

LIVE 5



Laurie Anderson . Glamour by deAk . Cal Acts . Movement Research Dance
Benefit . German Video-Performance . Matthew Maguire's Creation
Company . Books by Knowles, Greyson, Applebroog . Reviews

\$3

LIVE performance 5

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LAURIE ANDERSON

UNITED STATES



A Talk With John Howell

Photographs by Paula Court

How did this four-part United States performance begin?

I did a birthday party concert for Horace Solomon at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1979. That was an early version of *Part I*, then called *Americans on the Move*. It was a sort of holiday for keyboards with six of us playing because I wanted a really massive sound. When I did other versions of that piece later by myself, I began to see what the important parts were and to weed out the musical lines that didn't need to be there. Then what happened was that I had to fill it up somehow and be more in the foreground myself. Then in a way, I felt more comfortable because I had more control.

Americans on the Move, Part I, or as you now call it, United States, Part I, is a solo performance with a few supporting players. In Part II you worked with a large rock band. How did that affect your performance?

The problem was how to keep my words foreground and still let the music cook. The rock solution is to use repetitive language, that's one choice. But a one-shot concert is not like a record where you have a chance to pick it up after listening three or four times.

You either hear the words and pay a lot of attention to them or you don't bother. So I tried to keep the instrumentation real simple by keeping the musical pitches within talking range. Then you can pay the same kind of attention to the voice as to the melody. But even then, with so many people coming in with their musical lines, I didn't feel quite free enough to put more of myself in. So I didn't feel that I was quite *there* in the Orpheum performance.

Does Part II have a solo version?

I just performed it solo for the first time and I liked it a lot better although I missed hearing the other musicians.

Let's talk about Part II's songs. The program note says the song "O Superman" is "for Massenet." How did that happen?

I heard a concert by Charles Holland, an incredible singer who worked with Fletcher Henderson in the thirties. He couldn't get much work in the United States so he moved to Amsterdam. He and Dennis Russell-Davies did a concert in Berkeley that I heard

in May. The guy was so nervous because he was coming home after thirty years of being a musical exile that he couldn't sing. He dropped his glasses, dropped the music, apologized after each song, saying, "I'm sorry, this is a beautiful song and I've ruined it." The audience was just dying for him. Then he began this Massenet song which is really a kind of prayer: "O Souverain, O Juge, O Pere," then lyrics that say "All my dreams of glory are gone, your picture is in my soul, I submit to you, the light is dark, the soldiers march." I could only pick up fragments of the French. Suddenly he could sing because this song was an appeal for help. It was an amazing turnaround moment, the feeling in that room was very intense, and everyone was so relieved. I couldn't stop thinking about those first five notes of the melody—after that I couldn't remember how it went. So "O Superman" was made around those fragments.

What about that counterpoint line behind the main theme? Sometimes it sounds like "Ha-ha-ha-Ha-ha-ha," like laughter, and other times it sounds like "Ah-ah-ah-Ah-ah-ah," like sighs.

I thought of it as "ah." Rudolph Steiner thought that children should be taught the alphabet by getting them to believe that every sound has an emotion. So that when they pronounce "a," they should really let loose an "AH."

Have you heard this technique in action? It sounds frightening.

It is. I heard it in Bern at a special school.

Did you think about Part II as being infantile?

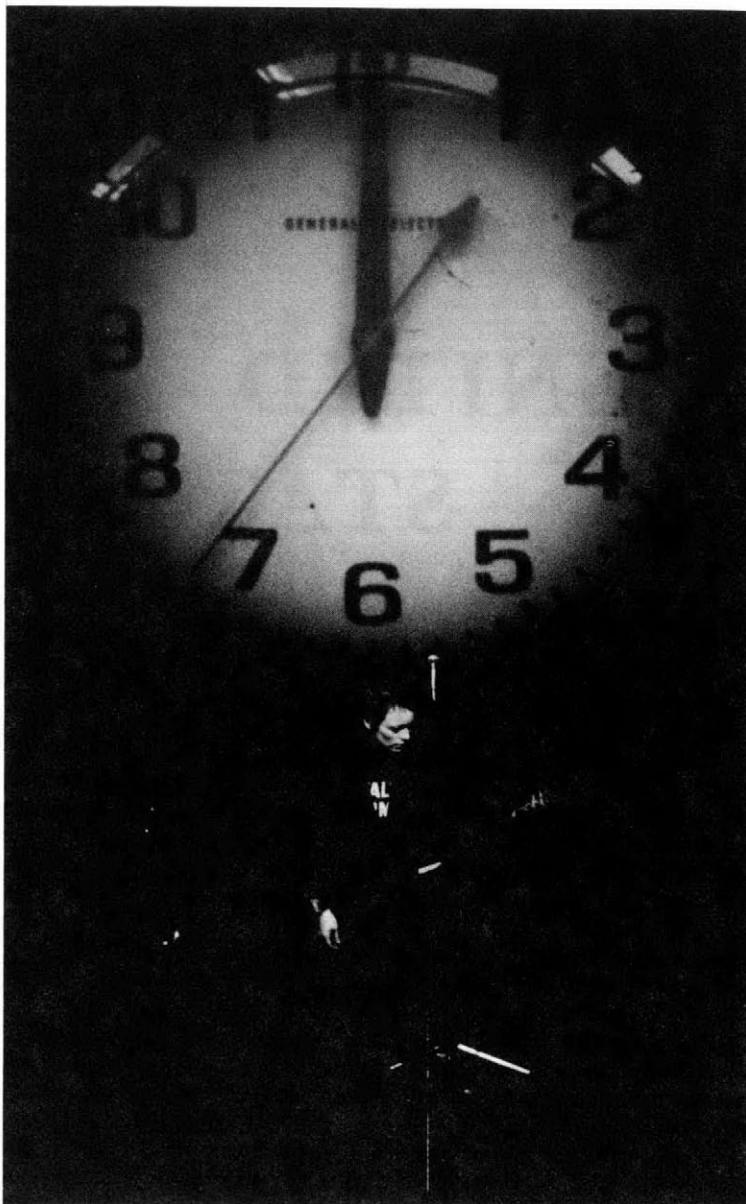
Sure. Babies is a kind of theme, this is a piece for a certain kind of baby. Someone said it was macrocephalic. You know those Durer drawings of babies? That was the image. That would be frightening if adults had the proportions of babies.

That image appeared several times. There's the mailman's nightmare....

