds him, to the context that's waiting to *absorb* him. And when he holds himself for too long in one spot, he becomes little more than a quizzical still life.

Spalding Gray



NANCY CAMPBELL

Eric Bogosian, on the other hand, in *Men Inside* and *On the Air,* blends in perfectly with the punk environment of Club 52. Bogosian's gig is the quintessential "club" act. His gestures come from the seediness of club iconography: the off-key singer, the off-color comic, sentimental shlock, the weary eroticism of the topless dancer.

DOUG WINTER

Bill Irwin

Brandishing a sort of punked-up maleness, Bogosian hectors the ringside tables, pledging false modesty and affection, telling bad jokes at everyone's expense, including that of a cockroach crossing the stage. His mimed routines of assorted singers and characters are pleasing but insufferable. And yet Bogosian's pugnacious and reptilian presence keeps us transfixed just enough. He plays bad taste to the very end and vulgarizes the already vulgar (if such a thing is possible nowadays).

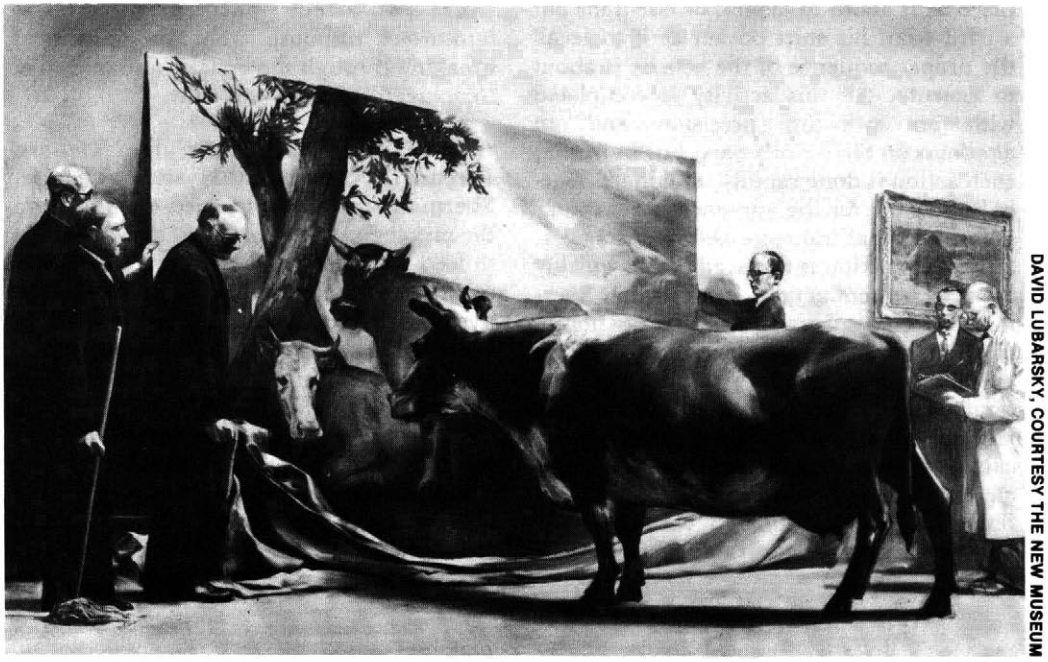
Bogosian's targets are already their own ultimate form of parody. How can you spoof radio voice overs when they're already a hoot? His "Retarded Ernie" radio spiel isn't better or worse than Crazy Eddie's, it's simply *like* it, reminding us how perfectly awful and in-sane it is. His lounge lizard singing routines have been better practiced by Bill Murray on *Saturday Night Live.* But then Bogosian seems to be paying homage to all attempts to be amateurishly enterprising. What he does to an audience is make them face the claustrophobic fear that we've all felt at performances of being at the mercy of such god-awful shmuckness. And he engages us by seeing just how far we'll let him take it.

Spalding Gray is something of a unique case. Not strictly a comic performer, Gray is more of a storyteller and fabulist whose effort to tell his personal history comes up smelling like comedy. His real-life funnies—the things that *really* happened to him—sound too good to be true. And yet they are! In the seven solo pieces previous to *47 Beds,* his own life emerged as a series of found moments.

But the most dramatic feature is how Gray has become the picaresque hero of his own unending tale, celebrating narcissism and unmediated experience and actually getting people to listen. Watching him master detail, refine delivery, learn when to speed it up and slow it down, you begin to realize that Gray is a master of comic surprise. But it involves risks, and each time Gray goes out—in *47 Beds,* for instance, an hour-and-a-half performance that is largely unstructured and unrehearsed—he dares his audience to stick by him during not only the high points but also the low points of his routine. Gray experiments with spontaneity. He challenges himself with the task of remembering and getting it right; his routine if full of names, places, dates, and facts. "Will memory fail tonight?" is written all over his face. Stage fright, both on stage and in real life, becomes part of his comic *persona.* Since memory is his basic script, and memory can fail, Gray doesn't so much capture as caption moments in his life. He has all the appearances of a reporter but what he, like Michael Smith, seems essentially to be is a deadpan cartoonist, caricaturing rather than characterizing his life. He's the Taylor Mead of the '80s: the avant-garde naif in the grips of all that he surveys.

Of all these four performers, Bill Irwin is clearly the most technically expert. A bona fide clown (he studied at the Ringling Bros. clown college), Irwin also excels as a mime, dancer, actor, and singer. With each piece that he's performed in New York he's perfected his range and increasingly made his material more complex. And yet he's a curious kind of hybrid performer—a rare combination in appearance and mien of Red Skelton, Buster Keaton, and, of all people, Douglas Dunn. Not being one kind of performer, Irwin defies simple classification. In some sense, he's a prisoner of his own eclecticism. But it's a dilemma he works out in performance. He makes us look carefully at his movement, for instance, to note how that of the clown, with its fits and starts, quick jumps and turnarounds, is not very different from the vocabulary of post-modernist dance. His gestures are as quotable as they are portable: the movements of one genre carry over into that of another. What Irwin seems to be telling us is that the best comic performers are protean, that they can change shape and expand at will. And Irwin, like Michael Smith, physicalizes this notion for us, while Bogosian and Gray do it almost solely through language.

Irwin's *Not Quite/New York* is a series of contests with four alter-egos (played by Charles Moulton, Michael Moschen, Doug Skinner, and Tommy Sellers who also collaborated on the piece); Irwin engages each in competitions of juggling, acrobatics, dance, movement, and song. The piece becomes a marathon routine that essentially says that all collaborations are dangerous and competitive. (It also comically exploits the idea of patterning and partnering.) Each of the other fours performers who confront Irwin win—in a



DAVID LUBARSKY, COURTESY THE NEW MUSEUM

***Innocent Eye Test,* Mark Tansey**

sense—but Irwin is the big winner in the end because the clown is a redoubtable survivor. Like all good performers, Irwin is the perfect scapegoat sacrificing himself for our pleasure.

Not Just For Laughs: The Art of Subversion at the New Museum, organized by Marcia Tucker who also wrote the splendid catalog that accompanied the exhibition, is a marvelous take on the sacredness of art. As Tucker says, "A museum is the last place we expect to find a good laugh." "Cracking up" at art is an uncommon experience because art is serious business. Yet this is an exhibition where snickering and giggling could be heard throughout the gallery.

While we know that visual art has its richly loaded satiric tradition in the likes of Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier, and its silly tradition in surrealist and dadaist fur-lined chamber pots and mustachioed Mona Lisas, this exhibition reminds us that there is also the cruder and rougher tradition of the cartoon, line drawing, and snapshot. Rough figuration is at the center of this exhibit and instantly recognizable visual puns account for most of the imagery. For each artist who burlesques and travesties shlock masterpieces, like Robert Colescott's *George Washington Carver Crossing the Delaware* (a boat load of blacks) or Mark Tansey's modern take on Elihu Vedder's *Secret of the Sphinx* (instead of a listener we have a reporter with a microphone), we have artists like Terry Allen, Steve Gianakos, Pamela Kelly, Jeff, Erika Rothenberg, and Glenn Baxter who mock the cartoon outline and serialized set of directions. Using the cartoon story board as a kind of recurring motif, the whole notion of a series of paintings or drawings on the same theme comes in for some pointed ribbing. Photographic works like Richard Ross's *Right, Wrong,* J.P. Hutto's *Dogs Dressed Like Men,* and David Troy's untitled performance play off and exploit attitudes towards the human body, juxtaposition, and uncanny resemblances. Before and after shots become disturbingly mated. They're takes on the very notion of likeness. The video pieces by Louie Grenier (*Caught*), Linda Montano (*Learning to Talk*), and Nina Salern (*Model X*) take the single shot gesture and turn it into a scenario.

To be sure, this is an exhibition of iconoclasts; artists who, like William Wegman, have their own special approach to what's funny. While on the one hand, these works are perfectly outrageous, on the other they are really quite serious and subversive. The images of death and destruction in, for instance, Tansey's *Action Painting,* Jeff's *Coffin* series, and Gianakos's *Dead Pop* series all show that the comic preoccupations of these artists are not simply mild—at times they are tasteless, lowdown, and dirty, and take for their subjects the violent and grotesque, racism, gender confusion, and the smarmy side of eroticism.

Poking fun at art pretensions is another favorite gesture, perhaps the one thing that links all these artists. Glen Baxter's drawing of a cowboy squaring off in front of an empty canvas says it all; the caption reads: "Tom's First Brush with Modernism." And the critical gibe in every viewer's mind is released. Yet a profound sense of humor is hidden behind these mostly primitive surfaces. A mind lies behind the making. As Richard Ross says: "Without humor we might all turn into formalists, minimalists, or get cancer." Indeed.

Michael Earley is associate editor of *Performing Arts Journal.*

STUART SHERMAN'S SPECTACLES

DE-EROTICIZING THE OBJECT

GAUTAM DASGUPTA

Last year the Kitchen Center mounted a retrospective of the works of Stuart Sherman. Normally, such retrospectives are given to artists of considerable stature and a substantive body of work or else serve to commemorate anniversaries. In Sherman's case (and I don't mean this pejoratively), neither instance could possibly have initiated such a celebration. It may well be true that for a pre-eminently downtown and solo artist he has a "large" body of work, but so do many other avant-garde artists. And as to his stature in the public eye, he was and is no more or less accepted than a host of other names from the performance world. Should the "Sherman retrospective" then not have taken place? I, for one, was glad it did because it allowed for the opportunity not only to see what Sherman's work amounts to as a whole, but also to place his ongoing experimentation within an evolving cultural spectrum that has dominated the contemporary scene in the name of "performance art."

Sherman's work, referred to by the generic title "Spectacles," is always qualified by a subtitle that lends specificity to each individual spectacle—"The Erotic," "Language," "Names and Places," etc. Equipped with an assortment of props and items, and locating himself behind a fold-away table, Sherman manipulates the objects and himself on occasion within short two-minute segments. At times he prefaces each act with the name of the person or place he is about to depict, or else pulls out a card from his shirt pocket as if to recall the proper sequence of the acts he is about to execute. All this activity is completed with an awkward precision and an aloofness on Sherman's part. Furthermore, each action is done rapidly, making it nearly impossible for the audience to recapture the images that transpire before one's eyes. Since each action is replaced just as quickly by a subsequent action, it seems that Sherman fervently plays against the possibility of any accretion of memory to distract the viewing subject. Finally, and most importantly, these actions bear little if any referentiality to either the exterior world, causality, or logical structure, thereby aligning Sherman's enterprise to Dada and Surrealist antics, although occasionally a visual pun or a recognizable disruption of cause-and-effect patterns elicits a humorous response from the audience, breaking through the opacity and objective "coolness" of Sherman's art.

A one-time performer in Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater, Sherman apparently learned enough from the ontological component of that company to feed his artistic vision. It was the idea of theater as presence—as opposed to the hysteric (hence psychological) aspect of Foreman's theater—that Sherman made the solid underpinning of his own work. Theater as presence was only possible if the theatrical or performative encounter existed wholly in a spatial dimension. Time, which has the potentiality of generating narrative and psychological layering, was eschewed. Of course, Sherman realized that an image in space could, given an adequate context, generate narrative complexity, and it then became his strategy to nullify these contexts—namely, the temporal, the mnemonic, the referential, and the denotative.

Sherman works with objects that are of such common usage (akin to Warhol's use of the Campbell soup can) that they are drained of any significant meaning. His rose is indeed a rose as are all the other objects. Sherman's objects were to be *seen* as objects, as presences, nothing more or less.

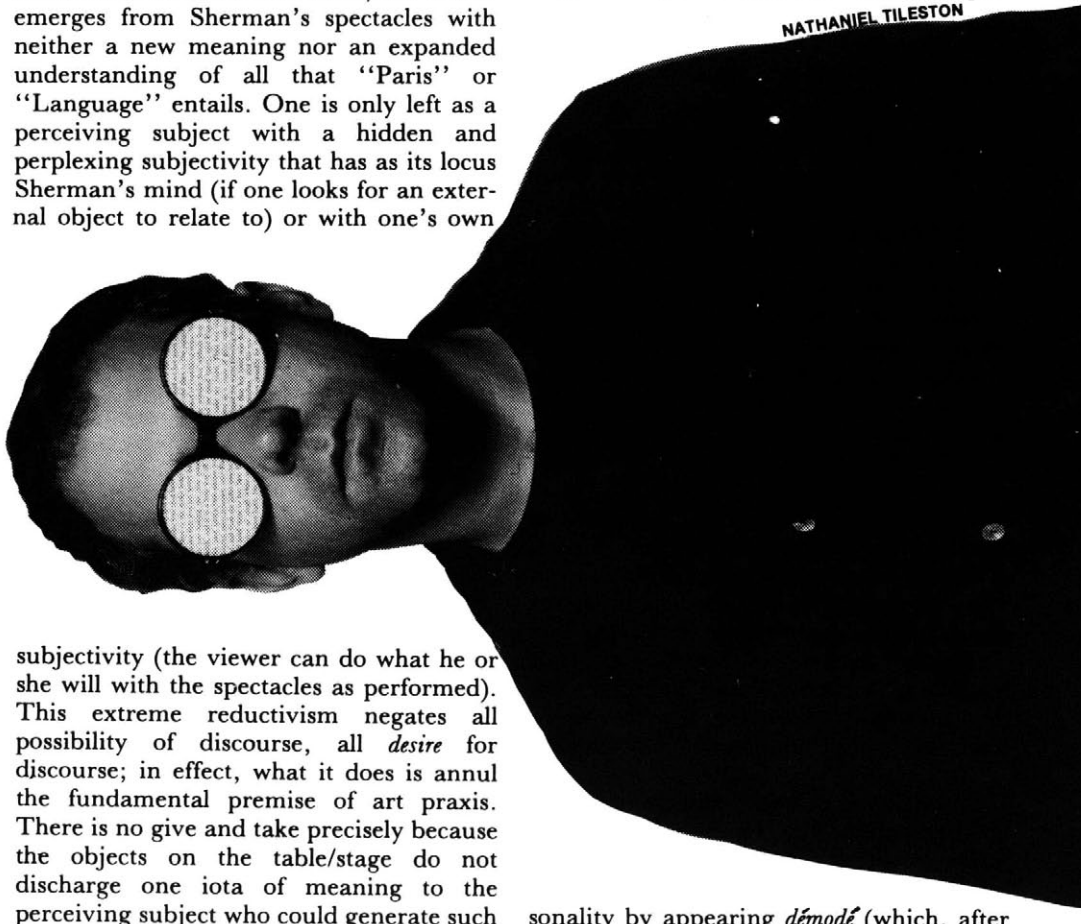
And taking this analogy further, no Object

was to be thought into existence through the manipulation of other objects. Objects in the Sherman canon exist prior to thought, and in their manipulation they do not affirm another "meaningful" object (even if that "object" is a thought)—they only result in another opaque object, impervious to meaning and/or thought.

However, it seems highly improbable that any external object will fail irrevocably to elicit thought or meaning on the part of a perceiving subject. The failure to do so is perhaps what Sherman has called an exercise in "retinal thinking" (analogous to D.H. Lawrence's phrase "image thinking"). But I think that Sherman, while conceding the impossibility of exorcising "retinal thinking," is at pains to negate its relevance to his artistic project. He does this by denying the mnemonic and temporal basis of his praxis by manipulating objects at breakneck speed. Objects are rarely allowed to be on his fold-away table/stage for more than a mere fleeting instant, making it difficult to invest any object with desire, which is at the core of beginning to generate meaning or significance. It is this impulse to get at the act of perception without desire that is at the heart (and the importance) of Sherman's spectacles. And it is because of this that he prefers to use objects that are "value-less," of little denotative or connotative import.

But then why is it at all necessary to create an elaborate artistic matrix (for example, "Language" spectacles, "The Erotic" spectacles, etc.) if the aim is to deny any signifying practice in what he does? The answer was provided by Sherman himself (in *The Drama Review*) where he went to extreme lengths to explicate the reasons why and how he came to structure his pieces. In effect, his matrix is a consequence of his deeply subjective responses to such topics as "Language" or such places as Paris and Copenhagen. But what concerns the viewer is the final product, the structured work, and it is here that Sherman's elaborate explication of his art practice seems to fall short. After all is said and done, the viewer emerges from Sherman's spectacles with neither a new meaning nor an expanded understanding of all that "Paris" or "Language" entails. One is only left as a perceiving subject with a hidden and perplexing subjectivity that has as its locus Sherman's mind (if one looks for an external object to relate to) or with one's own subjectivity (the viewer can do what he or she will with the spectacles as performed). This extreme reductivism negates all possibility of discourse, all *desire* for discourse; in effect, what it does is annul the fundamental premise of art praxis. There is no give and take precisely because the objects on the table/stage do not discharge one iota of meaning to the perceiving subject who could generate such discourse. Sherman could achieve the same response by sitting in a dark room and reciting the words "Paris," "Language," "The Erotic," etc. *De nihilo nihil fit.*

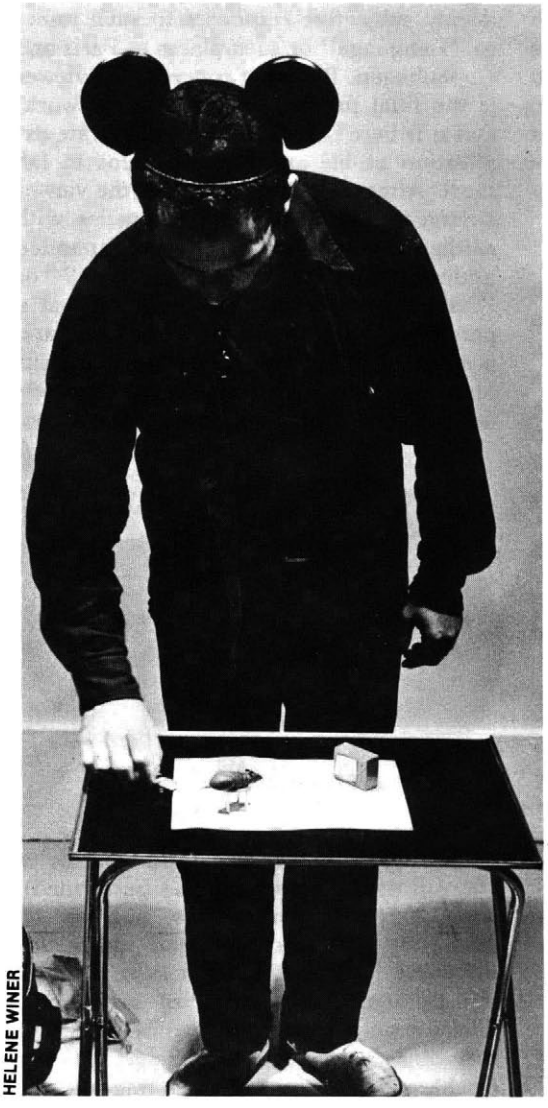
Of course, there is also the human presence of Sherman himself which, in all probability, has the further potential of generating discourse and "human" feelings, if not meanings. But here, too, Sherman is at pains to deny his existential presence, his own desiring self, by performing at a remote distance from his objects. He not only attempts to erase all traces of personality by appearing *démodé* (which, after all, is nothing new in the avant-garde), he rejects any seductive claim to the objects he handles. He doesn't fondle his props, he tosses and manipulates them brusquely, and after each act mercilessly shoves them into his suitcase as if they were little else than rubbish. This is also why he rushes



through each segment, afraid that should the objects "stay" for longer durations, they will accumulate in meaning (or participate in a desiring visual field) both for the audience and perhaps for Sherman himself. He further moves the objects after a quick glance at each one, conveying the sense of his own fear to appropriate the object in question, but a sufficient look to make each object a "perceived object" in its own right.

And not only must the element of time be reduced since its accretion may result in "involvement," but memory of an object in time must also be discarded. To do this, Sherman refers to a card prior to each act as if to "remind" himself of what is to be done next; he wants us to believe that *he* has no recollection regarding his objects and his artistic practice. The gesture not only adds to our seeing Sherman as a subject without desire, but as a subject without time, without history. He, together with his objects, becomes an object in turn. Sherman-the-performer is reduced to Sherman-the-presence or, at best, a pure self-reflexive mind, a mind reflecting on what the mind can do, thought reflecting on thought, perception reflecting on perception. And since the audience, too, is left in a self-reflexive stage, Sherman's entire theatrical encounter operates in a realm of "pure" and "total" objecthood.

Ultimately, it is this participation in objecthood that aligns him, more than other performace artists, with the aesthetic of minimalism in art. And although accomplishing this in a performative situation is a radical experiment, it is not enough to sustain a career, especially if one wants to conduct that career in a theatrical format. Perhaps this is what led Sherman to make short films and his adaptations of *Hamlet, Oedipus Rex,* and *Faust,* three pieces that have yet to be shown here.



HELENE WINER

Stuart Sherman's *Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)*

Gautam Dasgupta is co-editor of Performing Arts Journal.

ANTON'S AGON

by david rieff

Robert Anton has been performing his pieces publicly for more than a decade, although his appearances have been infrequent and his audience has consisted almost entirely of invited guests and people informed by word of mouth. Each performance can be seen by no more than eighteen people and, indeed, the ideal way to see the work is to sit as close as possible to the waist-high, semi-circular stage from behind which Anton and his "cast" of exquisitely-crafted hand puppets enact

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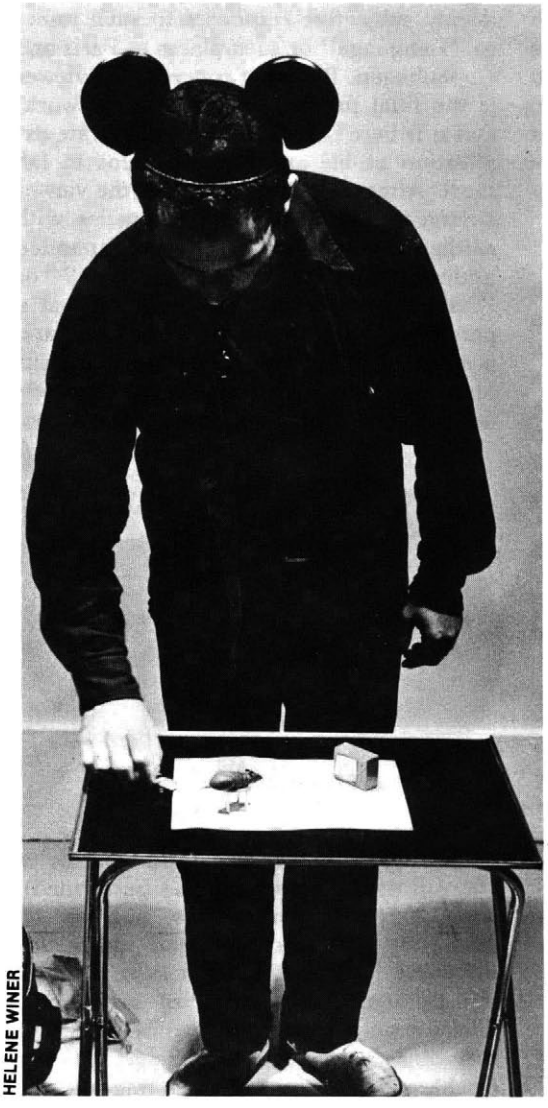

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their drama. The subtlety of the faces of the puppets, the details of the many props Anton uses during a performance, and most of all the interaction of gesture and facial expression between Anton, the animator, clad in black velvet, and the finger puppets, his subjects, his children, his victims, can only be fully appreciated from up close.

The performance is solemn. Anton seems almost in a trance, his attention riveted on the puppets. He has said that his characters take him in unknown or unexpected directions and that he views himself as both the creator of his piece but also as a kind of privileged spectator to it. This is certainly the impression one gets watching a performance, an impression that is underscored by Anton's use of alchemical props —beakers of fluid, smoking pots of water, burning incense—which punctuate the piece. The spectator is witnessing a kind of rite, a mystery at which Anton presides but which he does not fully control.

The effect is shattering, and intentionally so. The work begins in a tragic register, in tears, and for an hour and a half only becomes more painful, more despairing, more tragic. Anton leads his puppets through a series of archetypal situations. Sometimes he watches, sometimes he intervenes, but in every case what the puppets undergo is the experience and the penalty of their frailties, vanities, and helplessness. A finger puppet with an egg for a head tries to remove it. Unable to extricate himself the egg-puppet begins to bash his head against a metal plate, harder and harder. In the end, the shell cracks to reveal a face of such astonishing ugliness, a flayed face, that the puppet, weeping with shame, can only hide in Anton's breast. When Anton decides it is time for another of the puppets to die, that puppet struggles, wriggling frenetically, as Anton removes him from his finger—that is, removes him from life. Other puppets flutter and preen, cavort, dance, flirt, only to be humbled by age and death.

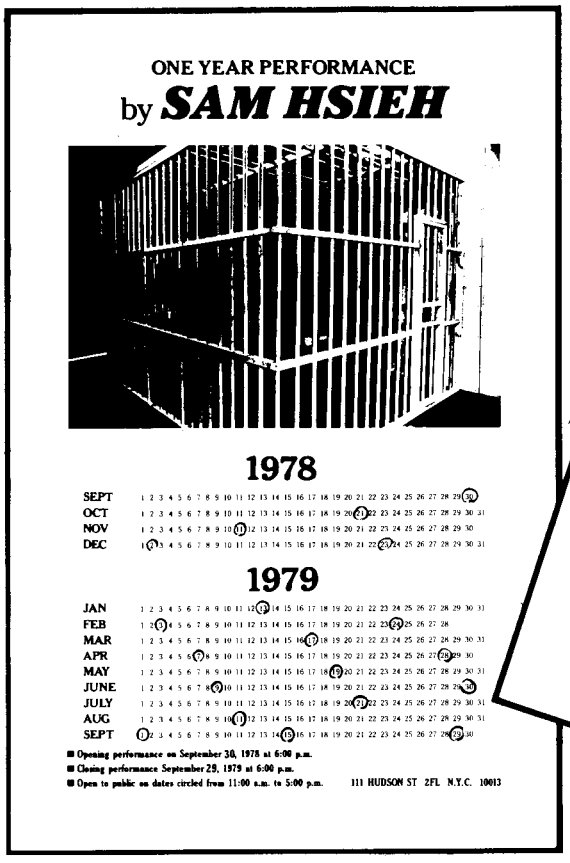
Death is the real subject of Anton's work and here, as in a number of other ways, Anton's enterprise is reminiscent of Beckett's. Both refuse any tinge of sentimentality. Both insist on the grotesquerie of eros. One of the most startling and upsetting moments in Anton's piece is when a female skeleton performs a kind of bump and grind manipulated from the pelvis by Anton's finger. For Anton, the erotic is repulsive and inevitable, the puppets sniffing at one another, grasping at each other's soon-to-be putrifying flesh.

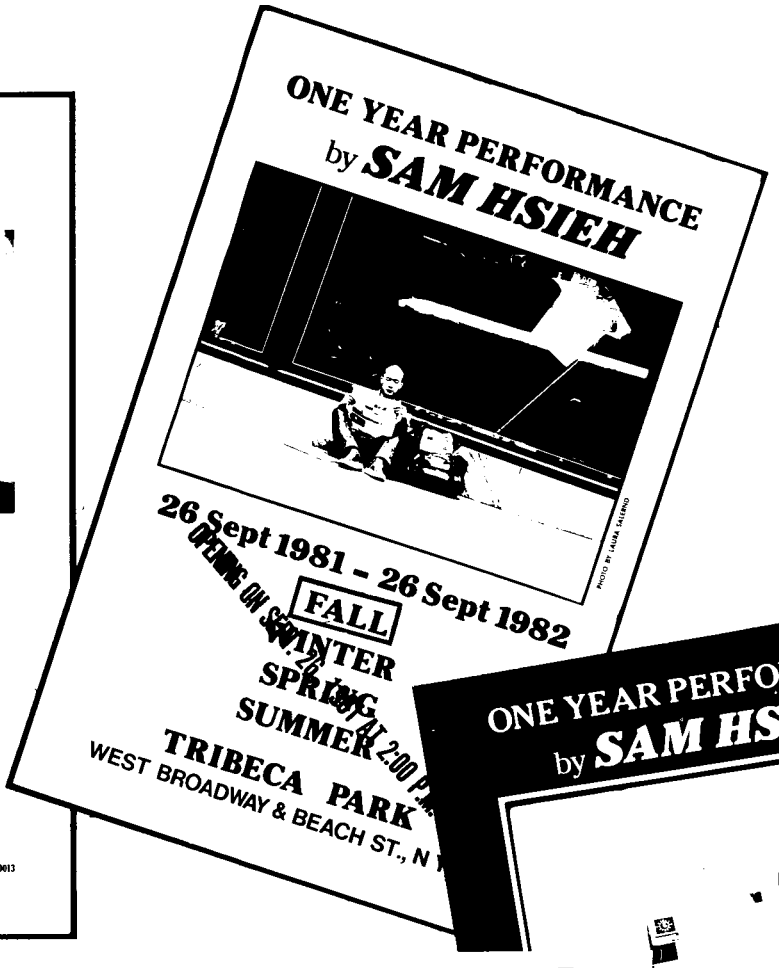
It could be said that Anton's work is a kind of morality play, a Pilgrim's Progress in modernist drag. Nothing, I think, is further from the truth, for what is remarkable about Anton is that while he is concerned as an artist with the tragedy of existence (concerned, indeed, with little else), he refuses absolutely the consolation of Christian morality. Even in its secular form, the pessimism of the morality play is mitigated by at least the hope of some exit, whether through redemption or virtue. Anton will have none of this, nor will he use the horror and tragedy he shows to any didactic or uplifting purpose. Anton is, in large measure, a pagan artist. One feels this in the animism he both attaches and demonstrates to the puppets themselves—the way in which he recognizes their autonomy yet unhesitatingly mistreats them, exposes them, imprisons them, causes their death. The staging with its breath of magic and alchemy is also pagan, never more so than when Anton pours magic fluids from beaker to bowl to some unknown and mysterious end.

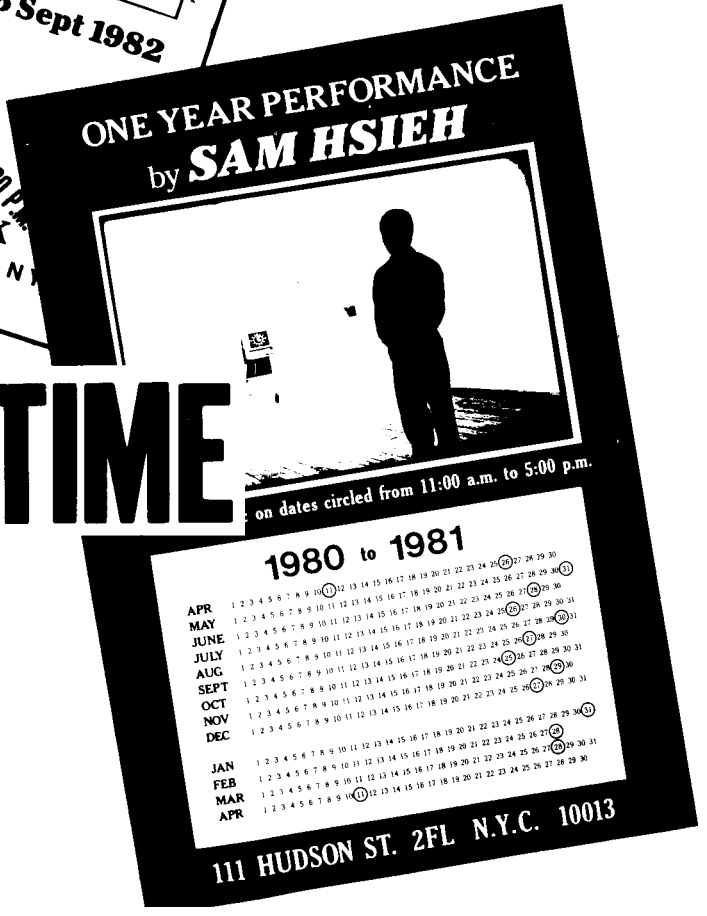
And through all this, Anton remains oddly serene. His pessimism is cold and strong; its emphasis on decay, its jeering laughter at sexual desire is often cruel. As Anton watches (often after having caused) the sad fates that befall his puppets, one feels that he is immensely sorry for them but is utterly unsusceptible to their appeals for mercy. After all, he is the animator: he could spare them if he wanted to. But he doesn't want to. He suffers with them, in fact, suffers profoundly (Anton has said that it takes him some time after each performance for the intense feelings the work engenders to dissipate), but also takes a kind of grave pleasure in their suffering and in his own. To know the truth is to suffer, and yet to know truth is also a pleasure.

These are Nietzschean ideas. "A preference for questionable and terrifying things," Nietzsche wrote, "is a symptom of strength." Anton is perhaps the only theatre artist working with these ideas in a profound and serious way. His work is the only current embodiment in the theatre of what Nietzsche must have meant when he wrote of the "tragic-Dionysian state." Anton's theatre is a metaphysical activity. He is, to quote Nietzsche again, one of those "heroic spirits who say Yes to themselves in tragic cruelty."

David Rieff is an editor at Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.







ONE YEAR AT A TIME

SAM HSIEH'S ANNUAL ACTS

BARRY KAHN

On September 30, 1978, Sam Hsieh began a year of solitary confinement inside an 11'-6" x 9' x 8' cell which he built within his studio. "I shall not converse, read, write, listen to the radio or watch television until I unseal myself." A friend, Cheng Wei Kwang, took charge of his food, clothing, and waste. At 5:00 p.m. on April 11, 1980, Sam Hsieh punched in on a standard industrial time clock he had installed in his studio, an act which he repeated every hour on the hour until 6:00 p.m. on April 11, 1981. And on Saturday September 26, 1981, Sam Hsieh began his third one year performance: "I shall stay outdoors for one year, never go inside. I shall not go in to [sic] a building, subway, train, car, airplane, ship, cave, tent. I shall have a sleeping bag," his statement said.

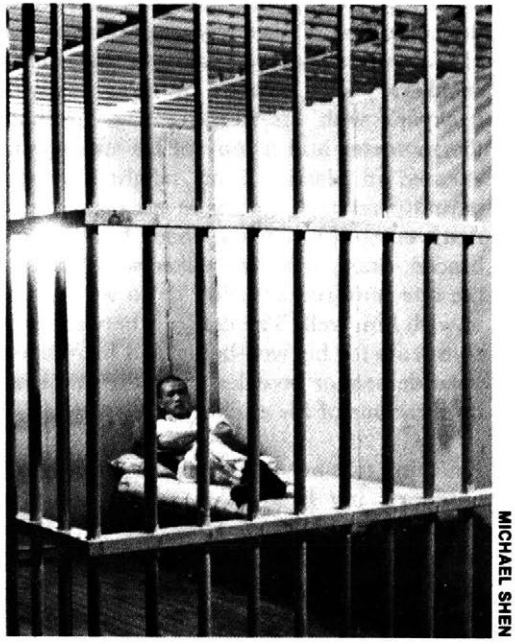
"Prisoner," Worker," "Derelict"—by freely choosing, as I conceivably could, to live in circumstances I avoid thinking about, Hsieh forces me to identify with him and thus with those whose living conditions he adopts. Using real time—a year at a time—and real deprivation, he makes me internalize his experience. In a world where metaphors and symbols have lost their power, he has invented a very effective means of communication.

Hsieh's earlier works, *Leap* (to the ground out of a second story window), *Horseshit* (immersed in a barrelful), *Throwup* (a Chinese dinner into a kulicke frame), *Paint Stick* (incise his cheek along a red line), and *One-half Ton* (of sheet rock dropped on to his back), relate to Chris Burden's *Shot in the Arm* and self mutilations of '60s body art. They show him responsive to his surroundings: he leaped from his studio window which is around the corner from the New York City police horse barracks, eats Chinese food, uses artists' materials, and has worked remodelling lofts. "Prisoner," "Worker," and "Derelict" come from the world around him by the same process which leads him from one piece to the next. Risking permanent physical damage and inflicting pain on himself, Hsieh gains willful control over his natural instincts. In these works the courage to act is everything; the gesture, photographed and videotaped, is merely proof. His one year performances are a breakthrough, emphasizing the mental over the physical. Requiring continuing discipline and self-confidence, their execution becomes an ongoing personal exploration.

