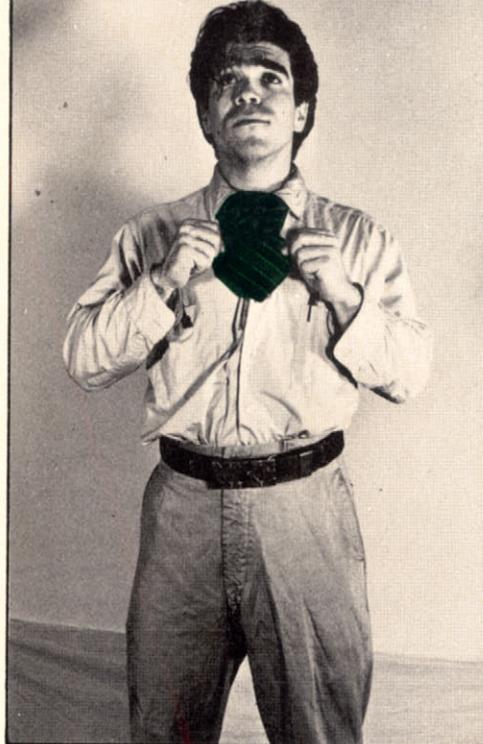


PERFORMANCE ART 2

BETTER GET READY FOR THAT PARTY...
THINK I'LL GO WITH A WINDSOR KNOT
TONIGHT.



HMMM, THAT LOOKS PRETTY GOOD... HOPE
THEY LIKE MY NEW SPORTS JACKET.



I THINK THEY'RE WEARING THEIR COLLARS
UP THIS YEAR—



**Comedy • Acting/Non-Acting by Scott Burton, Ruth Maleczech,
Michael Smith, Elizabeth LeCompte, Laurie Anderson •
L.A. Sounds • Rachel Rosenthal • Artist-as-Businessman •
New Music, New York • Reviews**

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CLOWNING AROUND

Tony Mascatello

Gleason and Duchamp,

(Commedia and Sitcoms,

Body Sculpture and Pratfalls)

It is clear enough by now that comedy of the most vulgar kind asserts itself at the center of the art community as a prominent concern of performance art. What is perhaps unclear is why such diverse artists as Julia Heyward, Michael Smith, Ralston Farina, Robin Winters, Jean Dupuy, Laurie Anderson, and many others not only perform comic material, but also employ comic forms and personae for the transmission of non-comic material. As performance art gropes for an independent existence apart from theatre, one sees that the clown has been among the first on the scene, enjoying the chaos attendant upon the birth of something new, and filling in the gaps with characteristic gestures.

To begin with, it will be useful to distinguish between verbal and physical comedy (wit and



PANTALONE

clowning). And it will be well to keep in mind that clowning remains what it has always been, an antidote to reason, a fertilizing white magic.

Then one considers the beginnings of art performance in the minds of turn-of-the-century painters. Art performers' collage events—this is an extension of painters having incorporated bits of the real world into their canvases. When Picasso placed a real object within a painting, he witnessed the coming of Surrealism. When Duchamp shaved a comet into his scalp, the painter's very body was incorporated as material, comic material in fact. Process art transformed verbs into nouns. The performer seemed bound to become a puppet.



THE HONEYMOONERS—

Art performers looking beyond props confront themselves on stage and are puzzled. If not an actor reading lines, then what? A painter or sculptor to begin with, but now? On stage, even if only as his own stage hand, the performer is forced to acknowledge his own presence. It is rare to find a trained actor doing art performance (which is not to say that one does not find similar issues being explored within the theatre).

The art performer has been a painter upon a stage, manipulating his event. A persona is sought, a way for the non-actor to act on stage. The stand-up comedian, the pop singer, deejay, emcee, the magician have all been influential. And since the painter, like Chaplin's Tramp called upon for words at the end of *Modern Times*, is at a loss for them, physical gags and slapstick forms assert themselves, and words become sounds. Ralston Farina is a magician without tricks, obsessed with timing. Julia Heyward and Laurie Anderson explore the notion of speech as sound. Gilbert and George stand there sculpturally. Michael Smith deadpans. The art performer's sources include the

popular media; his lineage extends back through the commedia dell'arte to the Etruscan Atellanae and the Greek satyr plays where theatre is born of sophisticated fertility rites. Priapus is the prototypical clown. Dionysus was the popular god.

Faced with the problem of stage identity, of persona, many art performers, referring to the popular media, seem to have adopted the comic mask. Chaplin reinvented commedia for our time. Cinema was new, chaotic, improvisational, and vulgar. According to Chaplin, "nothing transcends the personality." The repertory gestures are unified in it; the hobbled walk, the trouser hitch, shrug, cane twirl and flex, the image of his silhouette, all describe the same faun-like little man. Chaplin did not invent the mask of the tramp, however. He was born to elevate this vaudeville character to the heights once reached by the great Harlequins who were revered by the kings and literati of their time. His personality is the lifeblood of those silent gestures which the world has recognized as art.



THE SECOND HONEYMOON

Television was a kind of new, proletarian cinema. In its formative years, it thrived on the work of superlative clowns. From Milton Berle through Sid Caesar to Jackie Gleason, clowning yielded to sit-com. In Gleason, finally, there coexists a brilliant clown alongside a merely tolerable (because of text) sit-com actor. This split accounts for the derision in which both he and Jerry Lewis are often held. Because it is Gleason's repertory gestures that have all the power, the variations on the slow burn are what we anticipate with delight. In the explosion of his pent up fury his absurd persona becomes incandescent, his growl delightful, his gesture sculptural. These meaningful moments are set pieces, gaining power from continual

repetition until they reveal themselves as unchanging objects, not events. They are placed within the simple plot to be deliciously anticipated like the drop in a roller coaster.

The terms "mask" and "role" are interchangeable in the commedia. And the mask was in more ways than one a physical thing. The face piece and make up, the actor's typical postures, his bearing, the shape of the body, were all aspects of the mask, unified by the personality of the performer who identified with the role. The clowns of the commedia often played a single role for life, rarely more than two. That the masks were mythic, and the plots simple paths along which the great ones walked sustaining themselves with

banter and gags, is history. Improvisation was the rule, and highly prized as part of the performer's technique. Difficulties in transition were filled with specialized bits of physical comedy (*lazzi*) which every performer held in repertory, and with which he or she was often associated. These gags (body art) were eagerly anticipated by every star's fans who, it seems, watched as well as listened to their idols. The nobility sustained the commedia as art.

I recall waiting time and again for Gleason to explode at Art Carney's provocation. I yearned to see again the exquisite timing, the coming together of performer and his mythic image. I watched the limited repertory go by

dozens of times, and came to see not only Kramden's gestures as objects, but his relationships as well. They are so simple, his wife and his best friend, both of whom provoke his anger and his love to excess. In either case, Ralph becomes part of a mythic pair. Like Stan and Ollie, Ed and Ralph are fixed in the relationship of the slow burn. They do not change; they never change. And they are physically a traditional sculptural unit, Fat & Skinny doing Punch & Judy. All the classic commedia masks were performed with puppets, despite the stress on physical prowess for the stage roles. The comedian's profile, his image, was re-stated by Chaplin, Keaton, and Arbuckle in the improvisational welter of early cinema. Not only their persons, but their gestures and events were sculptural, both in concept and in their physicality as film.

The comic form is a short form, perfect for new beginnings, thriving on improvisation. If art performers working in this mode succeed in the long term, will they be creating art or comedy? Or a new hybrid form? It is notable that art performers do not always go for the laugh with comic forms. This helps to maintain demarcation between the performance event and the play. The art performer, like the painter, may have a positive manifesto on his mind, yet the work has a life of its own which has nothing to do with writing. Of course theatre also may deal in images to the exclusion of words, but a difference is evident. Despite art performance's having sprung from plastic arts, the art performer is



Roy Export

THE CHAPLIN REVIEW



HARLEQUIN

an actor. By virtue of his being on the stage as the center of attention, he seems defined as such. The difference is in the performer's role as author. He is forced to act, but within his own non-theatrical construction he may act as he chooses. And so the non-actor moves himself through the work, a kind of divine puppet, manipulating his own strings. Only the personality clears the fence in this case by providing a means whereby the gestures become characteristic and acquire meaning.

Tony Mascatello acts up
in New York City.

ACTING / NON-ACTING

Until recently, most New York performance was thoroughly anti-theatrical, for motives ranging from ideology to ignorance. But almost overnight, performance activity has shifted from confessional and formal gestures to theatrical entertainments. Such a quick and quixotic change puts some basic issues up for grabs (narrative, autobiography, materials, staging) and I asked several performer/directors to comment on one of the most significant and elusive topics — acting/non-acting.

John Howell

SCOTT BURTON



Do you think of your "Behavior Tableaux" performances as a theatre-performance hybrid?

Ten years ago it was fantastic that, as a work of art, art could be a live event. But within a couple of years, that in itself was no longer enough. I think one began to be bored when the time element was not manipulated. Back then, it was just fascinating that an event could be plastic art, not theatre. Not to be Greenbergian ... but after a while people had to face up to the inherent nature of the medium which is keeping people's attention occupied through "X" number of minutes. So I found myself very conscious of how I would have to direct time.

ACTING / NON-ACTING

Does that mean you adopted a dramatic structure?

Not dramatic in my case, because it's just one thing then the next thing. I wouldn't want it to be dramatic. You know that Merce Cunningham said "Climax is for those people who like New Year's Eve."

So you think performance can be theatrical without being dramatic?

The nature of the performance medium is inherently theatrical, even if it's not the theatre of writers, directors, and designers, which is such a schizophrenic product, usually a pseudo-collaborative effort. In my earliest performances, I used myself conceptually, but when I started using other people, I became aware of being a pseudo-director of a pseudo-theatre. My early performances were very intellectual gestures . . .

I've been sort of stage-struck all my life. I was very close to going into the real theatre at one point but the people in real theatre have mediocre minds. My mother took me to the Alabama State Fair where I saw Gypsy Rose Lee, and I remember these strip tableaux as making deep impressions which have profoundly influenced my performance format.

Why did you begin to use other people in your pieces?

I think because I loved the theatre and wanted to imitate it. I wanted to deal with elements of costume, lighting and sets, as well as directing, but in a very Walter Mitty way. That's the only way you can when

you're one person. Artists' performance is an integrated form, not a schizophrenic one. One person is responsible for everything.

How does that work when you include other performers?

It was a breakthrough for me. I used the people like models. Like my furniture, the behavior tableaux are pseudo-sculpture. When I work with the models, I just touch their bodies and push them around.

Concrete gesture and meaning are the same thing.

Are a lot of their poses conceptualized beforehand?

I get an image in my head, then I try it on them. Then I re-arrange, alter, edit, and try to clarify. But it's not schematic. I try to make the setting and costumes look like they don't exist. I try to be on the edge. It's very carefully planned but it should look like it's just that way. The tableaux are secretly completely theatrical, but I try to make it look sort of real. The costumes, for example, are carefully edited street clothes.

Do you get images from the people you select as performers, as well as from your own image bank?

I always use tall, slender men. For one thing, their limbs carry well at the great distance that I use. That linear clarity is the main thing. Also, the uniformity of look is very

important. I try to make them look similar but not identical. Not so different that you get involved with personalities, but not so similar that they're like robots. It's not about a we're-all-machines idea.

Then what makes it performance art instead of theatre, given your terms?

I'm working on a new piece that's very involved in costume and narrative, which is as theatrical as I can get. In the behavior tableaux, the people are treated in some ways as automata which must link me with De Chirico and the whole surrealist thing about mannequins. In a way, I use performers like dolls.

What happens in a rehearsal?

The performers are very carefully rehearsed. They have counts, moves, and cues—what they call blocking in theatre. From their point of view, it's task-oriented, but from the audience point of view it's not. The audience sees an image or a representation or a re-enactment, but the performers are trained to do it as a task.

Is it difficult to keep out what you would consider extraneous material?

Very hard. They can't be too good and they can't be too awkward. If they're not really in their own bodies and stumble around, their movement is not invisible and it is distracting. If they're trained performers, especially dancers, I just have to sit on them to keep their gestures where I want them. The best performer I ever had was a musician who

was a performer, but not an actor or dancer. He had stage presence and consciousness, but it was his own, it wasn't a persona.

So you're really muffling any projections.

They can't really project except through gesture because I have so removed them. You can't tell it, but I use a whitening make-up on the eyebrows and the lips to erase the face which my 50 to 75 feet viewing distance does too. So the only projection is through supple movement.

Do you think of it as dance-related?

I'm not involved with dance. I want to stay away from that because my work would suffer greatly by comparison. I don't want my performances to be dancery.

Do you try to teach or develop a performance attitude as to the particular tasks?

No. There's no self-expression.

Do you think the audience reads expression from their actions?

What is to the performer a task, the audience sees as a representation of an action, an avoidance or an approach in a gesture or a display.

And you don't want the performers relating to that?

What the audience sees is not a task but, ideally, my representation of an action. It's pictorial rather than literal. I want the performers to just do the specific job.

How do you feel about that quality in the current wave of entertainment performance?

The turnaround time was so short. Performance used to be lying in the gutter on 14th Street, now it's *Saturday Night Live*. The old attitude toward the audience was indifference/aggressive, and it wore itself out very quickly. So it seems natural to swing the other way. And, the examples of people like Foreman and Wilson, Yvonne Rainer and Merce Cunningham, the great theatre performance artists, had a great influence on this theatrical kind of art performance. Also, a lot of conceptual performance turned into body art and nothing is more boring. It was important when Acconci first did it, but it degenerated into what I call the I-do-this-you-do-that school.

There are some performance precedents for theatrical works, Fluxus, for example. These events were built on whimsical timing.