Who dreams that everyone in the world has a baby's proportions. People can't read or write and he sees them walking down the street. It's a dream that I had, part of a series in which I asked people who had a profession related to the dream to read them. In this case I chose a mailman because of the aspect of delivery.

How did the idea of "baby" affect your language?

I tried to keep words to one or two syllables. That was one goal, to



do a very Anglo-Saxon language piece with as many nouns as possible, to be as concrete and basic as I could. Also, the percussive aspect of the electronics I was using, and especially the repeat mode on the harmonizer, tended to influence the music because a lot of the basic tracks came from them. I wanted to pair that sense of a digital beat to appropriate language: nothing too flowery. So the words tended to be short. The phrasing tended to be slogans or repetitive progressions, like "when love is gone there's always justice, when justice is gone there's always force."

Then you go on to say "there's always Mom." Don't those responses that objected to feelings of helplessness come from those baby allusions, from coupling the loss of love and justice with Mom?

You could make a case for that. The six times babyhood is pointed to, powerlessness is present. But I was surprised when people told me that the piece was satanic.

Referring to all the blackness?

I think they meant dark, scary, evil. Well, I don't know about evil.

There is a tradition that black or dark equals evil.

It was not really intended to be so dark. We were trying some backlighting.



Isn't that talk about color a way of talking about emotional tone, of apocalyptic content? Could we say that your earlier performances were more humorous and autobiographically anecdotal, and that Part II is straight eighties politics, and that's a grim picture?

It was very odd for me to hear that this was a helpless, hopeless piece because I think you can talk about things without being them. My impression about performing is that I don't feel helpless, and I didn't feel that the work would encourage people to feel helpless. I was interested in infantilism but I don't feel infantile. I don't think you have to be what you talk about.

When we talked about acting and non-acting in performance last year [LIVE 2] you spoke of not using "I" so much in your texts and attitudes.

In *Part II* I tried as much as possible to be an observer more than a first-person commentator, and to try to stick to some kinds of factual information. There are several sections that begin with "I" or an implied "I" that's more like acting. That William F. Buckley song, for example, "Private Property," is an attempt to refer to his voice as well as talk about him. The flip side of that is that I didn't say "you" consciously in *Part II*. There was a floating idea of babyhood. Now I was not the baby. Who was? The viewer is not about to think "I'm the baby." So babyhood just hovers around.

You're not saying you don't take on any of the characteristics or moods of whatever you're talking about?

Oh I do. Right now I feel helpless politically as I think a lot of people do. But that's not the extent of what I feel, it's one mood. One of the reasons that I want to do the whole *United States* as a four-part series is that there are other moods in other parts.

There's a lot of frustration in Part II: The first few stories are "I can't speak French," "I can't see the traffic," "There's a newspaper strike on and everything's wrong on television," and so on. There's a repeated idea that things are going wrong in a very powerful and significant way. Don't you think that some of the audience projected those expressions as your feelings because they didn't want to admit to their own frustration or political helplessness?

What resentment there was only reinforced my own ideas about how people do feel helpless. I don't see how it could be any other way after being able to feel your own political power in the sixties.

The first group of stories ended with the image of gridlock, the ultimate irony

of the highly technical, complexly organized society—of which New York is supposedly the epitome—frozen in complete paralysis.

I don't blame people for not wanting to identify too heavily with that, it's not a beautiful picture. But I didn't see any reason to soften it or to come to terms with it, I just wanted to present it.

Don't you occupy a politically ambiguous zone by only pointing to issues and refusing to specify solutions?

I don't think of myself in any way as a war-monger, but if you start pointing to information like that, you have to take a clear position about your feelings. I tried to avoid taking a political posi-



tion although I'm sure I did just that by the way things worked out.

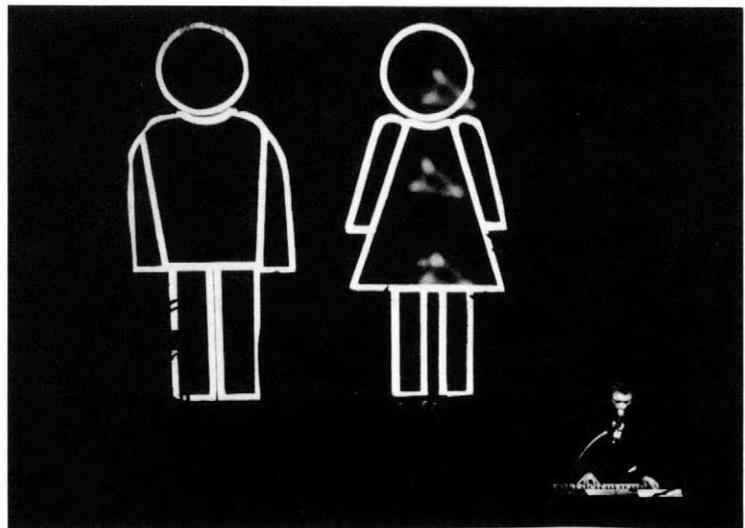
Do you think the piece itself has a politics?

Let's say that it's political sense, a certain kind of attitude that I think people in the art world share. I didn't really say what I thought should be done. I'm not running for office. It's not my job and it's not what interested me in doing this work. Politics is about problem-solving. I wasn't attempting to solve any problems, I was simply looking at problems and using them for my own purposes. One of my purposes was to see what kind of real, basic, down-home attitudes have to do with political attitudes. Another reason I

chose to look at these issues is that I'm really bored with working with things that can only be judged in aesthetic terms. That's not enough any more. I wanted to look at something more or less real, although the more I looked at these particular political issues, the more unbelievable they became.

We could call them subjects of the larger world. The news seems very unreal these days.

Someone wrote that *U.S. Part II* was a lot of in-group word play and asked, "What does it mean?" This person is, I believe, a dance critic. I'd never ask what a dance "means." In all of the work I've ever done, my whole intention was not to map out



meanings but to make a field situation. I'm interested in facts, images, and theories which resonate against each other, not in offering solutions. And also *not* in stating my case in a way that is dogmatic. I don't think that means that the work is unclear or that it's just playing with words.

So it's more an impression than an analysis....

Like a thermometer....

Taking the temperature of the subject rather than x-ray it. Most viewers found that Part II's dark mood and so-called "lack of answers" was an accurate and moving picture.



But those other reactions are the ones which interest me the most. It really bothers me that some people felt that it was upsetting, that it was frustrating.

Was working on the piece frustrating for you?

Yes, but it became my channel for saying something about that mood so maybe I was able to relieve myself.