I should qualify Hsieh's term "one year performance," which rings false in my ear as I write. He arranges visiting times during his performances, when his private activities and documentation are made public. Punching his time clock for the last time in his "Worker" piece, he turned to the assembled crowd and said: "Thank you, I like to show my film now." He had exposed one 16mm. frame after each punch of the time clock; the hands of time whirred, his hair, shaved when he began, grew to shoulder length and he jiggled in place. He carefully crafts each piece, using signed paper seals and a witnessing lawyer to avoid any suspicion of cheating. As he began his year outdoors he told me: "It is not possible for someone to witness, follow me all the time. If I did this piece before I did the cage piece, people might not believe me, but now they believe me." Obviously his audience matters, but looked at structurally—out of 365 days, nineteen, then fourteen and now four are for visitors—sharing is secondary to doing. Whether aloof from or interacting with his audience, Hsieh has not rehearsed his behavior. It's business as usual in his studio or a public park; as observers, we become participants.

Writing about Hsieh's solitary confinement in the *Village Voice,* Kay Larson said:

Hsieh sleeps on a bare mattress over a metal frame. The cell holds a sink, a bar of soap, a roll of paper towels, a mirror. Over the sink is a dry used tea bag hanging by a nail. A bare bulb on the wall over Hsieh's head casts shadows on a "calendar" of scratches in the plaster, Bastille-style. . . . Within a few minutes I deliberately started to make a mental catalogue of the objects in the room. After a few more painful minutes I realized I was cataloguing Hsieh along with the "other" objects. With shock I discovered that I neutralize disconcerting situations . . . by objectifying them. Hsieh, meanwhile, had done nothing but recross his arms.



MICHAEL SHEN

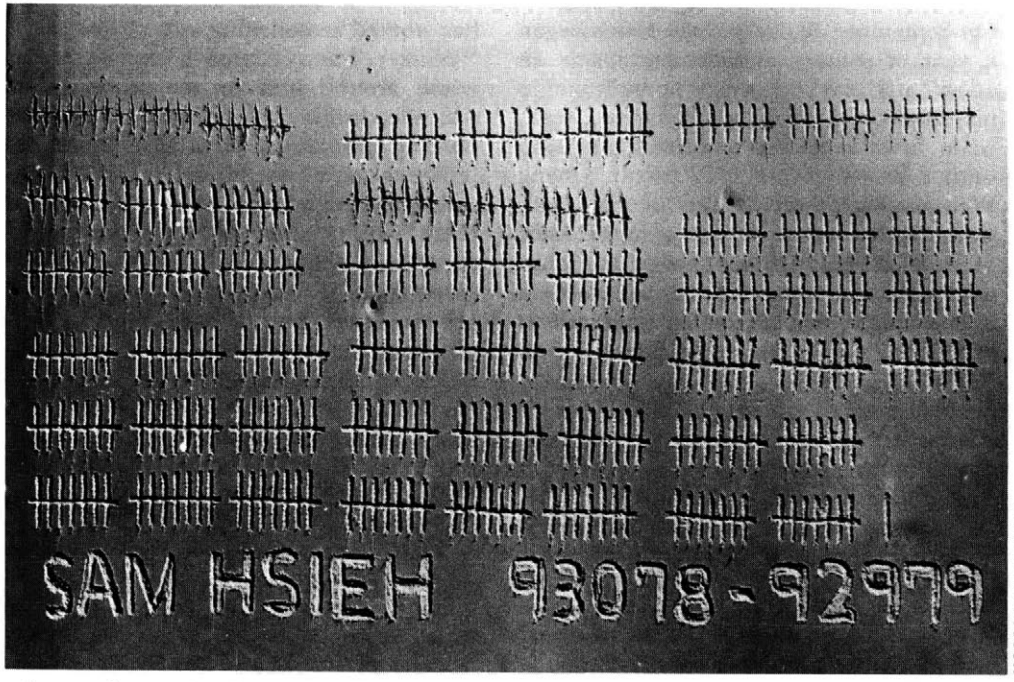
Shaving his head, then filming his hair's growth, weekly intervals marked on his posters, a calendar carved in his cell, he becomes preoccupied with the passage of time. His carving became deeper and more ordered after six weeks in his cell, when he must have become intimate with his place and his bodily functions—my concerns—and confident of Cheng, upon whom his life depended. His challenge was

to live within the world of the mind, to maintain faith in himself, to find meaning in meaninglessness. The enormity of a year's undertaking overwhelms us, but as a fixed goal, it makes his project conceivable. Each mark brings his goal closer *and* shows how far he has to go. Choosing the marking of time to structure his second piece ["Worker" piece] reveals how important this daily ritual becomes.

In his current outdoors ("Derelict") piece, Hsieh, his head shaved, strolled into Tribeca Park in New York at precisely 2:00 p.m. where the public had been invited to the beginning of his one year performance. He wore blue jeans, a khaki shirt and black sneakers, and carried a gray canvas backpack with his sleeping bag, a small thermometer and a copy of his statement, encased in plastic. Short, slight and apparently relaxed, he made no formal announcement but smiled, shook hands, embraced, drank wine and talked with most of the one hundred and fifty or so who came to wish him well. The contrast between my own fears for his well-being and his warm, open demeanor revealed the more personal implications of his endeavor.

Knowing that he would spend the next year outdoors, my head filled with questions: Where will he shit? How will he keep clean? Warm? Eat? Does he have money? Will he be attacked? Projecting my own fears on Hsieh, I could not identify with him either. Because his work is clearly conceived, meticulously crafted, and rigorously executed, Hsieh becomes a mirror showing us our fears, our limitations, and our potentials as he discovers and confronts his.

This current endeavor suggests a shift in his attention. Gaining self-confidence while alone in his cell, he now exposes himself to



CLAIRE FERGUSSON

others, whose ethical code is different from his own. Derelicts ravage each other. Why should they respect him? Will he avoid them? Carry a gun? How will he cope? He will get cold and wet—will he take shelter if ill? Has he addressed death? Always in public, can he obtain physical or mental privacy? Can he function knowing that he may be interrupted at any moment?

Do my projections mirror his concerns?

Like powerful works of art of every era, Hsieh's one year performances function on many levels. They teach him of his limitations as the wanderings of early Christian martyrs or the solitude of Buddhist monks taught them theirs. Undertaking his journey as art, not religion, in an era when the money lenders have taken over the temples of culture, he revitalizes and restores dignity to art. By making his undertakings visible, he acknowledges the artists' public role. In one of his few written statements he says: "I kept myself in solitary confinement for one year because I wanted to physically express and convey the life process of an artist. The artist like [sic] to escape reality . . . to suffer . . . to isolate himself . . . to exile himself in his work to transcend himself." Having clarified his personal priorities and sacrificed family, material and physical comfort for his life as an artist, Hsieh stands before us as a moral example: Have we accepted responsibility for our lives as he has for his? And choosing symbolic roles—"Prisoner," "Worker," "Derelict"—he invites us to re-examine our society's values.

Barry Kahn travels between Detroit and New York.

OUR TOWN OUR COUNTRY

BONNIE MARRANCA

If you follow Route 1 all the way north from New Jersey you'll end up in Vermont, the landscape of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* which is the center(piece) of The Wooster Group's *Route 1 and 9 (The Last Act).* The intersection of these two sensibilities—Wilder's genteel view of small town America at the turn of the century and the Group's more abrasive contemporary politics—generates a new text whose subject is "our country."

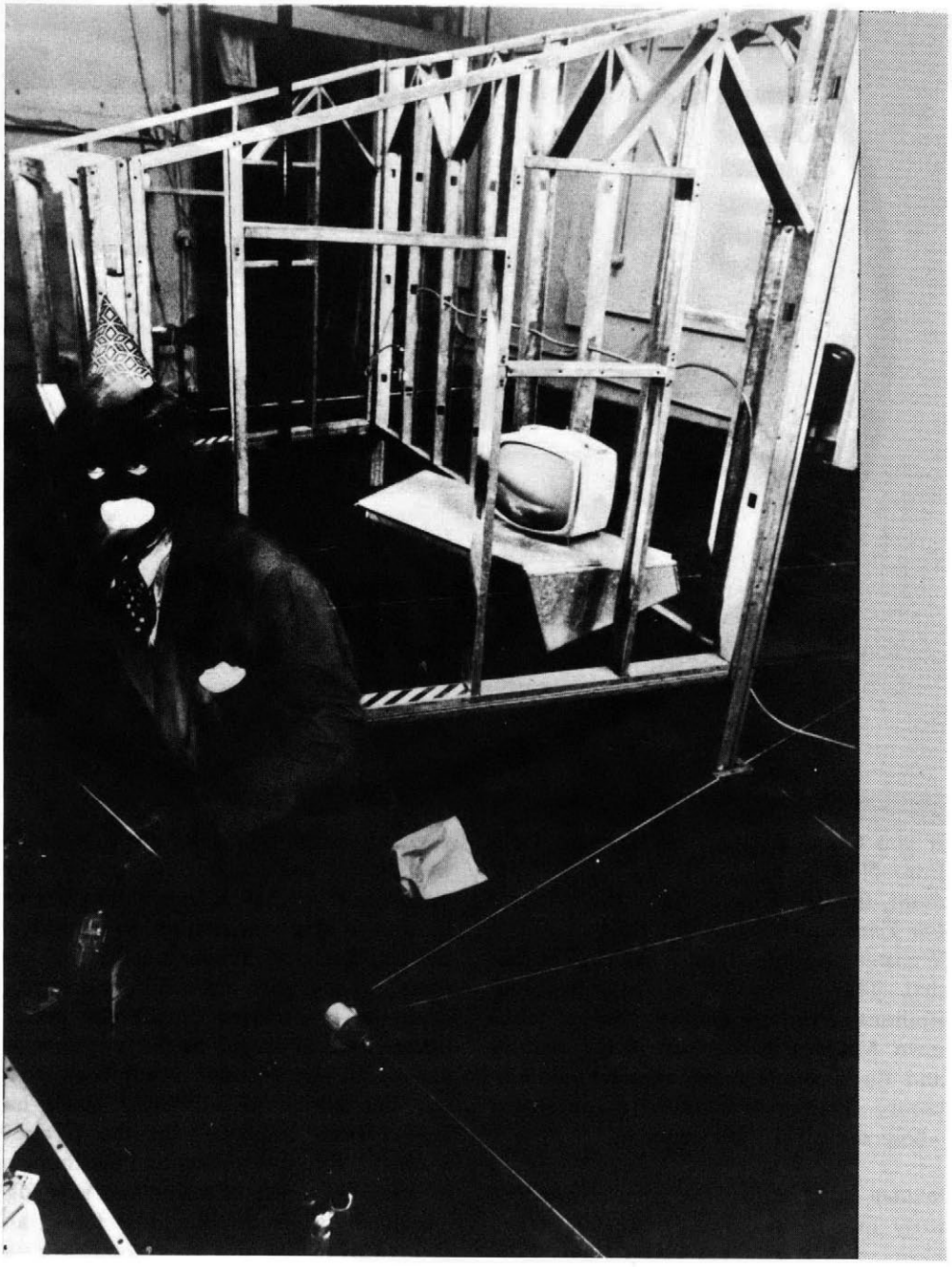
Wilder is, I think, the unacknowledged early link to avant-garde theater. When most of his contemporaries were busy devising literal *settings* for their plays, he was already working out the idea of *performance space:* in that differentiation lies the history of experimentation in American theater. Early on Wilder understood how space, as a highly artificialized property, could be constructed during the performance itself, a project he put into practice and which The Wooster Group has carried on. The notion of building a space has always been important in the Group's aesthetic, acting as conceptual backbone of its anarchic union of forms and raw-edge emotions: their productions force audiences to watch how they are being put together because the *process of making theater* won't let itself be taken for granted.

In *Route 1 and 9* the performance is very rigorously delineated in four segments which, briefly, are these: "The Lesson" (on video tape), "The Party" and a romantic scene from *Our Town,* "The Last Act" which is the final scene of *Our Town,* and an overlapping explicitly sexual video tape that plays off the porno genre and "Route 1 and 9" film. The cross cutting of film and live action from two rhythmically different performance "texts" creates the dialectical "frame" of reference this difficult, disturb-

ing work evolves, and to which Elizabeth LeCompte gives so startling a directorial shape.

Ron Vawter opens the production with a satiric reconstruction of a 1965 Encyclopedia Britannica film lesson which demonstrates how to interpret *Our Town*—this is the way most of us were taught play analysis in school. His purposefully fautous and wooden, impersonal delivery challenges the whole system of Cartesian logic, in fact the humanist tradition of interpretation itself, by which knowledge is transmitted in the culture. The speech doesn't by itself mock the play, but the comically gestural, old-fashioned acting style in which it is delivered only serves to show the aesthetic distance we've travelled through modernist art and theory: the classical approach to interpreting drama is too codified and stale for an open system work such as *Route 1 and 9*. Set against this "lesson" is the alternative model of the "learning play" (in the specific Brechtian sense of the term) that the Group proposes.

Video is used again for a romantic scene (in close-up) between a young couple in Wilder's play. What is remarkable about this scene, played in an intense, soap opera acting style, is its inherent commentary on language, chiefly the distinctions between stage language and film language, but beyond that theatrical dialogue and the more natural speech that has replaced it in avant-garde theater, and finally, pointing up the differences between acting and performing. Quite simply, the highly charged, expressive language that Wilder's characters speak overwhelms video



NANCY CAMPBELL

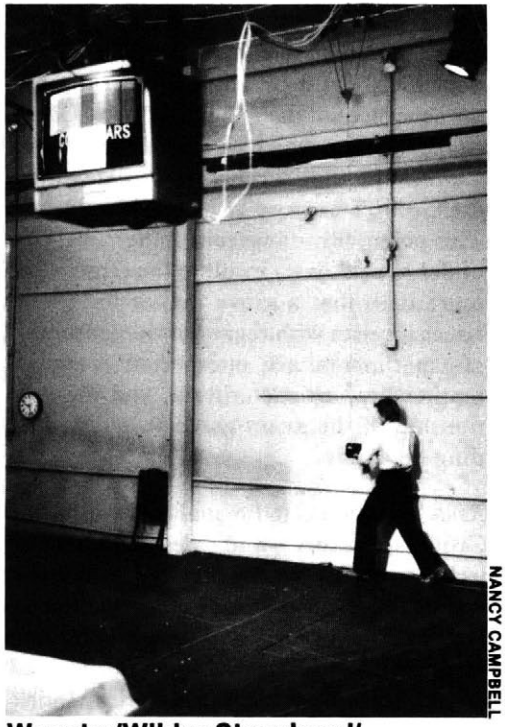
technology. I found myself watching a monitor furthest from where I was sitting because the dialogue was too powerful, perhaps "full" is more correct a word, for a film medium. (Theater productions fail on television precisely because of this disproportionate sense of scale in the speech.) What's more, I realize how much I regret the absence of inflected, unself-conscious stage speech.

Some of the actors in this video love scene re-emerge in the sex film segment (e.g., Willem Dafoe is both the young George of *Our Town* and the randy male), in the sequence in which whites in blackface variously set up the space for the next scene (Wilder's stage hands also prepare the cemetery scene), drink, dance, party and call up take-out food places (here real time intrudes on artificial time), and in the car ride of the closing film. A few (including the actor who gives the opening "lesson") also recreate a Pigmeat Markham comedy routing ("The Party") originally performed by the famous black comedian in 1965.

In the context of *Route 1 and 9* this latter scene functions as a double commentary on the concept of the mask that by its form criticizes the idea of playing roles, both in society and in theater. It is also a radical use of the theatrical *masque* ("a form of entertainment originally featuring the arrival of guests in disguise bearing gifts"—the *Encyclopedia of World Theatre* precisely defines the blackface segment), that illuminates the real content of the piece.

Route 1 and 9 is filled with such contrasting and distorting mirrors, all of them reflecting perspectives on the manner of American life and death: the "journey" theme of *Our Town* juxtaposed with the "Route 1 and 9" film segment that shows characters in a hapless car ride through the polluted industrial New Jersey landscape (I think the addition of quotations from Wilder's *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden,* poised in relation to that film, would have contributed an even more ironic frame to the piece—but that is a personal view); the memory of Wilder's child-like lovers erased by the film's faceless, copulating figures whose only language is a genital one; stage hands who provide a historical continuum to the scenes; the conventional drama lesson lost in the radical dramaturgical model this piece proposes. Uniting all these aspects is *Our Town*'s last scene, set in a cemetery, whose inhabitants act as a chorus commenting on the live action as it moves through time.

Route 1 and 9 embodies an uncompromising critique of prescribed social and art forms that outlines, from Wilder to the present, the loss of innocence, of spontaneous expression, communication and language, o f values. That energetic critique is the unspoken dialogue the two texts compose: the Wilder text, by its very "quotation," is the system against which the whole production can be measured. One also finds constructed in it an American experimental theater history: of acting styles, organization of space, use of props, multiple role-playing, theatrical language. And in Jim Clayburgh who, with LeCompte designed the production, one sees Wilder's stage manager for the new theater he envisioned, cranking up the television sets for a change of scene.



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Wooster/Wilder Stagehand/ Performer Jim Clayburgh.

Route 1 and 9 is in that line of the best world tradition of the avant-garde that is both politically and aesthetically radical. In this country only The Living Theatre, Squat, guerrilla theater groups and black theaters of the '60s have approached audiences with the high energy assault tactics that these theaters have made characteristic of their work. Their antecedents are found in the classical avant-garde line of dadaists, futurists, and surrealists who valued the gesture—the theatrical action—above all else: theater that undercuts the assumed values of its own form as well as subverting institutionalized thinking. This is theater as an act of faith in the power of art to change people.

There has been much controversy as to whether *Route 1 and 9* is racist, an accusation leveled at it by audiences, critics and the consensus of the New York State Council on the Arts which, it seems certain, has withheld funding for that particular work of the Group's because of its blackface scene. This potentially dangerous judgment, now under appeal, is an insult to the Group, but more than that a grave matter for all the issues it raises with regard to the censorship of experimental art, interpretation and intentionality, artistic criteria, and the relationship of the avant-garde to public funding demands.

Route 1 and 9 has to be analyzed within the Group's history and development of techniques and themes that define its style: distortion, exploration of character types, juxtaposition of several art forms, masking, identity crises, demystifying social and family traditions of white America, satiric and ironic modes of performance, play-within-play structures, deconstruction of space—there is nothing that leads logically to the charge of racism. Unless one considers an *anti-white* stance racist.

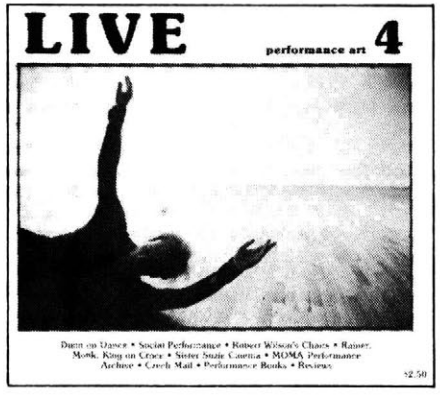
This work ruthlessly depicts the disintegration of white American society, and the perversion of is manners and values. It attacks the mode of thinking on which Western civilization is founded—even mocking accepted ways of thinking, feeling, talking, creating art, and finally, living. It's been a long time since any avant-garde theater in New York presented a politically controversial work of such emotional ferocity. We had forgotten that this kind of work should generate polemical outbursts in audiences.

This is why the question of racism is such a stupidly myopic entree into an analysis of the piece. Does putting actors in blackface mean that the work is racist? Is racism only about color? Does putting a female character in an apron mean a play is sexist? When does a Jewish mother become an anti-Semitic figure? And, my last point, if whites are exaggerated comic figures or stereotypes in plays by blacks, is that a form of racism—or is it affirmative action? If the idea of *representation* is undermined it destroys the foundation on which theater is based.

To my mind, the only positive actual scene in the whole piece is the metaphoric segment with the blacks, their masque that masks the real allegory of *Route 1 and 9* and links it to the house—the partially-built aluminum stud structure whose very presence criticizes the box set and the ideology of traditional domestic realism that it alludes to in this scene and in all the Group's previous work. That *house* that is not a home is the elusive sense of place LeCompte has theatricalized from an abstract ideal. *Route 1 and 9* is a poetic statement about leaving home (that of the parents—and for LeCompte it was literally New Jersey) and trying to establish an independent base. It has to do with stability, roots/routes, a place in society (for the endless oppressed the "black face" represents) but in particular for the artist as outcast. *Route 1 and 9* is a triumph of survival without capitulation to social and artistic expectations.

The only language of this work is Wilder's: his beautiful, evocative language, now so lost to us it actually sounds more like literature than everyday speech, so far away because it reminds us of the absence of sustained verbal discourse in contemporary life. *Route 1 and 9* sets off a desperate cry for communication. Is anybody listening?

"Perhaps all religions die out with the exhaustion of language," Wilder once wrote, as if he could see from a more peaceful American era the coming despair that would separate the body from language because it became futile to talk.

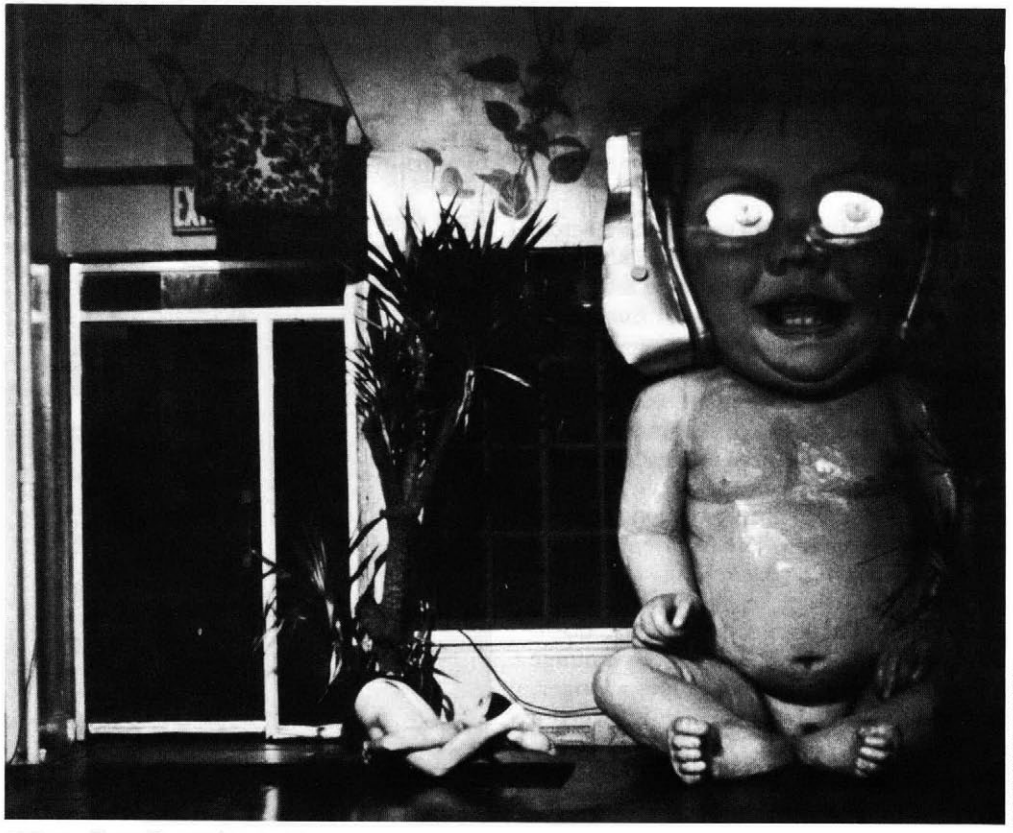


CHILLS AND THRILLS

BY JOHN HOWELL

This season's zeitgeist finds three of New York's most performance-oriented theaters—Squat, The Wooster Group, and Mabou Mines—doing shows which use film (actual footage and adapted techniques) and soundtracks (of appropriated texts and actual music) while laying out sexual matters as one of their Big Subjects (topic for a whole other discussion: their politics). These angles are intrinsically related; movies (kiss, kiss) and music (let the good times roll) are desiring machines ne plus ultra, and a look at their parts in these plays turns up some new ideas on a performance style which embodies (rather than merely describes) theatrical hot shots with a beat.

When Janis Joplin sings "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose, and nothing, that's all Bobby left me" ("Me and Bobby McGee"), the lyrics' face-in-the-beer existential dreads are contradicted by the raw passion and nostalgia-ridden timbre of Joplin's voice: she and Bobby had (have) something—love—and he (or it) just could be on down the road. Squat's *Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free* operates like that song, displaying a New York City hell with such energy and wit that the group's subtextual message—"*Don't* Abandon



NANCY CAMPBELL

"Mrs. Free" works out.

Hope, All Ye Who Live Here''—is stamped on their every view of the abyss. Like all classic spleen artists, Squat's vision is a dented but not disillusioned Romanticism expressed through blasted images and pessimistic statements that still vibrate with furtive yearning. That's what makes *Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free* a moral fable.

The performance is like a live album, a series of wordless tableaux set to musical numbers. This action is movie-ized by being staged at a long distance from the audience: the set looks like a far-off movie screen. Watching over the events and staring out at the audience is a giant papier-mache baby with video eyes; as we watch the images displayed from within its electronic head (the creature also wears stereo headphones), Squat's conceit stands out clearly: we're only getting pictures of pictures.

Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free begins with an actual film which alludes to the group's history (expelled from Hungary, they settled in New York in 1977) in scenes of European-style theater-of-cruelty violence—an *Andulusion Dog* razor-slit throat for example—set to campy silent movie jazz. Then the film switches to American super-real surrealism: a parody of a fashion commercial (a striptease ending in a pieta pose), a one-armed Gestapo agent exercising his parts with a Vacu-Jac enlarger, a coked-up punkette asking a belly-dancer/astronaut to teach her to dance. These vignettes unfold to nervous, dissonant, ''skronk'' jazz (DNA, the Lounge Lizards, James Chance). So does a longer, tabloid-like narrative sequence in which a cop calls his pregnant wife, then is shot dead by a thief; the wife delivers her baby (actual footage of the actress giving birth), a documentary followed by a sequence in which a Lolita-like Esther Balint recites hard-core porno adventures to another young girl while walking through an abandoned warehouse area.

The wordless-action-set-to-music concept continues in the performance's live events as does the hilarious, grotesque, and finally blasphemous sexual imagery (Central Europe is a very Catholic place). For starters, a woman performs yoga exercises, a thoroughly spiritual discipline rendered weird by her working out nude, setting up a voyeuristic relationship to the suddenly almost prurient positions. Other scenes work changes on these themes. A military chaplain reads a Dear John letter to a wounded GI who then tries to masturbate; the padre gives him a last-rites blowjob—the grunt pukes and dies. Another soldier chants an obscene rap to recorded funk by DNA: ''Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free, fuck with you and fuck with me.''

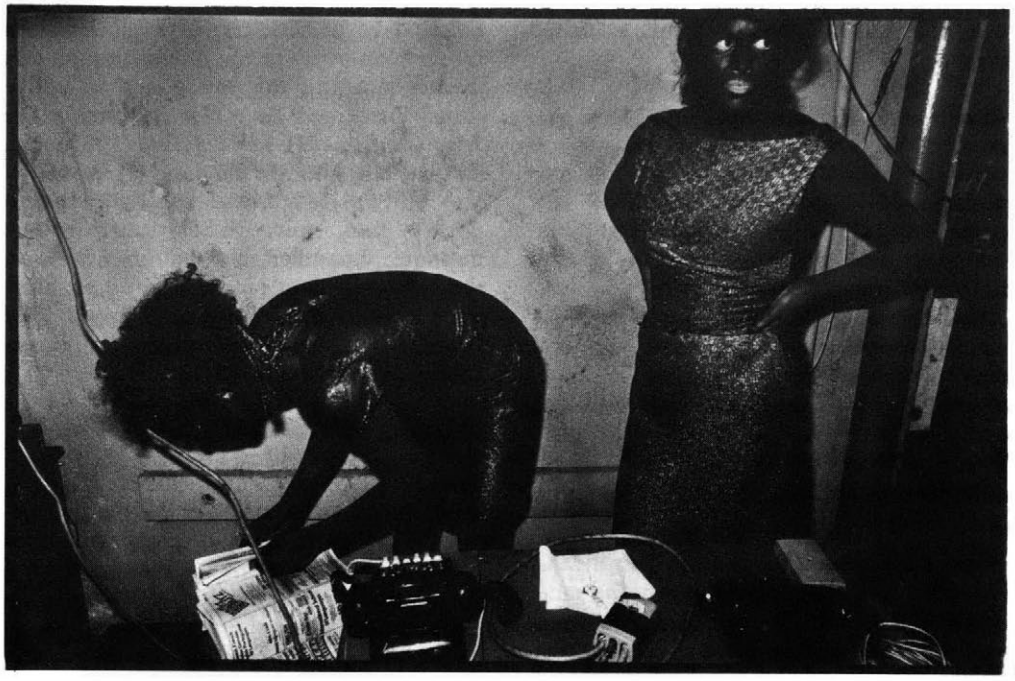
The final sequence shows how music-determined the entire piece is. A formally dressed chanteuse and a tuxedoed violinist perform James Brown's ''Sex Machine'' in Hungarian; then muzak plays (''I can't help falling in love with you''). Next, the waitress' lover leaves with another woman and she commits hara-kiri with the shish-kebab she has just cooked. The bystanders in the lounge—The Lounge Lizards band—sing, then play ''Some Enchanted Evening'' over her corpse. Finally a burned-out Nico croons ''New York, New York'' on the baby's video eyes and the performance abruptly ends.

All this kinky sex is played out to funky music so that the agony—twisted, perverted desire—is drilled home with the ecstasy—a driving beat and uptempo energy. The music gives clues about what's taking place, and that's usually a humorous commentary even though it's bitterly satiric. Squat says there's nothing left to lose, but their anger about going down with a dying empire gives them the energy to stand up a little longer.

NANCY CAMPBELL

Route 1 and 9 also begins with a film, a videotape parody of an educational film about Thorton Wilder's *Our Town*. The professorial unctuosity and relentless platitudes of "Clifton Fadiman" (superbly mimicked by Ron Vawter) are exposed in a damnation-by-quotation parody: "The playwright's art is complex and demanding." Likewise, the film's style quotes and ridicules the "neutral" techniques of such A-V teaching tools: static shots frame the serious lecturer, portentuous pans follow him from pose to pose, and jerky zooms to close-up emphasize "meaningful" statements. This 30 minute videotape establishes *Route 1 and 9*'s basic conceptual premise—it's a play about other plays (*Our Town* and black comedian Pigmeat Markham's vaudeville skit, "The Party")—but it also outlines one of the many dialectical frames which overlay the work: a contrast in racial stereotypes between white "sophisticated" media-mediated performing and black "crude" live performances.

In *Route 1 and 9*'s last act, there's a media buffet spread around in the aftermath of "The Party." Monitors suspended over the house show a weepy soap opera version of *Our Town*'s cemetary scene, its lugubriousness underlined by funereal Ives music. Off to the side a sex film starring Group members plays on an old TV set; this film apes the content of porno movies (shots of doggie-style coupling, a spread beaver, an erect cock) but its grainy, almost dreamy black and white quality makes it look like an old TV movie about old emotions: there's no attempt to hide a desperate sadness. Its weird beauty derives from that emotional realism—there's no illusion of ecstasy in sight. Then we see a homemade, on-the-road trip movie shot from a van traveling along Route 1 and 9 in New Jersey—these shots come from the



NANCY CAMPBELL

"I am a camera, I only record" school. Kerouac thrills shrink to documentary note taking.

Despite all the "hot" emotions in these emotionally-loaded visual genres, the acting is dead, inert, zombie-like. The performers make no effort to exploit or bridge the media-imposed distance, but settle for affectless images with minimal expressions, flat-voiced dialog, and mechanical movements. A pall of numb melancholy overlays these film versions of white American culture.

By contrast, the same actors are wildly alive in "The Party." R and B music rules, its pumping, high-volume rhythms sending the two couples into spasms of happy feet moves. There's even a show-stopper number, a unison high-stepping routine to "Land of 1000 Dances" (Wilson Pickett). Unlike the filmed, stupefied whites, these "blacks" *vibrate*-every gesture goes all out for a frenetic, hyperactive good time. The guys (Vawter and Willem Dafoe) spray around gallons of booze, tell nasty jokes, and move in on the girls. The chicks (Kate Valk and Peyton) look like R. Crumb cartoons with tight shiny dresses and frizz-top hairdos. These red-hot mamas not only drive the guys wild but also stir up some long-distance action when they phone out on the spot—through an amplified phone hookup—for fried chicken. In the performances I saw, they never failed to get other "offers" from delivery*men*.

Of course these boozing, lusty, boogieing "blacks" are a racial cariacture, the crudest form of white stereotyping. The "blacks" are more superficially alive than the whites, but their good time is hardly a

profound emotion; it's as mindless in its own way as "Fadiman's" over-educated blather.

Route 1 and 9 is a bitter pill of a piece, and most of its downer mood is traceable to these aggressive performances. The opposition of white (media-numbed, sad, poetic everyday language, discreet and blatant sex) and black (party-mad, always laughing, juicy R and B lyrics, raw lust) stereotypes is neither satisfying in itself nor does it synthesize into any resolution. This dialectical detour by director Liz LeCompte and The Wooster Group is a real dead end.

Wrong Guys takes its cues from Jim Strahs' neo-noir, film-wise crime novel of the same name. It's a B-movie-mad play with crime movie motifs and structure. *Wrong Guys'* devices have precedents in Mabou Mines' other work (equal parts cinematic theater—Buchner, Brecht, and theatrical film—Godard, the Truffaut of *Jules and Jim*). But the play unfolds more like Hawks' *The Big Sleep—Live!* than any post-Brechtian *denkspiele* about Crime and Society. *Wrong Guys* mimics that movie's Chandlerian conceits of night-time atmosphere (bright tightly-focused lights and dark shadows), colorful characters with twisted tics (gangster bosses and thugs with individual accents and kinky habits), and a murky plot—here, something about a pharmaceutical deal pulled by "Johnny Street" (Lee Breuer) and "Jack Straw" (Bill Raymond) which ends in Street's rub-out. From its title sequence opening—hoods spelling out W-R-O-N-G G-U-Y-S with typewriters wielded like machine guns (it's done with projections)—to the swarm of technicians who work visibly around the edges of the play like an over-sized movie union crew (and who are credited as performers), *Wrong Guys* is a movie/play about crime movies, tough guy theater pushing the *noir* goods as a live show; check out *Body Heat,* Altman's *The Long Goodbye,* and *The Big Sleep* (1975) with Robert Mitchum (in England (!) instead of L.A.) on the difficulty of making a contemporary film noir. (Theatrical/cinematic footnote: Chandler modeled his novels on the conventions of Jacobean drama: short, violent scenes about lurid subjects—usually revenge murders—with two or three-character confrontations.)

But *Wrong Guys* is no mere cinematic simulcram; whole chunks of the performance are built around actual film and projections. One scene unfolds in several shots: two hoods lurk behind a screen while a projection gives the text (projection as visual V.O.), then they slit the screen and peer out (literally), through the text's venetian blinds; this turns into a film which picks up and carries forward the story. Another theater/film moment is a live re-creation of a process shot: Johnny and Jack are seated facing a windshield (they're driving a truckload of drugs across the Canadian border) on which is projected the winding road. That's an idea you would only buy in theater where its mechanical illusion is both novel and funny; in film, it's a cornball cliche now replaced by super-realism and super special effects.

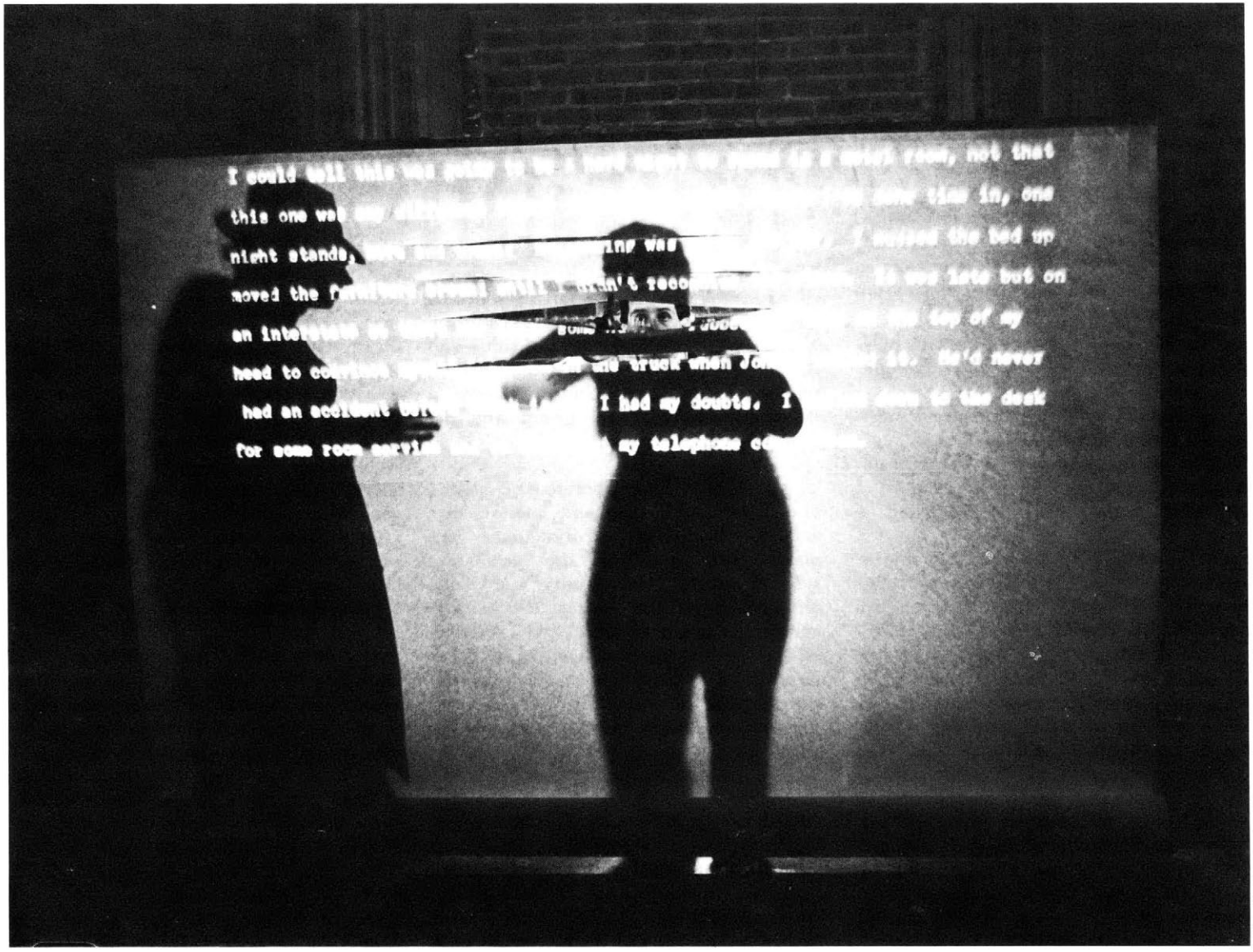
For a *noir* performance, *Wrong Guys* doesn't use much music but it's really not needed—there's a full soundtrack of breathy voices (the dialog is broadcast with a super-sensitive Sennheiser mike system), recorded sound effects, and musical underworld argot:

> The big boys in the downtowns around the land were keeping tight fists on big bunches of folding money and everybody had some problems with flow, no cards flashing in certain sections and no Christmas lights in the board rooms, if you know what I mean. It was all I could do to get two quarters to click in my fist, never even thought about making ends meet anymore. Street and I had been sitting pretty though we never counted our chickens until we cracked the shells.