When I first saw Ralston Farina, I thought he was Fluxus reborn. I never saw Fluxus, but he seemed like that spirit. He was an early referent to theatre, but amateur theatre, like the kid next door who was a magician. The original performer, the primary figure for everyone from Warhol to Acconci, is Jack Smith.

How do you choose your performers, and do you project on them?

There is some self projection but I'm not really aware of it. When I changed the figure from a woman to a man, it all came out. I used

I don't believe in the artist as his or her own subject matter.

to use women before I began to work with behavior content, but there's something personal and projective about that kind of material.

There's a sub-text to what's shown?

No, concrete gesture and meaning are the same thing. I work to make sure I've gotten the essential gesture that is as clear as it can be to the audience. I don't want mystery, I want them to understand the form of gestural and spatial communication that goes on between us all the time. There's no sub-text because that's a narrative concept. In the behavior tableaux what I want people to become aware of is the emotional nature of the number of inches between them, or how a person uses an arm as a barrier to communication. I want to be didactic and explanatory but there's all kinds of other content which creeps in that I don't care to go into. I don't want to think about the psychological content.

So you try to keep yourself out of it while you're in it?

I don't believe in the artist as his or her own subject matter. First-person performance can be good but I don't think it's that great. I've done performances about the self but I consider them very minor. I'm not a personal ar-

tist, I don't believe in the validity of that stance.

You prefer to be objective, almost mechanical.

It's very cut and dry, almost schematic, but it's schizophrenic because I know the audience gets this other stuff from it.

Then, unlike "schizophrenic" collaborative theatre, performance art is schizophrenic solitary theatre. But, you know there's more personal content than you've let on.

I know there's a certain homosexual content which I do not put in. But somehow it comes out. The actors never do anything sexual. The audience may see something like that but it's not there.

Do you think gay or straight people look harder for that?

Straight people see it more. But I can't deal with that, so I just ignore it. A long time ago I did pieces with a homosexual content, and I'll do that again in a new piece which features a series of sexual self-presentations. But there's no overt sexual content in the behavior tableaux. *Group Behavior Tableaux* is about a stable peer group, then an unstable peer group, then a hierarchy with one at the top and four below, then a hierarchy with one below and four at the top. *Pair Behavior* was about strangerliness, acquaintanceship, intimacy, estrangement, alienation, aggression, and avoidance. *Individual Behavior Tableaux* is about what is called aggressive displays, threat, appeasement, and sexual

displays, what one would call art poses, not for plastic but behavior reasons. I don't know who gets how much of that how often, but that's the way I think about it.

RUTH MALECZECH



As an actress, do you feel that when you perform you pretend to be someone else in a time different from the real time of the event? And is that a useful distinction between acting and non-acting in performance?

I always call myself a performer because I think the term actor or actress implies what

you've just said. It implies the adoption of a part other than my part. But I also think that a theatrical performer is more compelled to search in areas that a performance art performer would rather avoid. That is to say, those areas which are sometimes embarrassing—psychology, emotion, feelings—and hard to deal with. It's easier to pretend that they are not material and therefore not to deal with them and make a process performance. But I don't like to define performance and performance art because I don't think there's any difference in a way. It depends on the depth to which you're willing to go to find out what's in a performance. Most performance artists content themselves with much less in-depth looking, maybe because it's not as much fun. I think performance art is more fun.

What about those once-popular performances in which heavy psychological, personal material was offered in presentations which were very naïve by theatrical standards?

Naïveté is like a mask in performance art. It's an escape to be able to say I'm not really a performer. But it's true, you don't see that very much any more. Now you see quite skilled performance art, equally skilled as theatrical performances, and that's why it's more interesting now because you can talk about it as a field, as an art. In a theatre of the kind I work in, what happens in performance art is very important. If you're only dealing with emotionalism and psychology, you won't make very interesting theatre. It'll

look like thirties theatre; it just isn't good enough—it won't make art. So it's important what goes on in performance and in the art world in general. There's some kind of median line which has to be struck wherein the theatrical performer is performing rhythms and dynamics and the subtleties of those things in the same way as she is dealing with psychology, with words, and so on. The reason that area has been opened up to the new theatre is through performance art.

Did Happenings affect theatre as you knew it?

Happenings presaged what's happening now, but they didn't really develop it. They were spectacle events geared for perceptual changes. But I think it starts with a post-Judson time when Yvonne Rainer and people like that became involved in the idea of live performance as art. These gray areas that had been missing in the Happenings and that had been totally left out of the theatre began to emerge then. If you can somehow get a skilled theatrical performer to be able to think and develop along the lines of performance art, I think you end up with a better performance than without that kind of exposure. I also think a performance artist who has some background in visual art or music is a better performer than someone who is simply a standup talker. Where you cross-fed these ideas is where you get really good and interesting work. And there's more and more of that happening all the time now. Not so long ago the theatrical performer dealt with character and role, and the performance art-

ist with "my" personality, and neither of those attitudes are completely true now.

What other changes do you see?

There are very sophisticated developments in performance art, for example scripts and relationships to language which didn't exist at all earlier.

Mabou Mines used to perform primarily in galleries and museums, and I remember that the reactions you got from artists were praise for the visual and plastic elements, and reservations about the use of acting.

Exactly, and I think that's probably still true about our work, that idea that all of this stuff could be seen better without the presence of all that feeling.

I don't know if it's so true now; those distinctions seem to be breaking down. What do you call a show like Jack Smith's recent version of Ibsen's *Ghosts*?

It's really hard to figure out whether he is a performance artist or a theatrical performer. I always think of him as a brilliant theatrical performer, I love his work, but I know he's not everybody's idea of theatre. The most interesting people are those you can't really categorize. While allowing for the presence of the internal workings and motivational structure of a performance, our company is always trying very hard to straddle that vague line. For example, we don't perform much in museums any more, but almost every piece we've done has had its first performance at Paula Cooper's Gallery. We owe

a lot to that world because it taught us things that kept us from being a regular theatre.

And theatre as you found it when you came to New York pushed you toward that kind of influence?

It wasn't interesting to play parts in other people's plays anymore. Also, it probably wasn't interesting for directors to do new interpretations of often-done plays either. Something else had to happen performance-wise, and a connection to the art world has changed not only our theatre but others as well, and it's very easy to see which theatres have been influenced and which have not.

There are very sophisticated developments in performance art, for example scripts and relationships to language which didn't exist at all earlier.

It's not just due to performance art, but to Grotowski's idea that it was no longer necessary for the actor to realize the author's intention when he wrote the part. Once that became clear, then a piece becomes the story of the lives of the performers. So the context is changing and within that changing context, you see the life of the performer. We're not really working with any material except ourselves.

If performance art has contributed to this big

shift in theatre, what about the performance art idea itself?

Performance art doesn't seem very radical to me.

Is that because it stands outside of art traditions?

But isn't there a very long history of performance in art history?

Yes, but I don't think that means performers know very much about it or care to. I think most performers started out as painters or sculptors and were attracted to performance because the standards and expectations were up in the air.

But I still think they're under the thumb of having to make art.

I think that's true for those who still perform in galleries, and who make drawings, installations, and video works as well. But I think there is another kind of performer who is only a performer, and who works outside the gallery system, usually in alternative spaces which include performance in their programs in a major way.

Some of the people with whom I work and myself are starting a studio to explore these kinds of questions, because I think we're all a little confused and very happily so. It's a good confusion because a lot of good work is going to result from it. What is it that makes one narrative form not quite a theatrical performance? What element is it that allows an audience to be so objective, so passive, that is

so unlike a theatrical performance there is nothing to draw it in, there is simply something being presented for the audience to see and hear? That area which is and is not performance, and which is and is not acting is the most confused and the most interesting one right now.

What do you think is the essential difference between a performance artist and a performer?

A performer is not on the outside of the piece showing it. The nature of a performance is performing, and to do that you need an outside eye, someone who is looking at the performing of a performance to see whether or not it matches the ideas of the performance. In other words, whether or not you can translate an idea into a moment.

Do you think a lot of performance artists conceptualize pieces that they can't realize? And do you think they care to realize them?

When you're a performer, you're doing it with everything you can do it with—with your body, your voice, your mind, your sense of rhythm, anything you can draw from your past, and so on. There is a whole other way to look at that which is to show an idea the performer has, to make an interesting piece about how that person's mind works, how that voice talks, and to hear what she has to say. Maybe the difference is gray, but they're not the same. A performance artist is more likely to perform her conceptual mental picture of what a performance can be

because that's what she is already equipped with. That's another skill that can be developed of course.

MICHAEL SMITH



How do you think about "Mike," this character you've created in performance, and Michael Smith? Can you keep them apart, or do you try?

I'm probably more confused about it than most people who've seen my performances and who know me. That character moves around much more slowly than I do, for example. It definitely comes from me, what

"Mike" does, but there's a difference. I feel very comfortable with the character. I have a certain sort of affection for him, though not when I'm playing him because I really become "Mike" when I'm "Mike."

There are some comedians who do characters, like Red Skelton or Lily Tomlin; then there are others who appear as entertainment versions of themselves, like Rodney Dangerfield who presents "himself." Do you feel closer to a comedian like Dangerfield?

I feel closer to Dangerfield because I'm exaggerated, or rather in my mind I'm exaggerating, but I don't think it comes out that way. Some people, like Jackie Gleason, create caricatures, and my character isn't like that. I think "Mike" is a sort of condition, and where he is is just an exaggeration of my, or somebody else's, way of being here.

When you think about "Mike," do you have qualities or do things that you give to him, or do you decide that since he was such and such a person he should do this action or talk a certain way?

I think he came out of a play on words. Somehow I came up with this phrase: "the blanded gentry." Then I started thinking about "Blandman." I wrote letters to a lot of people asking them what they thought blandness was. What I wanted was a script from these people, hoping they would tell me what Blandman would do...

My interest in comedy really comes from an interest in timing, that very slow delivery. I

think "Mike" is the character who allows me to be very slow and demand a certain amount of attention. Also, I think most of my humor is visual, he doesn't say much.

When "Mike" disco-danced along with the Osmonds' tape in the Rec Room, is that something you do or something you thought "Mike" would do and then learned?

My interest in comedy really comes from an interest in timing.

That's something I've been thinking about for years. When I first saw Donnie and Marie, I was impressed with their incredible production. I think they're insidious, but awful in an incredible way. The first time I saw them, Donnie did three types of music: he was on ice skates, he was underwater in scuba gear, then among some explosions, and there was a little bit of country, a little rock and roll, all this glitter, everything kept moving, and he looked the same in everything. That's real blandness, and that's why I did that bit.

When you think about timing, do you think about it as helping create that particular character, or as a technique in itself?

The way the words come out, the deliberateness, says a lot about "Mike." But also, I'm getting better at the delivery. There's a certain amount of skill involved.

Does "Mike's" character create a situation

and then that becomes the performance, or do you think of adventures for him to have?

I think in fragments really, and then put them together to get a story. But the story always comes last. I have such a hard time putting a story together that I thought a good solution would be to use the same story over and over and do different things within it.

Were you ever in a real play?

No. This movie I'm in is the first time I feel like I'm acting. I was a painter, and I get a lot of my ideas from the way I draw. I don't know how to draw very well, but sometimes a drawing mistake will suggest something.

How have your performances changed as you do more of them?

I've gotten better at dancing, at economizing, and at getting things going. I'm very interested in polish, how to keep the show going. In my first routine, I was my own technician and I incorporated a dialogue with the tape machine, which I turned on and off, into the show. But now I don't think I need to be a technician.

Are there things you would like to do in a performance that you feel you need to study to do?

After I learn how to do something to use it, I don't develop it anymore. I learned juggling and baton twirling, but just the basics, enough to do them. Tap-dancing is the only thing I've sort of stuck with, although I'm not very disciplined. I would like to learn some

acrobatics.

What about things actors study?

I think I want to take some voice lessons; I could learn a lot about projections. But when I learned how to juggle, I looked at the end of the book and saw a picture of this guy juggling a tennis racket, a garbage can, and a chain. I wanted to be able to do that, but I realized it would take a really long time. I wanted to be able to go right into it at that level.

Would "Mike" ever do anything that you didn't know how to do and so would have to learn?

I don't think so.

Do you want to make up other characters?

Yes. There's this guy, somewhat along the lines of "Mike," but he's older, about forty-five, his stomach is over his belly, he wears a thick white belt. This guy is a little more active, he initiates more action than "Mike." So far I've really only got the outfit in mind. And then there's my "Baby" character, it's grotesque, he looks like a little ape. He wears a bonnet, a white diaper, and a t-shirt, and he walks and talks like a baby. He's four, and only has a one-word vocabulary: horsey.

ELIZABETH LECOMPTE

Nancy Campbell



How do you describe what you do as the director of Spalding Gray's pieces?

What I do is organize spaces and people and make situations—really make worlds—and I make them wherever I am.

Were you hired as a director?

I came in as an assistant director to Richard Schechner. I was a performer for a while to explore the other side of what I liked. Then

Spalding and I talked about doing a piece together, so it was a very natural evolution.

Did you feel like you were learning about theatrical performance or "performance" performance, or did you think about it like that?

In *The Performance Group* there's lots of room to develop because there's no overriding aesthetic, there's no one way of doing anything, which allowed me to develop in a way I wanted to. With Spalding, we have a very good combination of my interest in space and form and in the structure of a psychological performance, and in his interest in performing, in confessing, showing himself. Also, I think *Dionysus in 69* definitely bridged the gap between the theatre world and the art world. Structurally it was non-linear, and it broke open a lot of ideas about theatre space. That piece should have been a bridge, but I think the aspirations of the people who were involved were theatrically-oriented. The performers wanted to be great actors but they had no sense of or interest in the meaning of the piece, its concept. They wanted to be told what they were to do and to do it well; the director was the person who made that concept. In performance art, and even in theatres like Mabou Mines, everyone is interested in some way in the concept of the performance, not solely in their performance within the piece. I always felt that that kind of performer had a much greater intellectual stake in the performance itself.