I know you feel that the work's refusal to present solutions doesn't imply any lack of meaning, but when you say you don't ask what something means....

I take that back. By "mean" I meant to write a paragraph, to distill the whole experience so that you end up with "she's talking about frustration." That doesn't tell you anything. I certainly didn't mean that this piece meant nothing.

You're saying that your meanings are not detachable from the complex of

ways—text, music, visual image, media—in which you are presenting them.

Exactly. This code is opaque. *Part II* was about a certain mood that was that mood. The song "Let X*X" was saying leave this code alone, this code is self-reflexive.

Reducing or summarizing your statement is not your job.

Right. I'm only interested in thinking that way when I see other people's work.

In earlier performances, your texts were more about storytelling, narrative anecdotes in which the listener is mostly a passive receiver. Are you opening up that mode in Part II?

These days I feel more comfortable with songs that are more disjunctive than linear. This piece is more about words than others but in another way. How can you say what's on your mind?

without letting it all out? People came down on that, too, saying I used language to say that it was impossible to use it.

Do you plead guilty? What about the song for Burroughs, "Language is a Virus"?

One of Burroughs' main themes is that language is a kind of disease and that when you open your mouth, you should know it's communicable. If you interpret that statement in the Buddhist sense of getting rid of the split between the thing and the word, then the idea is "don't name it, let it exist." So I don't feel I was untrue to one sense of Burroughs' quote. I referred to things but didn't get carried away with their analysis. You can say a word, refer to that word in a discrete situation, then let it sit as a noun.

You also referred to that original language-as-problem man, Wittgenstein.

In Bern I met Jacqueline Burkhardt, a descendant of Jacob Burkhardt, one of my cultural heroes. She came to my solo performance of *Part II* and couldn't believe this translation of Wittgenstein's quote. She said it should be "If you can't talk about it, don't talk about it at all" instead of "If you can't talk about it, point to it." She also said she loved my translation because it was so mute and clear in itself.

I think the last phrase is something like "be silent" in German. How was Part II received in Europe?

Very well. Europeans didn't identify with it so directly so there wasn't that immediate problem with the politics. But it was not taken as political propaganda either; the reactions focused on the language issue. On the whole, the piece was more clearly perceived there than in New York.

Did you feel like you were feeding Europe a black view of America that they like to have confirmed?

I had some reservations about that but I can't re-write a work for each audience.

Were you surprised by how people took you to be or not be "you" in Part II?

I was surprised nobody asked why I was in drag, a reaction I got when I first started using those clothes with those male voice filters.

It's ambiguous because you're using several voices, filtering your voice through electronics to create voices that are part yours and part machine, part

you and part that other voice.

When I'm doing a song with that deep male voice, I completely disassociate myself from it. It seems so separate, it really is another voice coming out of a speaker over there. It's not me, it's the Voice of Authority, an attempt to create a corporate voice, a kind of "Newsweekese."

How do you feel about your voice as an instrument?

Captain Beefheart or Meredith Monk have voices that are really musical instruments. I have the voice I'm using now. I guess I could take voice lessons, but I'm not interested in that kind of virtuosity. If I can achieve the effect I want electronically, I will.

Did the experience of performing at the Orpheum Theatre make you think about differences between performance and theatre?

I've lost interest in that as a distinction.

Are you saying the labels have no meaning?

No, but I don't think about it. I don't think the work becomes more or less theatrical because of the space. I don't wonder whether I'm doing performance or theatre, and basically I don't care what it's called at this point. I used to be manic about the fact that I was not doing theatre. Maybe it's because I'm getting closer to theatre that I don't care, maybe it's a way of saying that it's okay to be theatre if that's what it is.

Don't you think that question influences how people perceive what you're doing? You know there are mixed feelings in the art world about "theatre."

Oh sure, but I like the idea of work entering the culture in a different way and that's what I'm trying to do. For years I've thought about a way to have something to do with the larger culture rather than just being part of a museum-gallery, downtown art culture, and to try to get away from being supported only by government funds. Radio is another way out.

Part III will be about money, what about Part IV?

Love. That's a solo.

And you'll do the whole cycle at once when those parts are finished?

I would like to do two parts a night, two three-hour shows on con-

spective nights which would show all four parts. I feel very strongly that there's a lot of consistency in these pieces and that they need to be done together even if just to avoid things like misunderstandings about the politics in *Part II*.

Were you surprised by the large audience for this Orpheum show and the extensive publicity it attracted?

I don't think of myself or my work in terms of fashion. I think of this as something I'm going to be doing for a long time. If my work appears fashionable, I think I'll survive that. Performance art was fashionable five years ago, it's out of fashion now.

Fashion in art now is a certain kind of painting.

Fashion—art: a snake that bites its own tail.



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THEY LIVE BY NIGHT

John Howell

As New York clubs have multiplied, heating up the scramble for your "new wave" dollar, they have been fighting all the more to become the HQ of the art-fashion-music nexus. Some places work at this elusive, formulaic cachet from scratch (the Rock Lounge), others try to hang on to what they've got (the Mudd Club). One common practice at these and other clubs—Hurrah's, the late Tier 3, Club 57—has been the presentation of special events: theme nights, fashion shows, and personality skits. During the last year or so, they have begun to host more all-out performances, from group variety shows like *Last War III* at Mudd, last winter's month-long series, and *A's* at s.n.a.f.u., an occasional showcase for Arleen Schloss' workshop, to any number of solo shots around town.

Certainly it's been a mutual affair. The venue shift makes sense for performances built around music, slide, film, and video images, "personality," and costume, which deal with hot subjects—politics, sex—in a topical way. This brand of performance has all but been evicted from galleries, and the alternative art spaces have booked-up programs. Besides, the club idea comes on sexy: late hours, new audiences, lots of uh ... social interaction—in short, nightlife glamour instead of art world aestheticism.

However, this unholy union has its price. The flip side of these shiny thrills means big problems: rudimentary technical resources, lack of appropriate space for both performers and audience, disorga-

nization by organizers, late-arriving viewers who are notably impatient (better be "good," i.e., flashy, fast) and less than attentive (gotta check out the scene). So far, the experiment has turned up nothing to shout about in terms of either club as social milieu or performance as art.