Music breaks out in a big way only when Straw comes up on the gangsters' hideout and one of the "boys" (Greg Mehrten) enters singing a camped-up, a capella "Easter Parade." Why that song, I don't know (I couldn't find the moment in Strahs' text) but it's one of those trademark off-the-wall Mabou Mines numbers that hits home—it's hot, incongruously funny, and theatrically *right.*

The scene's broadly played swish underlines *Wrong Guys'* continuous theme of macho male camaraderie which is clearly homoerotic though not explicitly gay. Like its film noir models, the play's women are nymphomaniacal "fluff": in one film sequence, a moll gives Straw some discreet head; in another sequence shot like a silent porno film (iris lens as a peephole frame for voyeur Straw and the always voyeuristic audience), molls orgy with the thugs. But the real action is Man's stuff. *Wrong Guys* live cast is all male, and the "boys" strut their goods a la gay baths at the end, posing nude while Straw and Street carry out their last palship/partnership/almost-lovers deal. Though the sexual angle is bent, the sentiments are straight and Street's schizy soliloquy is a naked, moving, spoken *liebestod.*

Wrong Guys final twist is a typical Mabou Mines double-take: this male paen was directed by the group's Ruth Maleczech.



NANCY CAMPBELL

A WORLD OF COLOUR

PATRICIA JONES

Black, Asian and Hispanic artists have, until recently, been absent from performance art. The hegemony of white performers in this Eurocentric form had effectively sealed off spaces that cater to its audience: galleries, alternative spaces, schools. However, the growing plurality in the art world has helped make performance a viable medium for artists of color.

Although there have been a limited number of performances by artists of color, several tendencies have been displayed in their works which separates them from most white artists:

1. Use of political concepts, especially ones focusing on racial, sexual, and economic oppression.
2. Connection with revolutionary images and ideas of Third World peoples.
3. Use of ritual especially by African-American artists.
4. Humor, both to illustrate biases and to relieve tension.
5. Symbolism. By men, large ritual objects similar to objects in secret societies, especially musical instruments and weapons. By women, this involves dolls, toys, and costumes.

Of course, some of these tendencies are found in many performance artists' work, but in the hands of artists of color this vocabulary is pervasive and pointed.

Three women of color recently presented performances in downtown spaces; there were similarities in their work, but two of the pieces were considerably riskier than the other one.

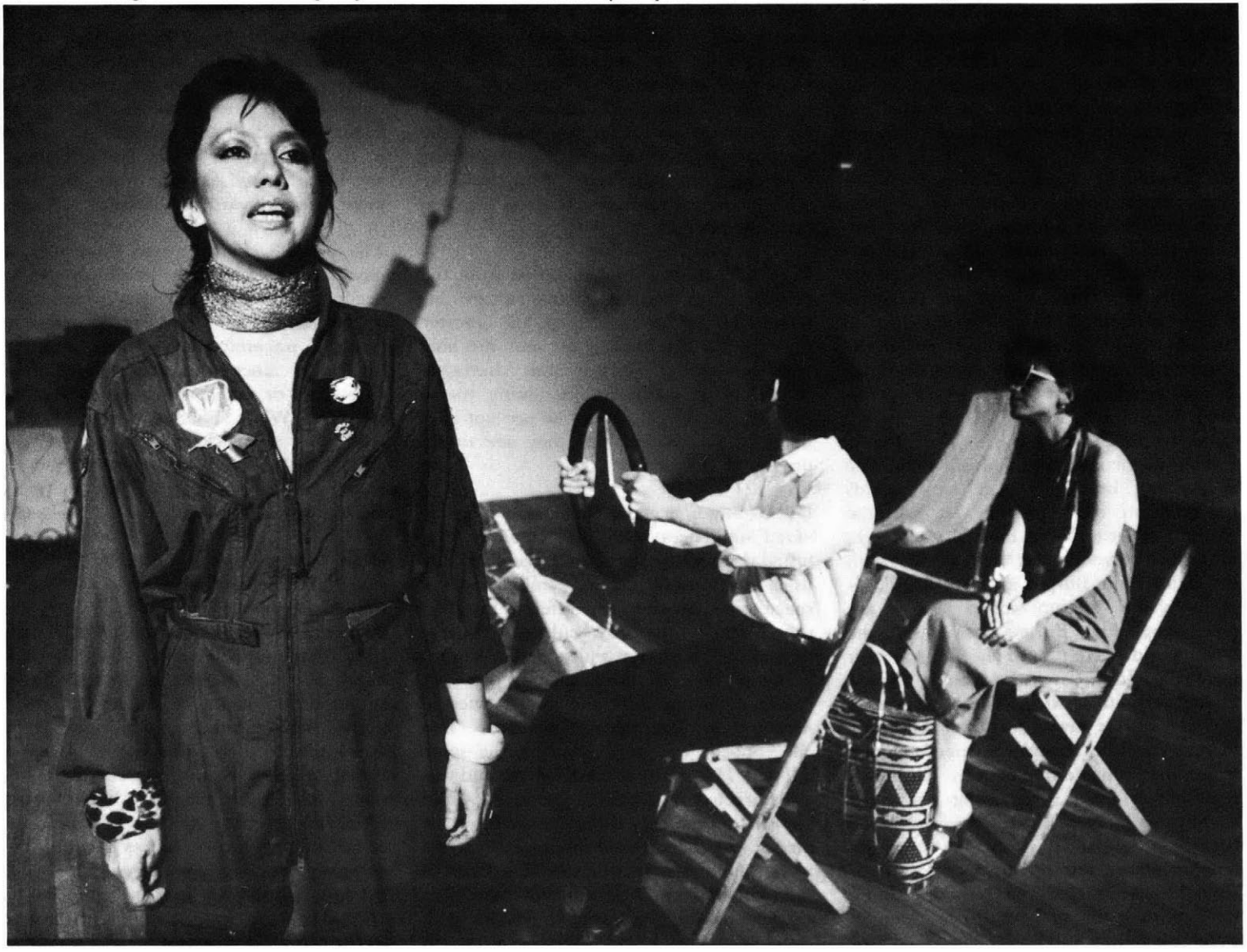
Candace Hill-Montgomery's *Teamwork: The American Way* at Franklin Furnace was both ambitious and problematic. It included an installation by the artist, slides, a gospel choir, and selected tapes of Malcolm X's speeches. To the delight of some and the chagrin of others, her piece brought together the Black United Front, a Brooklyn-based political group and the downtown art audience.

The installation was elaborate. It consisted of dolls, musical instruments, military toys and toy animals. Hill-Montgomery explained (privately) that the installation symbolized the "Community," a village setting of miniature houses, toy animals and people, and the "Ideal City," composed of painted cinder blocks with a couple at its pinnacle. Between these two settings was a vast space with two musicians on either side and a miniature army (unseen by the villagers).

The choir began the performance with a singing of the Beatitudes. As their voices faded, the speech of Malcolm X about the murder of four black girls in Birmingham rang out. During this time, slides focusing on protests against police brutality were flashed against the wall behind the installation. Hill-Montgomery's choice of speeches combined with the singing in an evocative way, giving the piece a generous texture: the live voices of the singers, the live voice of a martyred leader—the outrage, humor, helplessness and hope were all there. Unfortunately, that tone was not sustained in the imagery. The slides, at first provocative, became distracting as the performance continued; it would have been interesting to have seen slides made by the artist as well as those generalized images brought by the Black United Front. Furthermore, there was no reference during the piece (except for a brief moment at its beginning) to the elaborate installation.

Even with its problems *Teamwork: The American Way* was distinctive. Hill-Montgomery reminded the art world of a rarely noticed constituency: the black, brown, and yellow people who live next door or in the next borough. She also brought out black people who wouldn't know Soho from midtown striking a blow against the provincialism that pervades the black communities and the Third World art world. The piece ended with Malcolm's speech on the traits of a true revolution ("A revolution is bloody"); the choir sang "Where Would I Be?" The audience gave them and Ms. Hill-Montgomery a standing ovation.

Jessica Hagedorn and company in *Tenement Lover: (no palm trees/in new york city)*



Jessica Hagedorn's *Tenement Lover: (no palm trees/in new york city . . .)* is concerned with alienation, cross culturalism, and despair. Built around an adaptation of her short story, *The Blossoming of Bong Bong* and four songs written by her and The Gangster Choir, the piece included live performance of the songs and a scenario that treated culture shock, political repression in the Phillipines, urban ennui, violence, and fascination with American popular culture.

As directed by Thulani Davis, the piece was composed of a set divided by a barbed wire construction by artist John Woo between the " real world" of a rehearsal studio and the "dream world" of Bong Bong. In the "real world," the Gangster Choir performed songs as a kind of backdrop to Hagedorn's monologue. In the "dream world" Renee Montagne and Luis Burgos acted out a stylized class battle: colored immigrant as chauffeur/servant to white woman complete with sun glasses, fashion magazines, and a pina colada. The interaction between these two worlds centered on the television set and the reading of letters. For most of the piece, Hagedorn stayed in the "real world" with her band while Burgos and Montagne remain in the "dream world" but as the piece progressed, Burgos strayed into the "real world." He turned the TV channel: ironically, John Gavin was being named ambassador to Mexico. These excursions between worlds gave a surreal touch to the piece. Also, the changes in tone emanate from the songs/monologues: Hagedorn read letters from Bong Bong about his adventures in New York City, and as he became progressively crazy, the songs got tougher, more outrageous, more violent. Hagedorn countered the action of Bong Bong with a telling of a dream, one in which her family and finally she were killed by members of the Phillipine army. Bong Bong's derangement in the New World was balanced with the terrors of the old.

Although the performance was well-crafted, the interaction between the two worlds was at times strained since the connecting links—the television and the letters—were only used by Hagedorn (once by Burgos). The band was used primarily for the songs except for one member who sat completely covered by raingear, holding an umbrella; most of the time, the other members remained passive, separate from the action.

Tenement Lover's power stemmed from the conflict which arises when two cultures intersect. Hagedorn's charisma, the Ganster Choir's solid musicianship, and the able performances of Burgos and Montagne combined to create an intriguing piece. Alienation and culture shock are not particularly new issues, but they are rarely presented in this way.

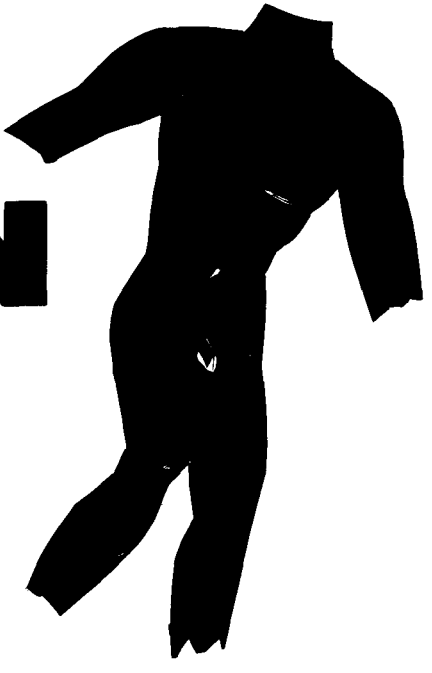
Hill-Montgomery and Hagedorn both provided audiences with performances that tested the boundaries of their visions. They used repetition of images, symbolism, and space to convey two very different insights: the former involved cultural/political aspiration; the latter, cultural dislocation. Some of both of those themes provided Ntozake Shange with the juicier lines in *Mouths: A Daughter's Geography*. The choreopoem was performed on the same bill with Hagedorn at the Kitchen, and was also directed by Thulani Davis. It would appear that the only thing connecting their pieces was the director because Shange's piece stayed safely within the boundaries of the choreopoem, a concept she has singlehandedly popularized. *Mouths* is a series of poems strung together around a "romance" between Shange and Richard Lawson, a handsome, yet limited actor. The poems speak to the problems, prophecies, and passions of black people whether in America or the Third World. The poems are danced, and movement often enhanced the work, especially during "What are you doin' on those goddamned horses" in which Shange's outraged admonitions to the liberators of Haiti are displayed in bold and beautiful movement by the dancers: Ed Mock, Halify Osimare and Elvia Marta. At other times, the movement was awkward and jarring.

The use of Richard Lawson was the major flaw in the performance: he simply was not needed. And his performance especially during the "some men" excerpts were incredibly uncomfortable—which was not surprising since the poems are angry harangues or malicious character sketches of men. When Shange performs them alone they are wicked, bitter storypoems. In Lawson's performance there was an element of sadomasochism that detracted from the poems' power.

Even though *Mouths* was entertaining, it shared little with the pieces composed by Hill-Montgomery, Hagedorn or other performance artists like Lorraine O'Grady or Ping Chong. It was a solid, slick entertainment although serious because Shange's subjects are serious. It was an "uptown" piece—the beginnings of what seemed like a new theater piece. The lack of objects or visual imagery of any sort could be construed as "poor theater" but the performers were not objectified. *Mouths* was compelling as theater, not as performance.

Patricia Jones is a poet and critic whose recent collection of poems is *Mythologizing Always.*

WOMEN IN CAGES AND MALE MEN



LENORA CHAMPAGNE

The experience of being caged and bound by others' rules has been an especially prominent one for women. In two recent Franklin Furnace shows, Denise Green's and Elizabeth Sacre's *Striped* and Carlyle Reedy's *Yoga with Interference, Odette, Woman One, Laundry, Waitress, Miss Aminta, Tortilla Mary, Reflections, Waters. . . .*, the metaphor of prison and confinement plays a crucial role.

Both Green and Sacre are from Australia which was once, of course, a British penal colony. In their performance, a classic joke was quoted: "An English girl tells her mother that she wants to go to Australia. 'Oh you can't do that,' the mother replies, 'That's where all the criminals went.' An Australian girl tells her mother that she wants to go to England. 'Oh you can't do that,' says the mother, 'that's where all the criminals come from.' " This exchange has a vaudevillian "turn" quality, but most of the piece was serious and political in tone, a performance about "belonging and outsiderness, enclosure and disclosure, the containment of bodies, the corseting of space, the telling of secrets." In *Striped,* these two women look for and display their ghosts.

Green and Sacre applied their sense of the English/Australian, homage/bondage relationship to the way women are seen and see themselves. They joined historical information about Australian prisons with facts on discipline in Australian school systems, and placed the socialization of Australian women in this context. For example, on consecutive audio tapes a reading of the penal code was followed by instructions to teachers; at the same time, a film of a woman dressing—fastening her bra, adding layers of clothing between her body (her self) and the world—was projected. The obvious refrains of the themes of discipline, deprivation, and repression in the audio tapes reinforced the triple associations. Later a tape of a woman's voice whispering obscene stories of sexual degradation was coupled with tape describing forms of punishment in prisons. One of the most interesting observations (which borrows from contemporary French psychoanalytic theory) was that Australian women go through a process of "double othering"—as Australian and as woman: "There are strong bonds between

Australian men. Man as mate. Woman as inmate."

Near the end of the performance, as the two women were applying vertical strips of white tape to the backboard (metaphorical prison bars), a woman's taped voice urged: "Make politics of manipulation. We will resist cynicism and resignation. We will refuse to be caged." As the lilting melody of "The Blue Danube" came on, a slide with an image of a blue sky and a single palm tree was projected, and the performance ended.

This final image radiates optimism, serenity, at least hope. It was also a liberating, colorful moment: a sudden opening out from the pervasive black and white into the possibility of peaceful paradise. (Previously, everything in the performance, with the exception of some slides, was black and white.) This end was a surprise that didn't convince, considering the fascination with perversion which had preceded it. Yet despite the tacked-on moral and other flaws such as the films poor technical quality, *Striped* was a provocative piece.

In Reedy's *Yoga,* shiny silver strips hung over a white screen indicated a jail. "Odette," a woman who was experiencing "interference" while trying to do her yoga behind the screen, introduced the audience to characters who were imprisoned (so were the audience members, she noted, by reflection in the silver strips). The imaginary characters were all poets of one sort or another, imprisoned by their poverty, by routine, or by fascination with their own image.

Reedy's run-on patter was eccentric, affable, witty, modest to the point of self-denigraton, political, and feminist. In an almost offhand way, she demonstrated an anger at injustice, exploitation, and poverty, a frustration with social restrictions, and a scorn for those who buy the image of themselves they are sold. My favorite character was the self-absorbed "Miss Aminta," in love with her own image and always expecting everyone to look at her: "She works for British Airways, takes a lot of showers, and talks on the phone all the time." Reedy squirted shaving cream on her face (by this time, she was wearing only her slip), then slathered it all over her body, saying that she was doing so to demonstrate that "Miss Aminta" was what we'd suspected all the time: "a bourgeois cream puff."

MARTY HEITNER

Carlyle Reedy in *Yoga With Interference. . . .*

Reedy used found objects to extraordinary effect, creating a Pierre Balmain evening costume out of trash, and poetry from found words. Apparently the final section, about reflection and the river, was supposed to be the liberating part, in which some spirit of the women poets was to be set free, but the projector didn't work so the performance ended; "Odette" went back behind the screen to concentrate on getting her yoga right. Although her characters didn't break out of their jails, they showed that they could cope with imprisonment with remarkable good humor.

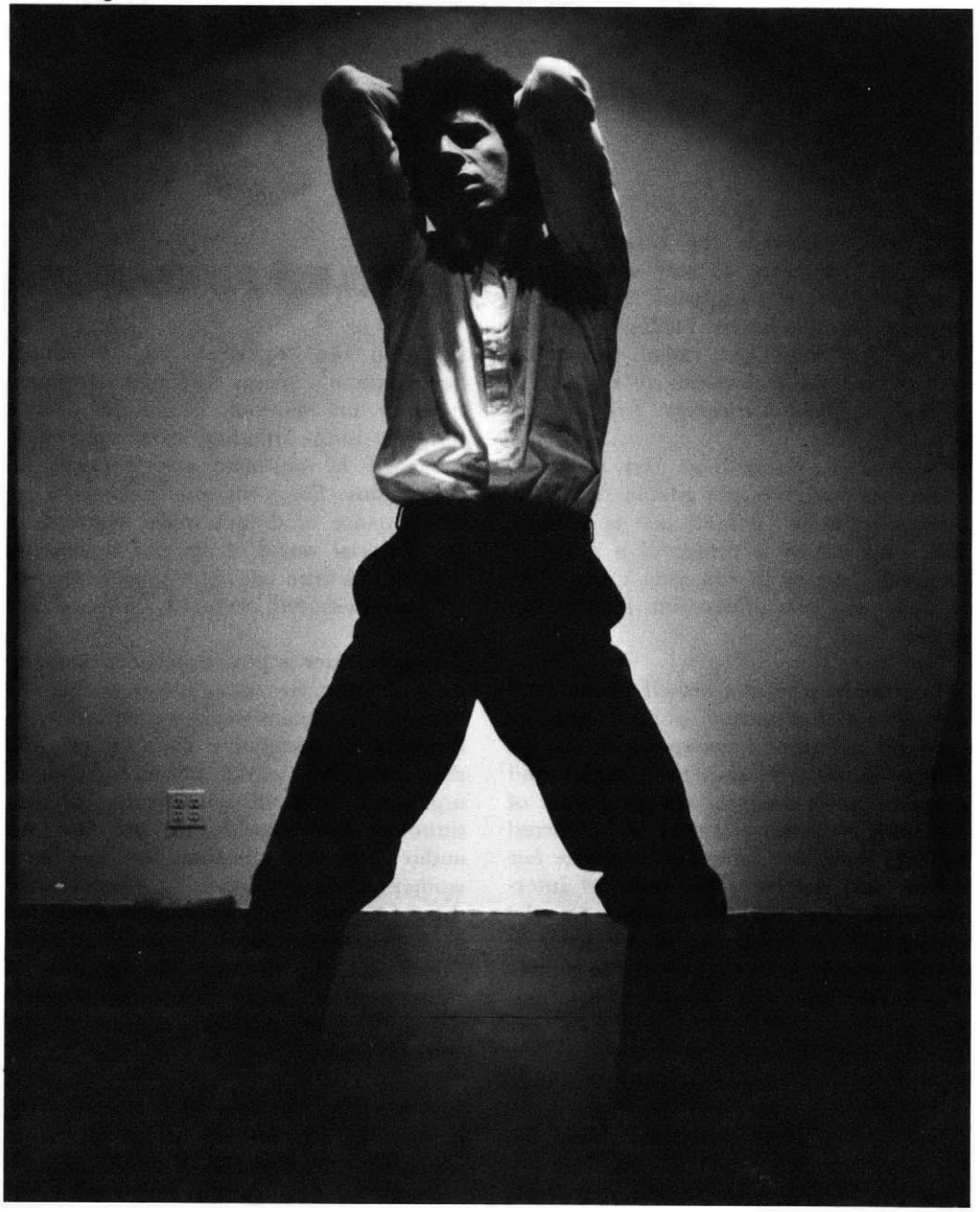
In *That Girl,* Eric Bogosian amused much of the audience at his Franklin Furnace performance with his series of a dozen male impersonations which ranged from a slick disco dancer to a happily-married New Jersey worker, from a junkie to a nightclub emcee. Most of them were skillfully done with vocal modulations and gestures appropriate to each character. There were disturbing aspects to the performance, though, that I don't know if Bogosian intended.

When he revealed his fantasies about women as "the m.c.," we were aware that Bogosian wrote this talk, that he was enjoying saying it, that it was pretty degrading and objectifying as well as violent (as were the fantasies and remarks of several other characters), and the ambiguity as to whether he was using the opportunity to entertain or insult the audience made laughter stick in my throat. When women use degradation or obscenity as a device, they're very conscious and deliberate about that choice. Bogosian apparently expected the audience to go along with or participate in it somehow, seemingly unaware of larger implications: to say it was enough for him.

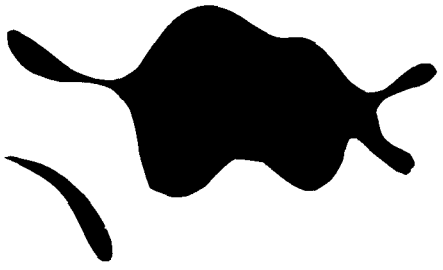
The aggressive alienation of Bogosian's characters was especially puzzling since he'd indicated that the subject of this performance was "love and desire." It was only in the "New Jersey man" and in "guy with a cat" that we saw love which wasn't simply lust. Bogosian seemed more involved in self-expression than in cutting to the quick of the thing: the act of naming as a way to get power over, to confine women.

Lenora Champagne has written on performance and theater for *The Drama Review, Theater,* and *LIVE.*

Eric Bogosian in *That Girl*



FRESH BLOOD



CHARLES FREDERICK

If I could persuade the Greed god of dreams, Morpheus, to stay awake long enough to tell me his dreams, I would not expect the reductiveness of a narrative to be his telling. I might get, rather, something like Carolee Schneemann's *"Fresh Blood"—A Dream Morphology.*

Schneemann, dressed in red pajamas, begins her piece lying on a table, twirling a plastic umbrella. Behind her is a large screen on which is projected a series of recurring images in changing order. The audience sits in a proscenium relationship to her.

Schneemann recreates herself in this performance as the passive subject/character, innocent before and susceptible to the influence of her own flow of thought, art, and dream. The innocence, the autonomy of the subject/character/creator is reinforced by Schneemann's refusal to organize her dream material by a hierarchy of interpretation. Instead, the images (of the dream and her notebooks, an extension of her dream-life) are juxtaposed, and radiate discussion, thought, irony, association, and gesture.

Morpheus is an allegorical god rather than a "real" god. He was constructed by Greek poets (and moralists) from the meaning of the root of his name—"morph," meaning shape or form (*Morpho* is also an epithet for Venus). Schneemann's piece, although composed from dream material, is not the passive flow awaiting Freudian categories: it is managed by aesthetic and political interventions. Schneemann's piece is a reperformance of dream world material in the material world of art and interpretation. It has been wrought: joined, planed, affixed, measured, textured, designed.

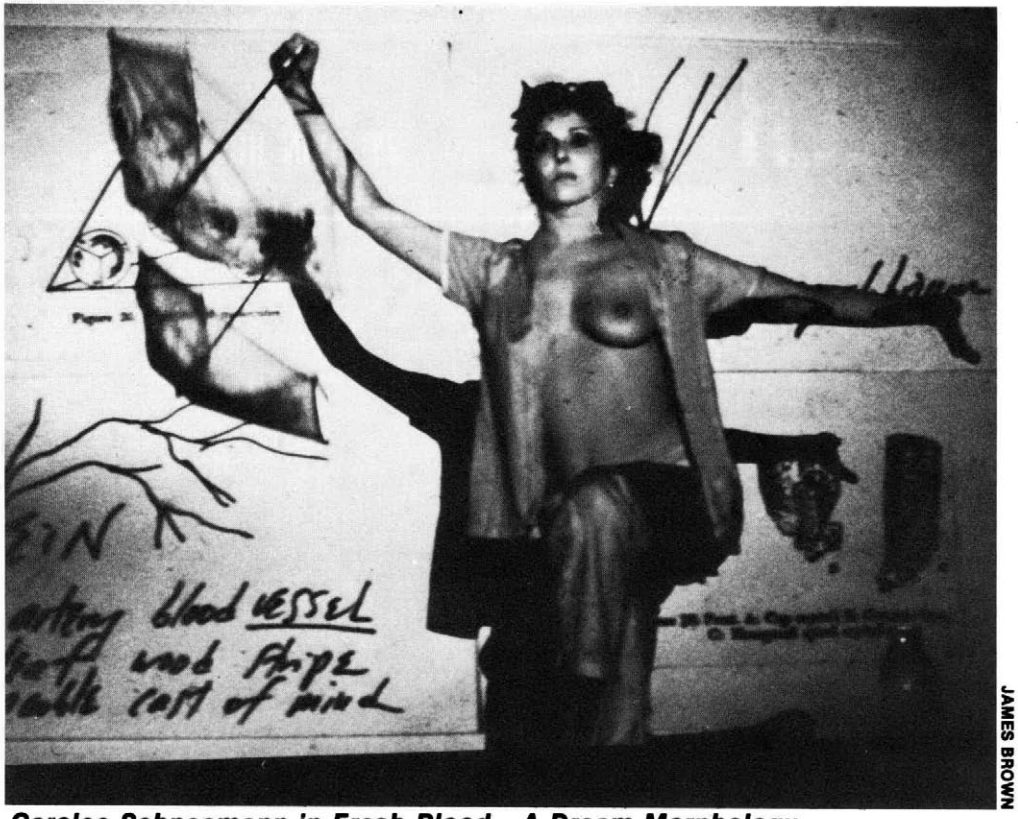
The performer is poised between and immersed within two antagonistic worlds: the unconscious dream world, organized by its dissembling associative continuities, and the conscious world of interpretation, organized by its dissembling logical continuities. Both worlds are perilous. An audio voice-over questions the dreams of women: "are we dreaming ourselves, or dreaming the dreams of men dreaming us?" As interpretation, the problem is that Freud thought through the *categories* of "dream-mind" while Schneemann wants muscular and genital *locations* of the "dream-body."

The performer is as well performing the making of art, an act of interpretation which uses the material of dream and the material of possible discourses of interpretation in the manipulation of space, dance, voice, and media to create the art work.

In the second part, Schneemann recites the dream narrative, her voice disembodied by amplification. She is restless on stage: she sits, lies back, opens her legs in the air and V-frames the slides—there echoing a recurring image from the slides: the triangle, the pubic triangle, the shape of the unfurled umbrella, the erupting volcano, as though there were a sexual triangle among the dreamer, the dreamed, and the analysis, or the dreamer, the composer, and the performer.

She kicks against the words, denying the completion of the experience of the dream, or the received means of interpretation, or even her own art-making. Under the opened blood-red pajama top are her bare breasts, the undeniable physical sign of the performer/creator. This is a woman whose dreams may not be her own, the interpretation of whose dreams certainly escapes her control. Her art work—technically clean, economically and complexly composed—is at least partly about a restlessness with the categories of space, tricks of language, and the enigma of intuition in art.

Schneemann has carried some of the persistent concerns of her career into this piece, namely, space extensions, and the in-



JAMES BROWN

Carolee Schneemann in Fresh Blood—A Dream Morphology.

tervention of the creator on the flow of material which comprises the work.

Schneemann's work has been an important part of a movement which broke the notion of space and its depiction out of the picture frame. Schneemann's feminist concerns allow her to reformulate spatial problems as questions of flow and pattern in the body, shaped particularly by a woman's biology whose rhythms, of course, differ from those of a man. Schneemann is interested in the loci of activity in and on the body, with the attendant implications and compositions.

In this piece, a central image is an umbrella which becomes many things—not *interpreted* as many things, but *performed* as many things. The umbrella is itself an object which always implies an extension of itself to achieve its function. This umbrella becomes a witty metaphor because of its morphology: for the vagina, for the entry of the penis in the enclosure of the vagina. The ribs of the umbrella become, by extension, the rays of orgasmic energy, the lines of blood through the body; in the dream narrative, the umbrella becomes a piercing tip which wounds a man's thigh in a taxi, the way a penis enters a blood enriched womb. (The womb is both functional and social, private and public—not unlike a taxi.) In turn, the human vascular system becomes the vein structure (morphology) of a leaf, etc. These meanings connecting with the umbrella even as the images and meanings in the piece attach to the body/-mind of the performer.

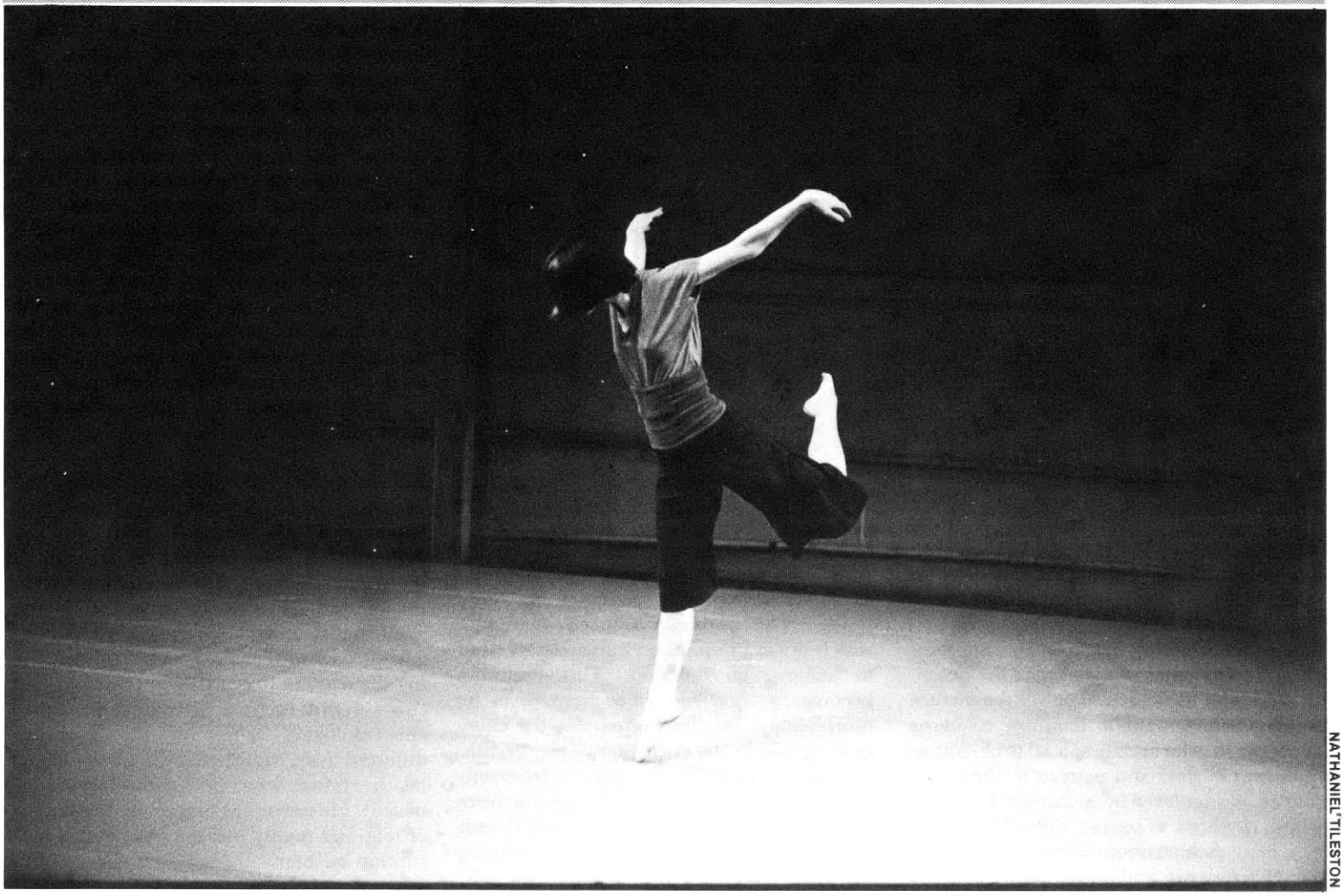
The creative process is then a negotiation among intuitions, conscious notions, and the array of possible materials. The material of the piece is manifest in these twistings and turnings of the interventions of mind and matter. The unavoidable problem which concerns Schneemann's piece is both artistic (contained within the strategy of the work) and social (informing Schneemann's experience). The brilliance of Schneemann's achievement is the congruency of these two issues as one in the work. In the art work, the problem of interpretation is at base a problem of crafting a medium: the achievement of execution. In quotidian experience, the problem is self/social definition (interpretation).

By attempting to force continuous experience (dream) through the differentiated experience of material (art) reality, Schneemann is performing the struggle of interpretation itself. She is working within the limitations of available materials and available strategies of artistic execution, and she is also seeking a means of identifying the content of her dream in defiance of the rigidity of received male epistemologies. In this way she is, at last, different from Morpheus, who never leaves his dreaming, who can remain forever innocent. He never has to face the limitations of material reality nor the inescapable corruption of interpretation.

Charles Frederick, theater artist and critic, was co-creator of *Paradise Regained* at The Performing Garage.

DANCE SAMPLER

BY JOHN HOWELL



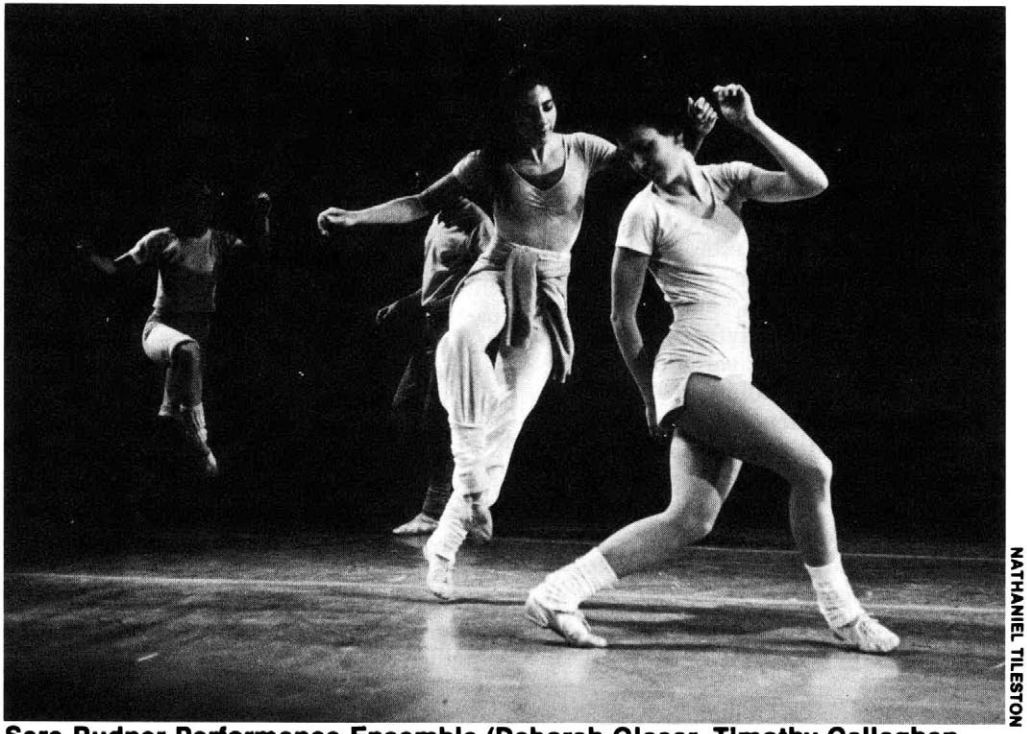
NATHANIEL TILESTON

Dana Reitz

Theater is back in favor in downtown dance after years of real-time task activity, pure movement studies, and rigorous geometric, structures. Last season's performances were loaded with costume, music, narrative, persona—even *psychology* (that dread tar baby nemesis of "progressive" art). This shift is not a coherent movement-with-manifesto, but simply a response to a cultural zeitgeist which says that stripped-down kinesis and conceptual frameworks just aren't enough anymore. Of course the general formula isn't surefire—dance-theater is a tricky mix to pull off—but there's a juicy pop when it hits home. What follows is a quick tour around town of some dance performances which try to blend downtown integrity with theatrical trap pings.