In performance art terms it's unusual to have a director, someone who stands outside a

work and helps shape it. How do you direct a performance made up of someone else's very personal material, material which seems beyond question or criticism?

I'm so involved with form I could put anything into a structure. It has no personal meaning for me when, for example, Spalding hands over tapes of his grandmother talking. I'm totally involved in the form of it although I think that's a mask for the content for me. The way I'm involved in the content is through the form and the one that I choose exposes some kind of content—but I don't know what it is until I've chosen the form.

So you don't judge the material or worry that such personal content might lead to a performance dead end?

I don't because I don't have any stake in that. I don't have to deal with it.

(Spalding Gray walking through room): Last night I openly read from my diary to forty people and told them exactly what was happening in my life and waited for someone to comfort me. That's what I think Sex and Death was about, simply recounting my life. I also think I'm right at the edge of stopping performing.

How does that affect the director?

If Spalding stops, I just get somebody else as a performer. Not that I wouldn't want to convince him to keep going but I have to go on.

(Spalding Gray): I want to see you stop with

me.

I know and I would try to stop with you because I don't see any reason for going on in the grand sense of the word but I can't help going on. For me it's a compulsion to make order out of chaos, I've spent my life doing it, and it doesn't have to do with personal material. Somewhere I'm not trying to be understood, I'm not trying to communicate to an audience. I'm just trying to make some sort of pleasurable order that will make people like me.

What kind of things make a pleasurable order for you?

That's impossible to explain, it's totally intuitive. Usually they're the shlockiest things—emotional, sentimental junk with no narrative, just moments. What I do then, since I am embarrassed by these moments, is to make performances with all of that emotion cut with what some people call cynicism, what other people might call coolness, just because I don't want to show too much cheap sentiment.

Do your intentions ever clash with Spalding's?

I'm so involved with form I could put anything into a structure.

No, because his intention is totally removed from mine. His intention is to show himself, advertise himself, and he trusts that I'll make him beautiful or intelligent or attractive in some way to the audience. It's an act of faith. And it's an act of faith on my part, that I trust that he is those things.

And he never does anything in performance that you object to?

There are a couple of gestures he does that sometimes rub me wrong, that just don't satisfy my vision of him, and I'll try to stop those. Sometimes he'll balk a little about that.

What about the other performers?

I have disagreements with other performers sometimes, but not very often because we're all involved in an act of faith.

So as performance mechanic, you're immune to issues like the controversy over the use of recorded tapes by people who didn't know they were being recorded, or who specifically asked that a recording of them be played publicly?

No, not immune really. What Spalding played with with the subject of his material is what I played with in that very controlled visual field, the "dangerousness" of the edges of the material. By "dangerousness," I mean a certain kind of sappy romanticism and cloyingness about the illness of his mother. I walked that line all the time in the piece in the personal material and the decisions about why and what form and how to use it.

Is it hard to repeat personal performances?

No, all performance is physical actions. As a director, I can give the performers a physical score where they can forget that any of the material is personal and see it just as a series of actions that they must perform in front of an audience. What I do is make a score that is in essence an abstraction. Now the solo pieces are a little more difficult, but they still have a very small and tight form.

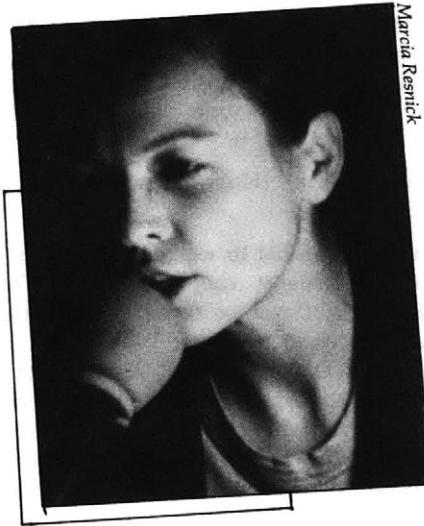
Could you imagine that Spalding would come with some material you would object to?

It's hard to say because that's hypothetical, and the way we work is that he says something and I'm excited about it, and I say something and he's excited about it. When that stops happening, then we'd be working in a normal collaboration. I know we don't have a normal collaboration because we would have argued a lot more. There's something else going on, something symbiotic.

ARTISTS

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LAURIE ANDERSON



Marcia Resnick

You don't call what you do in your performances acting, and it isn't just personality either.

I would call it talking styles. For instance, I've used about eight talking styles today, starting with a phone call about a death in the family and talking with my mother, then screaming at the lawyer in my most efficient, business-like style. A lot of audio stuff I've

done has drawn on that—you could either use the filters you already have or, as I like to do, use electronic ones. The first songs I did like that were *Songs for Telephones*, half normal voice and half through a telephone filter, that voice of New York social life: "Hi, how are you, we should really get together sometime." Things people keep saying and that's the total sum of the conversation, just social jive talking that everybody does. I do it all the time. Since I work a lot with tape, I get used to hearing myself, and when I listen to myself talking with other people during the day, I realize how many styles I actually have, and it's a lot. So the extent to which I use any idea of acting is to use those different forms of voices.

Also, acting sometimes meant, and probably does mean, acting out.

I've been finding out a lot about acting just from moving. For years, most of my work was just standing around with my hands full of my violin. The latest piece I did [*Americans on the Move*, see PAM 1.] I considered a breakthrough because I was able to move my arm. I had a lot of gestures I wanted to put in during the snakecharmer song, gestures that were almost a sign language, beginning with a hand-waving thing, then a shrug, and so on. Also, it was a kind of two-handed duet for boom stand and microphone which came much more naturally to me than trying to think of a way to move, just because I had something and it was making sound.

Do ideas come from your equipment or do

you work for certain effects you've thought of?

It works both ways. A lot of times I just sit around here and tape things, play with microphones, until something suggests itself. That tends to be a more organic way of going about it, although there's some thinking going on. When you get an idea and then try to do it, it almost never sounds like you think it's going to. I find it's best to start with the sound to suggest what's going to happen.

Do you remember the early reactions to your first performances when it seemed to be important whether your stories were true or not? Do you think of acting as pretending to be someone else, and non-acting performance as concentrated pretending to be yourself?

In a way, yeah, and I've just begun to realize how much I love doing that. Part of it is just the attention, and the other part is the idea that if this experience is going to happen, it has to happen exactly now. It isn't a plan for anything else. You have to be right there and make it happen, and that's really exciting to me to have to consolidate my energy for that kind of presentation. No other part of my life is like that. You only have that one moment to make this work or not.

Are there things you've thought of as material that you wouldn't perform for some reason or another?

Yeah, but I can't talk about them for the same reason. I've never said anything that I

felt uncomfortable saying. I'm familiar with that squirming feeling when somebody's telling something personal and you don't want to hear it. I always felt it was a mistake being labeled as an autobiographical artist. I never felt I used that kind of material as primary stuff but that it was fitted into this structure that made it something else. It was just a certain content that I felt directly connected to and used. You cannot not project yourself in some way.

So you think of yourself as a character in a performance in the same way you think of yourself as a character in life?

Exactly. But I've started using "you" and "they" a lot instead of the first person in performance—which is probably the main shift in the last few years. "I" is almost completely out of it at this point. I use "I" only as someone who has gotten some information but not as a prime subject, more as a sideline observer. If I use "I," it's very peripheral to the action.

And what does that do for you?

It makes me really free and I'm happy about that. You can get pretty narcissistic with "I" very quickly. The worst part was performances which used "I" that I had to do a number of times. I didn't like that at all.

Because you would have to present something apparently personal that you didn't feel?

Right. I've repeated a lot of pieces in song formats and I feel fine about that.

Do you think that the "I" out of it makes Americans on the Move more theatrical?

Probably, and more political too, more didactic. I've been using "you should" a lot. I'm attracted to the power of that statement, you can follow it with anything and it becomes immediately interesting, not just "I think" but "I think you should," and that's a different kind of assumption, a more political one.

Is that directed to the audience? Do you feel different about them since you address the audience that way?

I think differently about the world now, and insofar as the audience represents the world, yes.

Do you feel more like a conduit for material than a focus of it now?

You cannot not project yourself in some way.

Yes, it's much more a function of pointing to diagrams really, saying "Look over here" and doing a sort of waving action.

Do people still confuse "you" with Laurie Anderson, the performer?

Not now, but it used to happen. People used to think I was their friend because they knew so much about me, or thought they did. I used to get letters that were quite personal. It was

too much for me to handle, although I was enough of a voyeur to be interested. But I didn't know what to do with the information. Now the letters I get are much more factual, which I like, and full of data.

You also used to wear white gowns in performance and now you wear a black outfit.

I used to wear white so that I could be a film screen but more than that, to separate that sort of activity from everyday life. Very ceremonial, now that I think about it. Lately I like black a lot, I don't know why.

Which can also be ceremonial.

Right. Someone called me a funeral director.

Do you ever think you're somebody else when you're performing?

I have a vague feeling sometimes, but I don't know who it is.

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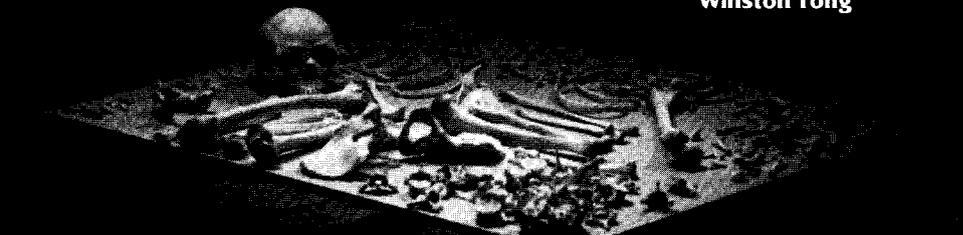
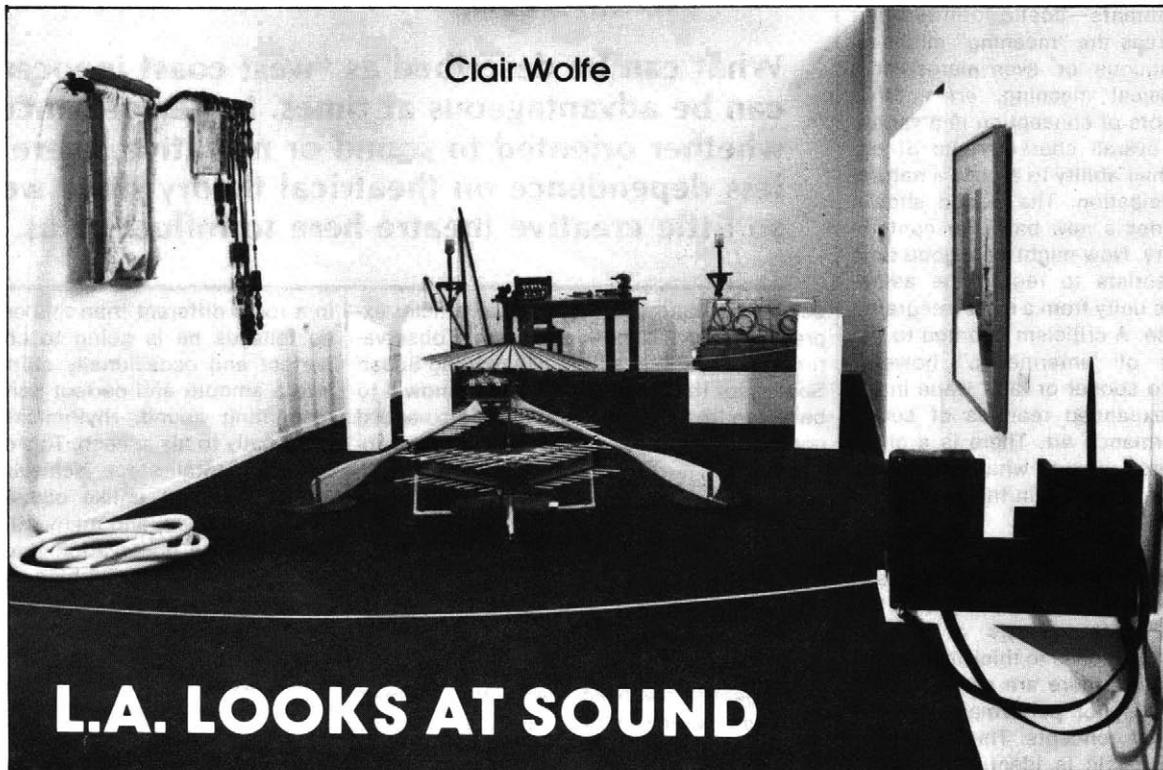


photo by Shigeo Anzal from performance by Matt Mullican

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When the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA) realized the importance of introducing the public to the multifold activities of artists working with sound, there were no really clear-cut ideas on the essential nature of this art. But over 35 artists exhibiting in one space, and two weeks worth of individual performances, both raised and

answered pertinent questions concerning sound art. Before the show surfaced, it was all a matter of "hybridization, interdiscipline and synaesthesia," which it is; but by the time the performances ended, those who took the opportunity to engage themselves seemed to develop a sensibility in tune with the remarkable cohesions experienced

through sound art. In the best works, one was rewarded with something more than pleasurable aesthetics, reaffirming the rich rewards inherent in pure sensory perception.