Leave it to Edit deAk, all-around producer of *Art-Rite* magazine fame, to come up with another take on the whole phenomenon. Her 1974 *Person/Persona* show, a week-long program at the original Artists' Space gallery, introduced pizzazz to alternative space earnestness, and so made the liveliest statement about seventies performance activity (among the artists: Jack Smith, Eleanor Antin, Scott Burton, Laurie Anderson). Three nights of this November's *Dubbed in Glamour* gave a twist to such matchmaking by presenting personalities as performers; kinky glamour met up with straight (relatively) art space. In the Kitchen's more formal setting, the frothy creme de la creme of club society served up an "image frolics" of performances, slideshows, videotapes and films, music prerecorded and live. When the glitter settled, there were more than two or three things we knew about her ("Glamour is woman, of course"—Edit deAk).

1. Glamour makes you wait. The first two hours of each four hour plus show were like sitting on the sofa talking to parents while the corsage wilted in your hands. Glamour takes her time.

2. Glamour doesn't work too long. Brevity is the soul of flash. Too long under the

lights and style, like make-up, melts into a patchy blur.

3. Glamour doesn't exert, she exudes. Sweat means she's sick. Trying too hard is trying. Glamour doesn't try at all.

4. Glamour is extreme. Catch her in the middle of the road and you've caught her in motion, not action.

5. In glamour, pose is *ne plus ultra*. Attitude is all, or she's nothing. Image is skin deep, artifice is her only reality.

6. Glamour begins with looking good. Ugly will never do. (See Baudelaire on make-up.)

7. Glamour dresses up. A "come as you are" invite never catches her with pants down.

8. Glamour "does it." To dress up is a necessary first step for undressing. Then comes step two.

9. Glamour loves herself. Narcissism in the pursuit of image is no crime. Media exists to play back her portrait to her own adoring self.

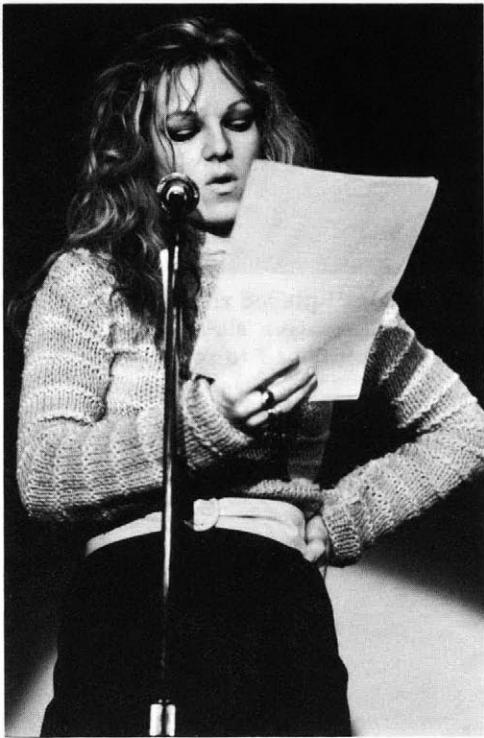
10. Glamour likes music. She's got rhythm in her methods. Talk is cheap—which she is not.

11. Glamour saves the best for last. Each night ended with a musical bang: Ex-Dragon Debs, Funky Four Plus One, Bush Tetras.

12. Glamour travels. Even working in the Kitchen, style shows.

Glamour Groupies at the Kitchen

Paula Court



ANNE DEON Italian vision with black hair against rippling red dress ... mouth like a beautiful wound ... breathed life into stiff format of live singer and pre-recorded accompaniment ... details of songs (her own) lost in blur of heated delivery.

Paula Court



COOKIE MUELLER Emcee for Night Three ... sassy and real ... read stories made up of equal parts dumb cliches and clever twists ... run-on delivery of run-on hippie epic about '60s California, i.e., heroin, Charles Manson, crystal meth, black rapists, grass, gurus, LSD, communes, hitchhiked rides to nowhere, mescaline, crash pads, you know.



Paula Court

MISS VENEZUELA Night Two's M of C ... claimed to have forgotten all English (sample intro: "This next is fun, I think it is very funny, I hope you have fun") ... she was fun, very funny, and fun was had ... likewise ingenuous about killer blue formal gown: no strut, no sashay, she just wore it with throwaway panache ... charm to burn.

Paula Court



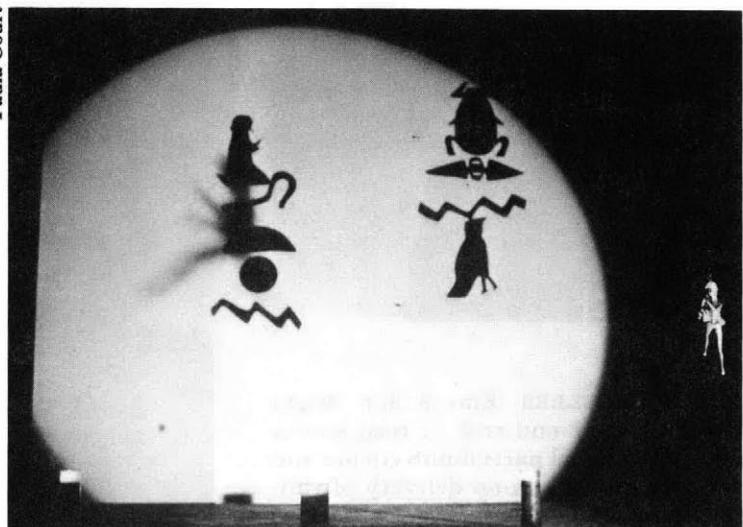
FUNKY FOUR PLUS ONE MORE Hip-hop rappers ... four guys and Sha Rock ... dj "Breakout" played rhythm track disks while Funkies took turns at individual capsule bios spoken/sung in alliterative slang ... "Manhattan" (Sha Rock) another world to these Bronx groovers, but they ripped the joint, had to repeat numbers for overcome Manhattanites.

Paula Court



MARILYN Two New York archetypes, leather boy and Queens secretary, joined in statistical passion in make-believe unemployment office ... ah, their claims were final: they've been murdered (Hell is other people in Section C) ... script for this perverse skit from N.Y. Post.

Paula Court



TINA L'HOTSKY Her "Last New York Disappearance" ... golden Barbie doll (tiny mike in hand) twirled in spotlight ... candles flickered as did interest as we waited, waited ... then all too clearly: that was it ... Act II: L'Hotsky's appearance at the Rock Lounge party afterwards.