First, some oldies-but-goodies. Three former members of the prescient, defunct, wonderful Grand Union improvisational troupe showed off their current choreography in individual concerts. Barbara Dilley offered what she calls "contemplative dance practices" at the Performing Garage, a series of impressionistic improvisatory exercises to spoken American Indian poetry. The dynamic of her "open structures" was simplistic; for example, at the mention of a bear's footprints, a dancer adopted a bear walk. And her set, patterned quartet, *Navajo Homage,* had neither the stringent geometry nor the ritualistic veneer such dances need to go anywhere. Dilley herself remains an eye-catching performer with her unstressed kinetic flow and calisthenic-like movement, but the other performances lacked punch.

Nancy Lewis presented a low-key series of informal concerts at Studio 505 which featured typically whimsical choreography for Lewis' daffy ingenue persona.*Small Talk*: "this work has no musical score except for the snapping of fingers, feet, breathing, whistling, or sound around or out of the room. Improvised it is." Lewis is a large, unevenly weighted performer who turned these unlikely qualities to her advantage; she translated slightly awkward turns, jumps, and skips into moments of unpredictable charm. She's fond of "off" costumes as well (a purple harem-like outfit for *Jonquil*) and of dancing against the beat of Richard Peck's jazzy musical accompaniment. Her wispy choreography is real performance work—it didn't exist apart from her moment-to-moment doing of it.



NATHANIEL TILESTON

Sara Rudner Performance Ensemble (Deborah Glaser, Timothy Callaghan, Linda Cohen, and Susan Van Pelt).

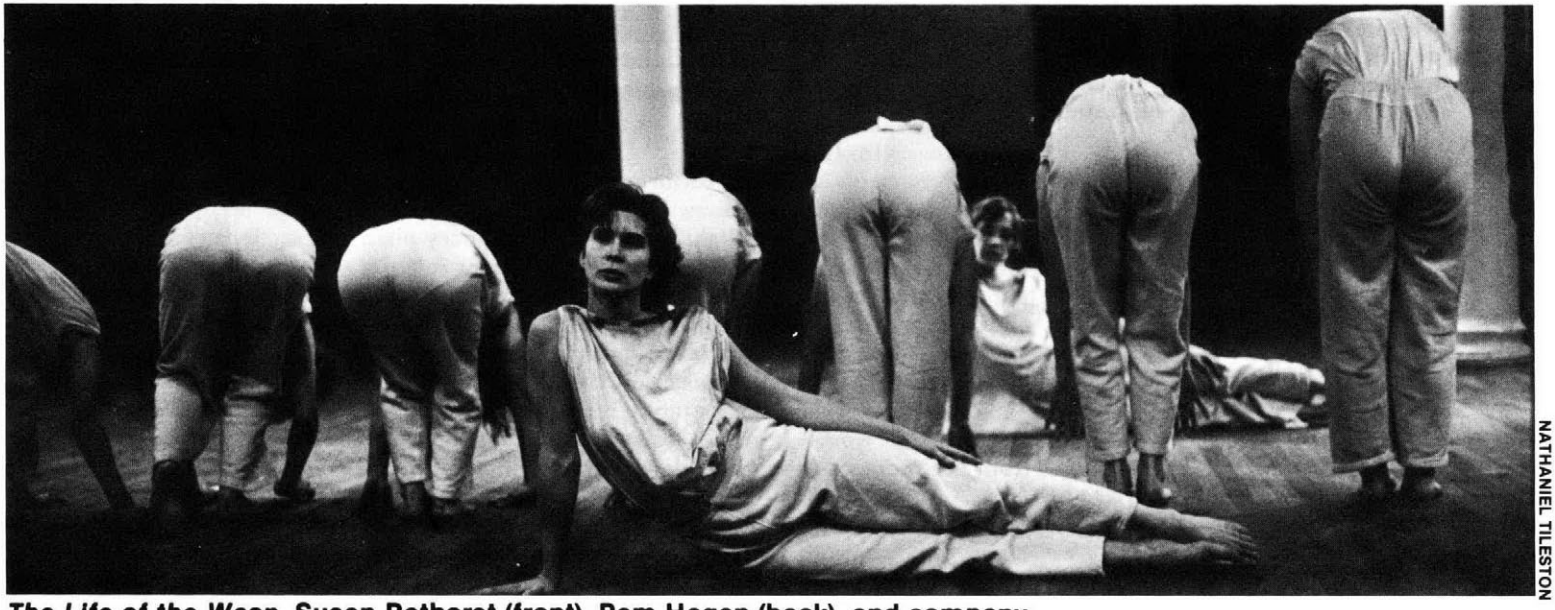
Douglas Dunn's *Walking Back* at the 14th Street Y began with an old act: a woman suspended by her ankles with a rope harness. Then it turned into a neo-Cunninghamesque assemblage of parts of previous dances. There were "event" touches in the piece's structure (bits of previous dances like *Rille, Coquina,* and *Lazy Madge* arranged according to some chancey plan, and sections of group movement intercut with Dunn solos) and in its complex unisex, sketchy/brushy movement style. Dunn even scoots out with a chair and fools with it upstage of the oblivious company. Sound by John Driscoll accompanied the dance in a Cage-like mode, occupying a parallel but separate space and time; it didn't relate to the dancing nor the dancing to it. The movement was Dunn-difficult, and the company's technically proficient dancers showed off its uniquely awkward, elongated intricacies but they just *did* the steps rather than perform the activity into life. Only Dunn's duet with

Susan Blankensop (the only time he danced directly *with* anyone) stirred up some intense color; everything else—despite Hawaiin shirt costumes—was a cool, neutral pastel tone with few quirky, fauvish highlights.

At the Performing Garage, Dana Reitz improvised alone in silence in its open, informal space. In *Steps (III),* she worked in a distinctively Reitzian style of upright torso, stepping back and forth, hand and arm gestures, and subtle rhythmic shifts in weight. Her flow of new variations was so unbroken, even, and fluid that the drama of moment-to-moment decision-making was almost lost. It's a cool calligraphic choreography in which many hours of preparation lie behind each "spontaneous" step. The dance was a quiet drama of meditation in action, veiled by her interior gaze.

By contrast Sara Rudner's *Dancing For an Hour or So* by her Performance Ensemble at White Dog Studio was a loud raucous pillow-fight of a dance, a downtown *Chorus Line.* From its naive, fake-rehearsal conceit—Rudner entered with a portable tape player and worked out some phrases to a funk beat—to the costumed cavortings near the end, the dance laid out a deconstructed Tharp-like vocabulary (how much of Tharp is really Rudner?): high-energy technique, lots of tangled tricky partnering, extreme contrasts like lyrical phrases followed by awkward falls, and constantly changing tempos. *Dancing* was non-illusionistic, a real hour or so of luscious dancing by her talented group which was stranded by its coy structural frame. That simple mock-rehearsal notion allowed Rudner's endless digressions room to unwind, putting the focus on the process of practising steps rather than on the act of performing, but it also prevented any accumulation and development, and so short-circuited the piece's incipient drama.

At the Kitchen, Susan Rethorst's *The Life of the Wasp* directly alluded to Doris Humphrey's *The Life of the Bee,* and like that early modern dance, *Wasp* displayed the workings of an expressly female movement community. A series of trios, duets, and a solo established the basic, shared kinetic vocabulary: languid stretches, rough and tumble/tender encounters, hieratic gestures, and movement activity somewhere between everyday and athletic in a smooth, even flow of phrases broken by abrupt awkwardnessess (falling to the floor, lying with legs spread). Groups of dancers entered from behind the audience (placed on opposite sides) to re-shape the space, for example, forming a line which separated a Rethorst/Pam Hagen duet. The dance's deliberate *femaleness*—unhurried movement, non-aggressive actions, a caring mutual attention—gave it a warm emotional tone although the "story" (who this group was,where it was going) was left somewhat up in the air by a casual ending



NATHANIEL TILESTON

***The Life of the Wasp,* Susan Rethorst (front), Pam Hagen (back), and company.**

NATHANIEL TILESTON

***Opposite Arch*, Charles Moulton and group.**

Mary Overlie's *Adam and Eve* at DTW also went for the warmer feelings by referring its male-female dances back to early Eden, the happy part of that story. Each dance of the episodic suite had an unspoken but bluntly underlined moral. A courtship duet was performed by three couples in a row ("Life goes on"). "Adam" lay on a mat with one foot in the air for an uncomfortably long time, then pulled out a bag of apples ("There's trouble in paradise, but it's just a joke"). "Eve" zipped through a mischievous solo ("She's a flirt, not a femme fatale"). In a waltz finale, a couple (Overlie and Wendell Beavers) danced lovingly while several "Eves" chattered about domesticity and several "Adams" reached for their apples ("So we fell, things are still okay aren't they?"). This one note sentimentality wore thin fast as little of Overlie's latent mysticism showed through the simple movements and the simplistic structure. *Adam and Eve* outlined its form but didn't really color in its subject.

In separate performances at DTW, Karole Armitage and Charles Moulton showed two possible ways to travel with a Cunningham background. For *Drastic Classicism,* Armitage collected a peer group of dancers (a rare event in these careerist days) and turned them loose in Rhys Chatham's sonic field of dense, rock-like sound. The movement was stretched-out, exaggerated Cunningham, and the dancers, especially the lithe, mercurial Chris Komar and the spiky, taut Debbie Riley—threw themselves into it with raw punky energy. But there was no shape, no pattern, no through-line, no build, and finally no direction. The dance played with surfaces; like a mirror, it simply *reflected* so that Part Two repeated Part 1 with only a change in freaky outfits and a minor increase in tempo. *Drastic Classicism's* punches were flurries of jabs, not knockout blows.

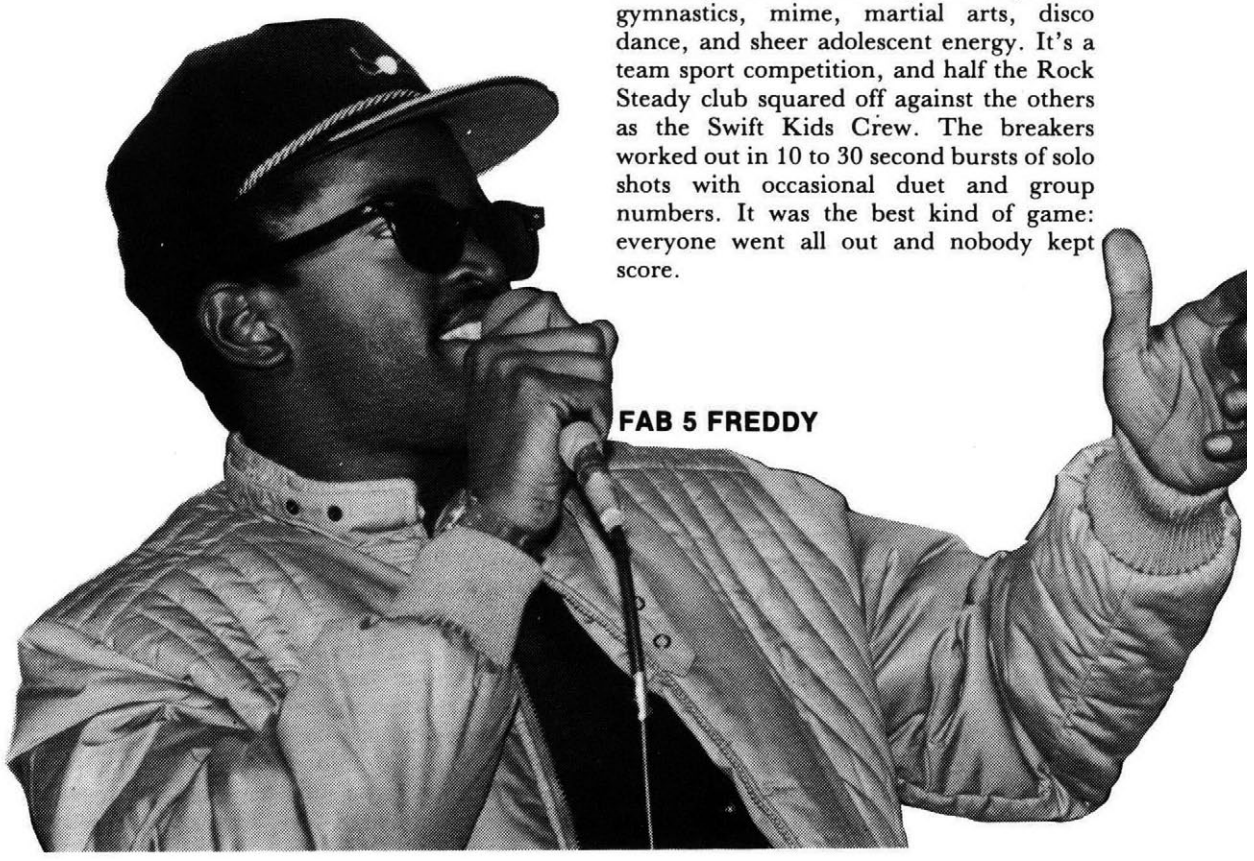
Moulton's dances carried one Cunningham strategy—game-like structures—to playful extremes. *Precision Ball Passing* in both "three-person" and "nine-person" modes was a minor, witty conceit of assembly-line er, ball passing set to A. Leroy's metronomic score. *Opposite Arch* presented an athletic quintet in a game of leaps, slides, rolls, lifts, stamps and skipping footwork. The rules weren't schematic—they're hidden—but they clearly governed the patterns of ever-changing groups and constant high speed action so that sheer energy of a competition was conveyed without any reductive score-keeping. This game was sweaty but fun, and exuberantly performed by Moulton's group. Moulton's choreography was less effective when it steered away from such strongly architectural frameworks. *Motor Fantasy* featured de-constructed tap dancing in a duet between a man (Moulton) wearing taps and a woman (Barbara Allen) who wore sneakers. Without a game-like point, the activity seemed uncertain, like a trial-and-error rehearsal for an unmade game.

BREAKING IN THE KITCHEN

Bronx street acts heated up The Kitchen in *Graffiti Rock,* a three-way collaboration of rap, graffiti art, and breaking. To the driving rhythms of Fab 5 Freddy and D.J. Spy on mikes and turntables, and against the visual backdrop of spray-painted murals by Dondi, Duro, and Lee, the Rock Steady breakers showed off their moves.

Photos by Paula Court

Breaking is street dancing made up from gymnastics, mime, martial arts, disco dance, and sheer adolescent energy. It's a team sport competition, and half the Rock Steady club squared off against the others as the Swift Kids Crew. The breakers worked out in 10 to 30 second bursts of solo shots with occasional duet and group numbers. It was the best kind of game: everyone went all out and nobody kept score.



FAB 5 FREDDY

Like any true folk art, breaking is simple—a rigid form and a small, repetitive vocabulary carry the straight-ahead emotions. Within these concentrated, kinetically rich limits, each breaker invents his own "signature" style. A breaker typically began with fast, syncopated, foot-shuffling steps, then dropped to the floor on all fours, propping himself with his hands while swinging the legs *a la russe*. Other moves to the floor include dives, cartwheels, somersaults, and flops. After these set-up moves, each routine turned quickly to a big climax, frequently a spinning maneuver using the back or head and shoulders and a pivot. The punch line was a fall out of the spin into a frozen pose which was most often an insult: grabbing the crotch, simulating a moon, miming a long tool (these are *boys*).

Put to rhythmic rap and flashy graffiti graphics, the breakers strutted their stuff straight: no show biz, no glitz, just pure, homemade, New York black/hispanic dance genius. The house was rocked.

John Howell

FOUR CHOREOGRAPHERS

JOHN HOWELL

Most labels are snakes eating their own tales and "post-modern" dance is a particularly hungry python of a pseudo-category. I talked with four choreographer/performers whose work has strong performance features—they say yes to persona, props, narrative, costumes, music, (in a word, theater)—which let the taxonomical chips fall where they may. I deliberately chose pairs from opposite backgrounds: Jim Self and Meg Eginton share histories of their own choreography followed by tours as dancers in the Merce Cunningham company; Pooh Kaye and Yoshiko Chuma come to dance with no formal dance training, just unusual personal experience and concerns, and a need to express them kinesthetically.

POOH KAYE

What's on your mind about your choreography now?

First I would say that I don't choreograph. I don't have the level of sophistication of putting material together to come under the heading of choreography. Since my process always tends to be reductive instead of elaborative, I don't want to be responsible for saying I choreograph. What's on my mind lately about movement and performance is . . . I think I'm in transition, leading away from narrative and expressive themes and formats into simpler, clearer motives that are more isolated, focused on the content of each fragment that I work with, on a movement as opposed to a series of movements. I think I'm going against the times because everybody seems to be getting into expressiveness and content.

You think it's a backwards transition? Against the flow?

I guess it's what I'm missing: some kind of purity or purism that's just about totally disappeared. I mean work that had been done in the art about the nature of materials and trying to bring out the innate expressiveness that's in those materials, so that expression or narrative is not something that's overlaid, but is available in the material itself.

Are you trying to stir up a neo post-modern Judson?

I haven't achieved that yet in performance.

So in contrast to Thick As Thebes *at the Kitchen which had a story running through it . . .*

Yeah, it was a narrative.

you're saying now that you're not connecting up the units, that you're letting them be what they are?

Or letting the content develop out of what the units are. In other words, because the material is just there, it sets up possibilities—it's not theatrical.

What's "theatrical" to you?

To me, it has to do with image, with metaphor, with intrepretation, and how you perform something, the particular manipulation of performance dynamics. I have nothing against theatricality. I really like it.

What are your discontents with it?

I've just gone too far. I storied myself out. I started off with grandiose themes like life and death—*TAT* was my expressionistic display about death—and now I've reduced myself down to making tea at home, household stuff, love poems. I don't have strong feelings about any new direction so I'm just trying to open things up for myself so something can start to happen. I'm going to do a piece in the spring and I'm thinking of doing it with a simultaneous dual cast, one of children and one of adult males and females to point out differences and ambiguous cross-overs between men as men and men as children, and women as women and women as children.

There's always been something child-like, or innocent, running through your work.

I think I generate almost all my material from my childhood. Right now, my own personal concern is being an adult in touch with one's own gender as well as the androgynous child and where the two meet or don't meet.

You think of children as androgynous?

They have their innate differences but I think that the way they experience information is very direct, therefore androgynous. That's also the time when the kind of information that's appropriate for each gender gets set up, but until then, there's a real ambiguity about the motivation to get it. That pure motivation doesn't belong to gender. I've always been interested in that kind of consciousness. Now what interests me is what is real about sexual differences, the biological differentiation, not what's socially conditioned.

Why not the social aspect?

That's very confusing. It doesn't hold water very much anymore. I'd like to know what the real motivations are for having a sex at all.

The short films you showed at Warren Street two years ago had that quality. In the first you were nude and burrowing in dirt, in the second you wore a grass skirt and tried to climb a pillar, and in a third sequence you were nude and laid across a chair and table while moving your arms and legs. You were child-like, sometimes animal-like.

Everybody attributes this animal thing to me because I worked with Simone Forti but outside of *TAT* which had all these organic images, I have never worked with any animal imagery in a conscious way. I am very interested in the possibilities of the human body outside of any Western formal dance tradition.

Although you were nude in the films, they weren't at all sexual.

That's right. I never in my life really dealt with having a sex at all, at least for a large part of it. Since my work is very personal, how I perceive myself comes out very strongly. I was nude in those films because there was no role I was playing. Since I didn't have a role I didn't know what clothes to put on. The idea of clothing is always very difficult for me.

So you thought of the movement as certain activities, not as an expression of character, not as a story?

One of them was a character which I later developed in a couple of performances, the one in a grass skirt which is an obvious costume. That was a character called the "wild girl," which was an attempt to put a formalist energy into a social role. I picked a social role that doesn't really exist.

An unsocialized social role.

A character who had never really dealt with society in any way. She did all sorts of things that people weren't supposed to do. She got to do whatever she wanted to do.

Why do you choose to use such sensitive personal concerns as performance material?

Because I always have to start off with something that comes out of me. That's why I think of myself as a very small person, I'm not a creator with a large world view. I make performances for a certain community since it comes from problem-solving I'm doing for myself. I try to make it large enough so that it incorporates other people's universes.

Sexual identity is not a little problem.

No, it's a large one and I don't think my problems are unique. But I'm absolutely crippled when I try to be larger than my own life, to tackle a world problem that I haven't experienced. I'm making my material from my own experience and my own possibilities, I'm deliberately not going outside of that.

That means in terms of discipline as well as themes, doesn't it? I know you've never really studied dance.

No, I never studied it and I never really studied with Simone, I just performed with her. At the time Simone had this very democratic, egalitarian philosophy about never telling anyone what to do, so it was always up to me to do what I thought was appropriate. I began making my own material. I believe in that and am very supportive toward people who generate that kind of effort.

Do you still plan to work that way yourself?

I think I was more democratic in the past than I am now. I used to have this method of group observation in which we all would observe and pick out material, then I would organize it. Now I seem to be thinking about people I work with as autonomous tools, that they have their own selves but that I can still work my material on their personality.

There's a sort of group I think of in your work, people who work with you and whom you work with.

Yeah, Yoshiko Chuma, Susan Rethorst, Simone Forti, Cesc Gelabert, Peter Rose. Those are all autonomous people, powerful people in their own right, and we've all affected each other very deeply. I put a lot of faith in acts of empathy on everyone's part.

That way of working is unusual now isn't it? Choreographers are using younger dancers rather than sharing their performing experiences in the way that the Judson bunch did.

I've noticed that. People don't want to share careers.

What happened in the Performing Garage series two years ago?

That was our split-up.

You presented two pieces: Ragged Valley *was billed as Yoshiko's work and* Camptown *as a collaboration between you, Susan Rethorst, Clair Bernard, and Peter Rose.*

And Carol Mullins the lighting designer.

How'd that double bill happen?

It was a disaster. There were too many egos. *Camptown* was an actual unsuccessful collaboration. Initially, Yoshiko and I were going to do something, then she didn't want to share directorial responsibility with anyone else except me. We had a fight about it because I was convinced it was still possible to have a real collaboration. So I took half the run and she took the other half. . . . The whole situation was too idealistic, too removed from actually making the work. Everybody either wanted their way or not at all, and some didn't want to get involved at all. What we finally came up with was this farce-like thing that was mostly about months of argument. I did enjoy performing that particular piece because the situation was so difficult.

I know I have a strong taste for extremes, for extreme soft sensuality and also for hardness, for violent, physical sensations. A lot of the material people find titillating I never considered titillating.

I've never gone to one of your performances thinking that I knew what I was going to see, but there's often a quality of titillation, of feeling like I was supposed to look at it sideways because of the difficulties or problems that the performance displayed.

I think I do that strongly and deliberately, and that it comes from

childhood radicalism on my part. I know I have an attraction to taboos, like psychological realities that don't have a place in public society, like sado-masochistic tendencies. I know I have a strong taste for extremes, for extreme soft sensuality and also for hardness, for violent, psychical sensations. A lot of the material that people find titillating I never considered titillating. I was totally innocent about it.

That attitude can be pretty titillating in itself.

I suppose so, but I was always shocked when people found my performances shocking. In *TAT,* people were very disturbed by all the dirt stuff—throwing it, burying our heads in it.

I hate dirt myself, but I'm willing to be upset by it in a performance. Did you like dirt?

I was terrified of dirt all the time as a child. I had a terror of dirty bathrooms and I used to clean bathrooms before I would use them. Now I've forced myself to overcome all those particular psychological aversions. I think that facing and overcoming fear has a lot to do with the kind of tests I've shown in performances.

Do you think of performance as therapeutic?

By the time I get around to using them in performance, they're no longer fearful but enjoyable. Once you get past the fear part of a taboo, you can make a choice about the sensation whether you enjoy it or not.

Are there taboos that you wouldn't deal with in performance?

Oh yeah. I would never deal with sexual taboos on stage. It's not that I don't like to see it, I love to watch it in other things. It would be very hard for me to do that, to perform naked.

You did at The Kitchen when you were "Wild Girl."

No. I took my shirt off because I have no sexual feelings about the upper part of the body, but we wore these grass skirts. In my work, things are only vaguely sexual.

I think of it as polymorphous, sort of pre-sexual differentiation.

Exactly, you got it. But another thing that concerns me, more powerfully than taboos, is oppression of self, of genuine organic needs, which leads to the oppression of people by each other. That has something to do with my preference for working with autonomous individuals. So much of our lives is about interpersonal, social, political, and economic oppression.

And earlier you said you dealt with little subjects?

They're little subjects in my format I guess.

Since you never studied dance, can you explain why your work comes out as kinetic movement performances rather than as, say, poems?

I think my work exists between disciplines, between dance, theater, and sculpture not unlike a lot of other people, but I think I have a very strong kinetic relationship to people and things, and I trust that material as a direct vessel to define psyche, energy, intelligence. I just don't have as strong a relation to other mediums. I don't write and I don't trust words. I spent a lot of time playing as a child in a way not very different from these performances, making very ritualized, object-oriented kinetic games.

How does this feeling of transition in your work affect the subject of your next piece, the one contrasting adults and children?

Thematically I don't think it's any transition except that I'm trying to integrate the transition into the material itself and not have it applied from the outside.

How do you start working on a piece?

I usually start with some kind of boundary that is basically thematic, and with a certain direction, a sense of how I'm going to formally organize it. In the past I've gotten people together and worked into the material and into the psyches of the people so that everybody is sharing the same process.

Do your pieces ever use music?

No, that's a problem. I know it's time to have music, not only because it's part of the times, but it feels like something's missing. It's a real problem because I'm scared of that kind of collaboration—my work tends to be so integrated that it would be impossible to pastiche some music on the outside like some people do. On the other hand I don't know if I'm flexible enough to reform myself around a composer's vision.

JIM SELF

How do you feel about being called a postmodern dancer?

I don't think it's appropriate. I think if you have to distinguish between modern and postmodern, then I'm modern. In Minneapolis, Sally Banes was talking about the expressiveness of modern dance, and how postmodern—after Balanchine and Cunningham—was more formalistic, and I thought, I'm modern.

When you began performing in Chicago several years ago, did you think of it as dance or as performance?

As dance. Towards the end of that period, I was doing a lot of improvisational work. Every Monday night for twelve weeks I gave an informal performance. Usually it was solo, twenty minutes long, and the material had to do with working out things, more with possibilities in performance than with structured choreographic work.

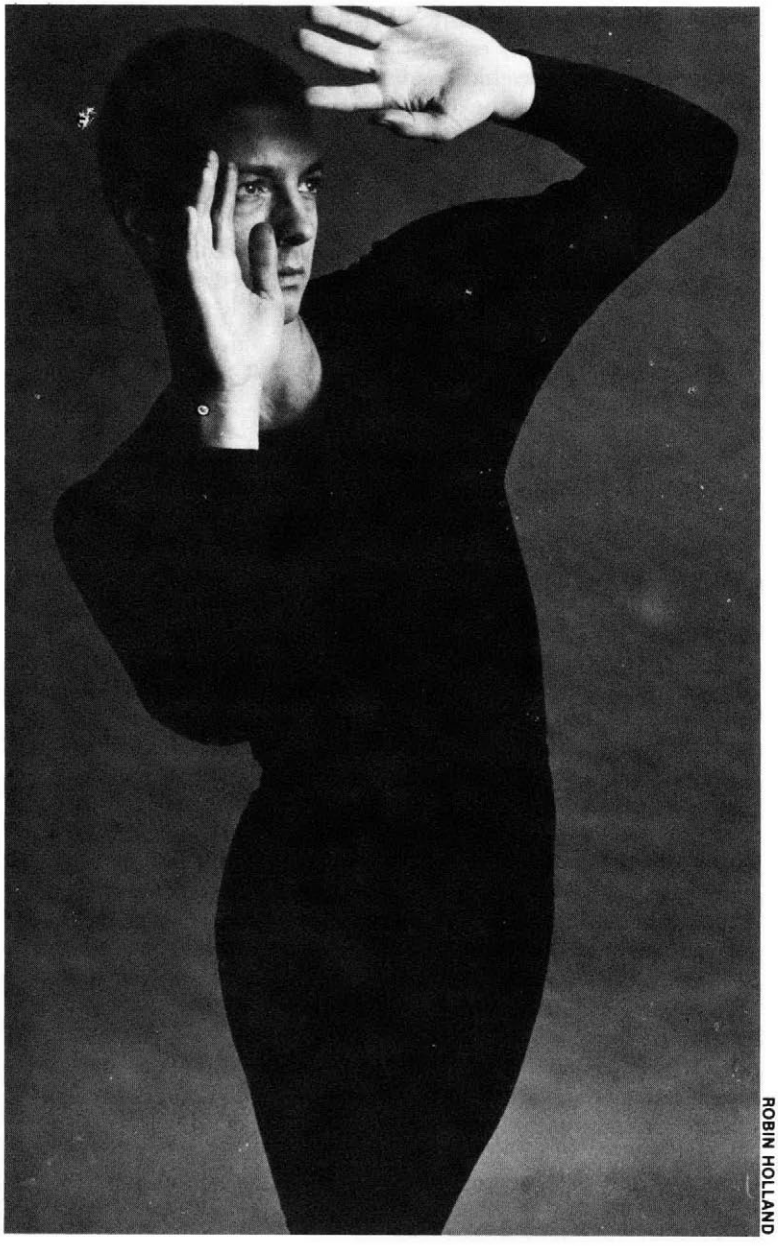
How were those performances set up?

In various ways. I started out with some props and ideas and put them together. Then I was working toward not having any ideas so I would go in with nothing—no props, no music—there was just movement and a movement idea. Once I finally got to the point where I had no idea of what I was going to do and just did something although it was based on what had gone on before in earlier performances. The last performance was a recapitulation of all the others.

When you came to New York, was it for the purpose of joining the Cunningham Company?

No. I had seen their work, but I only intended to study at the studio. It just sort of happened. I decided I had to give up outside work and concentrate on Merce's work. I kept working but I didn't show it.

Do you feel like your dances now are full of elements that Cunningham dance leaves out? For example, specific costumes and props, music, character, an overall dramatic point and shape? Those aspects are often included in the term "modern," and those who call such dance "postmodern" either have to ignore such features or consider them a regression.



ROBIN HOLLAND

That's one of the big problems with that term. Obviously anyone who worked with Merce and who now does their own work went to him to learn something, not to any of the Judson choreographers. From what I understand of their work at that time, it was getting rid of things, and rejecting Merce's work too because somehow he was the clearest about what he was doing, and taking dance somewhere else. They found their solutions and it didn't allow for other possibilities beyond that. So you can grasp their work very quickly because it exists in a limited area which they do very well, but it doesn't have broad possibilities. You have to go to the source: Merce.

Each of your dances is specifically and spectacularly costumed. Do you think about "character" when you choreograph?

That has more to do with working with Frank Moore because there was never a costume element in the earlier work I did. I used street clothes or sweatpants. My work always had a theatricality to it, and costume brings that out even more. It always had characters.

Dances as character studies?

Yes. A certain kind of movement would suggest a kind of character, but not like the development of a story.

Would you begin with the idea of the character and start to move, or start to move and discover the character?

Both. The structure of a piece was based around moving as the character and not moving as the character, and those sections alternated so there were various stimulations for movement.

Were there sections in your recent dances that were not "in character?"

I wasn't thinking so strongly about character in those pieces. *Uproots* was not so much about a character but about a situation of going from one place to another place. In one place I was really planted, the movement was based on the torso and the legs, then parts of the body on the floor. Then I went to a totally different place, where the whole body was released.

And you approached the piece with a list of movement possibilities based on those contrasting places?

Yes, but it was done right after I moved from Chicago to New York so it was also a way of making sense of a lot of new information.

So when you performed it at DTW you were presenting a past version of yourself since it was about an event that happened around 1976?

It's autobiographical, but all those things are just suggested. People tend to read more things into what I do than I think about when I'm doing them.

Why do you think that happens?

I don't know. People have always talked about these characters and these situations. In Chicago I used to deny it although in the beginning it was very much about character. I guess I wanted to get rid of that idea in some way but it didn't go away: I was denying it but people saw it. Since most of my work was solo I didn't really know what was going on.

Do you think that audiences now are looking for all those qualities—character, themes, stories—which were excluded from dance and which generally came under the negative heading of "theatrical?"

Whenever I would look at Merce's work, I would always see stories, and I couldn't believe that he didn't tell people about them. I thought it was amazing that he could make this movement which contained such strong, rich imagery and it always suggested something—a father and kids, or whatever—although it was never developed in that way.

Do you think that's true of Cunningham's later dances?

The more I got to know his work the less I felt that way about it. *Sounddance* to me is like a village where people go to do their work—it's a real workers' dance—and go back inside at the end of the day. As a dancer you can do anything you want to within its choreography; there's a whole area of performance possibility in it.

In your duet Domestic Interlude, *with its pajama-like costumes, its lusty movement for a man and a woman, and its clock-radio, suggestion-of-a-bedroom decor, there's no way a viewer won't think of a story although you described it completely mechanically as built in sections of doubled time-lengths.*

That's the way it was thought of. It's true even if nobody believes it.

Did the title, costumes, and decor come later?

That's where I overlaid one thing on top of something else. The piece hadn't been resolved when Frank Moore took a look at it and suggested some ideas, and then I said okay, I can do that within what I'm already doing, it doesn't matter if the content comes about that way if it turns out later to be like a sex duet.

So you thought of character and story as something outside of the dance movement itself?

Yes. For example, for the ending of *Domestic Interlude* I had wanted them to separate but it didn't seem right even though it fell within the structure I had set up in terms of density.

What made that seem wrong?

There I was making some sort of statement. If I was making a statement where two people didn't get together, that was one thing. I chose a more tender kind of ending.

You can't be surprised when viewers see a story in that dance.

Oh no, I would be disappointed if they didn't. That's true of *Marking Time* also, the dance as definitely based on characters: one was hysterical, another was slower, and the third marked time in a regular way. That provided a time structure and motivation for the movement itself.

What's new or different about your most recent dance, Architectural Stories*?*

It's the most formalized dance of any I've done. The title comes from the idea of building a structure, in this case based on the space, and on the way the body is structured, and on top of that you have a story or stories, very simple ones like somebody walking across a room.

As Jack Smith put it, anything that happens in time is a narrative. What we're talking about is the quality of that narrative, what kind it is, what story it's telling.

When some people saw it in progress, they said the architecture was good but the stories were not so great—the writers I know wanted more narrative.

You don't use music except for a distorted tape of a disco song in Scraping Bottoms.

That's Frank Moore's idea. Originally I whistled.

Is music a problem coming from the Cunningham company where music is used as a sound environment, not as accompaniment?

I would love to use more music, but I haven't found some one to work with. I like the people who have worked with Merce but they're so strongly associated with him that I don't want to do that.

What about collaboration? You've worked a lot with Frank Moore for one.

At MoMing in Chicago, people wanted to work collaboratively and I didn't—I wanted to do everything myself. Gradually I've gotten more and more people involved. I'm not competent to do lights, sets, and costumes as well as choreograph and dance. More people make it more interesting. It's more complicated to work that way but its a complication I find stimulating.

You showed several older dances at the DTW concert. What did you think about the response to them?

In dance you can have repertory and keep showing older work—you can always have earlier dances. But I was surprised that the response to them was so strong, I had done them for so long before people took notice.

You told me you were suddenly interested in Martha Graham.

Particularly in *Diversion of Angels* which I saw last spring. But then I always thought that work like Yvonne Rainer's films was also very Graham-like: full of angst although it's personal rather than mythical.

What interested you about Angels*?*

The structure, the characters, and the way the whole thing flowed—it all worked so well together. Also, it was constructed like a painting in its colors which were also choreographed. The woman in white was in the middle raising her arms to the heavens, someone came in and fell at her feet, then someone zipped across the front of the stage—it was always surprising but always made sense.

Graham's supposed to be "modern"—does "postmodern" mean that dance has supposedly passed beyond certain attitudes and gestures like raising one's arms to the skies?