In many cases, this was the subject and meaning of the work. But the unique quality of contemporary sound art is the ability to in-

clude literal contents—poetic form is often achieved. Whereas the “meaning” might retain the ambiguous or even paradoxical nature of musical meaning, *art* entered through the doors of conception in a variety of ways. The overall characteristic of the events rest in their ability to arouse a natural sense of participation. The Sound show’s cohesion provides a new basis for contemporary art theory. Now might be a good time for critical theorists to regard the astonishing aesthetic unity from a more integrated conceptual base. A criticism oriented to the fragmentations of “intermedia,” however true, is going to sooner or later wane in expressing the expanded realities of sound art—and performance art. There is a close parallel, of course, though what differences there are can be revealing in the quest for a contemporary art theory.

Obviously sound art involves sound as a predominating characteristic. But what is the predominating characteristic of performance? The temptation is to think in terms of “theatre,” although there are severe limitations in conceiving of performance in the light of theatrical concepts. The parallel of sound art and music is identical. In both cases, “sound” and “performance” are the higher, less limited, more inclusive forms. To think of music as an aspect of sound, as “theatre” as an aspect of performance, is far more meaningful to the contemporary mind than vice-versa. The fact that we have these limited points of view stems from the disadvantageous orientations of a criticism rooted in modernist aesthetics. That a transitional dialogue is necessary is beyond question, and this is precisely what Peter Frank’s

What can be described as “west coast innocence” can be advantageous at times. In performance art, whether oriented to sound or narrative, there is far less dependence on theatrical theory since we have so little creative theatre here to influence us.

somewhat definitive catalogue article expresses, and Richard Armstrong’s observations, too. But it is a little like reading Susan Sontag for the third time—we now know it to be all too true. Like so much of the “expanded consciousness,” it expands itself into the obvious.

By the way of illustration, there really is no question of “music” being in any way oppositional to sound art. Even in cases where the sound utilized is totally lacking in musicality, musical movement is achieved in other ways. Bob Wilhite’s performance consisted in a continuous, barely oscillating drone tuned to a gorgeous revolving geometric painted sculpture which played against colored lighting. The subtle color changes and relationships soon became the “musical” aspect of the work, which is not only all mentioned, but an environmental installation as well.

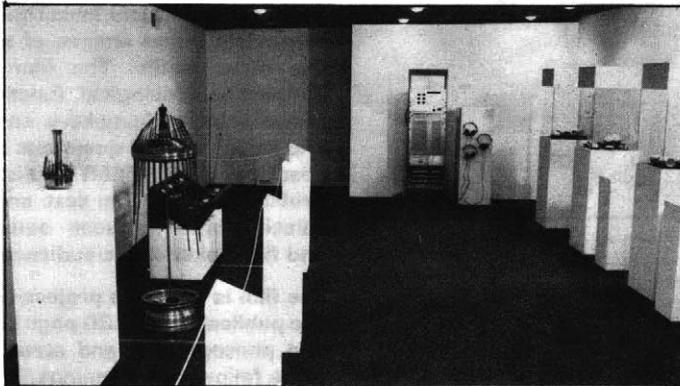
Alvin Lucier’s art achieves the highest perceptual intensity, while at the same time incorporating a profound literality—actual words describing actual conditions. Time itself exists both in the usual accustomed continuum of the present, and in a kind of weird “eternity” as well. By stating exactly what he is going to do on a tape “somewhere

in a room different than this one we are in,” he tells us he is going to change his imperfect and occasionally stuttering speech into a smooth and perfect harmonization of resonating sound, rhythmically structured identically to his speech. This occurs in slow transcendental steps achieving orchestral magnitudes not unlike classic symphonic form. These two, and many others, illustrate Peter Frank’s observation that “sound producing structures combine simplicity and complexity, both technical and conceptual.” He goes on to say, “There is a great deal of interest in sonic installation on the west coast, part of an interest in the subtle manipulation of space, light and time.”

What can be described as “west coast innocence” can be advantageous at times. In performance art, whether oriented to sound or narrative, there is far less dependence on theatrical theory since we have so little creative theatre here to influence us. Experimental theatre is non-existent on any serious level now. The result is an attitude toward performance divorced from theatre. Linda Burnham, publisher of California’s *High Performance* magazine is reported to have refused reviewing the performances of

Guy deCointet on the basis that they were too "theatrical" to be considered performance. No doubt, such issues are destined to become the critical dialogue of the future once we overcome our habituation to modernist criticism.

Another aspect of the nature of contemporary art brought out by the exhibit is the willing public response. Here is a relationship that, without sacrificing aesthetic integrity, the "public" can readily respond to. This art, when it is not profound, is at least amusing. It is perhaps the most cohesive and amenable style of contemporary art at present at a general level which only the most perfected forms of performance have achieved. The nice thing is that there we can distinguish the only way "art" can directly relate to "life" without confusing the values and decently recognizing art's inherent limitations—when you walk away from the art and it is still breathing in you.



Another interesting side-light arose in the social context of this important exhibit. For sometime now California art has suffered from an indifferent press and an impertinent, academic criticism that has probably done more harm than good. The performances were relatively sparsely attended at first. But as a testimony to the willingness of southern Californians to participate in the art here, once the reviews finally emerged the place was well attended, the remaining performances filled to capacity. Unfortunately this only occurred during the last weeks.

Although an important aspect of west coast art, sound art is engendered with equal thrust in the east and to some extent in the mid-west. But the fact remains that the most viable critical dialogues will emerge from the east. Los Angelenos will be looking forward to the New York presentation as much as New Yorkers.

Note: The "Sound" show opens September 30 at P.S. 1 in New York.

Clair Wolfe works for LAICA.

Photos by Michael Levine.

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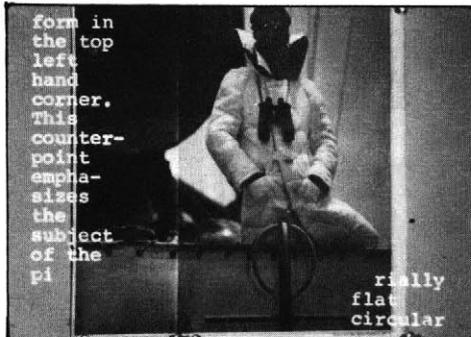
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ARGUMENT

Artist as Businessman

The twin principles
of modernism and
marketing: seeing
fresh promise in
familiar things

Anthony McCall and Andrew Tyndall



ARGUMENT (New York City, 1978) is an 85 minute, 16mm, color/sound film by Anthony McCall and Andrew Tyndall.

Fashion photographs are used as a starting point for a political investigation of news, advertising, and images of masculinity in the mass media. The film attempts to define the ideological function of avant-garde artists/filmmakers and their work, and raises crucial questions of radical film practice. **ARGUMENT** explicitly examines problems of the film text and its reading: relationships between sound/text/image and filmmaker/critic/audience.

The film is part of a project which includes the publication of a 30 page book of writing and photographs, and structured discussions following screenings.

The Fiscal Background

The 1976 Internal Revenue Service ruling that art [not including motion pictures] is an appreciable asset, created possibilities for the financing of art that never existed before. It meant that instead of capital being invested in the commodity of the art-work, it was now profitable to invest capital in the "artist as commodity." This mechanism operates by making the artist into a corporation. The artist is therefore personally responsible as president of that corporation, for success in the art world, and in addition, is accountable to shareholders [investors] ultimately to see a profit in the joint venture by paying dividends.

This difference makes investment in the artist a lower risk than investment in the art-work, since previously in investment in the art-work, profitability depended on the taste of the investor; now the onus for success rests on the artist, who must respond to market forces—"success" being defined as what sells, what can be marketed.

The Transition from Self-Employed Artisan

Modernism has been founded on a tradition of "constant revolution." This is a formal not a political description, which elevates the importance of "a work challenging previous work" in an art historical continuum, and defining itself in terms of its differences from work done previously. This constant revolution encourages the creation of diverse or pluralistic forms—for instance, minimalism, mytho-poeticism, conceptualism [theoretical, narrative, performance,

political, etc.]

These forms legitimize the creation and interpretation of art-work in terms of discrete traditions, thus allowing the most militant political materialist work to stand side by side with mytho-poetic romanticism, all part of the avant-garde spectacle. This has two main effects: first, to defuse the impact of the political work in any terms except that of its own tradition; second, it gives the impression of a fully stocked art store which caters to a wide range of tastes.

Whatever type of work is in this art store, all types have one thing in common: namely their market—an exclusive world of privilege and wealth, defined by the museum/gallery/university circuit.

At present this market is located around an intermediary—the gallery. The gallery is responsible for recognizing saleable trends, individuals, and work, and then marketing them [exhibition, distribution and publicity]. At the same time the gallery exerts some influence over the artist's practice to make his work more marketable. Thus the gallery makes the artist more accountable to market forces than under the earlier "patronage" system of financing, whereby the patron would pick an artist appropriate to his taste and desire for prestige and fund that individual under his direction.

The gallery system may prove to be a transitional phase in the artist's relationship to capital, a movement that may have been accelerated by the 1976 IRS ruling. The introduction of venture capital into the art world by directly financing the **artist** as an on-going business, would make artists, by their responsibility to return dividends to

their investors, more susceptible to market forces. While these pressures would not necessarily force all artists to make their work conform to a dominant aesthetic [since, as seen earlier, formal pluralism is encouraged], they would determine the audience—in a very simple way: the audience is those able to afford to buy the work, namely the rich. Although the rich have always been the market for art, the introduction of the artist-as-businessman system through venture capital rationalizes the accountability of the artist to the elitist market. In this way the artist becomes responsible not only for the **production** of art [the limit of an artist's responsibility under the gallery system], but also, for the marketing of the work—making contacts, generating publicity and criticism, organizing distribution, exhibition and sales, fiscal and office management. In short, an owner/director of an **organization**.

It might be worth mentioning that all these marketing activities have always occurred, but under the gallery system, artists would pay 50% of sales on their work to the gallery, for the privilege of being able to consider themselves "fine" artists, separated from these tawdry concerns.

Co-optation by Excellence

Success, rather than being seen as a function of saleability, is culturally defined as being a function of that mystical quality—excellence. The market is not interested in seeing an art-work in terms of its **intervention**, but rather as a spectacle, a singular commodity, the product of individual creativity, placed beyond analysis. Since an art-work is seen as the product of individual vision, then the meaning that the work has can cultural-

ly not be separated from the image of the artist who produced it. Artists are forced into the role of marketing themselves as a unique product with a singular personal vision, which becomes an integral part of the work itself.

Thus a double bind identifies itself: if a work has impact, the artist who produced it becomes culturally defined as "famous"—an excellent artist with a sound track record. Having been thus defined, this image of excellence becomes more important than the work itself, thus **defusing** it of impact by neatly placing the work—however different from previous work—into that artist's assigned niche.

Eliminating the Middleman

In the early and mid-seventies a tendency within conceptual art developed the imperative that artists should take responsibility for the theoretical grounding within which their work was made.

The effect of this imperative was to challenge the conventional function of the critic who traditionally had acted as a mediator between the artist and the audience, reducing the former to a voiceless role and the latter to a passive and ignorant role. The role of the critic was the theoretical equivalent of the gallery owner. Both claimed to stand outside the art-work, the former theoretically, the latter economically, although their function was actually a determining influence in the meaning system out of which the work was created.

The critic first started to lose this privileged place when artists themselves started to see their own art-work in terms of the "concept" or "idea"

The artist-as-businessman is forced not only to assume responsibility for the "aesthetic" theory within which the work is constructed, but now also for the saleability and success of his or her work, and for the projection of his or her own image into the marketplace.

behind it. This led to the demand for the artist to assume full responsibility for the theoretical (at first philosophical, but later ideological and political) position within which the work had meaning. The introduction of the concept of artist-as-businessman, with new methods of art financing, changes "responsibility" from a seemingly radical but purely theoretical position to an all-encompassing but politically problematic one. The artist-as-businessman is forced not only to assume responsibility for the "aesthetic" theory within which the work is constructed, but now also for the saleability and success of his or her work, and for the projection of his or her own image into the marketplace. In short, this "responsibility" is no different from the accountability of any "independent" businessman to his shareholders.

The "I" of Responsibility

The most commonly held myth of the "responsibility" of the businessman, however, is his responsibility to his employees. The small entrepreneur is culturally depicted as a benevolent patriarch, who by hard work, diligence, and character has created an opportunity for employees to earn money under his protection. This mystification of the exploitation of others' labor for profit would apply in exactly the same way under the artist-as-businessman structure. Here, it would be easy for a successful artist with a small business to draw on the vast pool of underemployed and impoverished artists and to use them as research and production assistants, librarians, secretaries, and carpenters, while the work that they did would be credited to the name, reputation and marketability of the artist as an individual.

So when the term "responsibility" is applied to an artist, it appears to cover a spectrum of meanings, ranging from the original, and apparently radical "theoretical" responsibility, through the questionable and all-encompassing "responsibility for the **whole** process," to the highly reactionary and mystificatory "responsibility as employer."

The conventional structure by which art is made and seen is a trichotomy of artist/critic/audience [producer, intermediary, consumer]. The introduction of artist-as-businessman rationalizes the relationship of producer to consumer by lessening the importance of the middleman [critic, gallery owner, etc.]. However, the concept of responsibility does not challenge the structural relationship of artist to audience. The artist still functions as one with knowledge/vi-

sion/insight, and the audience still functions as passive witness to this "personal" vision.

The element that links the extremes of the spectrum of responsibility is the "I" who takes this responsibility. So, responsibility, far from being a radical break, is the most recent articulation of an ideology of individualism. Despite the possibility of an increase in funds flowing into the art world as a result of the IRS ruling, these increased funds will still only be available to a small minority of successful artists—those with a sound track record.