Paula Court

EX-DRAGON DEBS (Lisa Rosen Nares, Mary Lemley, Anne Deon, Sophie VDT) Front group for solo numbers ... in rare moment of togetherness sang "Department Store Dummies" ... these girls give no quarter (yards of tulle, purple wigs, black underwear) ... fast-moving song and dance frolics pushed along by cool pianist Wesley Strick ... their act—profoundly silly, drenched in amateur charm—preceded by deAk's woozy, slow-mo, gorgeous Super-8 look at Debs' debut at Mudd.



Nathaniel Tileston

LISA ROSEN NARES, MARY LEMLEY Nares, pouting, sang "Don't You Touch My Thigh" while the fickle finger probed on and up ... fantasies of schoolgirl lubricity, "d'enfants toutes nues, pour tenter les demons ajustant bien leur bas" (Baudelaire) ... demons around the room rose to this bait.



Nathaniel Tileston

ESZTER BALINT, MARY LEMLEY Eine kleine nachtmusik: "Moritat"—"Mac the Knife"—delivered in German (every verse too) ... one new irony in "And Macheath has got a knife, but not in such an obvious place" ... sung dead pan to Balint's dead pan sawing.



BUSH TETRAS (Cynthia Sley vocals, Pat Place guitar, Laura Kennedy bass, Dee Pop drums) Playing better and better ... live "Too Many Creeps" 100% jump over record of same ... slashing and prescient cover: "Cold Turkey" ... funkily sprung rhythm section, scratchy slide guitar, chanted vocals ... still, tunes stay in two keys with similar textures ... performance peculiarities: Sley's collapsed stance, Place's interior stare, Kennedy's furious posing (love her hair), Pop's on-the-job look ... tension, some extra-musical, turned on their crackling short set.

Paula Court



ZOE "Mr. Jordan" and "Mr. Karras" took forever to explain stardom but Zoe was not for sale ... this girl kept her talent under wraps.

Nathaniel Tileston

CHI CHI VALENTI Tough-talking mistress of ceremonies on Night One ... performed solo lip-sync entr'actes ... favorite mouth-along tunes: humpy disco numbers and Motown scorchers ("Love Child") ... flashed her cookies for the boys on the front row ... not as naughty as she thinks she is.



Nathaniel Tileston

As the decade turned, a new force began to make its (literal) presence felt in San Francisco's non-mainstream art circles. The almost simultaneous emergence of six non-commercial art spaces run mostly by young, former art students marked the possibility of a potentially vital phenomenon-in-the-making. Interested observers wondered if it would prove merely a trendy diversion or a movement of genuine consequence. Happily, the latter seems to be the case. With a year's experience under their belts, the founders of these new spaces have matched initial enthusiasm with sustained commitment and quickly acquired know-how.

Club Foot, Valencia Tool and Die, A-Hole, Club Generic, Jet Wave, and A.R.E. (Artists' Revolution in the Eighties) are the six picturesquely named spaces. Such nomenclature suggests the New Wave sensibilities generally at play and in the cases of Club Foot and Generic, an acknowledgement of the current mutuality of interests among the videophile, club-based punk music and the experimental performance communities. (Probably not coincidentally, Futurist and Dada performance of the early 20th century flourished in similarly theatrically and musically oriented cabaret *milieux*.)

Performance is the major, but by no means exclusive activity presented in these spaces. Video, film and music are frequently scheduled (almost invariably for one night stands) and even paintings are sometimes shown. Beer-drinking and joint smoking are also ubiquitous. The programming differences of the various spaces seem to have more to do with the scope than the kind of programs presented, although certain forms, painting for instance, are taboo at some spaces (Club Foot and Generic), *de rigueur* at others (Jet Wave, A.R.E. and, occasionally, Valencia Tool and Die).

CAL ACTION

Unorthodox Acts Out West

Robert Atkins

The audience—art and music-makers and buffs, critics and curators-on-the-make—crosses over widely. It would be difficult, I think, to find someone regularly attending one of these establishments who had not visited several of the others.

The six new spaces are housed in low rent storefronts, lofts, even an old boarding house/hotel, scattered across about a five mile corridor from the rather dangerous Tenderloin District (Club Generic must keep its door locked to prevent winos and junkies from wandering in) to Civic Center and the outer reaches of South-of-Market and the Mission District.

Karen Finley prepares for her performance by regaling the audience with her onion stuffed, worn-over-the-blouse brassiere which results in surprisingly life-like effects. *Stop Talking, Start Kissing* has not, however, begun as yet. Finley is the last act on the night's triple bill with Gina Lamb and Jeff Stole. The double, triple and even quadruple-header has become standard practice at such events.

Finley prefaces her performance with the announcement that the video camera

operator ought to participate and in a manic burst of energy he removes his shirt, oils his torso and gets down to business. Business means emptying the contents of a nearby refrigerator, dousing herself, the floor and sometimes the audience with food, drink and assorted objects. Highlights of the first half include Finley overturning a dresser, stuffing canned peaches in her vagina and pantyhose and tossing live worms at the audience. The second half of Finley's performance brings a professional belly dancer who gamely keeps her cool while dancing in the now *very* messy space.

Bradley Bailey sits down at a table flanked front and rear by mirrors. He verbalizes an internal dialogue provoked by a mail order tract on how to measure your head for a toupee. Reason and narcissism skirmish. The punchline (and title) tells the tale: *Should I Get a Toupee or What?*

Bradley again presents what seems unusual material for a male, in a companion piece staged the same evening, called *Getting Dressed to Go to a Party*. Nudity, music and dance alternate, making Bradley's party preparations/quest for identity anything but a solemn ritual.



For Kate Kline May's evocative *Tableaux Vivants* the audience is led from a basement, entered via a sidewalk trade entrance, to an upstairs gallery by mute docent Ed Holmes, communicating via a hand-carried, portable cassette recorder. The text is pure art double-speak abstractly fashioned from an *Artforum* essay on Walter Benjamin coupled with Orson Welles' narration from the King Tut exhibition. Flashlight in hand, the docent turns our attention to the evening's attractions: documentary photographs on the floor of the performances to come, then the performers themselves.

In a ground level nylon net cage, Pilar Limosner parodies Martha Graham. She moves to Bach while an audial backdrop of rain, sirens and wind is heard. Blackout. Painted silver from head to toe, save for her

face, Judith Harding slowly climbs an aluminum ladder while expertly rendering *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*, *a cappella*. She is a topless New Wave sex object and the most current model of female artistic accomplishment May presents in this surreal gallery of living sculpture.

Australian Sam Schoenbaum's *Tri-X* is a 40 minute, Super-8 film shot at a recent Gay march on Washington, D.C. The visual action is confined, for the most part, to the marchers in motion, continually moving in the same direction. The film is pixillated, resulting in a relentless, thrusting dynamism.