Dance has progressed along a certain line, but that doesn't remove the fact that people still look to the sky and open their arms. It may have been removed from the dance vocabulary people choose to work with, but people still do it.

What attracts you about that kind of movement?

It's an immediately recognizable gesture, something you know. You know what it means.

Do you think of your dances as comedies?

After leaving Merce's company two years ago, initially everything came out funny. That's not necessarily the way I see the world.

MEG EGINTON

Your dances are as much about performance as choreography. Do you make a distinction between them?

No, because I'm interested in a new illusion of the self. When I'm performing I try to present a mediated version of myself and even if I'm doing personal material, it's a more rehearsed, edited version of everyday process. The dances are performance pieces in that respect. This illusionism helps me choose, edit, and condense material. I don't separate the making of the piece from how it will be performed—it's symbiotic.

That sounds like theater.

That's something we see in theater all the time but not so often in dancing. Too often in dancing the dancers are overly concerned with the physical execution of movement. It's a result of an overemphasis on the purely physical, virtuosic element of dancing. The dancing which gives me the most pleasure is both physically rich and informed by a mediated intelligence about the act of performing.

Are you talking about technical dancing in general or about the choreographic uses to which it's put?

There's a lot of work which can hold almost any performance attitude. Curiously, this doesn't produce individuality but anonymity—a body in space rather than *this* person's body. When someone does pop out as really special it's a chance encounter usually rooted in extreme gifts or in mistakes which catch the dancer off-guard and throw him or her back onto themself. This is a result of a choreographic formalism which sees the dancer as just a color or a quality, a part in an overall jigsaw puzzle—it leads to purely physical, emotionally unfocused dancing. The wizard of Oz is still around; despite all the rhetoric he pulls the strings, and he's the real show. I'm not thrilled by the other performance extreme either, that of impersonating God on earth. That's pretty boring too.

Isn't that the attitude of a lot of technical virtuosos?

Yes, pizazz and athletism, there's lots of that around. I really reject the idea of quotidian excellence in technical dancing because in real life that doesn't exist, people are always conflicted. I was a competitive swimmer and that kind of dancing is like swimming lap after lap just to get a better time. I'm looking for a really deeply-rooted sense of self which finds expression in movement.

Yet you danced with Merce and now study ballet.

I always wanted the skill but so that I could use it in expressive ways. As a dancer, I think it's important that you develop your own story, track, whatever you want to call it, for whatever dance you're doing because then you can inform, fill out your performance. And even if you can't totally get there, there's more to watch. Its more rewarding for you too. It's like Nietzche saying "Dance over yourself." Now that's freedom.

You performed with Mary Overlie and Andy DeGroat, neither of whom use diffucult movement, and you also performed with Douglas Dunn and Cunningham, who do use complex technique. How do you think of using both technical and non-technical movement in your dancing?

I'm interested in technique because it gives you a wider range. Of course it can rob you of some things—although I can still crawl or fall, I work on those things too. To say that Mary's work is simple isn't true. Physically it's not very demanding but it's demanding in mind-body ways. The pieces I did with her were structured improvisations, and at the time I found her work difficult because you were making it up and performing it at the same time.

How do you use your technical training if not as a movement source?

NATHANIEL TILESTON

I use it for range, stamina, and for the awareness it's given me about controlling the moment. As long as technique doesn't become a limitation, as long as you don't end up feeling that you can only move in one way and it's not okay to just walk or crawl or shake someone's hand, it can only help you.

And choreographically?

Compositionally, it gives you lots of options, but you can end up taking too many side trips.

Let me put that question from the other point of view. Do you think there are ways to put "yourself" on stage?

The closest I ever got to that was in *Bad News* and I would never do it again. I lost all interest in that dance as soon as I'd performed it. The only thing I still like is the film.

So it was more important as a performance event than choreography?

Yes, but in fact I still wasn't able to perform myself because I built a persona in it.

A version of yourself?

Yes. So I still wasn't just "being myself" on stage. I've never been able to do that, I don't know how.

Could you think of a way?

Maybe I could make a task that was so physically hard that I couldn't do anything but that—it's been done. Performing for me is so scary, the only way I can do it at all is to go through into this other place where the I and the Not-I is erased. Then the otherness of the audience doesn't have so much bearing on me in personal, everyday terms.

What kind of problems do you have by both choreographing and dancing in the same work?

One of the problems is fairly specific. If you are trying to intuitively sense dramatic time and you're not watching from the outside, you can't be objective enough about time. You can solve that by counting but I don't think that's the best way since then you too often lose the sense of immediacy which makes dance exciting. In general, things which seem actual onstage are often not, which is why videotape or a trusted friend's eye is so important.

Do you enjoy going back and forth between the roles of dancer and choreographer?

I'm torn between wanting to dance because I find it so important to me, and wanting to stop so that I can see what I'm making.

Do you try to have a consistent movement vocabulary that bridges different dances?

No, not now. I think that develops anyway. I'm not interested in willfully building a style. The voice is there anyway.

Does the same thing go for costume? Is there one costume that's right for each dance?

Yes. I would never sew a uniform which spanned all my dances. As soon as I realized that I was making expressive work, costume became important. Leotards and tights and unitards imply self-reflexive pure movement pieces to me; dancers playing dancers. Street clothes imply simple narratives to me: because you can't see what the body is doing, you lose the underside and are left with pure plot. I'm not very successful yet with costume, but I like to think of it as extending my own awareness of the piece and its world into clothing. And I try to design costumes to add to the movement, to amplify it rather than laying another interpretation on top.

Why did you use film in Bad News *and video in* Veii*?*

I'm interested in different versions and voices of identical material; in how the presentation of material is influenced by medium. The film and video contain condensed versions of the particular piece they're a part of. In *Veii,* the videotape which Florence Lambert edited, has an actual landscape behind it which evokes the original Mediterranean sensation that the piece grew out of. *Bad News* grew out of the film Ericka Beckman shot. We worked with very tight shots on a lot of movement, we divided my naked body into sections for study, then we used a lot of pixillation so the rhythm between the film's movement and the dance material is very closely related. It's theme and variation made with the camera as a context shifter.

Bad News *began with an audiotape by Christopher Knowles in the first part, and used pop music in the last section. Do you think about music and sound as accompaniment?*

I didn't dance *to* either tape. The dancing doesn't work against the accompaniment but it takes off from Chris's insistent voice or the music's insistent 4/4 beat so the rhythmic phrasing of what I'm doing goes away from it or comes back to it. I don't use music ironically, I play with it. Chris's de-accumulation poem lent an urgency to the start, it was like a needling voice stuck in a groove. The pop music is used as ambient sound—I wanted to dance to music which was part of my life.

In Veii *there are two solos within the duet choreographed to Paganini Caprices.*

My solo wasn't. I choreographed it without the music, then made the dance fit the music by changing the meter of a particular phrase or movement sequence. The second solo is choreographed exactly to the music, which is interesting, but I don't always want to do that.

Each phrase has to be like a brick in a wall. Each phrase has to work on a kinesthetic, pure movement level, and to be a cumulative link to the phrase before and the phrase after. I don't fragment.

There are only five minutes of music at those two points in the entire dance. Why was the rest in silence?

I used the music very theatrically.

Paganini is very theatrical, but what does "theatrically used" music mean?

Music sets an emotional tone no matter what the music is. Music just opens the floodgates, which is why it should be used very carefully.

And you don't want the gates to open?

No, that's why I used Paganini. It's very crazy, but also very structured, very controlled.

There's lots of material which seems to be about childhood memories in your dances.

Yes, some things come from childhood. They're physical memories, not autobiographical stories—not causal or situational. It's not very far away from the way I used to write poems: poems are written inside or underneath events, you don't write on the surface.

So when you go into the studio you have an image or an idea as a starting point?

Yes. I put an image or idea in my head. In *Bad News* I was working from material I'd been reading about the basic split in everyone's psyche. I was really working from those ideas, taking them down to size. If I'm working with something which is emotionally very resonant for me, I daydream and something will generally suggest itself. In *Veii,* the emotionally important, personal material took the form of a mini-narrative in the middle section of the dance. When I'm working with people, I work with fantasizing about them, how I think they would react and move in a given mind-place.

How do you decide which phrase goes where in the overall structure?

Each phrase has to be like a brick in a wall. Each phrase has to work on a kinesthetic, pure movement level, and to be a cumulative link to the phrase before and the phrase after, and a time control which makes for density of image squishing the linear development. I think the result of that density is that the narrative gets pushed, impacted, so that it will hit you—if it works—kinesthetically in an experiental way and bypass certain intellectual expectations which are game-oriented. Live, I think you experience the world of the dance, and afterwards you might have trouble figuring out if it worked or not in purely formal ways.

In Bad News *I saw a lot of repetition but* Veii *didn't seem to use that device.*

In *Veii,* there's theme and development but not repetition. The development is contextual rather than purely physical. The pieces are narratives of context and the phrases are made to be cumulatively important rather than to further linear plot.

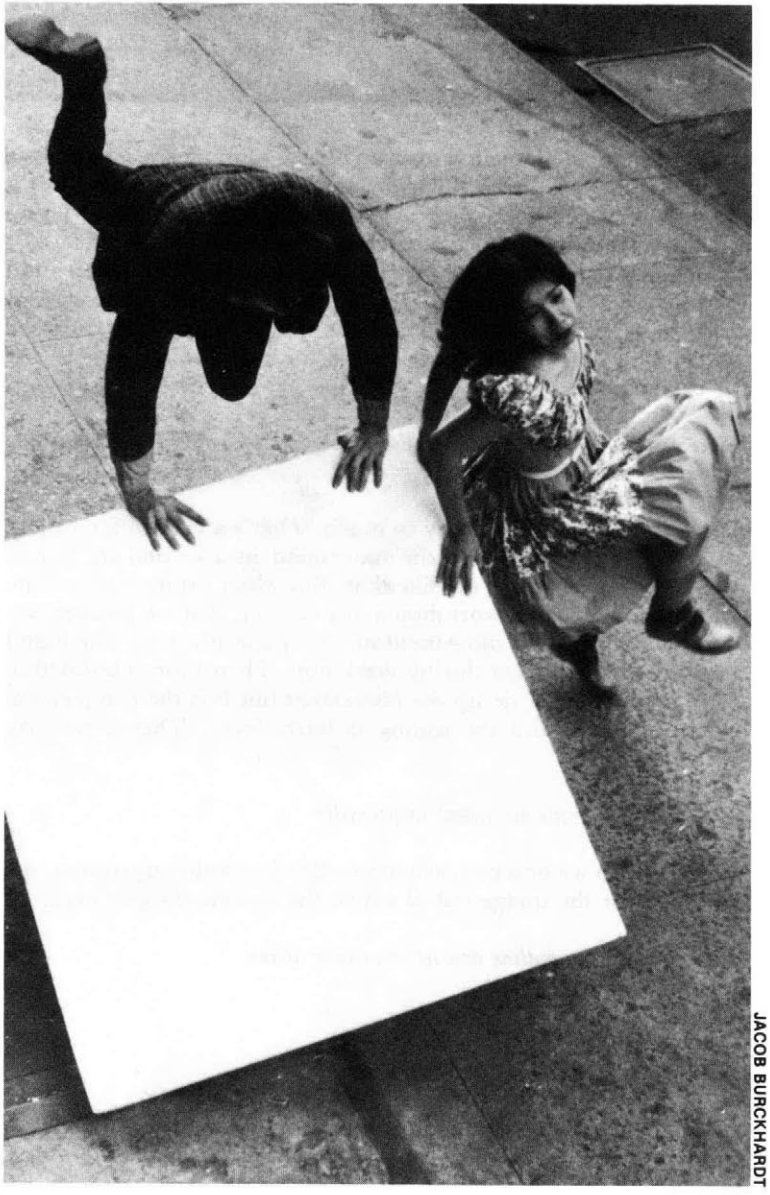
So all the elements are related to each other to make a whole thing?

Yes, I don't fragment. The dances are self-contained and because of that, they have their own surface, their own texture—which is why I'm not interested in making a movement style at this point. I think that each dance will have its own style, of movement structure as well as of formal structure. Of course I'm just one person. But everything doesn't have to be so codified into systems. We can't fit everything into a system anyway. We lose something by always trying.

Integral, self-contained—those sound like modernist criteria. What do you think about so-called postmodern dance?

It depends on who's doing the dancing. As a term I think it may already have outlived its usefulness. It's a convenience for the critics to cover work of a particular generation, the Judson and post-Judson group who grew up with the Cage-Cunningham aesthetic. If you really look at the work, it runs the gamut from pure formalism to out-and-out storytelling and entertainment. It's a media label—this year's passion, last year's fashion. Like other choreographers, I make movement, not Movements.

YOSHIKO CHUMA



JACOB BURCKHARDT

Did you study dance in Japan?

Yes. No. Well, actually in Japan dance history is different from Western dance history. I have never studied any traditional Japanese dance or martial art, but I graduated from university where I studied education for dance which was influenced by Western culture. But I don't have any Martha Graham or Merce Cunningham or classical ballet training. I do have a teaching license for educational dance.

Is it like phys-ed?

Yes. Its like you can express something by moving around in space. Creative dance, not theater. There was a teacher who studied with Martha Graham in the early years and who then came to Japan to make this program in educational dance.

Why did you come to New York?

When I was a kid I was an actor in childrens' theater and I had a very good teacher who made a childrens' experimental theater. He was interested in working with different ways of talking, different voices. When I was a kid I was already writing scripts, I was really a child actress. In high school I was a broadcast announcer and I made up my own programs; they were radio theater programs. Then I went to the university and I chose a very easy course because I didn't want to study very hard. I really didn't know what I should do, so I was a student. In 1969 the student movements broke out all over Japan. The university closed down, like here, and I got involved in a student movement. Also many underground theaters broke out in Japan, something like the Living Theatre here. They were involved with some kind of a new theater movement. I didn't have a conscious wish that said I wanted to make theater, or I wanted to be in a theater or I wanted to be a performer in the theater. But after I graduated from the university I went to Kyoto and in Kyoto I joined up with some underground collective theater people and worked with them. But then in Japan the whole situation, economic and cultural, changed and I lost the focus on what I was doing. And then a friend advised me to go to New York and see theater. So that's the reason I came here in 1977.

Do you call what you do theater?

No.

Do you call it performance?

I don't have a word.

You're usually reviewed by dance critics, but School of Hard Knocks *could easily be called a kind of theater.*

That's very good. I don't have a clear answer. I started performing and calling it dance theater because I was using physical elements without talking. *School of Hard Knocks* was the first time I used words.

How do you think what you do fits in what is going on in dance or theater, or is that another confusion?

I think my work is dance but I'm standing on the edge of dance. It's very difficult to say which is which right now.

Would you say you were on the edge of where dance, performance, and sculptural installation meet?

Yes. I have a very hard time writing my biographies.

Your work uses sets, props like big tables, and films. So you do use these theatrical elements.

Yes. After I made my first movie I found myself very excited to make movies. For a lot of reasons: one was that I could never see my performance, but with a movie I can be outside. And then you can edit in a movie. Maybe I don't like this part so I cut it off and then you can put two images together. So two images are going next to each other and I don't have to think of a bridge in time and space. In movies you can tie together two things on opposite sides of the room without traveling in real time. It's a way to make a more specific compact image. Now my most enjoyable times are when I'm editing a movie.

When you did School of Hard Knocks *you had the two kinds of time in the piece: the tables which shifted space in the film and a real table. Live, you looked as if you thought you could move it, make it move as fast as in the film. How did you decide on a table anyway?*

I did a piece last year at the Performing Garage called *Rugged Valley* and that piece was the first time I tried to use more integrated movement, movement with a soundtrack. So I was trying to do something continuous with images in the movement phrases, to connect the physical movement and its visual embodiment on stage. I liked the table because I could use it as a prop for movement, as a movie screen, and as an object—I made the legs uneven so that it rocked. Jacob Burkhardt and myself were invited to the Venice Biennale for a special project, Sound and Image. So we couldn't take the table, it's too heavy. So we kept the table here and took it out all over New York and filmed it. Then Jacob and I had forty-five minutes of a 16mm movie. So with many screens and six people I tried to develop the image more. And I worked with John Nesci who is a very good actor. I liked his character and he can move so well.

When I start a piece I am watching people in a workshop and I say oh, that's a great movement, and I use their movement in a very specific way. I tie up the movement but it is their movement.

Since you have not studied dance, do you have an idea of how you want them to move or a system you use?

I'm not doing choreography so much. That's a very different job, so I've never approached the movement in a second by second way. My movement is not like that. But when I start a piece I am watching people in a workshop and I say, oh, that's a great movement and I use their movement in a very specific way. The base I use is their movement during workshop. Then I am interested in freer performers. I tie up the movement but it is their movement or their shape, and the timing is fairly loose. They can make choices.

How do you observe movement in yourself?

We share, so we observe each other. But I give the suggestion, the situation, or the image out of which the movement gets made.

You give them an outline and let them color it in?

Yes.

Is there improvisation in your performances?

Finally I avoid improvisation through tightening it up, by giving tasks at certain times. I make a score, then they make the move-

I'm not making stories, I'm just using characters. I'm interested in people's existence on stage, that's enough for me. I'm not using people just to show movement.

ment at the beginning. *Hard Knocks* is made of forty images. The movies, the table, and the performers' activity are all included in each image. The whole thing is scored.

Why did you use Alvin Curran's music?

In the beginning he wanted to do a collaboration with Jacob and me for Venice. It was the first time I used music although I've used mechanical sounds in movies. But I used to feel that the sound in movies distorts the image. Now I'm very interested in using sound.

How do you decide what to wear?

That's difficult because I realize that dancers need very comfortable clothes in order to move, but in theatrical terms that's not so convenient. Leotards are not my way because I want to put something into the clothes, maybe character.

I've noticed that it's very difficult for a lot of dancers to figure out the meaning of the piece in costume terms.

I try this way and that way. For *Hard Knocks* I asked a costume designer and she made them.

When you say you take movement from your performers, how do you think about who they are in performance and who they really are? In other words, they don't play roles, but they aren't just walking off the street either.

In the group pieces I try to work more with character which is old age, or younger woman, people of the street, city types and country too, but human beings. I'm not using people just to show movement like in a lot of dances.

When you use John Nesci, who is an actor, how do you talk about character or do you leave it to him to create how he is to appear?

He is a character, a man, but it is his character, not someone else's. I worked with him and thought about him and a girl moving along in the space. My character was maybe a little girl in some way.

But when you think of movement situations, the character comes along with the situation in some way? In other words, well, I want a young girl and a guy to meet on the street.

I'm not making stories, I'm just using characters. I'm interested in the peoples' existence on the stage, that's enough for me. Now after working with John Nesci, it seems like another possibility for me to think about.

Are you saying that after doing Hard Knocks *you want to make another kind of piece?*

I don't know. I was shooting a movie this summer with older men, women, dogs.

What was it like for you to come to New York?

I was so shocked and interested by New York when I came here in 1977. I don't know if I'd want to stay if I came now because it's changed a lot. But when I came I stayed downtown for two years. I didn't go to 57th street or Bloomingdales. And I found some kind of truth here in New York because it is so poor in some way: the people you see in the streets sleeping.

Now that you're used to it, what would it be like to take that truth and your work and show it in Japan?

If a chance came, I might say yes, but I am not trying very hard to do it because I still feel some kind of culture shock within myself. And I am making work here—I think maybe I can't make anything in Japan. In Japan I was never sure if I was a good performer. You know, I never spoke English before I came here. When I came I thought, maybe I am doing a performance everyday, and so my eye was very fresh because I couldn't speak. Everything was like a very clear dream. And it was like world history. In Japan we don't have a physical feeling of the world. Here, for example, the man at the deli is Jewish and he lost his whole family in the Second World War. In Japan it was only in the books. Here it became real to me. New York makes me see. In Japan I wasn't sure what a world was. Here I can see a world.

World Regional Harmony Project (detail), Charles Luce

SHELLEY RICE

SCHEMES

Indoor installations have been prevalent on the New York art scene since at least the early 1970s. A small number of artists—Vito Acconci and Alice Aycock are examples—have made and/or solidified their reputations with such works, but for the most part installation artists have received little critical or curatorial support. There are, of course, reasons for this neglect. Installation works are not art objects in the traditional sense, so they cannot be defined, classified or handled in the same way as paintings and sculptures. They are costly to produce, and difficult to exhibit and sell—how many people, after all, are interested in buying a full-scale environment for their living room? They are also difficult to describe, since they defy attempts to analyze them with the critical vocabulary generally used to describe and assess simpler two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects. Indoor installations are, in short, mutations—and like all such aberrations, they fit only uneasily into the established structures of the Art Machine.

Earthworks and other outdoor installation pieces, which appeared on the contemporary scene at about the same time as indoor installations, are also aberrations from art world norms, but by and large these works have had more critical success. Many of these outdoor pieces are extremely sculptural, and they thus fit snugly into the art historical tradition of monumental sculpture. At the same time, these outdoor works are differentiated from most modernist sculptural forms by their scale and by virtue of the fact that they are situated outside of the normal gallery context. The clarity of these similarities and differences has made it easy for critics, curators and historians (if not always dealers) to classify outdoor installation works in a separate-but-equal critical category that is both

isolated from and related to the sculptural mainstream.

The boundaries are not so clearly drawn around indoor installations, which makes them far more problematic. Most of the artists working in this unconventional genre have chosen to exhibit in conventional gallery spaces; and to complicate matters further, they often mix-and-match other art forms and media within their pieces. Mary Beth Edelson, Terry Berkowitz and Hannah Wilke, for instance, have incorporated sculptural objects and photographs into their installations; Jacki Apple and Colette have combined found objects, texts, photographs and music. Roger Welch has created sculptural settings for his films and Rita Myers has designed mythical landscapes which serve as environments for her videotapes, while Dieter Froese has used video equipment as if it were a form of sculpture in his pieces.

These cross-references and combinations make it difficult to isolate and categorize these works, and the confusion is exacerbated by the fact that there are no formal or stylistic consistencies relating all installations produced during the past ten years. On the contrary, the visual solutions, themes and media used by indoor installation artists are endlessly diverse. These people are creative individualists whose sensibilities were formed during the upheavals that swept the art world in the late 1960s and early 1970s; many of them began their careers in the alternative spaces, like 112 Greene Street, that sprang up during those years to challenge the rigid strictures of the art establishment. No "ism" can ever be coined that will characterize all of these artists, who are grouped together here only because they all express themselves by arranging tangible and/or intangible elements—sculptural forms, found objects, films, videotapes, slides, written texts, found imagery, audio tapes, music, photographic prints, books, paintings, drawing, etc.—in complex configurations that define a spatial environment.

More than anything else, installation works are distinguished by their dependence on and manipulation of space. Traditional paintings and sculptures are self-contained: the viewer responds to them as he/she experiences a set of formal relationships

½ of *500 Fence Stakes*, David Nash

within the confines of the frame or object. The initial experience of installations, on the contrary, is a spatial one: the overall environment sets the tone for the work, and operates as the arena within which the internal elements—and the relationships between them—derive their meaning. Sandy Skoglund's ceramic goldfish, for instance, when seen singly, are playful sculptural objects; once placed within the aqua blue bedroom that is the setting for her installation "Revenge of the Goldfish," however, they become subsidiary parts of a bizarre and humorously obsessive fantasy. By isolating a space and declaring it an "art context" governed by its own internal laws, installation artists create an alternative reality that dictates the viewer's perception of the elements within it.

Many indoor installations are "site-specific": that is, they are specifically designed for the architectural space within which they are to be shown. This marriage of art and architecture is, of course, not new in the history of art; medieval cathedrals and De Stijl residential projects are only two examples of such a union. But the forms contemporary installation works have taken relate them directly to the art of the mid-1960s. It is, in fact, hard to conceive of these works existing before Conceptual artists like Robert Barry, Douglas Heubler and Lawrence Weiner "liberatd" art from its dependence on prescribed forms. Though installation artists don't "dematerialize" their expression, they have retained the Conceptual artists' interest in incorporating "real" space and time into their work. And they feel free to mix-and-match their media, as long as the elements they bring together are in the service of a unifying theme or idea.

While Conceptual art can be seen as an intellectual predecessor, Happenings and Minimal sculpture should be cited as the two most directly influential formal sources for contemporary installation works. Though these two art movements were very different, they shared a common goal: both attempted to expand the boundaries of art beyond the object. The Happenings artists who worked with Allan Kaprow often did this by performing in the streets, and declaring non-art environments and chance or unrelated activities to be integral parts of the art experience. Minimalists like Robert Morris, on the other hand, worked toward this goal by exclusion rather than

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

***Chromabetican Heliocopedia*, Kay Hines**

inclusion. By paring down their works until they consisted only of simple shapes free from internal relationships, these artists made the physical presence of sculpture so assertive that it shaped the viewer's experience, not only of the object, but of the space surrounding it.

These two historical influences are very much alive in contemporary installation works; indeed, they can be considered as the two stylistic "poles" which have defined the parameters of this genre. An artist like Bill Beirne, whose "Rumor and Innuendo" piece involved the installation of surveillance equipment at various locations throughout the Whitney Museum, is clearly a descendant of Allan Kaprow—as are those people who incorporate narrative elements into their work, or who (like Beirne himself) use installation environments as stage sets for performances. More sculptural works by people like Barry Le Va and Jeffrey Brosk, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with forms and materials; their installations can be seen as extensions of the Minimalists' preoccupation with shaped space.

It must be emphasized that there are infinite gradations of gray between these black and white "poles." The gap separating these two distinct sources of installation works has lessened considerably and, in many cases, disappeared over the past decade. Cross-references abound. An artist like Lauren Ewing, whose video projects are involved with narrative, houses her video monitors in simple sculptural structures that enhance the tapes' psychological contents; whereas a "minimal" artist like Robert Stackhouse often chooses to incorporate provocative figurative references into his sculptural works in order to add a narrative dimen-

sion to his installations. Happenings and Minimal art must be seen only as starting points, as creative sources which have merged and diverged in certain peoples' works and given rise to totally new and/or hybrid forms in others.

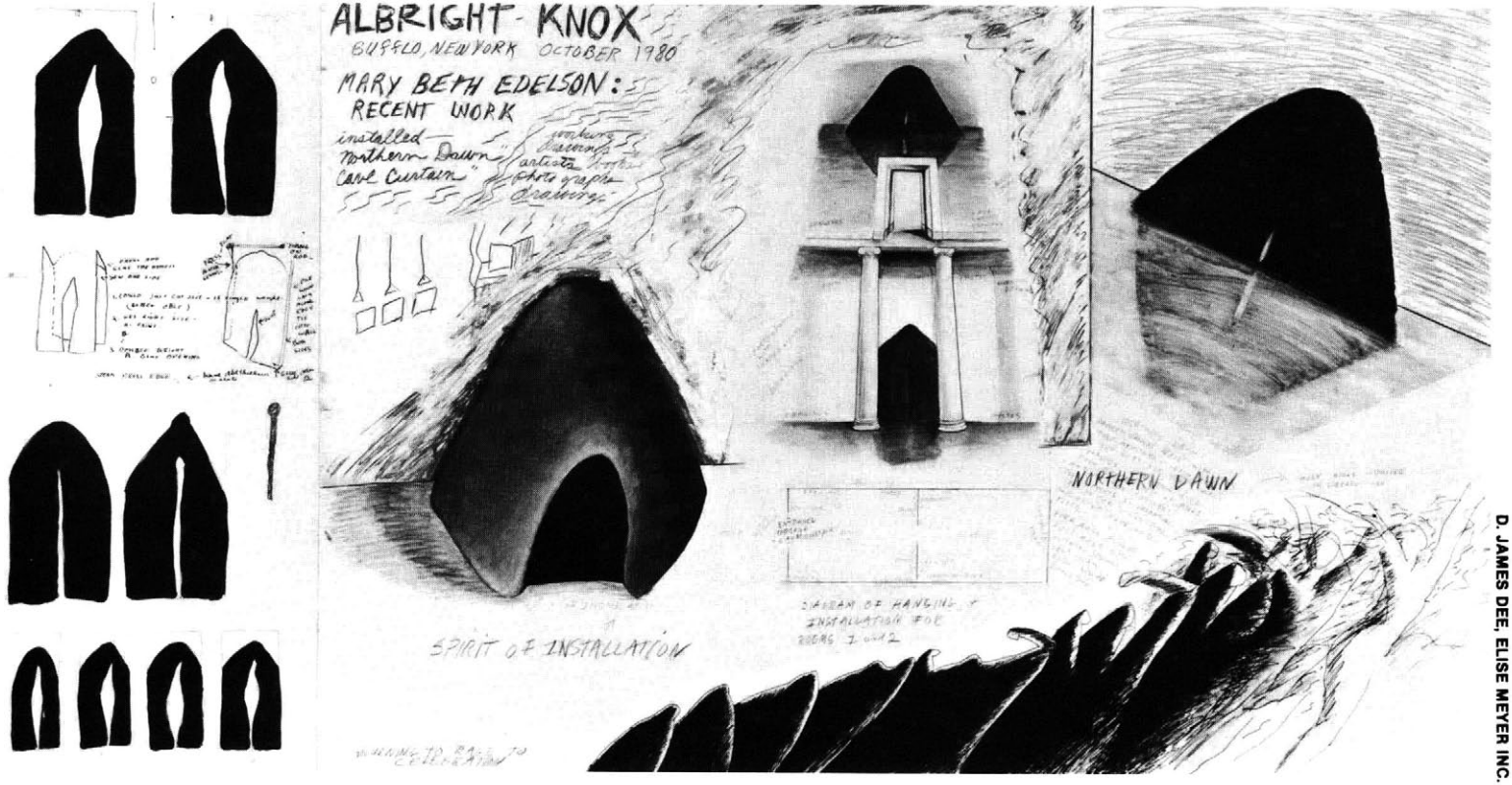
We've tried to reflect this open-endedness in the *Schemes* exhibition, which is a survey of drawings derived from indoor installations exhibited over the past decade. We decided that the most effective way to suggest the range of contemporary installation art within the confines of a single gallery was to gather together a series of drawings that remain faithful to the spirit of these seminal works.

The majority of the drawings (and it should be noted that "drawing" is defined loosely—as any two-dimensional rendering—within the context of this show) were produced *after* the installations were completed (a number of the works, in fact, were done specifically for this show), and therefore represent the artists' reinterpretation of the original material. This emphasis on reinterpretation differentiates *Schemes* from an exhibition of photo-documents. The works on view are not simply descriptive records or secondary sources designed to provide information about absentee art objects. Most of these drawings were created to be seen as art objects in their own right—as creative translation that represent new solutions to old problems, and new perspectives on old material. So it is not surprising that the drawings gathered together here are as visually and conceptually diversified as the installations themselves.

Excerpted from the catalog for "Schemes," an exhibition by Elise Meyer and Shelley Rice.

Shelley Rice is a New York critic with a special interest in photography and mixed media.

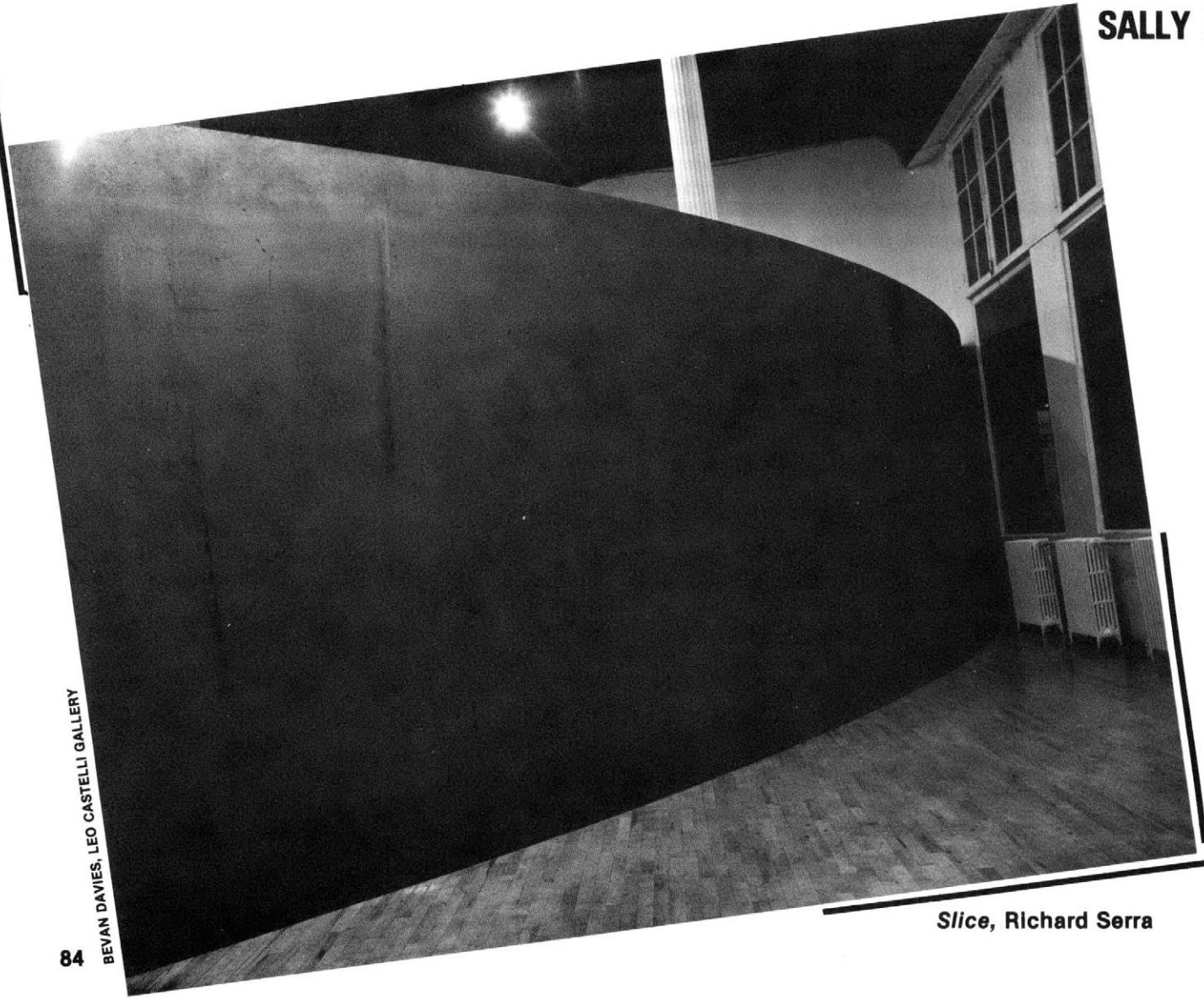
***Installation for Albright Knox, Mourning to Rage to Celebration,* Mary Beth Edelson**



D. JAMES DEE, ELISE MEYER INC.

PERFORMANCE IN PLACE

SALLY RANDALL



Slice, Richard Serra

BEVAN DAVIES, LEO CASTELLI GALLERY

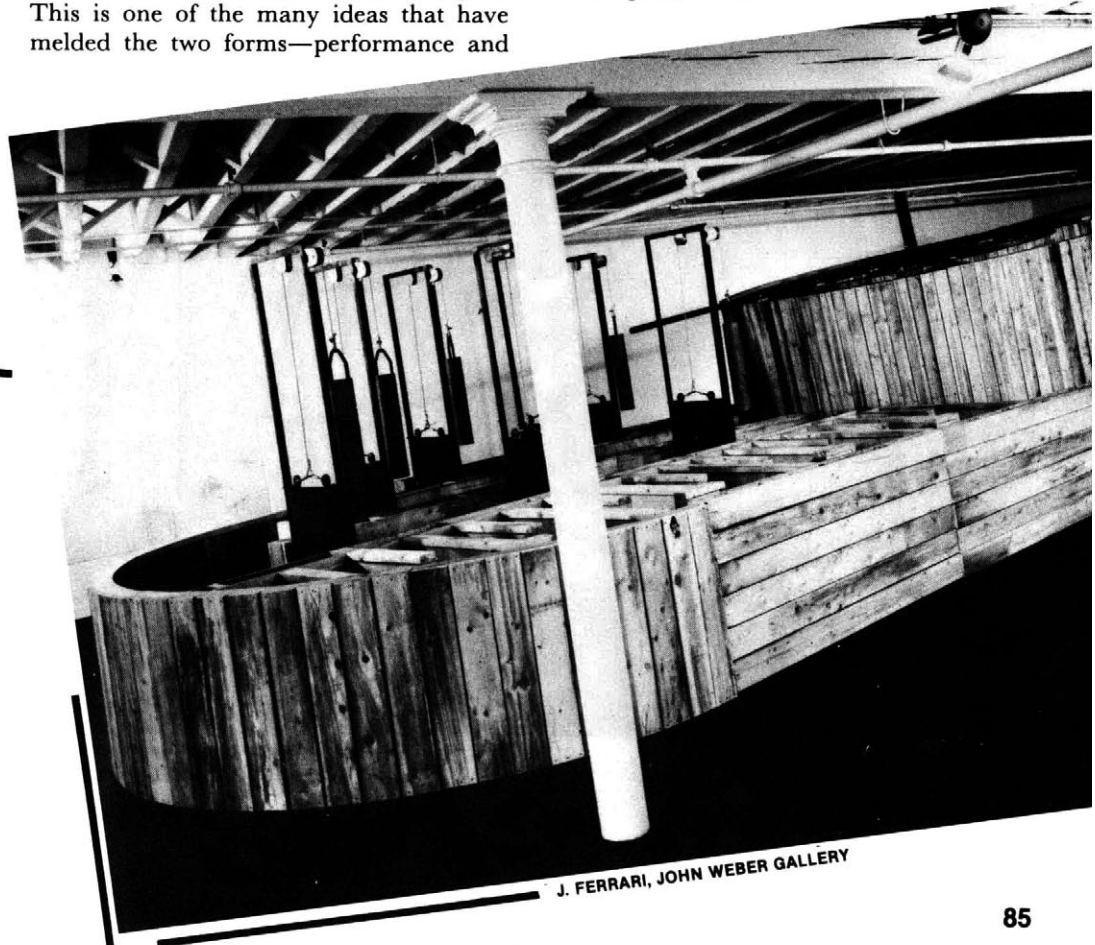
In sculptural installations, we assume that the environment is the stage. We adapt ourselves to our surroundings as extensions of the work. In Richard Serra's monumental barrier at Castelli, *Slice,* the space is split into separate environs, accessible by separate entrances. Our "action" is our realization of the activity on the other side; by our subliminal attention to the negative space we become positive space. This piece is a melding of structure and motion within it, not unlike a fishbowl.