In terms of resources available, then, there will only be a marginal difference between this and the self-employed artisanal mode of the gallery system or the lottery of government grants. So the important effect of venture capital entering the art market is to re-emphasize individualistic competition as the basis for art practice—providing a new carrot of the big art break [investors' capital] for which scores of artists can struggle. This competition is clarified by the emphasis on "responsibility," the primacy of the artist as "I."

Anecdote, Analysis, Discourse

It is impossible to place an art-work in its social and political context when it is isolated as a spectacle within a market, and its production is seen in terms of individualistic excellence. This combination emphasizes the passive function of the audience and demands an explicatory role for the critic. Conventional criticism, therefore, has gone hand-in-hand with the marketplace.

The role of the critic has been to "explain" art-

work, but at the same time, to preserve it as a spectacle. Critics have mystified this contradiction by telling stories. They are journalists who account for a work by constructing an anecdote out of the accidents of its production, set in the isolated and mythical world of an art historical continuum. So, in terms of the market, critics become the arbiters of taste; in terms of art practice, critics obscure the fact that work is a cultural manifestation by writing discrete aetiological fables. Work is thus deprived of context by becoming the last word, the inevitable resolution of a narrative.

This critical stance is one element in a structure which prohibits the artist and audience from taking **shared** responsibility for confronting the problem of how meaning is created. This structure:

1. refuses to allow an art-work to function as an intervention within a specific set of shared social problems;
2. mystifies the fact that a work is both made and seen within one dialectical process;
3. reinforces the cultural definition of art-work as commodity, and denies the imperative that art should demand active engagement;
4. justifies the "ghettoization" of art by both admiring and promoting its esotericism; at the same time it obscures the fact of the embeddedness of art within the social and political world, where no work can possibly be ideologically neutral.

In other words, the conventional critic's function is to deny art a context; to place it above analysis.

A constructive theoretical practice, on the other hand, would emphasize the embeddedness of art within culture. This practice would place art as one element within a political discourse.

New York City
June 1978

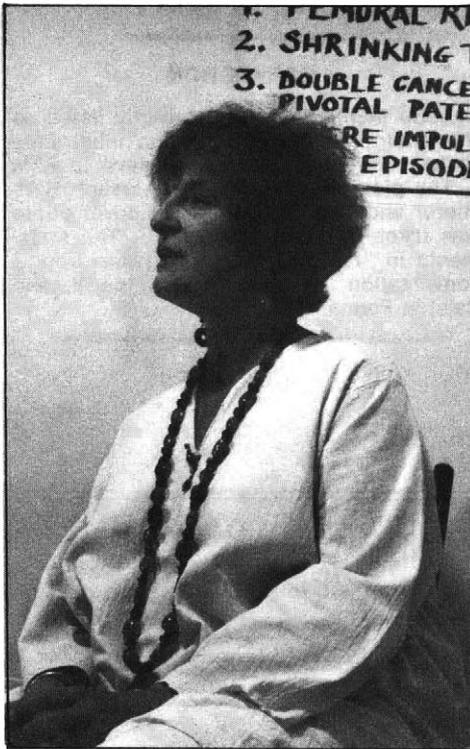
CORRECTION

Babette Mangolte was incorrectly listed as the photographer for the stills illustrating Richard Foreman's "Auto-Interview" in PAM 1. The pictures were taken by Joseph Bartsherer and Denise Simon. The cover photo was taken by Morton Beebe . . . The statements in "Paris Letter" were taken from a conversation between John Howell and Ralston Farina.

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RACHEL ROSENTHAL



Doonle Brown

Rachel Rosenthal was born in Paris. In the early fifties in New York, she was an assistant to Erwin Piscator at his Dramatic Workshop, and later danced with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. After moving to California, she founded Instant Theatre (1956-69), and during the seventies worked as a sculptor and co-chairwoman of Woman-space. Rosenthal began presenting solo performances in 1975.

REPLAYS, 1975

After living and working in New York and Paris, how did you end up in California?

After 1953, I came back to NYC and decided I wasn't going back to Paris. And that's when I got to be friends with Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and continued my friendship with Merce Cunningham and John Cage. I got very emotionally involved with some people in that group—it was a boiling cauldron of seething emotions—and I felt there was just no way for me in that situation. Also, I felt very energized and yet dominated by their charisma and somehow I felt that if I didn't leave this atmosphere, this group, I would never find what I had to give. Which was one of several reasons I went out to California. That was in '55.

What were the beginnings of Instant Theatre?

After I moved to California I started a workshop. At first it was just a simple actor's workshop. I was giving the actors exercises and improvisations—things I was thinking up. They enjoyed them so much that they stopped working on scenes and only wanted to do my ideas, exercises, and themes. One day I said, "We've found a new theatre. I

think we have something very wonderful here, let's do it for an **audience.**" And then everybody disappeared.

What happened?

The actors were all up-and-coming Hollywood hopefuls—people like Tab Hunter, Tony Perkins, Susan Hallison, Rod McKuen, Vic Morrow, and Judd Taylor, who is now a director. They all said their agents would never allow them to do it, it's just too crazy and way out. So I was left with just a painter, a dancer, and an actor who had been an engineering student at MIT. The four of us decided to hell with everybody, we'll do it all by ourselves. And that's how Instant Theatre was started. It was just a little box space and there were risers and, instead of putting chairs on the risers, I had pillows. That was in '56.

Who was your audience?

In those days the audience was mostly poets and artists.

Did people associate it with Happenings in New York?

One of the problems we had is that we associated ourselves with theatre instead of with art. It was always affiliated with theatre because there was, at the time, to me anyway, no other affiliation possible. It suffered from that, because people's expectations of theatre were such that our theatre was considered totally way out. A lot of people just didn't accept it or understand it, and the artists for some reason stopped coming, possibly because of the affiliation with theatre.

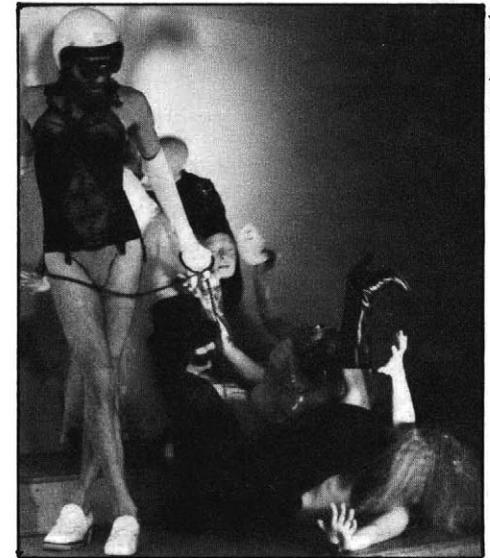
What kind of performances did you do?

I'm sort of embarrassed really to tell you about what Instant Theatre was. Because it sounds very self-serving and I'm making really high

David Moreno



THE HEAD OF O.K., 1977



Cynthia Upchurch

CHARM, 1977

claims, and there's no proof—there's no mechanical or electronic documentation, but there are a lot of eyewitnesses. It was a theatre that was the precursor of Happenings, Action Art, art performance, and Theatre of the Ridiculous.

How have the history books passed your theatre by?

Because we did it in California, and because I was maybe personally afraid to come out. I think that if it had come to New York it would have been very important theatre. Over there it was really buried. For awhile it didn't matter to me because in those days I had very Zen ideas—it's very ephemeral, it's for now, and so on. Then later on, I was very sad because I had nothing to show and everybody was getting recognition and credit for all kinds of things that I had done long before. So I say I'm embarrassed because it really sounds like sour grapes in a way.



INSTANT FAIRY TALES, 1977
 (The Devil with the 3 Golden Hairs — Bros. Grimm)



INSTANT THEATRE, 1977

How about now—do you find a theatre audience or an art audience for your work?

Now I'm very happy that historically the two have come together, in what is now termed art performance. I do my work in galleries. I want to branch out and do things which are really between the two—between theatre and art—because I think my work is very theatrical actually.

What was the theoretical basis of Instant Theatre?

The whole premise of Instant Theatre was that you could create theatre spontaneously, and collectively, and I assure you that it didn't come from theory. Because first of all I'm not a theoretical person, I'm an action person, and I never would have had the chutzpah to come out with such a theory if I hadn't seen it happen first. I saw it on stage. Then I started to codify my training methods in such a way that about nine months of training would enable the performer to do it.

Can you describe the training approach you devised?

There were two things that were important in Instant Theatre. One was the development of a free creativity in the individual, and a certain style, a certain form of work that would kind of push them into an aesthetics which was my aesthetics really, and then also the ability to create with others, to be subservient, to the whole. In training we used a lot of movement, a lot of vocal stuff, awareness exercises. In the beginning, I even used massage. I did everything to get people loosened up, to bring things out.

When you got together to do a piece, what exactly did you do?

There were four ways of doing pieces. The whole company would do pieces which would last a whole act, like 45 minutes to an hour, that were completely free and that would start simply from a set. And the set would be a big assemblage on the stage. The aesthetics of the period were very much an

influence. They were found sets—things that we would find in back alleys or that people would give us—old chairs, old window screens, tar paper.

So we would start out in this set, and the space and the mood of the set would get things going. One person would start and, very much like action painting in a way, would set the first touch of paint if you will on the stage and then other people would come and bring things and build a piece, the idea being that you had to be very aware, very sensitive, to what was happening, enhance what was happening, or bring collision. Surprisingly enough, these pieces had tremendous form, they always achieved their own kind of inner logic and had a beginning, middle, and an end, not in a narrative way, but somehow in a formal way.

Another way was what we called a point of departure. Very often we asked the audience to give us either a word or a phrase or a mood or the name of an artist or the name of a



THE AROUSING 1979

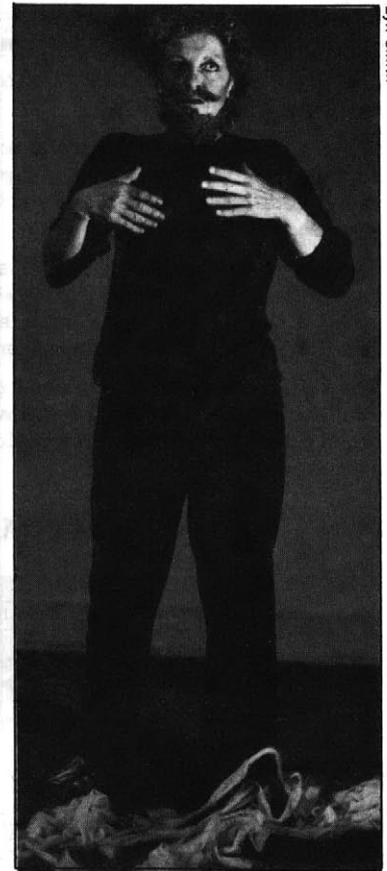
writer or whatever, and that would be the point of departure. We also had what we called forms, and the forms were very much like in music, where you have say, in classical music, sonata forms, symphonic forms, or whatever. They were set forms which were always different because the content would always be different. Finally, we would do structured improvs, but we would do very few of them, because, simply, there was very little time.

Were you influenced at all by Viola Spolin's theatre games and techniques?



(SHOCK,

She came to my theatre. I was never influenced by her. She only became prominent in the beginning of the sixties and Instant Theatre was long before that. To tell you the truth my influences were really John Cage and my painter friends. I was also influenced by Artaud.



THUNDER)

What about the Black Mountain people? You were working simultaneously, or maybe a few years after them.

I was influenced by Black Mountain only in a roundabout way, because I knew John [Cage].

There are precedents in artworld performance, even going back to the Bauhaus or Black Mountain Happenings. But in theatre, the only avant garde group that was know at the time was of course the Living Theatre. Were you aware of them?

I knew the Living very well, and, as a matter of fact, King Moody, my then husband and partner, had worked for them in New York. They asked me to come to New York to teach in their theatre. That was in '60. It just didn't seem possible then.

They were still doing plays; avant garde theatre was literary then. And improvisational theatre has always been literary in the theatre world context. So you really were doing art world stuff.

CHARM, 1977



Cynthia Upchurch



David Moreno

THE DEATH SHOW 1978



Doilie Brown

GRAND CANYON 1978

Exactly. You see this is why we had so much trouble. Because people just did not understand. They enjoyed it, because it was so visual, so beautiful, but we also broke down space and time, we broke down personality components, and we used objects in a very dematerialized way. This is why I become very jaded sometimes. I see so much theatre which bores me because in the years we did Instant Theatre we did so much of that stuff in such a fabulously beautiful way. Sometimes we bombed but there was always something exciting about it because of the fact that we worked with so many different things.

How did you move then from group performance to solo performance?

In '66 I quit doing Instant Theatre because of trouble with my knees.

How many years have you been doing solo performances?

Since '75.

Are your solo performances self-consciously autobiographical?

The way I've been functioning with those performances has been to sort of try very truthfully to get to the bottom of different phases of my life, so that by the time I die all my performances, end to end, will recreate my life. I've found lately that the end result of the honesty and truthfulness I try to put into recreating my life is a total mythology. That was really an interesting discovery for me, to find out that this structure of recreation had become a myth and runs parallel with me. It's made up of the same ingredients, and yet it is a complete fabrication.

Has the women's movement and feminist politics influenced your work at all?

I owe a tremendous amount to the movement. I think they brought me out. For about 5 years, I was totally isolated. I was doing my sculpture and living in the Valley. I stopped Instant theatre in '66 and I got involved with the women's movement in '71, '72 I think.

Did your performance work change?