The audio is divided into two simultaneously heard parts. Speakers in the front transmit an endless discussion by three therapists on the relationship of (anal)

Tableaux Vivants, installation by Kate Kline May, at Valencia Tool and Die.

sex and intimacy, while speakers in the rear project the music of Devo. Warholian overkill produces cumulatively powerful effects, which many audience members find discomfiting.

I've selected these three performances and one film for their typicality, rather than their quality. (Of the four, only May's *Tableaux Vivants* is genuinely arresting.) They do, however, suggestively and straightforwardly embody the themes characterizing virtually all the works, particularly performances, presented in these spaces. The themes are sex (and sexual identity), entertainment, commerce, fashion, art-making and political engagement.

The ubiquity with which these issues are raised suggests a thematic and stylistic reaction to the slick banalities of television, the media, and post-Watergate society-at-large. The somnolent seventies are gone and political rhetoric has re-entered the artistic vocabulary, especially the lexicon of this generation which has come of age in the seventies. Whether the message is overt or covert (or even incomprehensible), the sensibility is raw, technological, and above all, expressive.

Astonishingly, over 500 events have been presented at these spaces in their single year of existence. They have functioned as an art-making laboratory for an emerging group of mostly video/performance-oriented artists—Yura Adams, Jose Bustos, Bruce Gluck, Ondyn Herschelle, Randy Hussong, Richard Irwin, Tony Labat, Gina Lamb, Silvana Nova, Mike Osterhout, Sabina Ott, Mark Pauline,

Michael Pepe, Magdalen Pierrakos, Bruce Pollack and Jan Zbiciak, among others.

It is essential to note that the performances I've described could have been staged elsewhere. Similar fare is regularly dished up at punk performance/music palaces like San Francisco's Savoy Tivoli as well as at any of the local established alternative spaces (Museum of Conceptual Art, the Farm, 80 Langton St., Site and La Mamele). In terms of alternative art spaces, the work may fit (A-Hole founder Tony Labat highlighted 80 Langton Street's fifth anniversary performance series), but conditions have changed since the founding of these spaces 5-10 years ago. Apart from something of a generational sensibility gap, MOCA, the Farm and La Mamele have drastically reduced their performance schedules, 80 Langton Street tends to showcase the cream of local, national and international artists (a single show there a year is more than anyone could expect), and Site's mostly round robin curatorial policy often puts past exhibitors in curatorial positions, favoring a slightly older group of artists.

One wonders then if the new spaces should be considered a second generation of alternative spaces or some kind of alternative to alternative spaces, perhaps along the lines of what Richard Goldstein in the *Village Voice* called "anti-spaces." The six, however, bear only passing resemblance to New York's anti-spaces (Fashion Moda, ABC No Rio, and Group Material) which generally cultivate non-art world, third world, and neighborhood audiences and artists. And the question is complicated because the six, despite their similarities, are not a monolithic entity. A.R.E., for instance, perhaps the most art-establishment oriented of the bunch, is losing its well-located gallery donated by Angelo Sangiacomo, a notorious San Francisco

Kate Kline May



Judith Harding performs "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" from *Tableaux Vivants*.

landlord. Its directors are seeking N.E.A. assistance to continue programming. A "traditional" alternative space may be in the making.

Nonetheless, for the most part these spaces are structured quite differently and embrace goals and values far different than those of the alternative art spaces which essentially sprang from (post) counter-cultural thinking. This perception is based on my observations and the result of a questionnaire I circulated. Highlights of both include the following:

—The founders of the new spaces, not surprisingly, come from art backgrounds, most connected very recently with the San

Francisco Art Institute, some tracing their ties to Virginia, Massachusetts and upstate New York. Formal relationships with the New Wave music community exist, including sculptor Peter Belsito's participation in the founding of *Damage Magazine* and Valencia Tool and Die. Save for Club Generic, all were organized collectively, making this a group of twenty plus organizers rather than six.

—While espousing ideals of democratic and pluralistic participation, curating is as frequently the province of one or two as it is of a curatorial committee.

—This rather personalized orientation manifests itself in flexible policy-making and quick programming changes. A-Hole, for example, is (perhaps temporarily) cutting back on its programming reflecting the needs of its organizers, while Club Foot ponders the very necessity of its existence.

—Rents are paid in a variety of ways; subletting being the favorite. Bands are the favored subleasees.

—Subletting and late night musical programming (after-hours revenue generating parties) helped fertilize the potential connections between music and art makers already evident in local art circles. Thus audiences are by no means exclusively composed of art aficionados. (Different events, of course, bring out different audiences.)

—For artists, the spaces provide not only art making opportunities, but the practical experience of hustling publicity and audiences. (Alternative spaces created a class of professional administrators which insulated artists from these practical necessities.)

Such findings suggest to me that these spaces do indeed constitute a new phenomenon. They are neither alternative spaces nor anti-spaces, but provisional spaces. They represent not a destination, as do alternative or anti-spaces, but a provi-

Pilar Limsoner in *Tableaux Vivants*.



Kate Kline May

sional locale on the art-making itinerary of the professionally oriented artists involved.

Given the precarious finances and highly personalized character of these provisional spaces, it seems unlikely at this point that more than one (A.R.E.) will be sufficiently institutionalized to survive the inevitable loss of founding leadership. Whatever their longevity, the impact of the provisional spaces on the art-making community during this past year has been profound, and certainly more important than the impact of the similar number of well-funded alternative spaces. They have provided—and continue to provide—viable role models of professional accomplishment for those following them. They have generated excitement and forged a sense of community where none had existed before. They may be the first wholly positive emanation of the eighties.

Robert Atkins is a freelance art critic who lives in San Francisco.