Any work of such overwhelming size (10' x 104', 38 tons) appeals to the geographical instincts for exploration. Our major performance is in the degree of space and motion we allow ourselves before the constriction of the walls plays on our self-awareness and inhibitions. It is an intimate performance despite *Slice*'s vast size.

* * * * *

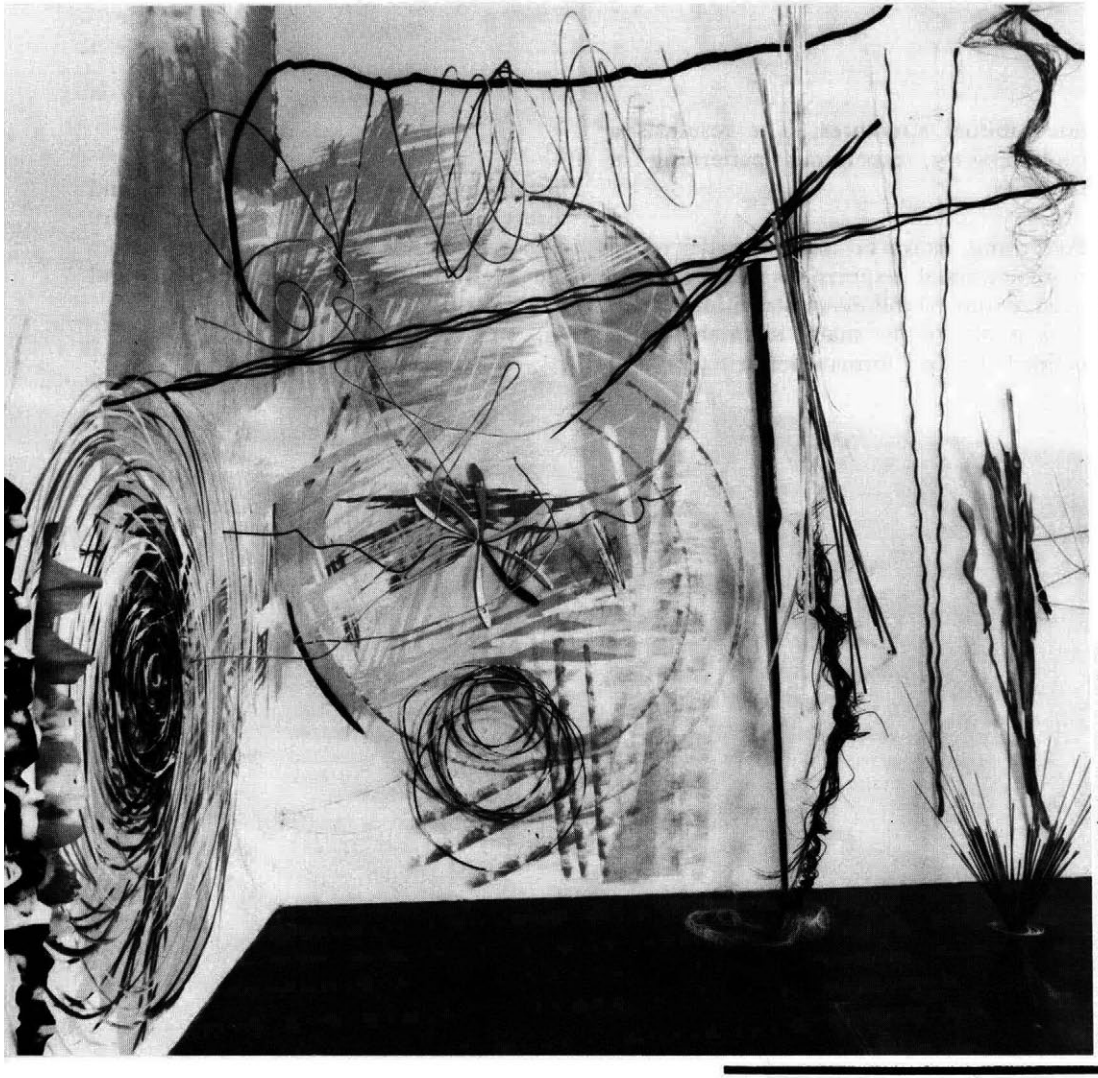
The installation can be influenced by the wisdom of science, architecture, and any spatial documentation. Alice Aycock finds her inspiration in the utilitarian embellishment of traditional architecture. In their classicistic ideals she finds childish functions that are translated into whimsical and non-habitual structures. The result is a contemporary, repetitious patterning of fantasies.

Patterning, however, has been driven to more minimal expressions through our need to understand moments within a grid. This is one of the many ideas that have melded the two forms—performance and installation—into one. Our quick and direct statements are requiring more elaborate blends of media so as to attract the attention that painting once did and now, again, does.



J. FERRARI, JOHN WEBER GALLERY

The Machine that Makes the World, **Alice Aycock**



EYRIS PRODUCTIONS, HOLLY SOLOMON GALLERY

***Dragon* (detail), Judy Pfaff**

Judy Pfaff coerces the viewer into involvement by fears of chaos. Within the tangled brambles of *Dragon,* shown at the Whitney Biennal, we choose our participation on a par with our daily encounters with similar situations. To enter her piece is to become lost, to play-act, to concede to childish inequities.

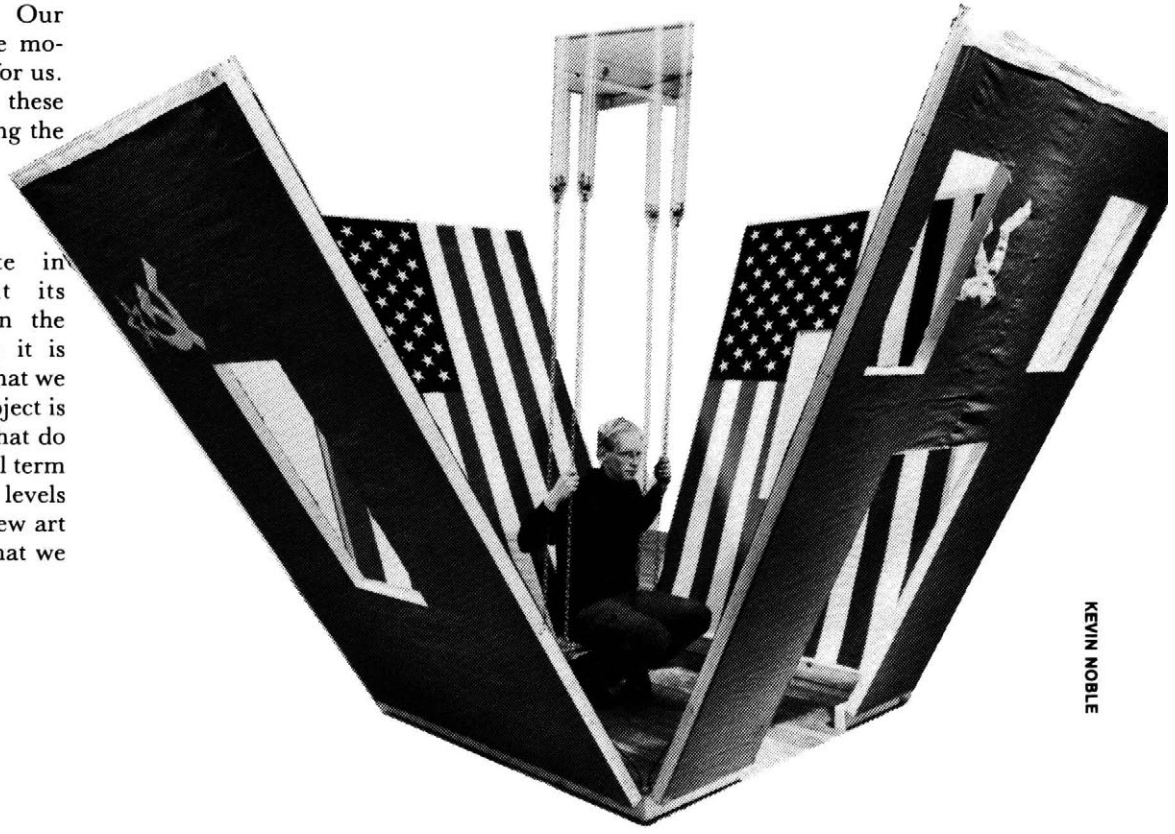
It is difficult for a formal New York museum audience to take this work seriously. Such a direct encounter seems unnecessary. The same audience might not disregard this piece if staged and performed by someone else, giving the audience a safe vantage point and a passive role, but it would also prevent us from fully understanding the crossover of the theatrical into visual art. *Dragon* is pluralistic and therefore too ambiguous to totally comprehend; as an "event," it disregards constructed theoretical modes to give us a multitude of ideas to explore.

Both Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim derive their installations from performance as a more permanent documentation of

motion. A stabilization of the object in space seemed to be a more serious committment to each artist's ideas and an alternative to the self as art. The modes of performance seduce our senses, becoming moving picture frames and so we are detached from a confrontation. Our realizations are more calculated; the motion acts out our supposed reactions for us. Both of these artists have suspended these ideas in their installations by defeating the differences between the two.

* * * * *

Performance is more immediate in response and commentary, but its mediums are no more direct than the mediums of sculpture or painting; it is simply more physical. The problem that we grapple with when discussing this subject is how to explain it. More precisely, what do we call it? Perhaps "event" is a plural term that does delete boundaries, but the levels must be expanded. Genre cripples new art forms and it is a problem of genre that we have, not actually of art.

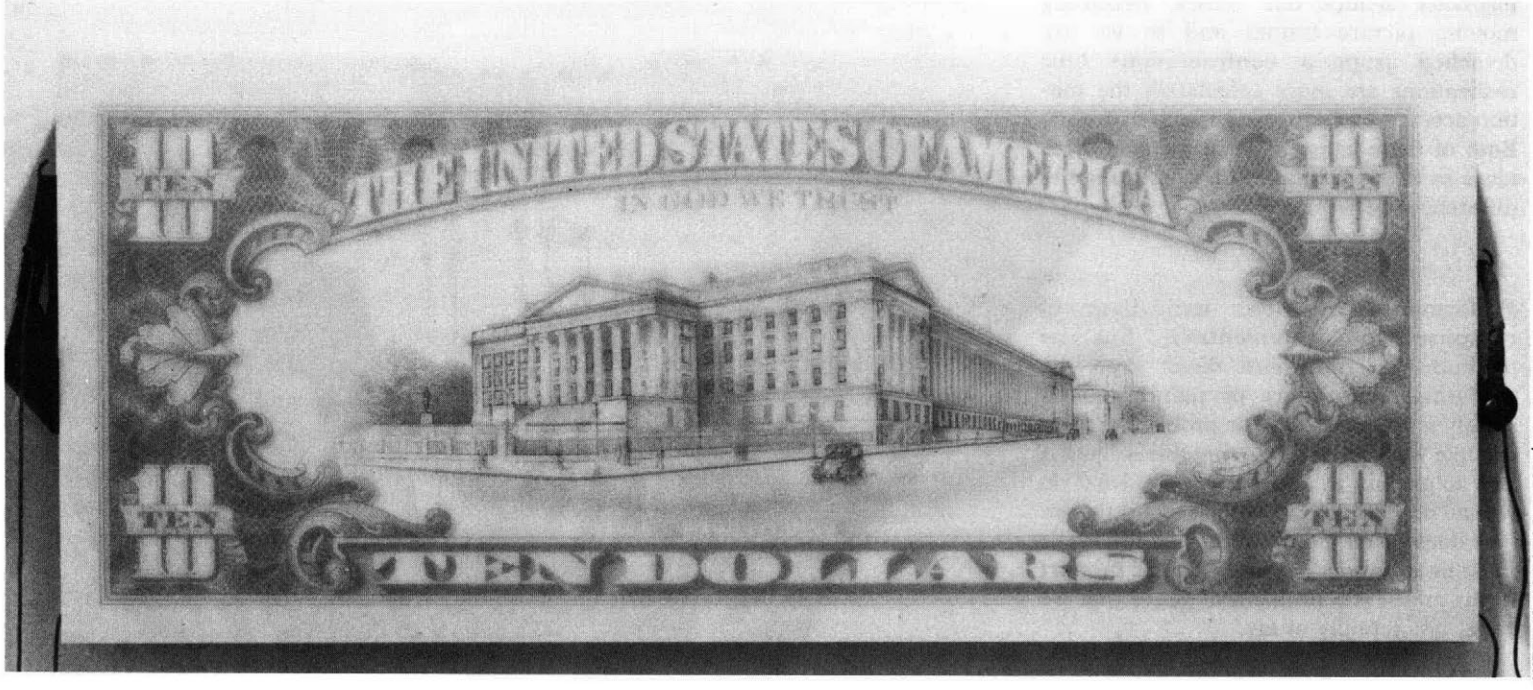


KEVIN NOBLE

Vito Acconci's play house

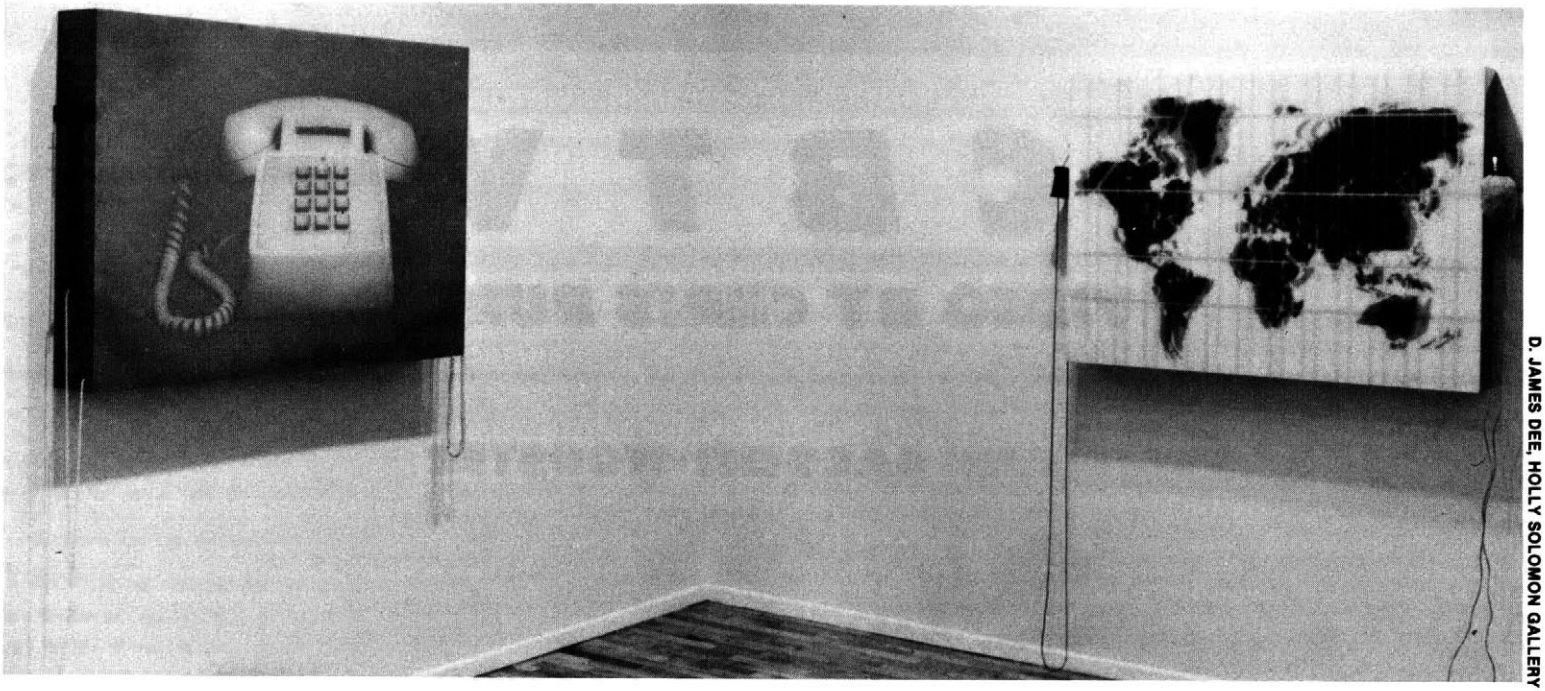
HELLO WALLS

JOHN HOWELL



D. JAMES DEE, HOLLY SOLOMON GALLERY

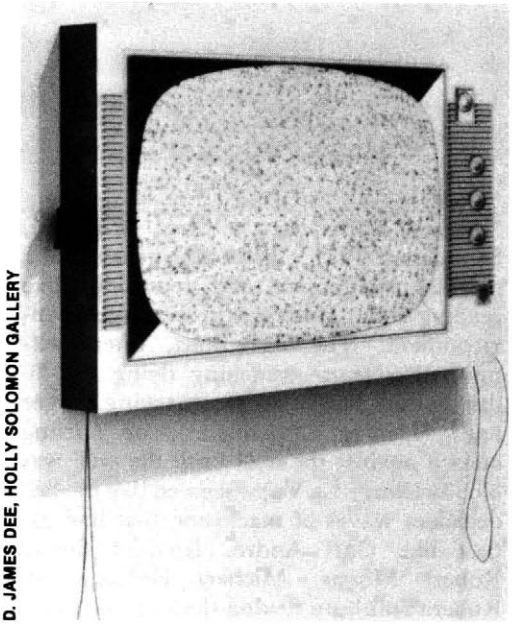
Travel, politics, money, and love—these are the respective subjects of Laurie Anderson's four-part performance *United States*; two additional, projected parts deal with science and communications. The same topics are dealt with in four Anderson sound sculptures recently shown at Holly Solomon's gallery. Each plastic object presented an emblematic image of American culture complete with participatory audio-visual gadgets. Telephone, map, $10 bill, TV—these are contemporary icons chosen with an archaeologist's eye for social and symbolic meaning. The map, printed off-register in social studies colors, (bright green and orange), juxtaposes two kinds of significant shapes (super-imposed grid and organic outline) to draw a picture of the country. you can look at this sketch through attached dime-store binoculars while earphones



D. JAMES DEE, HOLLY SOLOMON GALLERY

give you the sound of seagulls disturbed by an airplane flying over (taped at JFK?). I felt like I was scanning an empty land.

As do the other pieces, the map and its participatory action encourage the punning metaphorization which Anderson uses so effectively in her performances; the process puts double and triple meanings to simple linguistic constructs like "to map out," "to look at," "to fly over." And, of course, this is all happening inside an art gallery—I'm looking at the country but not really (another double-take). The TV is a meditative study, its screen full of 3-D dots



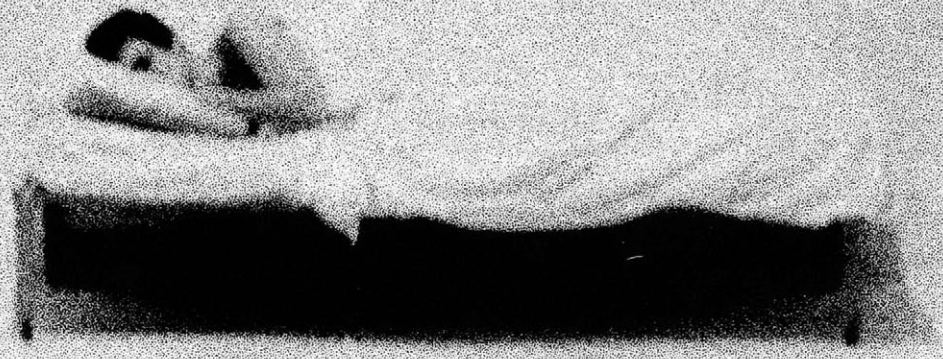
D. JAMES DEE, HOLLY SOLOMON GALLERY

(*not* brought together by the attached Lone Ranger mask) with a soundtrack of late-night movie highlights. As a distilled abstraction, you could probably watch it longer and to more purpose than actual television—I could. The $10 bill was more elusive as an experience; I couldn't make out exactly what the audio was up to (a visitor walking through a busy office). Maybe I should have put on the cashier's visor. And I don't think I got the phone at all (sound: an ostinato of cash registers). But these doodads are Anderson's best translation yet of her performance methods and subjects to static objects. They move.

CBTV

VIDEO BY CHRIS BURDEN

ANN SARGENT-WOOSTER



A decade after the birth of his body art/performance, looking back at Chris Burden permits an examination of his work from various angles, freed from some of the rhetoric and tension that surrounded it at the time. Equally important, his videotapes offer a way to evaluate the durability of concept-related performance as art works, and the success of documentation as a viable residue of this type of art.

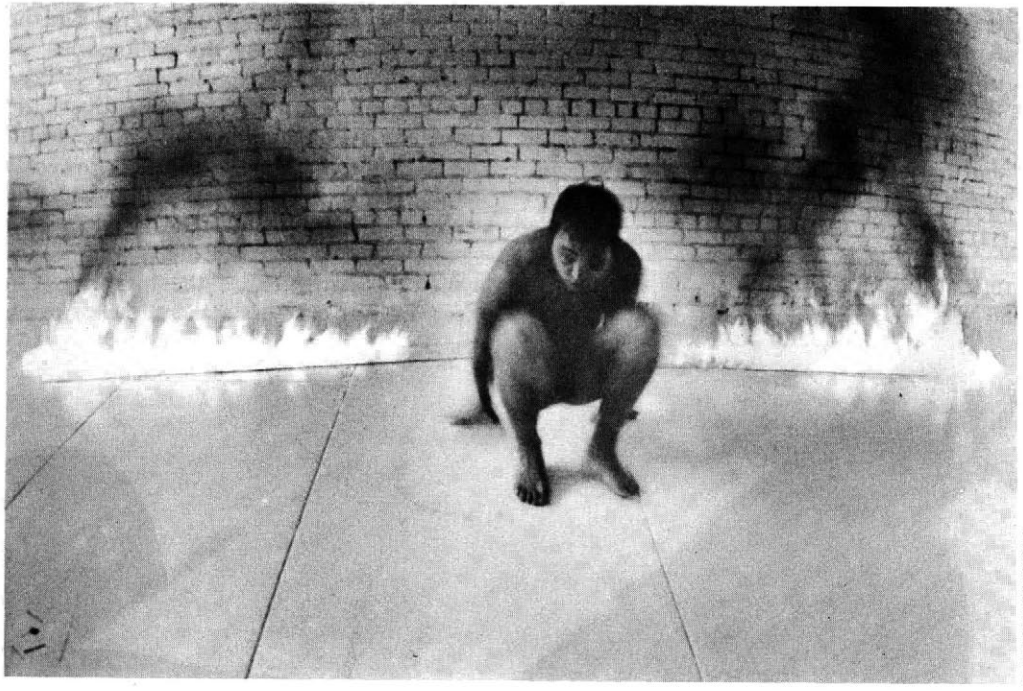
When the first records of body art/performance began to appear in national art magazines, e.g. Cindy Nemser's "Subject-Object: Body Art," *Arts Magazine*, September 1971, the work generated a peculiar excitement and repulsion, like reading about kinky sex in a bourgeois environment. The hazardous, often self-mutilating feats—attaching dying fish to the body (Terry Fox), smashing finger nails (Dennis Oppenheim), or hurling oneself against the wall until the wall was bloody (Barry La Va)—seemed like the last decadent waves of machismo that had artists like Carl Andre, Richard Serra, Robert Morris, Michael Heizer, and Robert Smithson flexing their muscles and operating heavy machinery in paeans to blue collar work. Body art was seen as an offshoot of Happenings and Duchamp at the time, but it could just as easily have been understood as the acting out of social-political violence, beginning with the Civil Rights demonstrations of the early '60s and continuing into the early '70s with Vietnam War protests. Fuel was probably added by Rudolf Schwartzkogler's death from self-mutilation in 1969 that was widely publicized at Documenta in 1971.

Of these artists, Chris Burden undoubtedly

made the most lasting impression because of his notorious performance *Shoot*, in which he had himself shot with a rifle. His work continued the theme of personal danger longer than any of the other artists in this group, but by the late '70s, his fantasies took on gentler dimensions.

Documentation of Selected Works 1971-1975, videotapes shown at Anthology Film Archives in the spring, recounts eleven performances of the early '70s. Burden's work exists not only in the often private, ritualistic acts, but in the public re-telling of them, what Germano Celant has called "The Record as The Work of Art." The process of explaining the work reveals Burden's love of story-telling; his press releases and writings seem like a version of the confessional literature in men's magazines. His performance persona as it evolves in this work-autobiography combines the matter-of-factness of a master plumber recounting his work-related problems and a showman of the order of Evel Knievel, engaged in artificial virility tests in which there is often a failure of his expectations. In contrast to Knievel, Burden's feats are small potatoes, distinguished only from extreme eccentricity by the appellation of Art. Like a compulsive gambler doomed to lose, Burden's "stories" about the performances emphasize the moment when the idea failed and reality intruded: it is this moment that often makes the story.

In *220* (1971), the earliest performance on the tape, Burden and two friends elect to spend the night on ladders in a room full of water (lined with black plastic) that has been electrified. Their dangerous nocturnal adventure is a grown-up version of the childhood fear of monsters biting off your fingers if they dangle over the edge of the bed at night. The fantasy became more obvious as unforeseen technical difficulties developed. The wood began to absorb water, intensifying the participants' fear they might be killed while they stood on the ladders.



BARBARA BURDEN

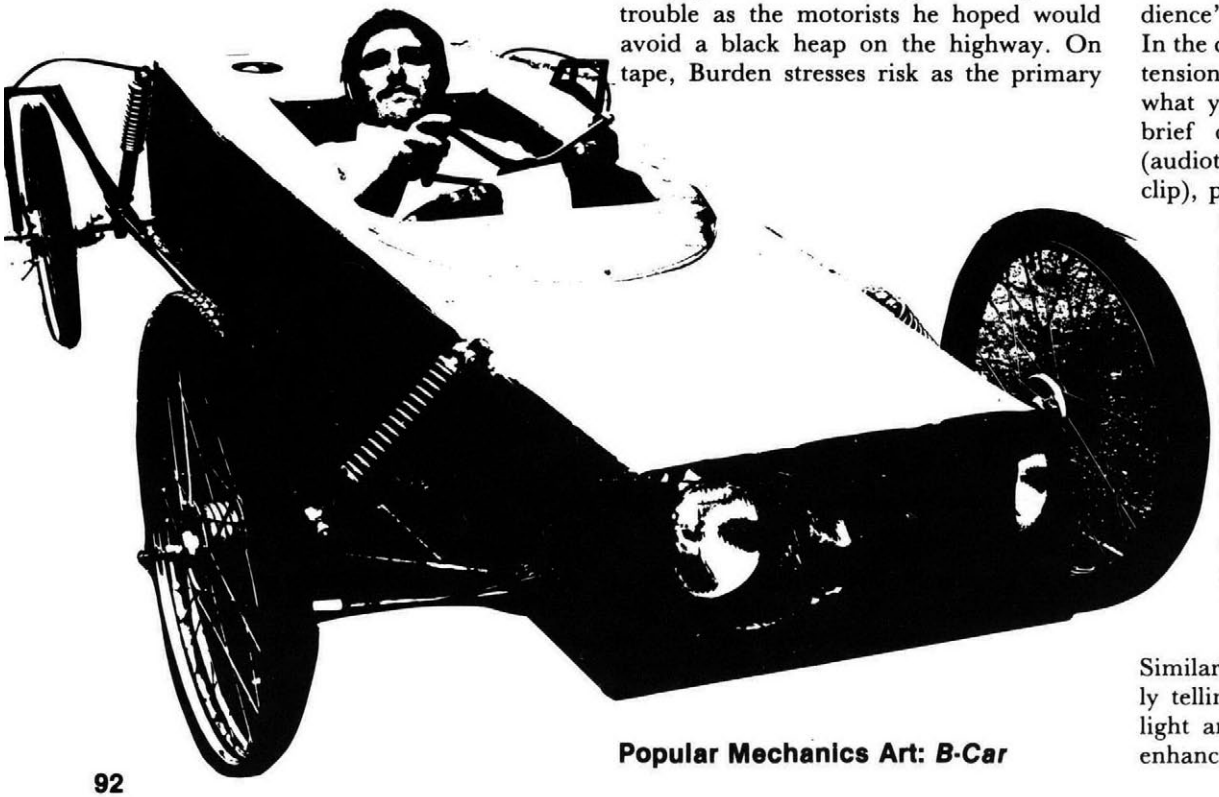
Icarus

In *Bed Piece* (1972), Burden was asked to live in an art gallery while confined to a bed for twenty days. His preconceptions about the event (the fantasy) were altered by what he found out about himself from the actual experience. The piece was originally designed as an ordeal on the order of his earlier *Locker Piece* (he was installed in a 2' x 2' x 5' locker for five days), but Burden discovered he liked living in a controlled environment and did not want to leave.

Icarus (1973) is one of his most visually eloquent performances. Denying the father-son tension of the original myth, Burden focuses the pain and ambition exclusively on himself, becoming at once creator and demonstrator. Here too, he verbally calls attention to failure, in this case the sound and appearance of a match failing to light (the original myth is a chronicle of ambition marred by failure). He lies down in the small space of his studio, his bullet-shaped body filling the entire area. Glass leaves are

placed on his shoulders. Gasoline is poured along the edges and lighted. For the brief interval he can endure the pain, he becomes a column of flame like the self-immolated political suicides of the late '60s and early '70s.

Burden's work has been described by Roselee Goldberg in *Performance Art* as intending to dramatize the violence in American society by enacting brutal events in controlled circumstances. However, Burden's performances exceed these political intentions, expressing a death wish that is only relieved by the suicide's traditional regrets and hopes for failure. *Deadman* (1972) combines Burden's twin concerns of danger and failure. As conceived, the piece placed him in the middle of a highway at night, shrouded by a tarpaulin, his position marked by two flares; the piece was to last for the duration of the flares, roughly fifteen minutes. The piece relied on a mixture of willingness to risk his life and a partial belief in the ability of people to read and abide by certain signs. But the event was stopped by the police who arrested Burden for creating a "false emergency." Burden rails against the police for disrupting his performance (with the elitist implication they don't know what art is), but their action represents the same reading of conventional signs of danger and trouble as the motorists he hoped would avoid a black heap on the highway. On tape, Burden stresses risk as the primary content of the performance but the bibliography on the event in *Performance Anthology* (pp. 72-74) suggests that the "success" of the event at the time was measured by the involvement of the extra-art factors of the police and the subsequent trial.



Popular Mechanics Art: *B-Car*

Another way to examine Burden's work lies in what it reveals about the documentation of fleeting performances. As the tape and other record-making projects make clear, Burden believes such work only exists to the extent it is remembered. Performances like *Shoot* (1972) in which Burden has a friend shoot him in the arm with a .22 rifle made the newspapers nationwide and entered into the imagination of a vast "audience" who had only heard of the piece. In the documentation of *Shoot*, mystery and tension are established by anticipation and what you don't see. Burden explains the brief documentation before it is seen (audiotapes sandwich a 1½ minute film clip), pointing out what to listen and look for: the sound of the camera starting and the words "are you ready" that let you know the "act" is about to begin. We see Burden and watch him recoil after the shooting. The picture vanishes and we hear the sound of a shell dropping on the floor and the words, "it went right through." In his low-key recital, Burden de-emphasizes the "failure" of the piece. (Other sources indicate that instead of grazing his arm as intended, the bullet "blew away a large piece of flesh.")

Similarly, sparse documentation has equally telling results in *Bed Piece*. Shot in low light and with an indistinct focus, which enhances the dream-like quality of events,

all that is seen is a vague, fuzzy black and white picture of Burden in bed. The camera roams the room making the bed and its inhabitants look like they are cut out of time and floating weightlessly in space, like the sensory deprivation situation it resembles. Just as in *Shoot*, the absence of visual documentation tends to abstract events making them more ominous or unreal. In a process more like the freedom of reading, the poverty of visual information and the emphasis on the verbal allots the viewer a more active role, permitting each to "write" his or her own scenario to fill out Burden's outline.

Commercials is a collection of three pieces for broadcast television. In common with a small group of artists in the '70s, Burden sought to break out of the confines of the gallery and infiltrate society at large, inserting his art into the mass media. Burden was unique in his ambition "to go commercial," and serve up his "advertisements" on broadcast television side by side with other products. The unidentifiableness of his product was part of the significance of the "spots," allowing him to at once be on TV and at the same time subvert the medium by adding jarring, incongruous elements to it. The first, *TV AD* (1973) was a 10 second, black and white clip from *Fire Roll*, showing Burden crawling along the ground, hands bound behind his back, clad only in shorts, like an escaped prisoner in a B-movie. That the rubble on the ground was broken glass and that he was bleeding was obscured by the use of black and white. In *Poem for LA* (1976), shown seventy-two times in a five day period, a big brother voice of doom offers the mysterious litany: SCIENCE HAS FAILED/HEAT IS LIFE/TIME KILLS.

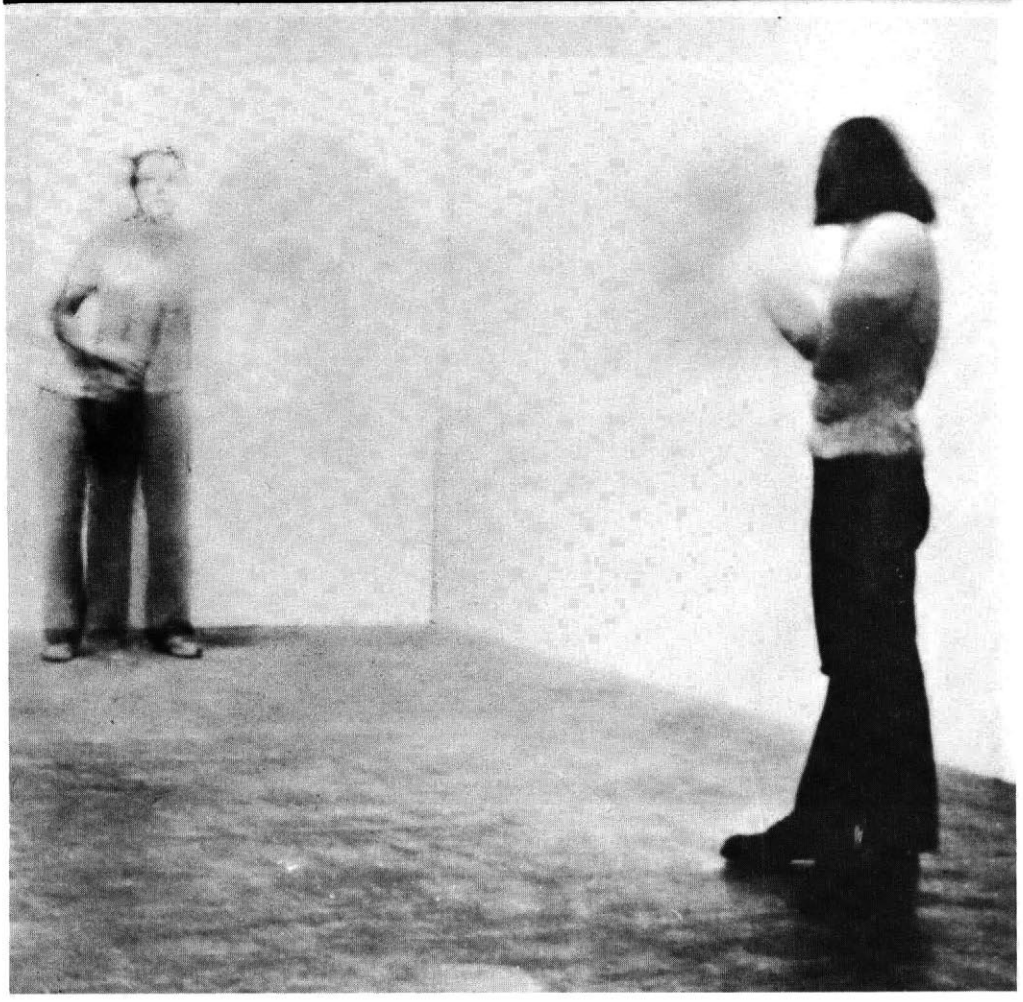
PEGGY JARREL KAPLAN, RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS

Deadman

These phrases are intercut with brief shots of Burden's face. The *Chris Burden Promo* (1976) is a self-aggrandizing message, intended, he says, to be taken tongue in cheek. Although presented "straight" many people took it seriously. In zooming titles as in previews of coming attractions, the words "MICHELANGELO LEONARDO DA VINCI REMBRANDT VINCENT VAN GOGH CHRIS BURDEN" are lettered across the screen, linking Burden mimetically in a megalomaniacal fantasy with art greats.