It didn't change, it began. I think the movement enabled me to accept myself and my life because up to then I felt that my life had been a complete waste and a mistake. I was

very harsh on myself, very self-destructive, and I felt ashamed of most everything that had happened to me or that I had done. Through the women's movement, and my own growth, I was able to take a whole new appraisal of my work and change it around to work for me, instead of my being smothered. I got very involved in establishing a woman's space and in several of the galleries that were women's galleries. I started to see a great deal of women's work. At that point I started to do performances which redeemed my life by turning it into art.

There are always surprises when people use very directly autobiographical material, aren't there?

My main surprise, I'll tell you, has always been the response of the audience. When I prepare a piece, I always think it's just terrible, that it's going to bomb, that it's completely narcissistic, and so personal that nobody's going to accept it. Now, I know that that's how I am, so I just don't pay attention anymore, no matter how negative I get. Then I do it for an audience, and my big surprise is always their response, which is completely personally involved and with them going through a certain private catharsis of their own. With each piece, although now I'm expecting a bit more, it's still an incredible experience.

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NEW MUSIC, NEW YORK

Bérénice Reynaud

The New Music, New York festival organized by The Kitchen Center June 8-19, 1979, was valuable in reconsidering the problems raised by the definition of what is called "New Music." Judging from the pieces offered during the event, three main tendencies within the diversity of practices emerged, even though the work of a single composer sometimes reflected more than one tendency. The tendencies break down as follows:

—Musicians whose work is based on indeterminacy or at least on a controlled drift of the material during live performance, such as Robert Ashley, David Behrman and Pauline Oliveros.

—Minimalists who, according to Michael Nyman in *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, have created their music in reaction to indeterminacy, such as Philip Corner, Philip Glass, Jon Gibson, and William Hellermann.



Pat Kelly

DAVID BEHRMAN

—"Collage" musicians, to be found mainly in the younger generation, who wish to integrate in their compositions "impure" musical environments—e.g., jazz (Garret List), pop (Laurie Anderson), rock (Rhys Chatham).

Beyond these divisions, however, the most interesting musical form displayed at the Festival was "performance music." This notion is ambiguous in music for, in the same way that one can say that all music is "repetitive," all music is "performance" as well. Unlike painting and cinema, music is nothing but the live realization of a pre-existing score. If in theatre the relationship between "score" and performance is rather ambiguously defined in western culture, with theatre often viewed as text, the ambiguity does not exist in music. In music it is generally understood that a piece does not exist before its performance: its history is that of

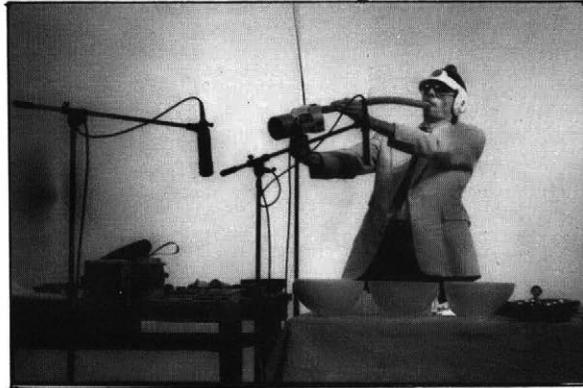
its interpretations. This very notion of interpretation underlines the position that a traditional musical performance is hermeneutic, and the purpose of each different rendering is to reveal the hidden meaning of the text (the score).

This understanding of the score as text can be related to the Judeo-Christian view of text exemplified by the Kabbalists and the Church Fathers: truth is nothing but the infinite rediscovery of the hidden meanings of the text. It also displays a Borges-like vision of eternity as an absolute potentiality (the score) experienced sensually only through the theoretically infinite number of its nearly identical repetitions.

In contrast, performance music is based on these two concepts: (1) the refusal of a meaning transcending the physical properties of the performance and (2) the emphasis on the uniqueness of the present moment. Improvisation technique, as in jazz, was the first blow struck against the classical conception of the score, and the indeterminacy principle brought by Cage and Fluxus was another.

The traditional conception of the score implied—albeit less precisely—a certain relationship to space. If space is conceived as a field open to human activity, and music as expression of subjectivity and interiority, then music is denied any spatial property; it only passes through space, and eventually fills it. This is, within “New Music,” the conception of such composers as Glass and Steve Reich. Conversely, “performance music” is concerned with the rediscovery of the spatial characteristics of music, reflecting the influence of visual arts. For Corner, for example, music is a bridge between subjectivity and external space because “you have in a score the three dimensions of space: width, depth, plus the fourth dimension of time.”

The rediscovery of space can be performed through purely musical means (as in the thick resonances of Corner’s music, or the superimposed layers of Phil Niblock’s), but it is often connected to a rediscovery of the dramatic role of the instruments and the relation-



Shigeo Anzai

DAVID VAN TIEGHEM

ship of instruments to musicians. This is in contrast to the classical tradition which views the instrument mostly as a tool, to serve *another* text, whose rendering must be completely mastered. Here also one can see the influence of improvised jazz pieces in which the subject is the relationship of the composer/performer to his trumpet or piano. Numerous performance pieces emphasize the dramatic value and visual aspect of the instruments used. This is more obvious when these instruments are non-conventional, such as the rocking chair that Hellerman rocks in *Squeek*, or the multiple toys and gadgets manipulated by David van Tieghem in *A Man and His Toys*. This second kind of musical performance is based on the notion of process, but it also has visual concerns.

A third kind of performance displays more obvious visual concerns, and the Kitchen Festival provided several examples of it. In some cases, it was the result of a collaboration between a musician and a visual or performance artist—such as trombonist-composer Peter Zummo’s and dancer choreographer Stephanie Woodard’s contrapuntal solos—or Charles Amirkhania’s concrete tape music accompanying Carol Law’s surrealist color slides.

In other cases the performances were solos dealing with words and even narrative elements: this sub-category is closer to “music theatre” as well as to “regular” performance art and uses as a

Shigeo Anzai



PAULINE OLIVEROS

medium the body of the composer/performer. Unfortunately the 15-20 minutes scheduled for every composer was too short for enjoying this kind of performance. *Performance Art Magazine 1* described Laurie Anderson's latest performance, *Americans on the Move*, and the excerpts one could see at the Festival were nearly as good as the whole piece. I would like to be able to make the same statement about Jill Kroesen whose previous performances I liked very much, but she seemed rather uncomfortable in the Festival situation.

Shigeo Anzai



**PETER
GORDON**

Charlemagne Palestine's show was also rather problematic. In contrast to Anderson and Kroesen, he is not primarily a performance artist but a composer who, in addition to his concerts, gives performances (mostly without music). There is, of course, a relationship between the two and the progressively more obvious dramatization of Charlemagne's music is paralleled by the dramatization of his persona as a performer. The sole subject of his performances and video tapes is the narcissistic *mise-en-scene* of his narcissism, and he is usually quite good at that, with his acute sense of live improvisation. But I didn't like his appearance at the Kitchen, perhaps because the darkness was not as total as necessary to create an atmosphere of quasi-magical "terror," or because the audience, not mentally prepared for such a performance between five different shows, responded poorly, and was consequently incapable of behaving as a mirror/accomplice for the brilliant self of the performer.

Performance being a "syncretic" art, the most successful ones were a mixture of the previous categories. For example, Robert Ashley's *Wolfman* (created in 1964) was a piece of music theatre with partially improvised electronic feedback. Dressed in a classic suit, Ashley emitted long shouts in a microphone on the front of the stage, giving every appearance of contained distress while "Blue" Gene Tyranny in the background played expressionistically on an electronic keyboard. The tension created by the piece was nearly unbearable—it suggested a real drama while being wordless.

David Behrman's *Touctones* explored quite

successfully the subtle reactions of electronic circuits to live “noises” caused by Arthur Stidfole. Alvin Lucier’s *Work in Progress for Amplified Piano* was unfortunately received by the Kitchen audience (perhaps bored by its minimalist evenness), but I found it a quite interesting and even moving piece. Visually it consisted of what I would call an “animated sculpture”: the juxtaposition of the stylized statue of a man’s head to the body of the performer at the piano (George Barth). Musically it combined scales slowly played to their barely audible feedback, like a mist invading a landscape.

achievement of mathematics, the ontological truth of numeric patterns, while at the same time being able to express an individual’s feelings and imperfections. Performance techniques reconsider the problem by using chance, error, and/or improvisation to disrupt or to enrich musical pieces produced by mathematical or electronic devices. The use of the human voice when non-classically trained—consequently a less reliable instrument in the classical sense—fills this need for error and imperfection. Pauline Oliveros’s piece, *The Tuning Meditation*, was a good example: she simply asked the members of the

Performance Music: (1) The refusal of a meaning transcending the physical properties of the performance. (2) The emphasis on the uniqueness of the present moment.

Phil Corner’s *Gamelan: Italy Revisited—II (Regolato)* created a sense of deep space not only through its music but by the remoteness of the instrumentalist, hidden in a room separated from the performance space where the audience was sitting in darkness. Whereas the heavy texture of two tapes by Phil Niblock—*Four Arthurs* and *Two Octaves and A Fifth*—played simultaneously, it was combined with live improvisations of two instrumentalists (Joe Celli on oboe and Arthur Stidfole on bassoon) fighting to produce sustained tones similar to the ones prerecorded on tape.

It has been music’s aspiration—since the Bible, since Plato—to reach the perfect

audience to sing sustained tones while breathing. People’s voices rose, were modulated together like a tide, and faded out spontaneously, creating an unexpected polyphony. Charlie Morrow, obsessed with numbers and chanting, performing alone, mixing breathing, experimental singing, a meditative state and narrative chat with the audience, represented perhaps the epitome of this kind of performance—an intelligent synthesis.

Bérénice Reynaud produces
programs for French radio.



PERFORMANCE BY ARTISTS

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REVIEWS

REVIEWS

REVIEWS

WARREN STREET FESTIVAL

5 Evenings.
75 Warren Street (July).

Creative Research, an informal umbrella group of performers, sponsored a week of events by associates and friends, each evening featuring four to six performances of dance, music, film, and poetry readings as well as the standard brand one-person show. The bare loft, with its minimal technical resources, was a low-key set-up for both the sketches of experienced performers and the initial peices by newer ones. Ideally, this situation should have turned up plenty of minor surprises, works saturated with personality, originality, and just plain idiosyncratic talents which are performance's strongest qualities.

That these delights were in short supply is somehow consistent with such enterprises, which always contain hints of Vanity Fairs,

and at the same time, a little disappointing—is the genre itself getting soft down at the farm club level? Aside from the accepted quota of bad acts, most were simply unremarkable. Yet a couple of positive points did seem clear. First, the large number of dance performers as a group made up an across-the-board exception to the rule of little interest, showing that the idea of a “downtown” dance continues to develop and attract thoughtful performers. And further, the week of events was well-attended, demonstrating that a constant audience remains fascinated with this most unpredictable of art formats.

Some brief comments on individual performances (I attended four of the five nights):

PETER ROSE improvised with some of the props and activities from his *the circular heavens*: objects pulled out of a garbage can

(a folding chair, a suit of clothes), mess-making (cat litter spread on the floor, liquid spilled from an overturned box of bottles), dance-like movement (a sort of jig while putting on the suit). His actions were accompanied by a semi-intelligible audiotape which turned out to be Joyce's reading of *Finnegan's Wake*. The tone was uncharacteristically subdued and tentative with occasional flashes of Rose's intense presentational attitude and emphatic timing.

The first two-thirds of ERIC BOGOSIAN's piece was preparatory; a woman in a dressing gown applied garish make-up while Bogosian moved around adjusting audiotape equipment which played diatribes spoken by alternating male and female voices. Bogosian then applied make-up to himself and the woman changed into a black satin pants suit. Finally, the pair stood near the audience, the woman repeating Bogosian's whispered fascist, sexist statements. Some real dramatic meanness threatened to develop at this point, but the elements of Aggression Chic—Germanic decadence, partial nudity, gender switches, loudspeaker sloganeering, the woman-as-puppet and man-as-despot im-

ages—remained undeveloped hints as the piece ended where it could have begun.

EILEEN MILES read prose anecdotes of lesbian life and love in the city in a nervous manner which involved lots of cigarette lighting and beer drinking. As writing, the episodes were no great shakes but were entertaining enough as filtered through her wise-cracking personality. A coda to her urban jitters occurred hours later when she ran, laughing, past Magoo's windows and disappeared up Sixth Avenue in a headlong sprint.

FRANK CONVERSANO intermittently performed some dance-like movement while constantly adjusting a transistor radio's wandering signal. All the while—and it was a while—RANDI FAIN lay slumped over at a desk. This hermetic and unfocussed action ended in an obscure climax when a stream of red glitter dropped from Fain's clenched hands and Conversano snatched up the desk.

JACOB BURKHARDT showed a fiftyish film, a sort of Son of Pull My Daisy which featured set-pieces of furtive gay dockside sex, an argument between a man and a woman, a poker game with outlandish stakes, an armed robbery of the other players by one of them, his escape and accidental dropping of the loot on the street. All of these scenes were set to a jazz soundtrack and edited in a quick, energetic style. Unlike most such quasi-adolescent movies, this one was well made and fairly entertaining.

CAROL PARKINSON played dissonant chords on an electric organ while JUDY RIFKA chanted and shouted some indistinguishable words. Visual accompaniment was comprised of slides of what appeared to be a stegosaurus stencil through which one could glimpse television and movie images; the slides also repeatedly

threw up the words "extinct" and "atlantis." The piece seemed to be an Apocalypse song-poem a la Patti Smith (Rifka wore a torn t-shirt and black jeans) but their performance presence was hardly up to such a lurid, symbolist message.