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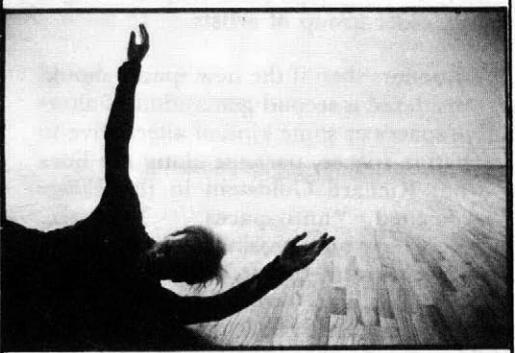
performance art #3



Robert Ashley • Dance Day at The Kitchen •
Intermedia Festival • Childs/Glass/LeWitt • S.F.
MOMA [Space/Time/Sound] • Performance Alia
Milanese [Sixto Notes Festival] • Performance Books •
Reviews

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performance art 4



Dunn on Dance • Social Performance • Robert Wilson's Chairs • Rainer,
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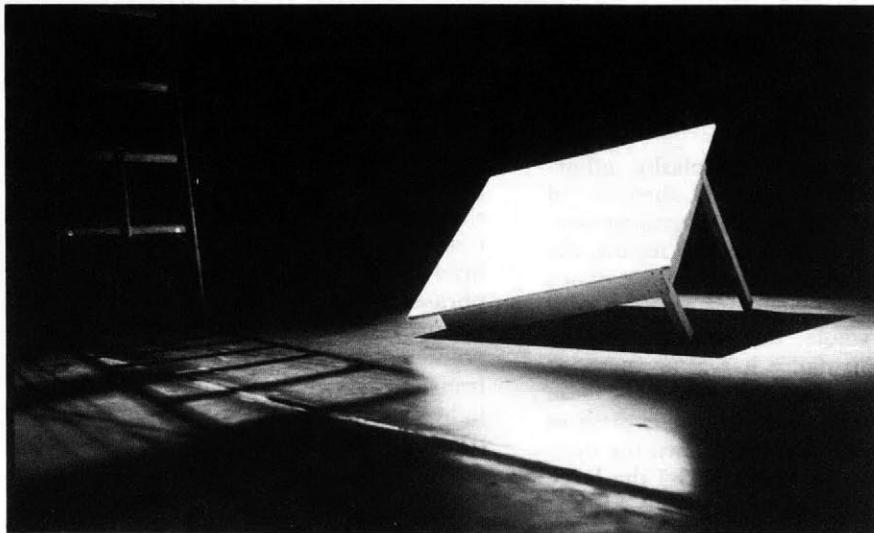
CHARITY BALL



Dance Benefit for Movement Research, Inc.

Margaret Eginton and John Howell

Photographs by Nathaniel Tileston



Cynthia Hedstrom, Director

Movement Research, Inc. is the flat-footed name for an organization which supports some of the liveliest dance around. As an institution, it exists not in a building but in the minds and studios of its affiliated choreographers and dancers. As a group it is eclectic by design, drawing on a sense of shared general attitudes toward dance rather than on any monolithic ideology. Movement Research sponsors workshops and informal performances, operates as a consulting service for concerts, and occasionally presents benefits for its programs. After two years its premise seems clearly established, for an overflow crowd showed up for the second such benefit at an out-of-the-way venue (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th Street) not suited for dance (an auditorium with bad sight lines) on a bitterly cold night (December 19).

The program featured nine dances by a mix of veteran and relatively new choreographer-dancers: Steve Paxton, Daniel Lepkoff, Lisa Nelson, Nancy Stark Smith, Christina Svane, Kenneth King, Douglas Dunn, Judy Padow, Dana Reitz, Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, Yoshiko Chuma, and Johanna Boyce. Their very different performances encompassed various kinds of contemporary dance called by that vague term "post-modern"; there were three movement-study solos (Reitz, Padow, and Dunn), one talking-dancing duet (Jones and Zane), two collaborative works (Freelance: Paxton, Lepkoff, Nelson, Smith, Svane; and King with Carter Frank, Shari Cavin, and William Shepard), two tightly graphed group pieces (Boyce and Padow), and one dance/film collaboration (Chuma with Jacob Burckhardt).

Aside from their diversity, the only other general characteristic this group exhibited was a sense of consolidation rather than of

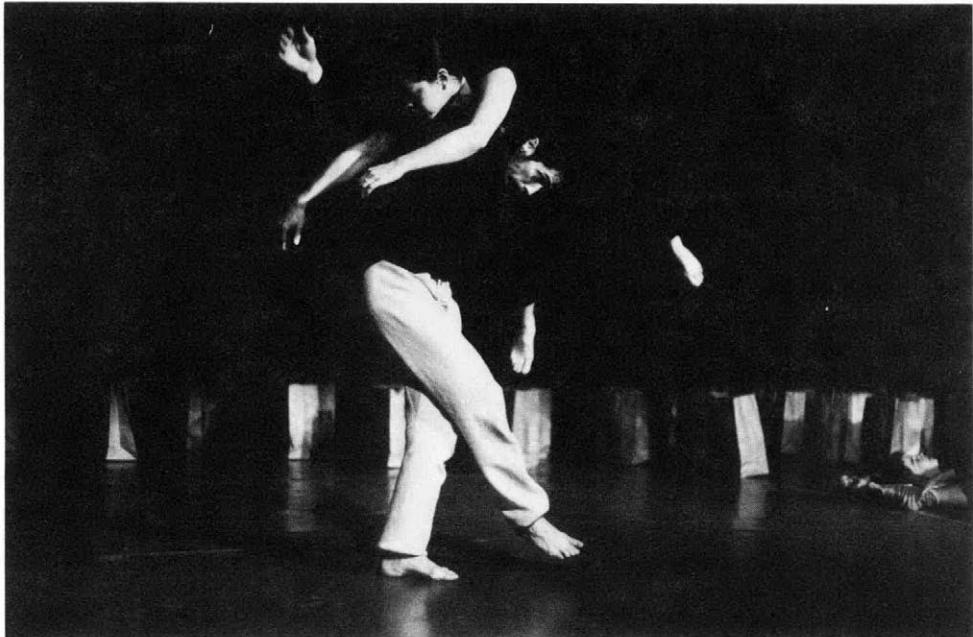
experimentation. As the Sage near us noted, it was strange to see nothing very strange at such a concert of "new" dance. Of course by now most polemical dance points have passed into conventional wisdom: unaccompanied dance, dance with distinctively separate accompaniment, structure as subject, non-technical and task-oriented movement, ordinary objects as props, neutral performance presence. And the use of more extreme elements—everyday behavior, improvisation, nudity, confrontation of the audience—has diminished as has their shock value.

All of the dances in this concert were very well-mannered (with the partial exception of Chuma's); nothing extreme happened to disturb an equally good-natured audience. The benefit atmosphere undoubtedly played a part in creating this mood. However, as each performer's dance was representative of his or her choreography, this good-will looks to be built into the foundations of a lot of current work; a certain disregard for the viewer seems absent in favor of pleasing (in the largest sense of the word) the audience.