By the late '70s, Burden's fantasies involved objects to which he was attached through construction and misadventure. Again and again, anticipation and desire dominate satisfaction as desirable states.

The Big Wrench (1979) is a gripping tale of obsession, telling how Burden came to own Big Job, a 16,000 pound antique tractor trailer. *The Curse of Big Job* (originally a 1977 performance) is revealed by Burden while he sits and holds an over-sized wrench. The objects of his dreams and



Shoot

desires and eventual disillusionment appear behind him. The truck takes on a life of its own, dwarfing Burden, and becomes the more active character of the story like the possessed creatures of horror films.

The Big Wrench is the third of Burden's object-related fantasies of the late'70s. No longer pursuing self destruction, Burden became absorbed in elaborate "boys' " do-it-yourself science projects such as the *CBTV* (1977), a working model of the first television, and the *B-Car* (1975), a handmade one passenger car capable of going 100 miles an hour. In *The Big Wrench* Burden allowed himself to pursue the slightly mad fantasy of owning a semi, a macho symbol *par excellence* in our culture. Throughout Burden's work there are a series of manhood challenges that are tinged with failure, and his fantasy of absorbing the truck's evil power is doomed from the start. Not only can he not get the necessary papers to operate the truck, thus preventing the fulfillment of his fantasy of bypassing the art world and becoming an independent entrepreneur, traveling around to shopping centers to display the *B-Car* and the *CBTV* for a fee, but the truck is a wreck: it simply won't run. In his ongoing soap opera, he sells the truck, getting back only half his initial investment only to find himself unable to "break up" with the truck (the parallel to interpersonal relationships is deliberate). Then the truck is involved in an accident before the new ownership papers are filed and Burden is held responsible. Later he is investigated to see if the truck is stolen. In an ironic twist, after publishing a story about Big Job, a collector wants to purchase the vehicle, allowing Burden to recoup his losses—but the new owner cannot be found.

The Big Wrench is the most elaborate of Burden's adventure tales where life and performance meet. He repeatedly tries to foil fate by inventing the world in his own terms only to be caught up in yet another quirk of misfortune, giving his life/art the quality of a Guy du Maupassant story without the hope of a happy ending.

Ann Sargent-Wooster teaches art history at Kean College

DRESSING UP ACTING OUT

TONY WHITFIELD

If art be pure, Margot Channing in *All About Eve* is only the character Margot Channing and is not to be confused with Bette Davis. Illusion in mainstream theatrics strives to define a world of its own. In that world an actor's identity is subsumed by the role s/he plays. In performance art, however, ambiguity between the performer's "true identity" and his/her assumed persona is often a crucial component in a blatant art/life commentary. Three videotapes—*He's a Growing Boy; She's Turning Forty* by Colin Campbell, *Learning to Talk* by Linda Montano and Charles Atlas' *More Men*—transfer that interplay from live performance to the video monitor. All three dismantle and rearrange the artifices of illusion that coalesce to form traditional "believable" characters; the personae they finally arrive at must be perceived as dualities. Television is the immediate format reference in these tapes. The territories they open onto, however, subvert its conventions.

Colin Campbell's *He's a Growing Boy; She's Turning Forty* feels like a series of pregnant moments extracted from a not-very-good soap. Caught within the video frame, shot at close range, and engaged in banal dialogues, his characters are victims of arrested development, caricatures stripped of the ongoing detail that would make them viable on afternoon television. What he attempts to expose hinges on dualities that are ultimately beyond the codification of personality common in the medium.

For several years Campbell has used drag as a device in his videodramas—literally in his portrayals of the melancholic *Woman from Malibu*, of the dippy rock club denizen, "Robin," star of *Bad Girls* and *Modern Love*, and of "Anna" in his recent tape *Dangling by Their Mouths*. Drag for Campbell is a key manifestation of modern illusion (or, perhaps more precisely in the case of Campbell's characters, self delusion).

In *Growing Boy* drag appears not to be an issue at first. No one assumes a character whose sex doesn't correspond to his/her own. At second glance, however, it is clear that each character is acting out an alien role. *Growing Boy* focuses on two characters: hard-as-nails Maxine Sledge (played by Martha Johnson), head of an advertising agency who is about to turn forty, and young Ricki (played by Tim Guest), Sledge's employee who is trying to come to terms with his adulthood. In the opening scene Ricki is being fitted for his first suit. With the constant advice of his Uncle Harry (Campbell), Ricki's masculinity is sized up by the tailor. In this ritual/ordeal of passage Ricki finally determines the cut of his image. The sexual tension is palpable as the older men discuss the suit's fit while the camera pans Ricki's body. That tension pervades the entire tape. It is even more explicit in a scene in which Uncle Harry delivers a monologoue describing a man and a woman making love in a parked car in graphic detail. Meanwhile, Ricki and the man seated at the next table (John Greyson) cruise one another with mounting intensity. The entirety of Elton Motello's "Jet Boy, Jet Girl" underscores this scene—"Jet boy, jet girl/wanna take him round the world . . . He gives me head . . ."

Campbell gives this scene more time than it needs to get its narrative point across. He forces the viewer to focus on the signs that express desire. Even the persona of Uncle Harry begins to break down as his macho camaraderie borders on verbal seduction; the determination of homo-vs. heterosexual motivations are confounded.

Uncle Harry is not the only character here who calls into question the boundaries of machismo. Maxine Sledge also plays on the stereotype. In our first prolonged encounter with Sledge, she is receiving a back-rub from J.J. (Rodney Werden), a

man in her employ. Together, they peruse her personal files which are filled with glossies worthy of *Blueboy*. J.J. is coy and questioning. Sledge is tensely off-handed. The role reversals in this scene are obvious. The photographs become channels for sexual currents. When these currents somehow short-circuit, what becomes clear is the degree to which Sledge's liberated womanhood is really masculine masquerade.

The final scene of *Growing Boy* has no dialogue and very little action. It is a series of tableaux punctuated with small gestures. Sledge and Ricki are part of an audience brought together to watch a performance of some kind. Both, however, are involved in little performances of their own. Ricki, we assume, has transcended his post-adolescent confusion and has taken a lover, the man from the restaurant. Sledge, on the other hand, has plummeted into crisis and, like Cleopatra with her asp, gazes at her diabetic cat's syringe.

While the plot line of this tape is quite unremarkable, Campbell has flattened the narrative to a level of shallow surface articulation to isolate certain disfunctional modes of role assumption.

In *Learning to Talk* Linda Montano takes on the roles of five women hustling their wares from the television screen: Mme. Breton, a French poetess discussing three things: 1) her book, 2) her background, 3) her book, *La Meme Chose*; Sister Rose Augusta outlining on a blackboard the differences between mortal and venial sin; Kay Pride, a half-blind, ex-drug addict woman of few words, and a white blues singer in a black man's world; a country and western singer, inspired by the wind in the trees, hard-driving men, and the Holy Bible; and Dr. Goody discussing and demonstrating the curative practices of nasal neti, shamanism, and acupuncture. Montano's characterizations are hilarious. When Mme. Breton leans across her desk and mentions in passing "your friend and mine Jean Paul Sartre" or Kay Pride sings her low-down, dragged-out, off-key version of "Can't help Lovin' That *Love* of Mine," Lily Tomlin suddenly has new competition.

COURTESY *FUSE* MAGAZINE

***Growing Boy* (John Greyson, Colin Campbell, Tim Guest)**

When all five routines are shown back to back, however, they quickly unite around a few very unfunny issues. An unspoken critique of the ways in which images of women are trivialized through the media begins to be articulated through the structural similarities in the presentation of each persona. All five women have information central to their existence (or at least to their image) to get across and utilize television's pedestals for talking heads—commercials, talkshows, educational programming—to do so. In one way or another each woman is functioning outside the social norm; they are "interesting, exceptional women." One by one, however, they all establish validating relationships to traditionally perceived realms of male dominance, be they black or hard-driving men, the scientific community, Jean Paul Sartre, or God. Montano's portrayals become quite disturbing when one realizes that their models are present enough in reality to have become cliches. When one laughs at the two singers one responds with disdain to women who have mistaken the marketing of their sexuality for power within male circles; to be amused by the inanity of Mme. Breton or the misguided fervor of Dr. Goody's quackery is to acknowledge belief in the myth of female incompetence.

Unlike *Growing Boy*'s non-analytic revela-

tion of sexual ambiguity which gives Campbell's otherwise vapid characters some distinction, Montano's subtextual feminist discussion is the cumulative and residual product of women talking about who they are in inauthentic voices. The element of mimicry that Montano uses to create her characters becomes a satirical device that allows the viewer to empathize with the women she has chosen to portray. As a result *Learning to Talk* is not only unified by its politics and media reference, but by the fact that Montano—by playing all of the roles—implies a sixth character undergoing a process of identification with each.

In *Learning to Talk* and *Growing Boy* the common devices of television which are set in motion around issues of sexuality underscore ways in which identity is consumed by image. In *More Men*, Charles Atlas extends those devices into the realm of a complex video language and moves beyond creation and presentation of persona to the construction of personality. The tape (still a work in progress) is a series of video portraits that are partly scripted, partly improvised, partly direct interviews. Each of the men that Atlas focuses on establishes a self-conscious relationship to the camera. As in *Learning to Talk,* each subject outlines some part of his life. In *More Men*, however, the baring of those details is mediated by the taping itself; the infrastructure of personality is revealed within the framework of art, and that art's framework reflects the complexity of the personalities it details. From the outset the duality of Atlas' subjects is stated by the projection on two monitors, two simultaneous views whose sound levels vary and are often displaced from the images.

In *More Men*'s first and most polished segment Atlas deals directly with the relationship between performer and persona. John Erdman plays the character "Lon Chaney III," an actor making a resume tape in which he acts out the roles of his horror movie star grandfather and his character actor father. Up to this point "Chaney III" has denied his heritage, appearing only in avant-garde productions under the name of John Erdman.

"To act well you need a good mirror" he repeats several times. The mirror here is the camera. The synthesis of images it records, as pieced together by Atlas, reflects the activity before the mirror. It becomes a process of expansion of and selection from the material that makes up Chaney III's persona. Alternating between the two monitors we see film clips of Chaney I and II while "Chaney III" talks about his relationship to his progenitors, imitating their facial expressions and acting styles, and making himself up. At several points Atlas splits the screens, silences a soundtrack, and juxtaposes black and white and color images, further complicating our perception of the work and multiplying the dimensions and points of view onto the personality of Lon Chaney III.

The other segments of *More Men* include a resume taping session by a new wave dancer/choreographer played by Joseph Lennon: a monologue delivered by a burglar (played by Atlas) followed by a demonstration of his stealthy technique; and an interview with Atlas' father in which he talks about his life and then recites "I Did It My Way." These sections isolate situations in which performance becomes a manifestation of character—be it in the role of burglar, dancer, actor or worker.

While Campbell, Montano and Atlas' tapes are all about dressing up and acting out to varying degrees, none of these artists has developed his or her characters simply as components in a narrative structure. What each persona signifies extends beyond the boundaries of the story she or he tells. Implicit in their presentation is a view of a protean range in personality that is limited by culture and codified in the mainstream products of that culture. By raising questions about the manner in which an actor (anyone) portrays a character (creates an illusion), each work in turn challenges the social, political and esthetic sources of that code and its resultant limitations on the ways in which reality is ordered.

Tony Whitfield contributes to *LIVE* and *FUSE*.

***More Men* (John Erdman)**

DANCING IN THE LAND WHERE CHILDREN ARE THE LIGHT

ANN SARGENT-WOOSTER

Rita Myers continues her exploration of mystery and spirituality in this elaborate multi-media, multi-monitor installation. Like an initiate or a space traveler, you enter through a red-lit vestibule with lights placed along the base boards. A voice intones relaxation/concentration instructions. You enter a darkened room that has been transformed into a garden-like landscape. Curving metal plates, serving as heraldic stanchions or trees sprout from black pulverized glass heaped into hillocks. Pathways wind through the material, expanding and complicating the space like a Japanese garden. Here, three unsynchronized half hour tapes are shown on three monitors which are placed so you can only see one at a time.

The tapes describe the creation of the world in three "songs." The spoken texts for Myers' recent work have stressed mystery and ritual applied to such diverse experiences as a detective story and the initiation of a young girl in *The Points of The Star.* The material in *Dancing* is based on creation myths and is recited by a variety of voices in a pattern of ragged singing and chanting (Myers is not a musician).

The visual portion of the tapes opens with an androgynous figure playing on the beach with a length of red ribbon. The other monitors gradually introduce the Primordial Couple, dressed in matching jumpsuits (played by Christa Maiwald and Alexander Thomas). The origin of the world is depicted taking place in a sandbox-scaled area with the jumbo sized creators dwarfing the materials of creation, turning them into playthings. Creation takes place in the bright blue light of the eternal noon of television commercials. These beings begin to play with geometric structures, as if Minimal sculptures (especially those of Robert Morris and Toni Smith) have shrunk and become children's toys. In Myers' hands (she was a student of Morris') they are no longer Minimal structures, an ABC Art shorn of human content, but they become toy barns and outbuildings of a farm. (These buildings suggest a link with Alice Aycock's carpentered imaginary edifices accompanied with texts.)

At another point, rectangular metallic blocks, such as might be used as models for Futurist architecture or Le Corbusier's buildings are arrayed in a skyscraper complex seen from a low-flying airplane. Gleaming in the sand, the shiny blocks also recall Robert Smithson's *Mirror Displacements.* Here, Smithson's simple and elegant conceptual markers of a journey have become architectural structures.

The second and third "songs" depict the creation of "man." A silvery skeleton is found adrift on the beach. In a startling play on scale, its true size is revealed: no longer "life-size," it seemingly shrinks, showing that its actual dimensions are those of a gumball machine toy or a homonucleus.

As with many current art works, Myers' performance/installations rely on the disjunction of image and text. A rivalry is established in which sound and image are not equal partners. Vision and movement command more attention, especially in the scenes with blocks and other props. Disengaged from activity, the sound never has the same immediacy as the images. This is The Problem endemic to disjunctive layering and multi-monitor installations: in a situation intended to increase information and parallel the information structure of the world, much of the material becomes filler as the mind wanders between different tidbits. Although the artist can manipulate the viewer and control the viewer's selective synthesis of the "story" that is not the case here. One is left with a sense of being overwhelmed and underwhelmed at once.

Ann Sargent-Wooster teaches art history at Kean College.

DAVID ALLISON

CAL ACTS

L.A.

STEVE FRITZ

STEVE FRITZ

JOHN DUNCAN ponders his music. As part of a group, he played a jackhammer and ended up riding it like a sled across the gallery floor.

Over a year later, the first Los Angeles performance art festival still reverberates as an impressive summary of California performance activity. The festival, held in May and October, 1980 at the LACE gallery, presented over seventy artists, including shows by noted performers like Allan Kaprow, Barbara Smith, The Kipper Kids, Chris Burden, Suzanne Lacy, Bob and Bob, and Rachel Rosenthal, and other artists like Stephen Seemayer, Johanna Went, and Nancy Buchanan who are gaining well deserved reputations.

Megan Williams, coordinator of the festival, talked about the artist's motivations and the theme of the festival.

I think what's real important is the title, *Public Spirit*. The word spiritual has become a dirty word in the art world and it's terrible. That's the artists' source whether they admit it or not. The title implies that the individual experience has social significance, that it has public significance. I think it's interesting that usually the audience was half artists, half . . . not only non-artists, but people who had never come to an art event. The in-between is the so-called art world, if that exists in L.A. They're not interested. Performance art is much more connected with the music scene and the party scene. The art system can be very vicious and most artists are scared to death because it's so competitive. What's wonderful about performance is you can do it anytime, anywhere. The artist doesn't need support from anybody. It's just them presenting something in an attempt to be completely direct and to the point with their audience. It isn't like

STEPHEN SEEMAYER trapped in a sea of skylines.

STEVE FRITZ

putting up some static piece and walking away, leaving the work to represent you. Most of the artists in this medium don't care what the dealers or the critics think. They've already found their own community. For example, a number of the women who have been involved with the Woman's Building (the women's art collective on N. Spring Street) participated here. They're dealing with social structures, class structures, the fact that lesbianism is still kind of a difficult life style. I think that most of them are doing it in a very direct, unabashed, unashamed, very proud way. Catharsis is the main thing these people deal with.

Some of the most revolting images produced in the world of performance art have come from the hands of Paul McCarthy. In one of his tamer pieces McCarthy ingested raw hamburger on a landing between the twelfth and thirteen floors of the Biltmore Hotel during the American National Theatre Conference. During this time he had a doll hanging out of his pants, an Arab mask over his face and a ketchup-covered doll on his head. He hung crucifixes on the railing and at one point tried to put a ketchup bottle up his ass. It lasted about thirty minutes—until the hotel security managed to stop him.

I talked with McCarthy about some of these things.

The whole movement has denied the capitalist art system. It's more political. But it's not really as clear cut as all that. When I work I don't really set up things all that much. The piece tells its own story. I collect things and arrange them in a setting. Then it's a matter of things developing—one thing leads to another. Sometimes it turns out lighter than others. Other things are going on besides shocking images. That's really been sensationalized. Still, doing that kind of stuff is a little risky. You open up things that people don't like to deal with. It isn't just about showing the obvious. The answers don't come that

STEVE FRITZ

ALLAN KAPROW talking down to his audience like a boring grandfather telling dull stories.

STEVE FRITZ

THE KIPPER KIDS entered through gallery windows blown out by an explosion. They burped, farted, and pinched their way through a show that ended when they threw paint and flour onto the audience.

quick, either. Artists are trying to get at them, but they don't have the answers. There's no clear cut way to do it—it's an experiment. Sometimes you get there and it's possibly scary. But it's a catharsis.

One way many of these live art works transend the moment of experience is through documentation by the California-based *High Performance* magazine. Produced by editor Linda Burnham, the magazine attempts to legitimize the work of these artists and at the same time preserves work that would otherwise be destined to folk stories and rumor.

Burnham talked about some of the issues that constantly haunt these artists.

Performance artists don't get into theater because they want to do their own work. They don't want to get caught up in a world that's involved with other people's work. Theater is involved with technique in a really huge way. The performance artist controls all the elements himself rather than being part of someone else's concept. It doesn't even matter if it's good lighting or a good set. The artist puts the concept uppermost in the piece. The technique is not the point. If the '60s and '70s have taught us anything it's that the art is not in the paint or the clay—it's in the artist. I trust the artist to get the point across. These artists are absolutely driven to show their work to the public even if it's embarrassing, boring or stupid. The actual creation and presentation can be incredibly difficult and painful. That idea means so much more to me than *Man of La Mancha.* It really touches the artist inside of me. I think it's the purest form of art there is. The ultimate goal of art is to change the way people think. The avant-garde does this especially well. It shakes up the way people see.

We talked about the problem of objective art versus live pieces. If your piece goes unrecorded and you don't have a finished product like a painting or sculpture the artist's contribution can be very fleeting. Plus you have nothing to sell for your own support. Burnham: "Ultimately the performance artist, if he or she gets famous enough, will get a teaching job. But that's about as far as it goes. I know of only one person who makes a living at performance art. The people who have been involved in performance since the '60s have begun to see that they will never really get what the painters and the sculptors will get for their contributions. There's only the documentation and until I came along there was nothing. Most publications don't know how to handle it."

The LACE festival brought one especially unusual performer into the gallery environment. Usually a club performer, Johanna Went, along with her accompanists, Mark Wheaton on keyboard and Brock Rock on drums, produced a very powerful event which combined numerous elaborate costume changes, a multitude of props, and a musical assault that created a raw jungle-like feeling in the room. Went danced around with feverish energy, changing into costume after costume right on stage.

This was another show filled with blood and guts and sexual alienation. At one point she wore a huge penis between her legs and pranced around with it, finally cutting it up with a machete. She threw cold hot dogs at the audience and pulled a bloody baby from a box covered with plastic arms and ears. Finally, a paper-covered man with balls and a penis kills her, only to be killed himself by her reincarnation. As the paper man dies she cuts open his back and eats the yellow substance which oozes out.

Went explains how she plans her pieces: "What I do is more like a dance and a collage of visual images. I get things together and have an idea what I'll do, but the rest is pretty spontaneous. As far as why I do it, I don't try and make statements. I'm just a mirror of the environment. I'm not violent myself but I see things that are brutal. It's pretty abstract I guess."

Another performance artist whose work has received considerable attention recently is Stephen Seemayer. His new work, where he immerses himself into a sea of tiny skylines, deals with many of the same alienation issues present in other performances. But Seemayer brings it off in a way more digestible to the art public. Throughout Seemayer's other work the images of skyline, fire, and numbers present themselves regularly.

The skyline and numbers just represent a real loss of personal identity—that's why I wear the jumpsuit. It's like a uniform that everybody wears in one form or another. Fire is a focus for people, it attracts their attention and depending on how it's used can either help or harm you. In my work I try to give people a glimpse of reality—like when you are driving in a car and you see a situation on the street for a fleeting moment. You can't really stop or change it but it affects you. You can really freak people out if you want but what's the point? This image of the ominous angry artist just doesn't have validity anymore. Getting the point across is more important than shocking people.

John Duncan, and his friend Paul McCarthy, have created some of the most controversial work in the Los Angeles performance art scene. Duncan has been both praised and censured for his explorations of sex roles, violence, and self-destruction.

In the name of art and self-exploration Duncan has put himself into potentially violent situations where he narrowly escaped attack while dressed as a woman street walker in the pick-up areas along Santa Monica Blvd. He has done a photo narrative piece exploring his own suicide and confronted friends at their door with a gun to communicate to them what it felt like to be attacked.

Most of the people I know who are currently doing performance started doing painting or very composed-type pieces. They bring that training into what they're doing in performance and it shows. But rather than using performance as an end in itself, it just becomes a more fluid medium, like a different tool. The point of performance is what people are saying. I've gotten into a lot of trouble with a couple of my pieces. But for me it's a way to be really direct. The *Shoot* piece came out of an actual situation in which I was attacked. At one point I was sure that I would be killed. I waanted to learn more about the psychology of violence and death and attempt to communicate that fear to people that I knew. There's a kind of exhilaration present in performance that is missing in static work. It's also a tool to learn about yourself.

One of the most respected and articulate practitioners of performance art is Barbara Smith. Her explorations into being, both in life and death, have a very ritualistic quality. Her piece for the LACE festival involved a private performance in a small room of a residence hotel. In it she put a long narrow box much like a casket. A short statement on the wall outside the room read in part, "I believe that there is no body which, though violated, cannot be made whole nor any matter that is not infused with spirit." On the walls she encouraged

RACHEL ROSENTHAL was unbound from a wheelchair and stripped naked by assistants who tried to repair her imperfections. She was then covered with frosting and sprinkled with nuts.

STEVE FRITZ

people to respond by attaching a drawing pad and providing pens. It occured to me that this was part of the piece too, like correspondence between unknown friends.

When we got together in the lobby of the hotel to talk about her piece Smith began telling me about her version of the origins of art. "People began making art in ancient times as a way of preserving and communicating with people after they had died. They began making impressions of the face and later developed masks that were used in ceremonies and became the first objective art pieces. It was a way of preserving their lives."

Just about this time the hotel's manager, a man in his fifties named George, came into the lobby. He had worked with many of the artists during the festival, including Smith. "You folks gonna stage something?" he asked as he entered. Smith asked him if he'd enjoyed all this? "Well, I'm still puzzled," he said as he rubbed his jaw. "My reaction from all of it is I haven't gained anything as far as experience is concerned. I view it. But I can't make head or tail our of it. Maybe they understand it, but I just don't. And they don't explain it to me." Suddenly the polarities of the controversy came into focus. He couldn't get anything out of it. But you could tell all these artists' events were disturbing him in a way he couldn't understand. It didn't seem to mean anything but it was working on him nevertheless.

Getting back to ancient art Smith went on, "These people lived in small groups and really had no conflicts until tribes began to run into each other and battle. The whole ecology was broken up and the conflict produced the need for identity because identity grows amid uncertainty. That's the tragedy of consciousness and the history of human beings—the tragedy of uncertainty and not being able to keep in touch with your spirit. It makes the human journey more difficult. For me we're caught in that process and that's what the tension is all about. The political statements come from people who get caught in a cause, but it all arises out of the conflict that produces uncertainty."

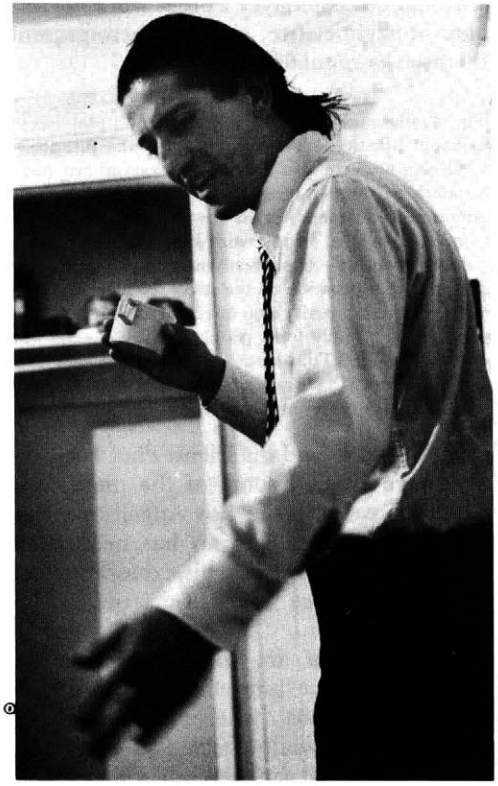
Nancy Buchanan's show at LACE dealt with the political issues of unchecked power in organizations like the CIA. She used a multitude of theatrical elements and presented a highly organized piece with both light-hearted humor and high drama. "My pieces usually aren't that theatrical," she told me.

There's been a lot of emphasis on the theatrical in performance. So I thought to myself—okay, I'll try to make it entertaining but I don't want to be real slick. I wasn't very theatrical myself, but I just had all this material and it had to be more organized. When performance art began to be done in the late '60s and early '70s the events were very intimate, very rough edged. People who came were mostly friends of the artist. It didn't have much publicity. We had very small audiences. Chris Burden's first pieces had about eight people. Everybody has heard about them now. But at the time there was hardly anyone in it. It was just a few of us. We're in a different time in the development of performance, but that doesn't mean that it should go into entertainment. Why compete with theatre and television? Those forms already exist. Still people come to these performances with expectations rather than a general willingness to look for what the artist has to say. The artist now has to get people's attention. Some people are more entertaining. Like Rachel Rosenthal who has a theatre background. I've always cared about the audience but I don't want to just entertain them. What I'm after is kind of a psychological connection. That's why I got interested in it in the first place. The immediacy of performance and the more deliberate creation of your work in the presence of your viewer is what really interests me. I think it makes a much stronger connection.

The personal nature of this medium also makes it a grab-bag for all sorts of self-indulgent expression. Under the guise of experimentation artists feel free to assault, re-arrange, and harass the viewer without consideration of how the message will be received. However, like George in the hotel lobby, some of the artists' intentions don't seem immediately apparent. The experience may not seem like much at the time but somehow a couple of days later it's still stuck in your mind. The image of Richard Newton, locked in the hotel room with white bread and TV tubes didn't strike many of the viewers in the hotel lobby that night. People kept wondering what he was doing for his performance. But it stuck: TV tubes and white bread. It stuck.

Steve Fritz lives in and reports on L.A.

RICHARD NEWTON



STEVE FRITZ

CAL ACTS

S.F. — ROBERT ATKINS

DEBRA HEIMERDINGER

THE WAY OF HOW **(Rinde Eckart, Leonard Pitt, John Duykers)**

The Bay Area is home base for a number of performance companies that walk a provocative and precarious line between art and theater. They present their work in either context, mounting productions for swimming pools or abandoned gas stations, artists' lofts, or proscenium stages. Their audience is disparate and they play to sometimes wild acclaim in San Francisco and Europe (recent residencies in Frankfurt, Paris, and Vienna attest to their European popularity) while remaining virtually unseen in New York and Los Angeles. Among the best known are Soon 3 (Alan Fineran), Snake Theater (now Chris Hardman's Antenna and Laura Farabough's Night Fire), and Jock Reynolds/Suzanne Hellmuth. With *The Way of How,* George Coates joins these ranks.

Director Coates is a product of conventional theatrical training. In a recent interview with Misha Berson, he noted that "My kind of theater is really a tool of perception." Familiar words coming from a visual artist, but unusual language for a director. Virtually everything about Coates' approach, however, is unusual.

Coates' latest work, *The Way of How,* is certainly no exception. It's a four man show comprised of John Duykers and Rinde Eckert, two tenors involved with new music, performance, and primarily with opera; mime Leonard Pitt and new music composer-performer Paul Dresher. The eighty minute show grew out of an intense, several-months-long collaboration between Coates and the performers. The results are hypnotically spectacular–a visual opera, for want of a better term, whose form pushes audiences to rethink (perhaps futilely) their relationship to what is happening on stage. A visual arts/performance perspective proves insufficient as do theatrical, musical, and dance/motion points of view. Only when intellectual resistance is overcome, does the seduction of the audience seem somehow more complete.

The Way of How unfolds rather than develops. It begins with an expository catalogue of objects, performers, and their special abilities. The acrobatic and musical skills of the performers are revealed through *arte povera*-style "props." Hula hoops, poles, and sheets of plastic are transformed into malleable, expressive objects. A wheelchair functions both usefully as a movable prop and perversely as a Duchampian readymade.

Meanwhile, Dresher, often positioned behind a Wizard of Oz-like scrim, produces live music using keyboard, guitar, and a tape processing system. His sonorous score incorporates Italian arias and found tunes in addition to his own compositions. Deborah Heimerdinger's projected slides frequently envelop the performers in patterned jungles that manage to marry the rigorous geometric abstraction of Sol LeWitt with the organic voluptuousness of Gustav Klimt. John Chapot's shimmering, inventive lighting literally illuminates the action, punching home connections between the performers and forcefully directing the audience's attention.

An audially-enhanced moving picture might better describe the combined—and often cumulative—effect of *The Way of How*'s various components. It is a tightly-woven visual and aural fabric whose seamless relationship of parts creates a symphonic ebb and flow. Its emotional range is wide: for me it inscribed an arc from wit to pathos.

What, you may be thinking, is *The Way of How* "about?" Essentially it is a process-oriented quest for form conceived of in the widest possible terms. The glacial formalism of what one fears early on might simply be another mood piece melts as dissociating devices emerge. Eckert attempts to divide the audience into sections for responsive vocalizing. Duykers enlists the audience's aid for an aria. These are moments of pure *shtick* which engage not just our attention but our complicity.

Coates is an expert manipulator of not only the audience, but the performers. He has long been interested in collaborating with *performers* who do not identify themselves as actors. He has previously worked with Pitt and Duykers, not to mention a belly dancer and a California state assemblyman. In *The Way of How,* by far his largest production to date, this results in a curious sense of skilled performers creating likable *personae* who are themselves, but themselves appropriately distanced and distilled, refined and aestheticized.

This sort of unconventional sensibility characterizes Coates and enables him to build something theatrical that isn't quite theater (or anything else). Coates is an artist who typically cuts across conventions of form in order to expand expressive possibilities. Like *The Way of How* his work is an ongoing act of creative demolition.

(Producers are currently negotiating an international tour that will take *The Way of How* to Europe in the summer and to New York in the fall of 1982.)

Robert Atkins is a S.F. critic who plans to move to N.Y.

CAL BOOKS

ROBERT COE

Performance Anthology
Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art
Edited by Carl E. Loeffler with Darlene Tong
Contemporary Art Press
P.O. Box 3123, Rincon Annex
San Francisco, CA 94119

Bob & Bob
The First Five Years 1975-1980
By Linda Frye Burnham
Astro Artz
240 So. Broadway
Los Angeles, CA 90012

whos listening out there
david antin
Sun & Moon Press
4330 Hartwick Road
College Park MD 20740

Arthur T. Johnson, a British visitor to California in 1910, "detected something elusively evil" there, reports Kevin Starr in his book, *Americans and the California Dream*: ". . . as if freedom, becoming license, were [sic] about to writhe back and gorge upon itself. Beneath the sense that all was possible, that anything went, lurked a baffled yearning for limits which in its frustration threatened to turn any minute into a repressive counter-force that denied the myth of liberation through which Californians mythically defined themselves."

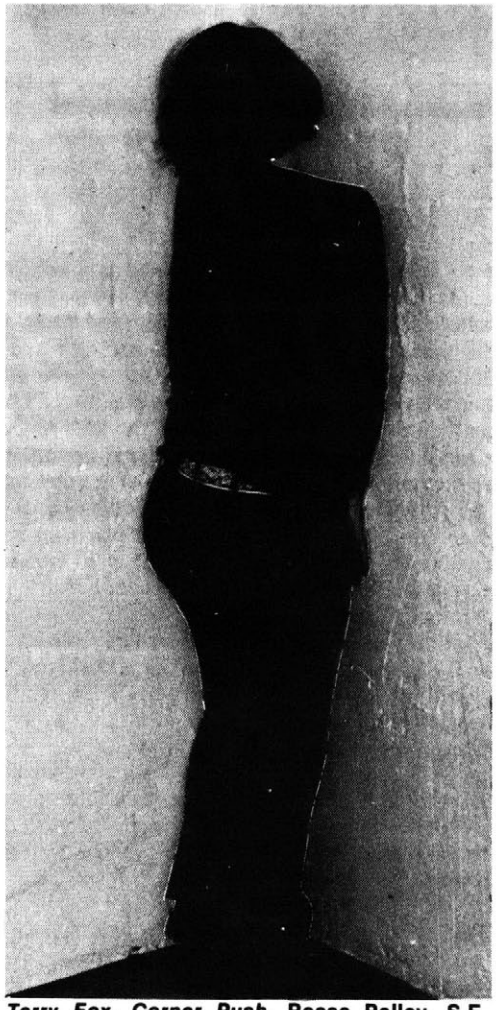
Johnson interpreted California's emptiness as license, and perhaps he's not off the mark. Freedom writhing back to devour its own tail: not a bad description of much of the work documented in *Performance Anthology*, a history of California events, actions and performance practice in the '70s. We presume that the relationship Johnson

John Duncan, *Scare*. L.A. 1976.Performing spontaneously for 2 successive nights, Duncan rang the doorbell of his friends and upon (their) answering, shot them with a blank pistol. This work was in response to Duncan being held up himself.
From *Performance Anthology*

sensed between license and evil—Ortega y Gasset considered this the fundamental conflict facing western culture as the result of modernism—is enfeebled by the sheer energy and revelation, harmless violence and self-reflection, banality and high spirits of California performance's decade-long hijinks. We might better ponder how California produced Chris Burden as well as Charles Manson, the Ant Farm and "The Love Boat," Bob & Bob and Werner Erhard.

Beats me why I think about it; as edited by Loeffler and Tong, *PA* doesn't touch on theoretical issues, even more obvious ones suggested by its regional bias. *PA* is largely just a chronological account of a remarkable body of activity by such groups and artists as the Ant Farm, Bob & Bob, Chris Burden, Terry Fox, Howard Fried, Allan Kaprow, the Kipper Kids, Paul McCarthy, Linda Montano, Bruce Nauman, Bonnie Sherk, T.R. Uthco, and many others. Regionalism may seem like a queer mantle to hang on the sloped shoulders of performance art anyhow, but as *PA* makes clear, performance (in California as elsewhere) is a homemade form, drawing on popular performing styles, political documentary, games, techniques for self-exposure, and expanding developments in 20th century visual arts. The four critical essays—by Loeffler, Linda Frye Burnham, Judith Barry, and Moira Roth—are thematic and descriptive, failing to qualify trends or place events in the perspective of an evolving/devolving form. The feminist viewpoint of Barry's and Roth's essays are the most clearly drawn, principally reflecting on performance's role in community-building—which is the purpose this "sourcebook" most clearly serves.

For outsiders, *Performance Anthology* is little more than an incredibly thorough collation of what Tom Marioni, curator of the



Terry Fox. Corner Push.* Reese Palley, S.F. 1970. From *Performance Anthology.

Museum of Conceptual Art in San Francisco, calls "an age (in art) of theatricality and decoration." Johnson's "repressive counterforce" is called "art" or "society," or at best "male oppression." That's pretty general thinking. In the day of the locust, where is the history of performance art's necessity? Even the vitality of pure gratuitousness deserves better accounting.

Bob & Bob (The First Five Years) is a paean to just how great those "art" guys really are. What they do is made for Linda Frye Burnham's pseudo-journalistic treatment—especially Bob & Bob's business merger/artistic counter-attack on the city of Beverly Hills. The transcendent irony of the unbroken pose: throwing the hip image of progressive/commercial L.A. back in L.A.'s face might legitimately strike some people as an irrelevance, but the joke is so thorough, so unrepentant, so insincere—you just got to laugh, you know what I mean? The colored pen and pencil drawings are pretty good, too.

David Antin once defined poetry as "uninterruptable discourse," and in *whos listening out there*—a transcription of a radio talk Antin delivered in LaJolla in the late '70s—Antin proves that in the postmodern era, the true gift of gab has become oracular. With a remarkable memory for personal history and anecdote, Antin talks to and about the sundry "ordinary" people he knows who might be listening over the air-waves, ending with a blow-by-blow of the Joe Louis-Ezzard Charles fight he watched on an early TV set back in his native Brooklyn. I didn't put the book down until he finished, and I wouldn't have turned off the radio either. Where the libido flows nobody knows. Conversation isn't supposed to be much of an art on the West Coast, but God knows there are enough people there with space for a monologue. As Raymond Chandler put it in one of his detective-murder stories: it's "a big sunny place where not much happens." What an opportunity.