Carol Parkinson

PARKINSON/RIFKA

CESC GELABERT performed a dramatic dance in which bursts of awkward, almost contortionary movement were followed by facial mugging and a slow recovery and preparation. There was a strong suggestion of the loony in both gestures and facial expressions, sometimes comic as when his leap against a wall resulted in a large and clearly unexpected hole, and at other times

spooky as when he threw himself to the floor, then rolled over to look at the audience in that characteristically uncomprehending way of the disturbed. While hardly a complex choreographic statement, the piece exuded "personality" as Gelabert showed a strong and consistent interior focus.

My favorite all purpose downtown trombonist GARRET LIST, played a couple of duets with trombonist GEORGE LEWIS. The "etudes" were obviously difficult (one of them originally written for seven trombones, not two) and involved all sorts of virtuoso breath and tone control which their playing rendered with skill to spare.

CONNIE MAY is an out-of-shape dancer who spent the first third of her piece putting tape lines on the floor. She then barely essayed some basic movement while counting aloud and naming various objects she had placed within the tape outline. These actions were accompanied by an unintelligible audiotape of random racket.

ANN MESSNER showed a film of incongruous activities in public places, the funniest of which was a lengthy sequence of a scuba diver's waddling progress through crowded subway cars.

POOH KAYE offered some super-8 films, the most striking of which featured animal-like behavior filmed at fast speed. In one, she burrowed a hole while squatting in a forest glade; in another, she lay across a chair, alternately on her stomach and back, performing swimming-crawling motions and rolling up into a resting position. The films strongly conveyed animalistic images without evoking any particular beast (the second sequence could have been insect- as well as animal-like). Further, Kaye managed to add a small plus to the general dismal history of nudity in performance by creating enough

distance (the film medium, the highspeed) so that the kinesthetic transformations worked on her hard athletic body were not lost in any sexually-tinged overload.

John Howell

A quartet by MOLISSA FENLEY worked out simple paths on various levels of spatial complexity. Reminiscent of Dalcroze Eurythmics, folk dance, and Lucinda Child's work, Fenley works with a basic clapping, stamping, and running motif. Using 4/4 time, she plays with aural counterpoint when the group splits to duets and visual complement in the simple sculptural arm shapes. Augmented at one point with wood blocks, the piece was most successful when the driving 4/4 tempo was matched with an almost loony—kids on the playground—enthusiasm.

Lit from behind by the light of an empty film projector, YOSHIKO CHUMA sat in a chair, aggressively facing away from the audience, and performed several violent activities: deliberately smashing a beer bottle, reciting a list of English words (probably from a vocabularly list prepared for foreign language students), reading a Japanese story extremely quickly and theatrically, patterning her feet in a bowl of water and finally spilling it. These actions, and a short jumping, stamping dance on the chair were carried more by Chuma's very strong persona than by an imagistic cohesiveness. Apparently worn out at the finish, she sang a lullabyish Japanese song to the four walls of the space.

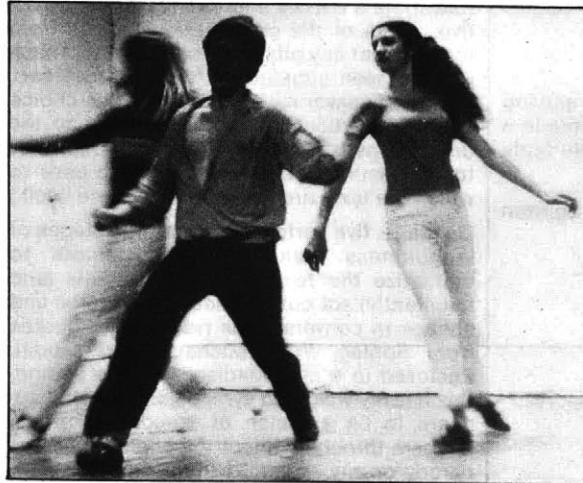
CHARLIE MOULTON presented his brand of athletic dancing, often on the edge of violence. Dancing alone, he punctured his limb-throwing style with a walk from wall to wall with his eyes closed, complementing the

apparent involuntary non-stop gyrations of his body with a literal image of blind urgency. A trio of GABRIELLE LANSNER, JANA JENSEN, and Moulton explored throwing the body to the floor, walking in skewed paths made interesting with pivot spins, catching, spinning, and throwing bodies plucked from phrases of violent semaphoric movement and then thrown back into the air to clumsily regain balance (these women are fearless). All of the above were tightened up and challenged by an insistent conforming to metrical fives and eights. Moulton posited this vigorous lexicon, then lightened it with a ball game, an intricate passing of three balls at breakneck speed.

KAROLE ARMITAGE, resembling a stick figure on speed, walked hysterically on the heels of her feet in a figure-eight around two vaguely art deco occasional pieces. She punctuated this route with isolated arm and hand gestures lifted out of everyday contexts and a fixed, startled expression on her face.

Periodically she stopped upstage to exhale breath in rapid puffs and flap her stiffly held arms. Three times she paused to crawl a step and a half. Although refreshing in its brevity (under five minutes) and successful in its girl-robot-on-rails character, the study suffered from an unnecessary repetition of the odd arm and hand gestures; a longer list would be more interesting. At the end Armitage fell into the audience, an attempt to theatricalize the basically workshop ambiance.

DIANE TORR and JULIE HARRISON wrestled, mimed, talked, and massaged their way through *It's About Time*. Notable mainly for the unusual—for the "weaker" sex—forms of behavior such as fist fighting and bullying verbal challenges, the piece presented historical and behavioral stories of time. At one point they mime humanity's ascent from four-legged to two-legged beast; at another they lazily gossip on film while dancing in slow motion silhouette. A mini-lecture on the organs of the body (body tempo) is delivered,



MOULTON/JENSEN/
LANSNER

Carol Parkinson



KAROLE ARMITAGE

with Torr talking and Harrison limply serving as sample body. Two fine prime movers in a free-for-all, unpretentious and formally fairly tight.

Margaret Eginton

Daryl Chin and Larry Qualls, *Apoplectic Fit*. Theatre for the New City, July.

For better or for worse, performance art practice has become virtually synonymous with presenting autobiographical elements in a performer's life. Although external elements do intrude upon the performance matrix, they are filtered through a subjective consciousness—reality is denied its autonomy in the melt-down process activated *vis-a-vis* personal mannerisms and one's own being in the world. The same was true of Daryl Chin's earlier performance pieces, culled as they were from a highly personalized mythology. In *Apoplectic Fit*, however, the reliance on subject matter shifts to a plane of objectivity—so much so that the authors of this quixotic piece relegate their presence to the sidelines as directors—with texts lifted verbatim from Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* and Yasunari Kawabata's *Beauty and Sadness*. (The objective nature of the presentation springs from the fact that any other text or texts could easily have been substituted for the above two, and one is never made to feel that the choice of these particular texts adds either to the ongoing myth about both Chin and Qualls, or to a pleasurable encounter with the uses to which the texts are put within the piece itself.)

On stage, five performers in various stages of languidness make slender attempts to dramatize the texts as they painfully (and reluctantly) act out half-hearted gestures and engage in conversations riddled with quotes from Sontag, Weil, Michaux, and Cioran. Enclosed in a chic Madison Avenue setting, this heavily-weighted symposium, by what appears to be a bunch of precocious grads, lumbers through without the slightest hint of parody or any attempt to impose a cohesive

structure on the proceedings. *Apoplectic Fit* is photo-realism of the Soho variety with its mise-en-scene suggestive of a cold wintry evening at a loft peopled with the NYRB crowd.

But only if the performers had the *élan* and mannerisms of the NYRB intellectual mafia (or of those French actors who appear so often in Duras's films, to which *Apoplectic Fit* seems closest to), then perhaps the evening may have had more going for it. Unfortunately, the performers seemed bewildered by their lines, and the event was burdened by a total lack of energy or commitment. Nonetheless, the attempt to create live art out of found objects, without the imposition of either self or a structuring consciousness was in itself an interesting notion—and one that, as the performance proved, may always have a failure mechanism built into it.

Gautam Dasgupta

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FORM**
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**Alberto Guatti, *Intervals*.
Artist's Space (April).**

Speed and issues of representation coded this nine second performance work, *Intervals*, by Italian performance artist Alberto Guatti. For the past few years Guatti's work has been seen internationally; many of these pieces have been based on scripts that Guatti suggests can be performed anywhere at any time by any performer.

Intervals appears to have been a departure from Guatti's earlier work, not just in its minimal aspect, but in its absence of dramatic text. It does continue, in a rather unobtrusive and neo-rationalist way, to suggest a general distinction between people-who-watch and people-who-do, between things "public" and "private" that appear in a concrete represented fashion in an arbitrary public space.

The work is performed in an empty gallery space that has been set up with a long arch-shaped "J" of folding chairs. A spring board sits on the floor in the band of the "J" and gymnastic mats lie on the floor behind these chairs. Once the audience is seated, the lights go out, and a strobe light begins to blink. The strobe slows down for a moment, then quickens its pace. A whistle blows and a man in blue starts to run toward the audience. The flashing light and accompanying sound breaks the image of the runner into frames. He hits the springboard with both feet, sails into the air and somersaults above the audience and lands on the mats behind them. The piece is over.

The work lasts only nine seconds, but is visually powerful in a rather uncanny way. The mind perceives the instantaneous speed of the event with the clarity not unlike the in-



INTERVALS

stant flash of perception that occurs during an automobile accident. Rather than play with distended images, Guatti contracts the temporal demands on the viewer and greatly intensifies the interplay between time and image. The unconscious faculties compensate for the speed and heighten the overall sensations of perception. This then is completely distorted within this infinitesimally short interval of activity.

Intervals evokes the early Muybridge animal locomotion studies where physical movement was photographed in sequences and then printed as a series of images in succession. More important is the possibility that Guatti might be seen as part of the current trend in Italian arts toward neo-rationalism. There is undoubtedly a strong sense here of a re-enactment of certain futurist manifestations. Sensation and concern with speed, fragmented motion presented in fractured static frames, motion appearing in a completely visual plane, these are caught in much the same way that Duchamp captures

the figure in his "Nude Descending the Staircase." Guatti obviously has condensed and heightened the scheme, but his roots remain clearly planted in continental thought.

Jill Silverman

**Joan Jonas, *Upside Down and Backwards*.
Sonnabend Gallery, May.**

**Sylvia Whitman, *South*.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, June.**

**Mel Andringa with the Drawing Legion,
Belshazzar's Feast.
Time and Space Ltd. Theatre, July.**

After a period of being watched and made use of by a "theatre of images," a staple performance genre that might loosely be termed "imagistic personality display" now appears to be looking back. To the typical format of visually-oriented vignettes built around props and audio-visual equipment, some per-

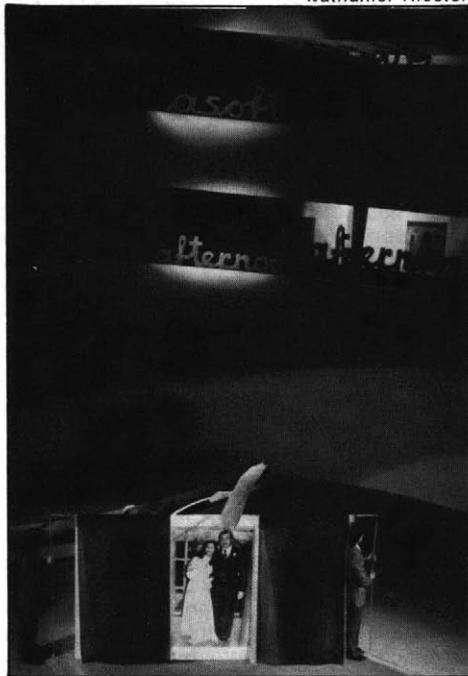
formers have selectively added theatrical trappings ranging from narrative as dramatic graph to lengthy duration complete with acts and intermissions. Also, the tendency to merely exhibit rather than develop events seems influenced by new concerns for thematic coherence and flamboyant subject matter. The result is an altered product which resembles something more than a didactic outline but less than theatre. It's an unwieldy hybrid guaranteed to startle both purists of the performance-as-gesture school and theatrical performers of no matter how unconventional an attitude. The promise of something novel has been delivered in performances documented throughout both issues of *Performance Art*, but like any other of the recent cross-bred fashions, this one has its ungainly offshoots. Three examples:

Joan Jonas's *Upside Down and Backwards* attempts to exploit classic narrative while short-circuiting its psychological consequences. In performance, this approach adds up to a non-theatrical show of theatrical material. So the piece begins with Jonas seated and reading two Grimm Brothers' tales, but her voice is prerecorded on tape and the stories have been cut up and interwoven to deliver the form of a narrative without its meanings. The imagistic scenes from the stories are acted out in succession in front of three panels painted with child-like drawings of landscapes, but this linear progression is propelled by a similarly collaged musical audiotape, not by story or character. A lot of the action and imagery so generated gives off the air of willful obfuscation, like those structuralists who exercise a brain-cracking vocabulary on the simplest literary forms, and for the most part, Jonas's double game is equally self-canceling and unconvincing. However, a few moments are as evocative as either unadorned illustration or formalistic diagramming could ever produce,

once when she plays a music box and sings over and over in a child's sing-song, "let me in," and again when she repeatedly pokes her fingers in a skull's orifices with the concentration of a child's perverse curiosity. Here *Upside Down and Backwards* retro methods came to terms with Grimm's "right side up and forwards" material to make something curious and touching.

SOUTH

Nathaniel Tileston

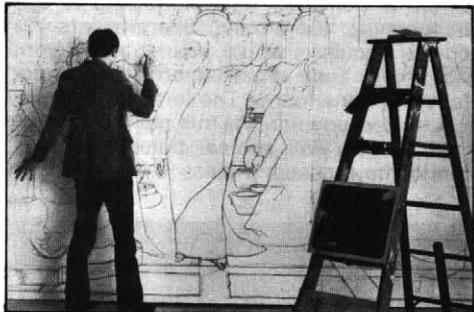


Sylvia Whitman's *South* shows two lengthy sequences of gigantic images in the cavernous space of the Guggenheim lobby. Part 1 is made up of personal pictures triggered by

Whitman's responses to her brother's marriage back home in South America; Part 2 presents more free-associative, surrealist images to a tape recording of Steve Reich's appropriately dreamy *Music for 18 Musicians*. All of these pictorial props are brought out, set up, exhibited, and taken off at a deliberate pace by performers who display no attitude other than that of doing a simple task. Their blank presence generates an uneasy, almost dispiriting effect which damped even successful and witty images. Some nice ones, like the giant whale which was awkwardly erected, were marred by clumsy execution. Other pictures of little interest in themselves—such as an oversize airmail envelope—were left stranded by this matter-of-fact parade. Lacking any action or interplay between performers or between performers and props, even *South's* most striking visual, a neon horse, came and went with little impact beyond an initial delight.

Although more theatrically conventional, Mel Andringa's *Belshazzar's Feast* presents a visual drama more expounded than acted out. Its subject is the history of an unfinished painting of that name by an obscure eighteenth century artist, Washington Allston; this convoluted tale is intercut with anecdotes from Andringa's life. As might be expected from a former Robert Wilson Byrd, the sets were wonderfully designed and constructed, and technical details well handled. And some of the five scenes were wacky convergences of elements somehow stuck together, such as a tableau of the painting which turns into a vignette about a Macy's sales department which included a decorator run amok and a woman who constantly appears with requests for directions; this action played to Handel's *Belshazzar* music and was punctuated by Andringa's earnest explanations about the set's incompleteness. Here Andringa's engaging, off-hand

Carl Paler



BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

presence as a store clerk set designer centered a nicely timed flow of comic surprises.

But most of the piece suffered from a casual pace and activity which barely sketched rather than established its points. A lengthy sequence presented in a marvelously rendered luncheonette never got beyond some repetitive mimicry of banal exchanges. An entre-acte reading of Allston's letter which had been re-edited by some lawnmower method was simply aimless. *Belshazzar's Feast*, like the painting itself, is a visual event which tells more than it shows, and what is seen sprawls in uneven fragments, a mixture of invention and inertness.

John Howell

THE SCHOOL FOR MOVEMENT RESEARCH The Museum of Modern Art Sculpture Garden (July-August). (selected reviews from the series' 10 concerts)

Yoshiko Chuma, *Make More Room.*

Simone Forti and Peter van Riper, *Umi Aui Owe.*

There is a sense of anticipation in Chuma's work. The unexpected, leaping urgency which characterizes her movement has a volatile energy, a sense of burning, as though she were trying to shake herself loose from all the burdens of humanity, release the tension which humanity carries within itself. Her body is controlled tightly like a ball of eruptive release.

Animal/insect-like crawlings, an aerodynamic balance of the body lying in quiet motion is redeemed by the breath, the breath of space. The body expressive responds to the violence in history. Her body screams with erratic impulses reflecting the suffering of humanity. Her body energy responds to the inner mechanism of complete consciousness and reawakening to response.

Her use of the grid created by the large concrete squares of the outdoor patio was symbolic of an extension of that confinement which she expresses so well. Before the movement ended, her long pole was dredging the waters of the fountain, and her body was being immersed into the cleansing moat, floating great and motionless, suspended in liquid motion.

Forti made use of the waters of MOMA's setting to begin her piece, emerging like a wet seal, sleek and playful, sensitive and aware of the sounds around her. Her motion was not mimetic but rather a deliberate, thoughtful consciousness of the space she spread her limbs in to occupy. Her gentle placings were enhanced by Peter van Riper's music, cleverly rolled about on portable speakers, echoing seal sounds, bird whistles, all recorded percussively and mixed with his own real sounds of birds, animals, wind pipe, multicircular corrugated brass tubing and fog horn clarinet. Small wooden flutes and recorder were used to create those natural man-made sounds which van Riper creates so well.

Forti slithers and gyrates in conscious mo-



Francene Keery

MAKE MORE ROOM

tions, not slick, very passive and emptied of emotional content. At intermittent points, as she rolls about on the concrete blocks, she picks up her cowbell for signal rings. Van Riper's face becomes art in itself as he moves in and around the piece, pulling metal speaker carts at random to redirect their sonar messages.

Mary Overlie, *The Figure*.

Mary Overlie's *The Figure* asserts a gift for making imagistic worlds out of odd spaces and a stripped down dancing vocabulary. The space itself helps to create metaphor, some-

in front of her torso, head horizontal to, but not touching, the ground. She presents the body as a sculptor would, in arrested motion. Two more such frozen-in-an-intermediate-place positions follow. The final one is a vertical seated position. At this point the other three dancers walk somnambulently forward toward the museum's glass wall. With one



Francene Keery

THE FIGURE

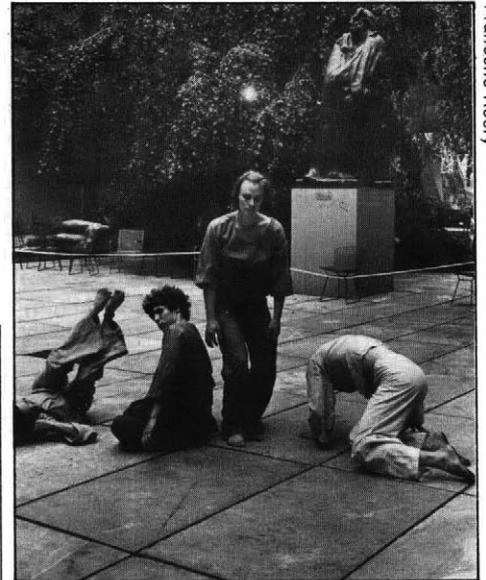
UMI AUI OWE

The piece becomes a concept of wonderment, all relevant and possible, and Forti's blue/gray clad body pulls the seal's energy with it. Van Riper reaches up to the darkness of the evening with his clarinet and his convoluted circular flute bellows like the Molimo of the African pygmy to which he likens the concept of the sound. Hollow bamboo pipes are played off the sides of his cheeks, parallel and rhythmically tapped. The small black bird whistle echoes the innate. Again the concrete grid is used for the propulsion of body movement and design as Forti quietly brings us the evolution of consciousness in one of the simplest of animal forms.

Cate Miodini

times quotidian, sometimes referential, to the art of dancing itself. Overlie illustrates space much as the early modern dancers illustrated music, not simply defining perimeters, but stretching them with the addition of self. These "stories of spaces" are made with movement which rests between the pedestrian and the choreographed gesture most often termed "modern dance." They might as easily be gesture drawings on architectural blueprints. *The Figure* takes its subject from the found qualities of the garden and from Overlie's musings on the human form in sculptural terms.

Four dancers dressed in soft pastel sexless costumes resembling pajamas stand on the footbridge which spans the reflecting pool. Overlie walks down the steps and along a strong diagonal path to a far corner. Quickly, she leadenly falls to a recumbant position. The shape is long, one leg slightly off the ground, feet relaxed, hands carefully placed



Francene Keery

arm gesture, they point up the presence of the sky and then, before retracing their steps, pause with palms open to the audience. This sequence of Overlie leaving and the other three joining repeats three times as Overlie introduces and asserts the presence of four moving bodies different from, but related to the huge Henry Moore and the reclining Maillol nude.

The third time the sequence occurs it melts without a clear transition into a unison dancey phrase which spreads throughout the space and breaks any illusions of slow and simple geometry that the audience might have expected. The phrase consists of a skittering walk with palms open frontally, a sweeping arm gesturing away from the body's vertical axis which motivates a similar leg action (something like a parallel bent-legged *rond de jambe en dehors* which opens the hip a little more each time that it is repeated), a lunge strongly forward and series of jumps in a mild first position with a collapsed fifth position *port de bras* and a tilt in the torso. Somewhere in this tuned cadence there is also a plied attitude with a twist toward the lifted leg. It looks like a ballet for rag dolls. This phrase is like a song, full of thrills but unmannered; it occurs often and is used as a transition or section divider.

All the movement contained in *The Figure* appears to be drawn from each dancer's inimitable body history. With such histories Overlie illustrates the body's natural predilection for symmetry and line, not the schooled straight lines of classical dance accented by a curved shape in the arm and neck, but a line at once all akimbo and perfectly clear. The body's form follows function, naturally. So *The Figure* has two subjects, the graceful shapes inherent within and without the human figure, and that figure influenced by and presented in a space dedicated to a schooled eye for three dimensional line. It's a dance sculptors would appreciate, performed in a style at once warm and distant.

Margaret Eginton

Susan Rethorst, *Long Sleepless Afternoons*.

In *Long Sleepless Afternoons*, Susan Rethorst presents a single-minded dance on a simple theme which carefully skirts the mere literal mimicry and conceptual triteness which so often mars such mood studies. Its generalized subject of insomniac restlessness is conveyed through blunt, awkward (though not awkwardly done), almost grotesque movement, such as a woman lying on her back with legs spread, or a difficult balance held until the dancer topples, or Rethorst pulling at her leg from a seated position until she too falls over onto her side. Throughout the piece, positions are rarely held, and then only briefly, movement phras-

LONG SLEEPLESS AFTERNOONS



Francene Keery

ing is clipped, and the tempo remains brisk, qualities which emphasize the tone of muscular agitation.

The structure of all this action, a run-on succession of solos, duets, and trios in canon and counterpoint, and a final sequence for all five dancers is unremarkable in itself. What is of interest are the unique responses the dance makes to the irregular, open garden space. Rethorst's dancers come and go during *Long Sleepless Afternoons*, a commonplace but one which works very well here; the entrances and exits from the numerous points around the irregular performance area create several small-scale dramas. This result stems from another effective feature of the work, an usage of the entire space in a decentralized way. The isolated areas, those of the raised platform, the pool, and the strips outside of the large area between the museum proper and the pool serve as settings to more or less the same degree as the natural rectangular arena. Such equal treatment retrieves them from the peripheral or idiosyncratic use to which most performers uneasily put them and allows for a more varied showing of *Long Sleepless Afternoons'* limited material.

The last section, a unison quintet of kneeling, lying, twitching, rolling, and crawling directly addresses that aspect of the garden most resistant to dance, its stone floor. The finale's length, about one-fourth of the entire work, and its head-on vigor assert dance's claim on such alien ground. At the same time, the movement sums up a forceful kinesthetic statement about a physical feeling of discomfort, fretful irritation, and unachievable relief.

John Howell

Spalding Gray, *India & After (America); Sex & Death to the Age 14; Booze, Cars & College Girls.*

The Performing Garage, September.

Spalding Gray's three solo "talking pieces," as he calls them, form a kind of oral history that expands upon the metaphoric treatment of the autobiography he presented in his trilogy *Three Places in Rhode Island*. I don't think the pieces would be as interesting in themselves if they weren't a part of Gray's ongoing anatomy of melancholy. Frank, direct (Gray is seated, and there is no setting other than a desk and chair), unpretentious, therapeutic, the solos create a portrait of an unexceptional narrator—Gray—in various stages of his life from adolescence to manhood. The more imagistic trilogy strikes me as lyric poetry and the solos as prose treatments of the same thematic ground: two sides of Gray—the performer devising a narrative self (role), the other unmasking that self.

The subject matter of the solos is fairly obvious from the titles, but *India & After (America)*, unlike the other two which simply unfold linearly as stories, is an experiment in narrative strategy. In this teasing theatre game which requires the assistance of another performer, Meghan Ellenberger, Gray is given a word randomly chosen from a dictionary, and a time limit in which to associate the word with a part of his story, in whatever sequence it relates to him.

Though this technique is not new to the novel or film, it does open up new possibilities as a dramatic device, especially since very little attention has been paid to experiments in time in performance, most experimentation focus-

ing on the use of space. Whereas *India & After (America)* has reverberations outside the world of the story, the other talking pieces simply compile data about Gray's life, offering crazy-quilt situational juxtapositions in place of a point of view.

The radical gesture of the solos as performance pieces is Gray's refusal to play a role for his audience—which is ironic in that, unlike most experiments in art which point to their uniqueness, his emphasizes the sameness of experience between himself and his audience. It is art refusing to be art.

Yet, by virtue of its context it is art, and from that perspective what I miss in the new work is a mediating consciousness which transforms raw experience into a new equation between the artist and the world (the "other"). Gray gives us only a self-portrait which merges his private and public worlds. David Antin has been doing his similar "talking poetry" for years, but he situates his personal experiences in an epistemological frame, whereas Gray is simply concerned with developing a personal mythology.

In a larger context, Gray's work pinpoints where performance theory is at the end of the seventies. One has only to compare his monologues with the earlier work of The Performance Group of which he has been a member for ten years to trace performance history in the sixties and seventies: from ritual to process, fiction to data, cultural anthropology to personal diary, the chorus to the solo voice as mode of speech.

Gray's talking pieces represent self-absorption in a relentlessly pure performance situation, and the concomitant refusal to make judgments about the world at large. It is an attitude that expresses no commitment to a future, irrevocably bound to its own sense of loss of the past. What Gray is con-

structing is a geography of the spirit outlined by the images and feelings he attaches to certain events in certain places, namely the psychic territory of his New England boyhood.

Gray is dangerously close to the kind of self-absorption that leads to breakdown or madness, most certainly beyond narcissism. His work is provocative as a theoretical model, and for its reckless exploration of the increasingly imperceptible line between performing and not performing. I think Gray's solos are about the way an actor prepares to create that "Other" between the self and the role, and as such only a stepping stone to what he will do in his continuing conceptualization of the performer as material.

Bonnie Marranca