Robert Coe is writing a book on American dance.


LIVING ROOM
THEATER
ENGLAND'S ACME ACTING CO.
STUART COSGROVE
2
3
4
5
1

Although there is no central impetus, Britian has recently seen the emergence of a new wave performance movement every bit as inventive as the musical equivalent of the last few years. The Acme Acting Company, though by no means comic in their intention, have much in common with "the guerillas of new wave humor" that congregate at The Comic Strip above Raymond's Revue Bar amidst the hard-core pornography of Soho. It would be unfruitful to insist that new wave performance is a conscious movement but it does seem that Alexi Sayle, Gasmask and Hopkins, 20th Century Coyote, The Outer Limits, the various exponents of Alternative Cabaret, and Richard Strange's Cabaret Futura have much in common with the Acme Acting Company: not only a commitment to new forms of performance but a concern for cultural *zeitgeist* and theatrical style.

The low-key publicity handouts for the Acme Acting Company offer an impressive array of performances for the stay-at-home spectator: "kitchen sink drama in your kitchen," *Psycho* in your bathroom, and *Apocalypse Now* in the comfort of your own home. Although the idea of performing live theater in the home began as something of a joke with no conscious awareness of similar ventures in the '60s, the Acme Acting Company immediately seized on the early publicity that their ideas generated and accepted bookings even before they had fully thought through the implications of domestic performance. They have deliberately tried to remain mysterious and frequently change their names in order to foreground the company's importance over its individual members. At present, and for the duration of this article, they will be referred to by their assumed names of Louis, Tim, and Jim Acme. (The company has recently been joined by their first woman member, Pippa Acme.)

Blanche Dubois (Tim Acme)

Initially they responded to requests for their performances by offering to do livingroom versions of well-known films and plays. They willingly accepted commissions, but soon tired of requests for home versions of *Ben Hur,* which forced them into the unenviable role of a spoof theater group. According to Louis Acme:

> If you do *Ben Hur* in someone's kitchen it's got to be a spoof. There's no way you can really approach it seriously. We are not into "spoof theater."

Nonetheless, the Acme Acting Company's repertoire is highly eclectic, designed to suit various tastes within the nuclear family. It includes specially adapted versions of *The Big Sleep, Psycho, Look Back in Anger, The Fall of the House of Usher, Eraserhead, Streetcar Named Desire,* and *Citizen Kane.* The performance space is the entire house and its surrounding streets. As Louis Acme says:

> When we ring the bell that's the start. Then we use all the rooms in the house. We really *live* the performance. It's much more intimate than the smallest theater could ever be. The drama spreads all over the house. When a character is not involved in the action he remains in character. Obviously, household pets pose a problem.

Each performance is planned well in advance; care is taken to ensure that the environment is suited to the performance and that the rooms do not harbor problems for the company's atmospheric style. Jim Acme:

> We go in advance to every house and size up the rooms for their size, shape, and atmosphere. You can visibly see people beginning to worry. They begin to think our preparation is a complex con and we are not really hired actors but burglars who have come to case the joint.

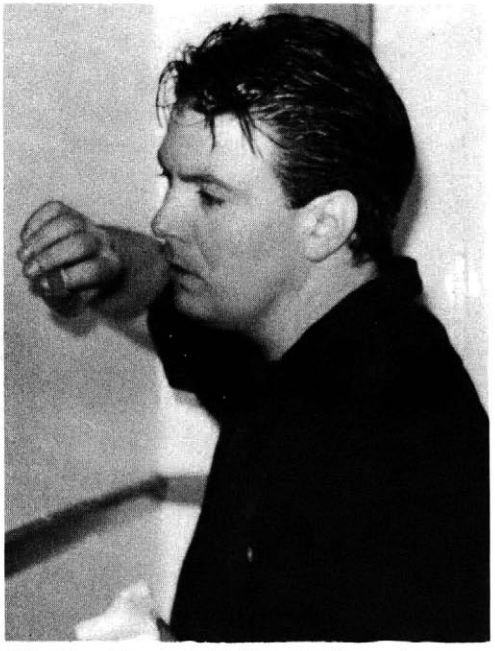
One of the Acme Acting Company's major regrets is the metropolitan nature of their audiences. Ideally they would prefer to reach more provincial working class

households, but reject the idea of "impositional" forms of performance such as street theater and agit-prop. They are currently working on very short performance pieces with the intention of taking them to housing estates and randomly knocking on doors to seek out an audience. At present the Acme Acting Company will perform during the day or night. Although their performances are rigorously scripted and rehearsed, they make use of any accidents, mistakes, diversions, or incidents that inevitably happen in the environment. During an afternoon performance of one of their most requested shows, *A Streetcar Named Desire,* the production began in an upstairs apartment but drifted out into the street and continued downstairs in a fruit store. In a less successful performance, an audience which was unaware of the demands of promenade performance sat stubbornly in their living room as scenes from *Last Tango in Paris* were enacted in the bedrooms.

From Louisiana to London on A Streetcar Named Desire

The sound of late night jazz can be heard above the conversations in the front room of Flat 1, 157 Goldhurst Terrace, London, NW6 when the door bell rings. At the door is a tall figure in a blonde wig and beige satin dress carrying a battered trunk and a small bag containing a tape recorder. The sound of jazz has transformed a modest London flat into the rundown New Orleans home of Stanley and Stella Kowalski, and the tall blonde visitor is the pathetic and vulnerable figure of Blanche Du Bois (Tim Acme). She reaches out to an unsuspecting guest, who is totally unaware that a performance is about to take place, and asks for an ashtray: the Acme Acting Company's stay-at-home version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* begins. Blanche shuffles nervously in the middle of the living-room floor while the audience looks around, as yet unsure of their role in the proceedings. Blanche lights another cigarette and the audience exchanges anxious glances hoping for some indication of the proper behavior.

The next fifty minutes are an amalgam of radically different modes of performance: ridiculous theater, hyper-realism, promenade performance, street theater and private vignettes. The Acme performance is naturalism of a sort, but it always places atmosphere over authenticity and mood over verisimilitude.



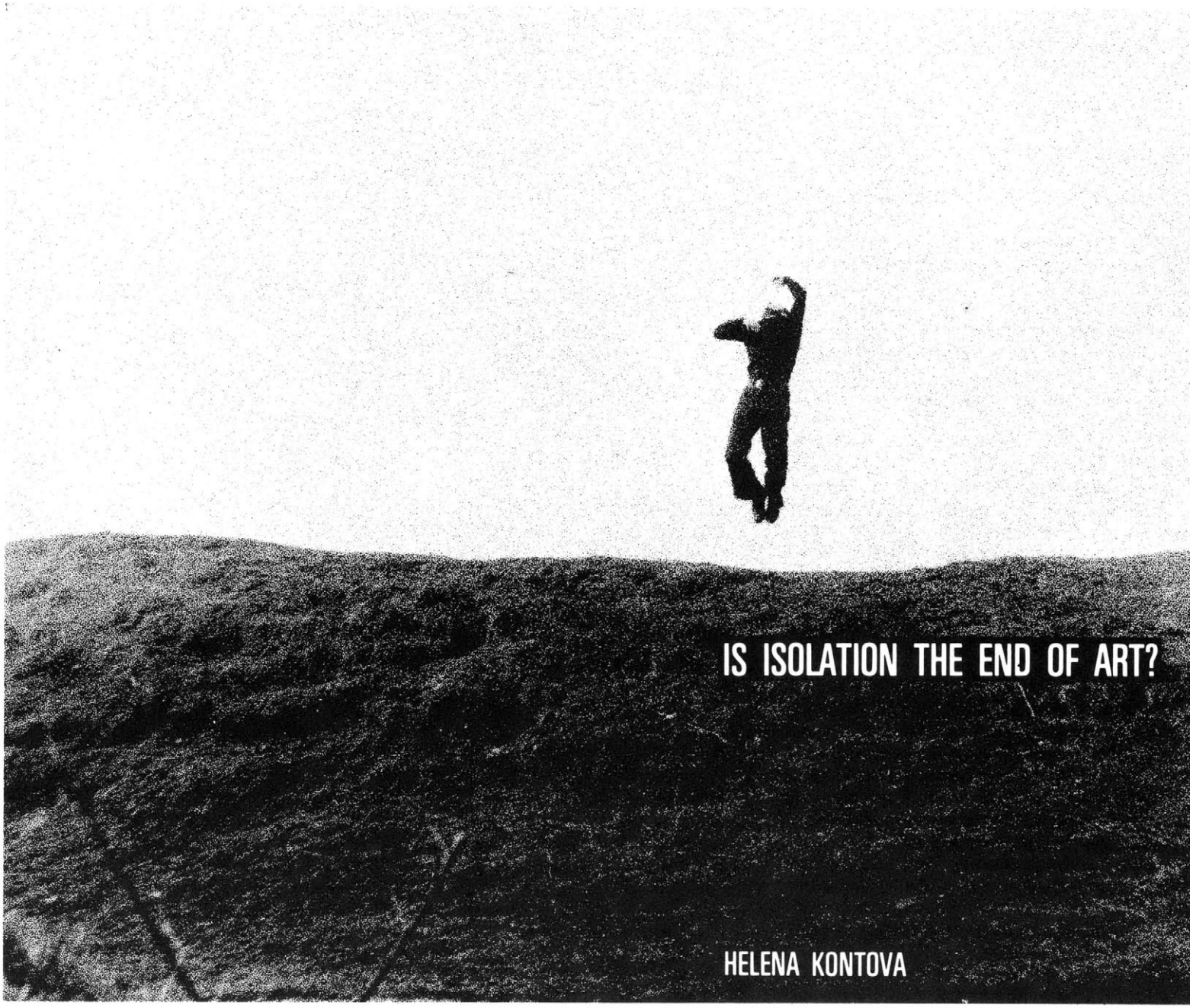
Stanley Kowalski (Louis Acme)

As the performance progresses, the audience begins to make choices. Some of them move to a bedroom to watch Blanche narcissistically prepare herself for the millionaire who never arrives, others choose to listen to a domestic argument between Stanley (Louis Acme) and Stella (Jim Acme). At one point, the exaggerated noise of Stanley's card party attracts everyone towards the kitchen. When Stanley attacks Stella, sending the birthday cake, the tablecloth, and glasses crashing to the ground, the kitchen is turned into a corner of mayhem. The audience members look to each other in disbelief as the kitchen where they previously drank coffee is turned into a domestic battlefield.

At times, the performance is conducted in three different rooms, and the audience moves around the house trying to catch the most compelling scenes. As the action moves towards the second bedroom, Louis Acme screams at them "Get the hell out of here," in a rare moment of direct address acting. The bedroom door is slammed shut and the audience is left to listen at the door as the confusion of the rape scene is simulated by noises, screams, atonal music, and the struggling bodies of Stanley and Blanche.

The performance ends when two of the company dressed as sanatorium nurses arrive to collect Blanche. They lead her out through the front door towards the street, but her exit does not conform to the usual ending of the play. The pathetic silence is overshadowed by a manic pavane as the Acme Acting Company dance in slow motion towards the late night shops on the corner of Goldhurst Terrace. The audience stands applauding in the street. Bourbon Street becomes North London, the neighbors look on as cars slow down to avoid the figures dancing into the distance. The house becomes a home again. The performance disappears.

Stuart Cosgrove is English.



IS ISOLATION THE END OF ART?

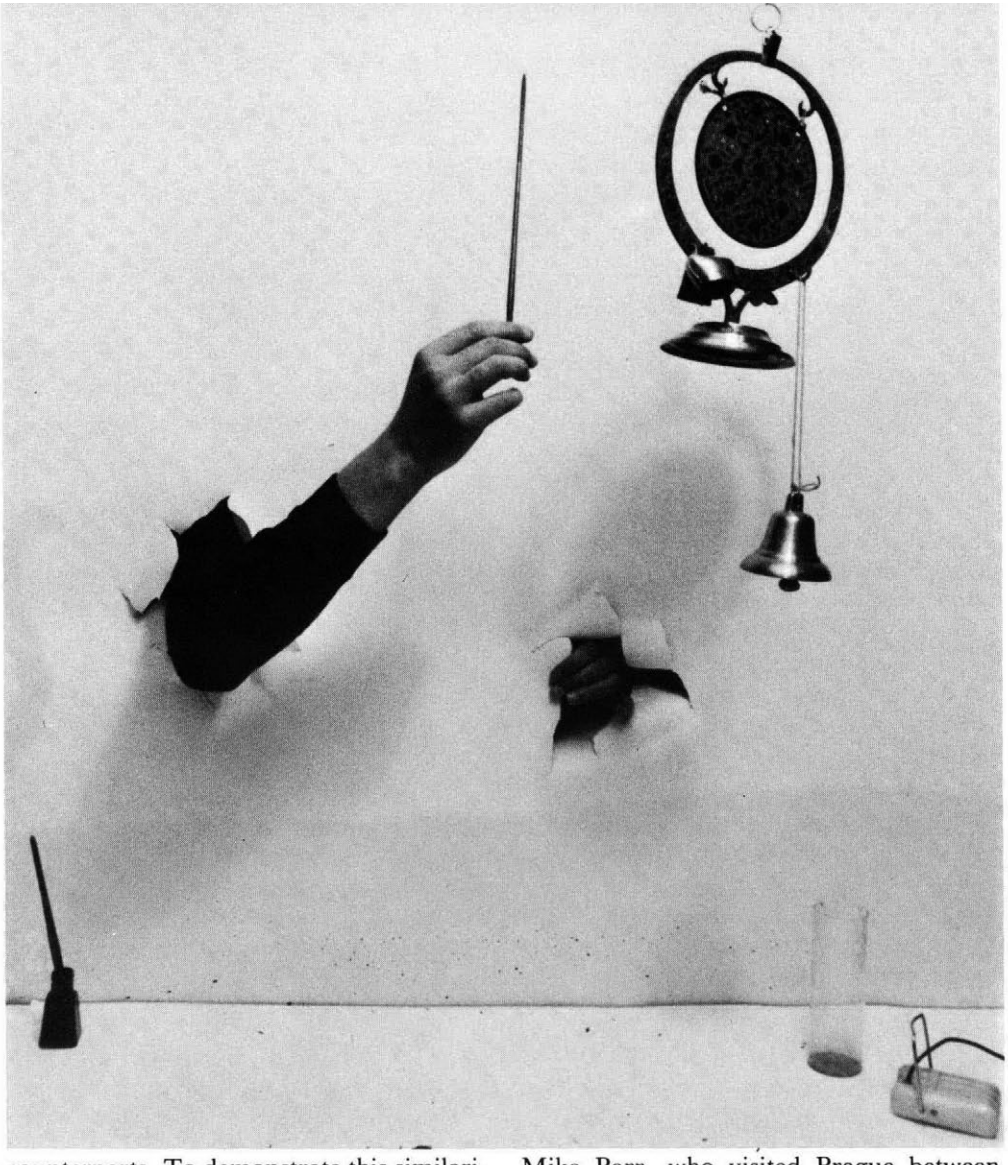
HELENA KONTOVA

***Overleaf: Closer to Clouds*, Karel Miler.**

Czechoslovakia is a relatively small country in Central Europe, separated from the West by ideological and cultural barriers. In fact, if we consider all the difficulties which one has to overcome in Czechoslovakia in order to keep in touch with recent developments in the Western avant-garde, it might be surprising for a Westerner to find that there are nevertheless some people whose way of making art can be compared to current trends in America and in Western Europe.

The magazines *Vytvarne umeni* (Plastic Art) and *Vytvarna prace* (Plastic Work), which reported recent developments in modern art quickly and accurately until the beginning of the '70s, have been abolished. Since then, artists, theoreticians, and art lovers interested in Western art have been able only to consult hard-to-find foreign publications (*Avalanche*, *Flash Art*, *Artitudes*, *Studio International*, *Art in America*, and *Artforum*, etc.).

The first personal contacts with Western performers (excluding Fluxus artists, namely Ben Vautier, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles and George Maciunas in the '60s) took place in 1975, when Tom Marioni visited Prague during his tour of Eastern Europe. He immediately found connections and similarities between certain Czech performers and their California counterparts. To demonstrate this similarity he and Petr Stembera executed a piece called *Connection*, in which both performers drew semicircles in milk and cocoa on their chests, forming a full circle when they stood next to each other. During the performance, the material on the artists' bodies, was slowly eaten by ants. Marina Abramovic, Ulay, Chris Burden, and Mike Parr, who visited Prague between 1976 and 1978, limited themselves to discussions and comparisons of documentation of previously produced pieces. All these meetings took place before a selected audience. Live art became the patrimony of a small group of people without the possibility of communicating with a wider audience.



JOSEF PROSEK

***Acoustic Drawing*, Milan Grygar**

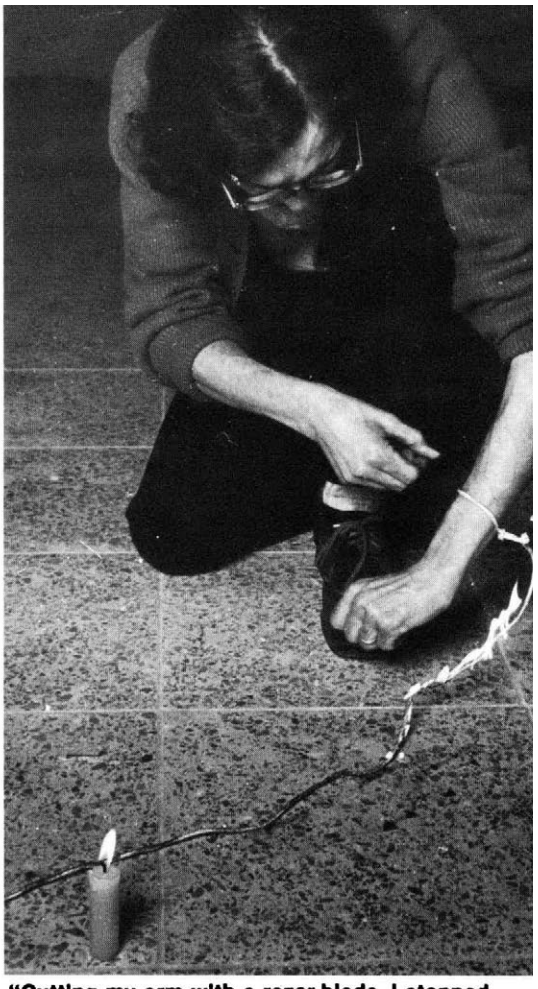
At the end of the '60s artists lost direct contact with the cultural centers of the West, retaining only a vague notion of the atmosphere that generated Western art during the '70s. Only a few of the many expressive possibilities which conceptualism and post-conceptualism had to offer were accepted in Czechoslovakia, namely those which Czech artists felt were still relevant even in circumstances vastly different from those under which they had arisen. We may find a lot of objective and personal reasons why only meditative and ascetic performances were felt to be important, and why spectacular and entertaining performances met with no success. And it is not surprising that Mail Art became quite popular during the '70s among artists wishing to communicate; it was one of the few ways of overcoming isolation.

If we search for the roots of the '70s performances in Czechoslovakia, we find that they do not lie in minimalism and post—minimalism, as in America. The performances and actions of Petr Stembera and Karel Miler date from the same years as the objects of lyrical minimalist Stanislav Kolibal and Milan Grygar's audio-spatial drawings. The first action of a conceptual nature, *Transportation of Two Stones*, was executed by Stembera in 1971; Karel Miler's *Bud' a nebo* ("Either-Or"), in 1972. Hence it is not Czech minimalism, but the action art of the '60s, and other forms grounded in pop art and new realism that provide the basis for '70s performance. Particularly important in this connection are the happenings of Milan Knizak's group Aktual, the acoustical drawings and mini-happenings of Milan Grygar, the actions of Zorka Saglova, the formally ambivalent objects of Eva Kmentova, and the happenings and land art projects of Eugen Brikcius.

Knizak's happenings in particular foreshadow, by virtue of their physical and moral exigencies, some of Stembera's ascetic pieces. Knizak's activities always required that the audience carry out the action. In *Tezkytobrad* ("Difficult Ceremony," 1969), the artist asked his audience not to eat or drink for twenty-four hours. However, the early performances and actions of Petr Stembera, Karel Miler and Jan Mlcoch applied a fundamentally different approach: they were chiefly intended for the artists themselves.

Indeed, many artists stopped trying to communicate with others for some time. Petr Stembera, for instance, executed ascetic actions between 1971 and 1974 (staying up for several days without eating, sleeping, or drinking) without documenting his actions with written texts or photos. These pieces clearly were not made for communication with other people, but simply for the feelings and experience the artist had during their execution, just as in therapy or yoga exercise. Karel Miler made body art-like actions to be photographed, but without any audience present during the actions themselves. He often used a self-timer to take photos which were shown to a very limited, carefully selected audience.

At the same time, Jan Mlcoch, who, together with Petr Stembera executed the first conceptual performances in Czechoslovakia in 1974, was writing his diaries and taking down his dreams. This private activity was quite important for his early performances, particularly *Vystup na horu Kotel* ("Climbing Kotel Mountain," 1974) and in *Ptaci* ("Birds"), both of which were practically projects realized from his diaries. As diaries, of course, the books were not intended for others' reading, but only for himself. Milan Knizak also



"Cutting my arm with a razor-blade, I stopped the fire with my own blood."
***Extinction*, Petr Stembera**

became convinced that it was possible to arouse intense feelings in people through silent contemplation, alone or with his family and close friends, without the participation of a wider public.

After several years of isolation and privacy the activities of Stembera, Mlcoch, and, in a certain sense, Karel Miler, underwent significant changes in 1974. The activities of these artists took on a new form more communicable to others: "California"

style conceptual performance, as represented by works of Terry Fox and Chris Burden. Karel Miler continued his actions for the camera, but began to publish his photographs in foreign magazines and to take part in exhibitions outside his country.

From the beginning Stembera's performances were centered on a few themes: Narcissus and the relationship between the natural and the artificial. The notions of self-inflicted torture, accepting pain, and connecting oneself to other people or objects (even those with which complete physical connection is not possible) characterized all his performances. For example, in *Stepovani* ("Grafting," 1975) he grafted a branch into his hand in the manner usually practiced in gardening, causing a severe inflammation of his hand.

Jan Mlcoch, like Stembera, was putting his body into inconvenient situations in his performances. But if Stembera expressed his ideas through complex symbols, Mlcoch stayed in at the level of direct facts. Having emerged from the realm of private activity, he continued in his performances to isolate himself from the world. In *Birds or Hanging* he blindfolded himself in an effort to fall asleep. In *Interrogation* he shut himself in a separate room after asking someone to send in a girl whom he had previously chosen from the audience. He chose someone who had come to a performance of his for the first time and did not know his work. Once inside he began to interrogate her without letting anyone outside know what was going on behind the locked door. After the interrogation he sent the girl back without coming out himself.

Karel Miler's actions have remained practically unchanged from the first *Either-Or* until today. His art has never been based on direct communication. The photos remaining from his actions may be compared to pictures more than to documents; instead of documenting what happened, they show the substance of the action. Instead of the real time of a documentary photo, time seems to stand still in his photos as in De Chirico's metaphysical pictures.

Jiri Kovanda joined the Prague circle of Miler, Stembera and Mlcoch in 1976. Since then he has executed performances mainly in the streets of Prague. His timid acts, chiefly directed toward contact with passers-by, are so simple and direct that they are rarely suspected of being performances. This idea of invisible action was carried furthest in *Theater*, in which the artist performed, on the street, preestablished movements chosen in such way that it was impossible to recognize that they were being guided by a scenario.

During the last few years Kovanda has left actions and made several installations, placing simple things such as rope, flowers or sticks in completely empty spaces, thus returning to the spirit of the minimalist object. But in comparison to minimalist objects Kovanda's pieces are fragile, unstable, and lyrical. Instead of referring to the object's physical material nature they refer to its existence.

After 1978 the frequency of performances produced by the artists discussed here rapidly diminished. Many performers who were doing body art and similar performances in the West left these activities for other fields, such as painting and installation. In Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere, the sense of executing such performances was called into question, and artists were faced with the decision whether to continue their work in a different art form or medium, or to abandon the art scene altogether. Many chose the latter option; in fact, the only one who is still active is Petr Stembera, who recently produced performances concerning the influence of the mass media on living subjects. The others, for the most part, have returned to introspection.

"The great artist of tomorrow will go underground" was one of Duchamp's last statements. According to Duchamp good art can exist in our society only outside the art world and its system. This was a general opinion in the '60s and '70s; we are now witnessing the rehabilitation of the art system. But in Czechoslovakia there is nothing to be rehabilitated. The art world in the Western sense had never really existed there. The official Art World continues to refuse certain trends of contemporary art whereas the unofficial scene has hardly any possibility of existence, and the West is too far away.

What remains is introspection and private spiritual excerise. After Duchamp this might be considered art, but for these artists the question whether their activities are art or not is not important anymore.

Helena Kontova is an editor of *Flash Art*.

TORONTO REPORT

MARTHA FLEMING

In the early '60s in Toronto, there were three television shows that all the kids watched constantly. All three were broadcast live from the Toronto studios of the state-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. In retrospect, and in thinking about contemporary performance, these three live low-budget shows produced for the entertainment of Canada's future voters take on political and aesthetic significance.

The *Friendly Giant* had one set: a window in a castle wall made out of heavy cardboard. The "Friendly Giant" stood outside the window and talked to two puppets; no jumping around, no color—they just talked for half an hour every day. This wit-for-four-year-olds was followed by *Chez Helene,* a program meant to teach English-speaking children French. Helene (a matronly Francais-Canadienne) entertained a puppet mouse named Suzi in the kitchen. This was, of course, in the days before Canada had two official languages and the show was good-heartedly patronizing towards both the French and the girls. Later the CBC gave us *Mr. Dressup,* also done live, in a set made up of a stylized garden and housefront. "Mr. Dressup" dressed up. A couple of times during each half-hour show, "Mr. Dressup" disappeared into his house; a full forty live seconds later he would emerge in a new get-up and sing another song. These shows taught me to look at TV as a talking information device, at media images of minorities (women, French speakers, gays), at dressing up as entertainment—in short, CBC's official culture as performance *and* social commentary.

So when I first saw David Buchan's *Fruit Cocktails* I had this feeling of *deja vu.* Like "Mr. Dressup," after a short introduction Lamonte Del Monte (Buchan's performance alter ego) went behind the set to "slip into something more comfortable." Performed as part of Fifth Network/Cinquieme Riseau conference held in Toronto, *Fruit Cocktails* now exists as a videotape, which is how I saw it. The Fifth Network presented eleven performances within the context of a symposium on media and its social impact: Buchan's was one of them, appropriately so since Buchan wanted to expose the physical, social, and moral structure of live studio entertainment.

Cameras littered the many makeshift sets. The audience for the performance piece doubled as the piece's studio audience—you know, the people who are always laughing at something that the home audience can't see. While mike booms swung and extras ran from set to set, cameras were clumsily trucked about the stage obstructing the audience's view, and Buchan got the audience to respond on cue to an applause sign. All this plus ratty dance numbers, performed by the Del Monte Fruit Cups and torchy lip-synch renditions of "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" had the effect of flattening the audience and the set into two opposing planes, mediated by the camera for each other and for the home viewing audience who couldn't be there that night.

This "who's the show for anyway" attitude was also seen in General Idea's interminable audience rehearsals for their *Miss General Idea Pageant, 1984.* In both cases, by applauding for a sign, the audience validated not so much the performers but their own reason for being there. Yet, what at first appeared to be a strain of art world, in-group camp bagan to take on more truly political significance when placed in the context of real political oppression.

Performance in a State of Siege

A little history: On December 30th, 1977, the offices of the *Body Politic* (Canada's gay liberation magazine) were raided by the police and all kinds of materials, including the subscription lists, were seized. Charges were subsequently brought against the *Body*

Politic for "use of the mails for distribution of obscene material." The material in question seemed to be an article entitled "Men Loving Boys Loving Men," a journalistic critique of pedophilia included in issue thirty-nine of the magazine.

The outrage against infringement of the freedom of the press and a terror of "morality" crackdowns galvanized the art community. Six performances were presented at a benefit to raise money (to cover legal fees), consciousness and community support for the *Body Politic*. The Clichettes, an all-girl performance group with an astute and quirky way of making

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The Clichettes at the Body Politic Rally

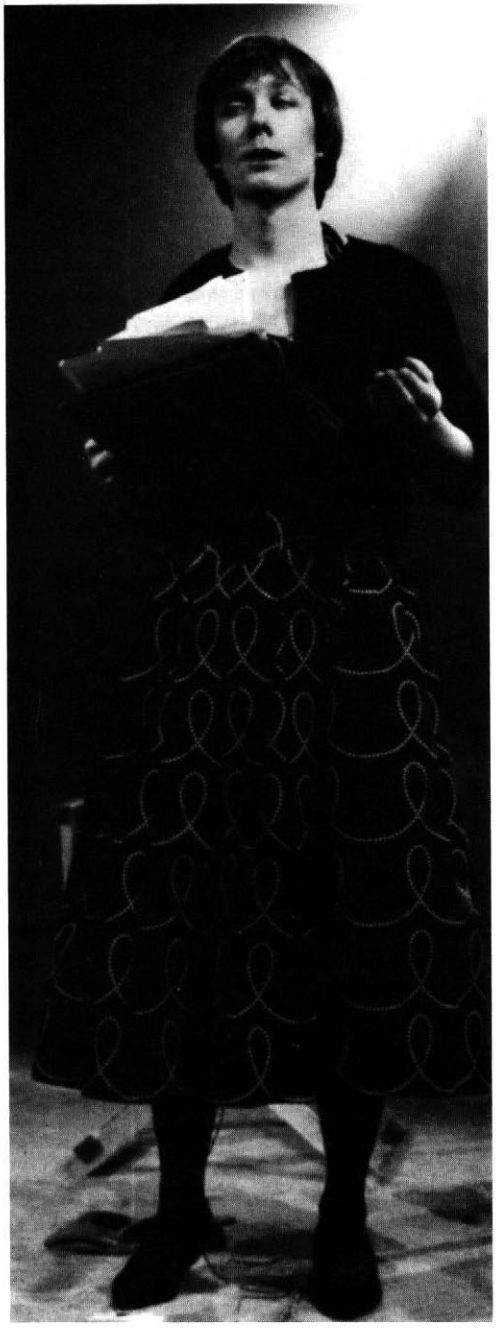
pop culture comment on itself as both social gauge and perpetuation machine wound up the evening with their lip-synch rendition of "You Don't Own Me" in dressed-to-kill early '60s period costume.

Don't tell me what to do
Don't tell me what to say
And when you go out with me
Don't put me on display

The situation was this: performance artists, long contained within the politically hermetic boundaries of the downtown art scene, became responsible to a sector of their constituency. Or seen in another light, artists, as a constituency sector of political movements, such as gay liberation, became actively politicized. No matter which way you look at this equation, its logarithmic expansion occurs in the crystallization of solidarity in moments of crisis such as this one. A new, actively politicized genre was born.

Video veteran Lisa Steele presented her first performance work at the *Body Politic* benefit. *Mrs. Pauly* expanded Steele's concerns as a feminist and a worker at Interval House in Toronto, a half-way house for women with or without children and who were battered physically or emotionally. Stumbling up to the mike wearing dacron pajamas and an elastic headband, "Mrs. Pauly" described the possible murder of her daughter's illegitimate baby. *Mrs. Pauly* threw a different light on the chronically crisis-ridden situation of involuntary social disenfranchisement for a predominantly gay audience.

Local band TBA's indicting song, *Straight Guys,* popped up out of the musical underground with prescient timing just before the suspect arrest of three hundred men in four gay baths in Toronto in early February. This arrest took place just a few weeks after the city lost its liberal mayor in a swing-to-the-right election, and a few weeks before a provincial election that had been called by the incumbent conservative government. This was the largest group arrest since the War Measures Act was imposed on the country during the 1970 "October crisis" in Quebec. The response to the arrests is still growing. One of the fundraising events organized by the Right To Privacy Committee (a gay acivist group whose membership swelled to one thousand after the raids) was an evening of performance on April 2nd, 1981. And again, the



performers' materials were implicitly political.

David Roche's *Dirt Is My Profession* uses class analysis cliches to expose sex and sexuality as underlying dilemmas which resist such simplistic analyses. Sweeping up the aisle in a '50s cocktail gown with Hoover in tow, Roche's drag appears at first to be justified by the fact that he seems to be "playing" the part of employer in a housewife/cleaning person relationship. But slowly his drag becomes an emblem of a subjugation which knows no class boundaries.

Another response to the gay situation in Toronto was John Greyson's *Aspects of Contemporay Gay Culture,* at the Harbourfront Centre last August. This performance's explicitly gay content enraged the higher-ups in the Harbourfront organization and a movement was on to cancel the performance. In reaction, all the other artists involved in this large, month-long exhibition threatened to withdraw. The Harbourfront curators backed down.

Ironically, *Aspects* was a fictitious symposium of fabricated newscasts from "CGAY Radio" chronicling the cancellation of the event by the "authorities." During the day-long performance, both gays and straights turned up to sit in on seminars only to discover that they had been "cancelled."

Greyson's self-cancellation got its point about oppression and self-censorship across, but he also managed to get some information out in spite of himself. Everyone who came was given a "symposium program" full of listings of films, books, authors, and media heroes of the gay cultural world. The Toronto art community has experienced a shift in concerns and structure directly related to the mainstream swing to the right. A re-alignment has taken place, made necessary by the real endangerment of artistic and human concerns. Three prominent artist-run organizations (Fuse Magazine, The Funnel Experimental Film Theatre and Canadian Images, a film festival) are all in court with the Ontario Censor Board over art material on tape and film. This shift in concerns and structure is seen in the forming of political fronts by artists (such as the Cultural Workers' Alliance) and in the use of art performance as a political tool within a social context, and in new notions about where art performance should take place.

Political Ideas and Moral Questions have, of necessity, become the new "alternative spaces" in Toronto. Performing in a state of siege alongside the gay community, Toronto performance artists are beginning to close out their accounts at the old, antiquated gallery "bank." Performers are choosing to carry their performance tents on their backs, ready to erect them whenever four like-minded people gather to be the metaphorical tent pegs. And although "benefits" still mean free labor, at least that labor now goes towards the creation of a situation that will eventually support artists socially rather than perpetuating an economic status quo which even alternative spaces (with their necessary dependence on government funding) must by a part of. The shift is from alternative action to aggressive, head-on opposition.

Martha Fleming now lives in Montreal and writes for *Parachute* and *Art Forum.*

Lisa Steele (right)

David Roche (left)

COURTESY FUSE MAGAZINE

SPACES AND FESTS

PAULA COURT

Mayfest, **Re. Cher. Chez. 11 shows in 3 weeks at Mabou Mines' studio workshop featured lots of low-rent high-tech, choral dialog, gestural-presentational performing, and movie-scene structures to lay out socio-political-personal-mythic subjects. Highlights: *Incidents* (Bonnie Greer and Ethan Taubes' punchy, political choreopoem based on a slave narrative, *Term: Oil* (Fernando Doty—see p. 30), and *Things Happen But They Change* (Retirees Theater Workshop), a hilarious essay/poem on clerical work. Photo: Giovanni Marotta: pure prosciutto in *Things.***

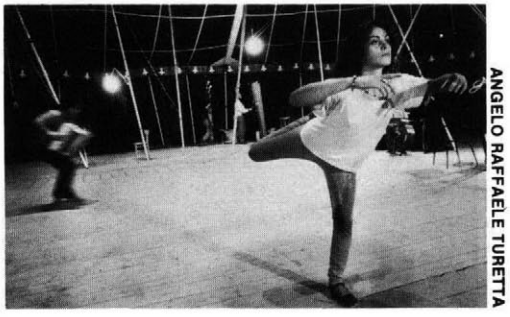
TERI SLOTKIN

Aluminum Nights, **Bonds. The Kitchen's 10th Anniversary celebration in two long nights. Highlights: the first night's musical buffet line-up of homemade heavy metal Zev, Bach-rock Philip Glass, explosively dissonant DNA, rocking Raybeats, sweet synthesizer Feelies, and an awesome *Ascension* by Branca. Night Two: Jill "I'm So Ashamed" Kroesen, David van Tiegham's robot mime, Rhys Chatham's devastating Din, Maryanne Amacher's grinding electronics, and Laurie Anderson's apocalyptic media tunes. Photo: *Turtle Dream Waltz,* Meredith Monk's song and dance.**

Noisefest, **White Columns Gallery. 30 plus bands in 8 sweaty June nights played art-rock which was mostly instrumental, often dissonant, and always loud. Highlights: Dark Day's murky drone, Jeffrey Lohn's orchestral Bach-rock, Sonic Youth's lush blasts, Red Decades big-picture beat, and Rhys Chatham's devasting Din.Photo: Rudolph Grey and co.: noise ne plus ultra.**

JEFFREY SCHWARZ

Spaziozero d'Aprile, **Spaziozero, Rome. A month-long Italian multi-media extravanganza in a circus tent. Highlights: *La Gaia Scienza's* neo-New York "club performance" (Italian soul band, disco, *Johnny Guitar* projected overhead), American dance-theater (Steve Paxton, Jana Haimsohn, Meg Eginton, Roberta Garrison), and Italian music/dance/theater performances. Photo: the cacophonous, disjointed, violent dance/theater work, *Latitudine Nord,* by Lisi Natoli and the Spaziozero group.**



ANGELO RAFFAELE TURETTA