Not all innovation is a splashy affair. Beneath the now-accepted rhetoric of "post-modern" dance, choreography continues to extend, by more subtle means, the forms and methods established for dance by two decades of exhaustive experimentation. On the whole, the program showed just how far this dance has come; now, as in the other arts, the trick will be for these dances to drag one foot in the side ditch as they find themselves rolling down the middle of the road. As indicated by the large and enthusiastic audience, the "post-moderns" have come of age.



Dana Reitz, *Steps*. Not the 1975 study of walking in place but a new piece (or new version of the old one) for arms and torso with some traveling ... structured improvisations: sections began with various simple arm-swinging motions, ended like a train of thought after variations, then a brief walk and into another ... witty phrases growing out of simple hand gestures ... a liquid quality which counterpointed the angular shapes ... smooth transfers of weight ... attack is quick and light but grounded ... new easy-going, direct attitude toward audience.



Freelance, *Raft* (excerpt). Dance in which things happen ... duet of many droll encounters (Nelson and Svane), stormy trio (Nelson, Svane, and Paxton), sleepy solo by Nelson, Lepkoff samurai solo of extreme spinal articulations ... some group contact work ... dead-pan chorus line joke ... freeze-tag ... paper sacks pulled across stage and slowly closing black curtain marked passing time ... interesting to see improvisational technique and style used as basis for set choreography ... piece held together by moment-to-moment incidental focus rather than by strong movement shapes.



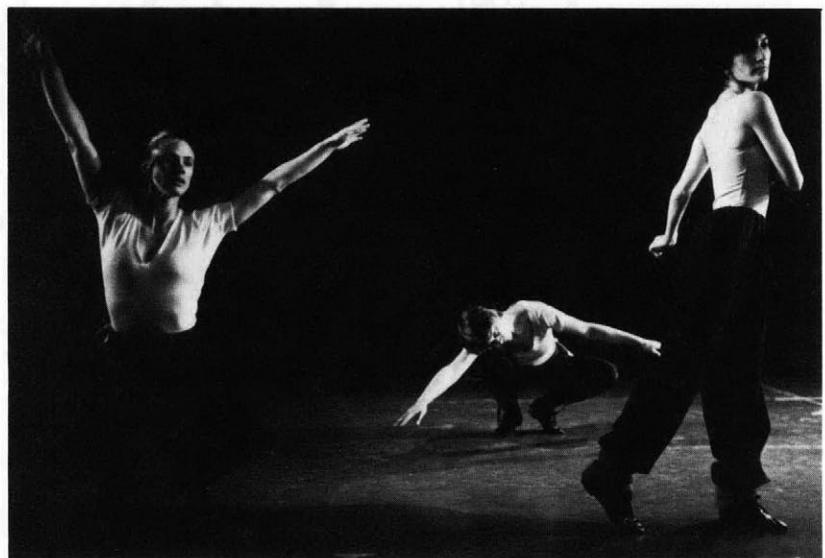
Douglas Dunn, untitled solo. Traveling phrases strung together end to end ... characteristic back work in opposition to rhythm in legs ... grapevine-like locomotor patterns ... Dunn's usual style of extreme internal concentration ... downstage releve balance turned into audience scan ... skin-tight black spandex disco jeans ... shape of piece: unedited stream-of-consciousness exercise.

Johanna Boyce, *Heavy Hand*. Dance to flat-footed piano score by Ray Shattenkirk ... Boyce runs dancers through flat-footed obstacle course in pedestrian movement ... makes mild jokes on the weight of her quintet, all of whom are hefty people ... formally tight framework filled with eighties consciously dumb movement: somersaults, swings, rolls, etc.... small vocabulary of repeated moves ... basically a one-liner ... creative patchwork Bermuda shorts ... dance for those who miss conceptual art.

Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, *Study for Valley Cottage*. Clever solo dancing by agile Jones ... phrases which rolled merrily along and ended with Jones saying “oil” ... later he lolls about and recites a letter which sounds like that from an absent lover ... Zane enters, rolling and tumbling duet follows ... then they run in a circle, Jones loping, the shorter Zane jogging fast to keep up ... both talk all the while about old friends ... vaudevillian non-sequiturs of movement and words.

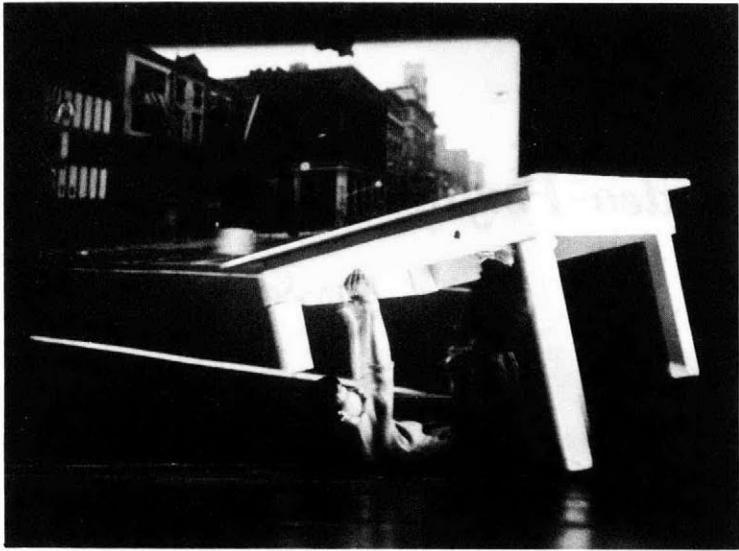


Kenneth King, *Currency* (excerpt). Sci-fi dancing to sci-fi electronic score by William Tudor ... quartet permutations ... in duet, King and Frank partnered the space around each other rather than partnering each other ... King trademarks: darting arms and legs, quirky skittering steps, tilting torsos, low leg circles, extensions, arms in second position ... adagio sequences made up of sculptural groupings ... constant looking around with bird-like head gestures ... dance began with quartet dancing in dark, ended with King’s solo exit phrase, also in dark (idea: endless, ongoing dance) ... work focused by proscenium stage and abbreviated length.



Judy Padow, *Mix* and *Cameo* (excerpts). *Mix*: trio of solos ... Nina Martin, Christina Svane, Padow ... canon, occasional unison ... quirky rhythms ... small-scale movement which rippled along spine ... accompanied by free-form abstract scat singing by Lisa Sokolov. *Cameo*: solo for Padow ... simple arm gestures performed in iris of light designed by Keith Sonnier ... decorative gestures with a romantic quality ... neutral costumes and presences in both dances.



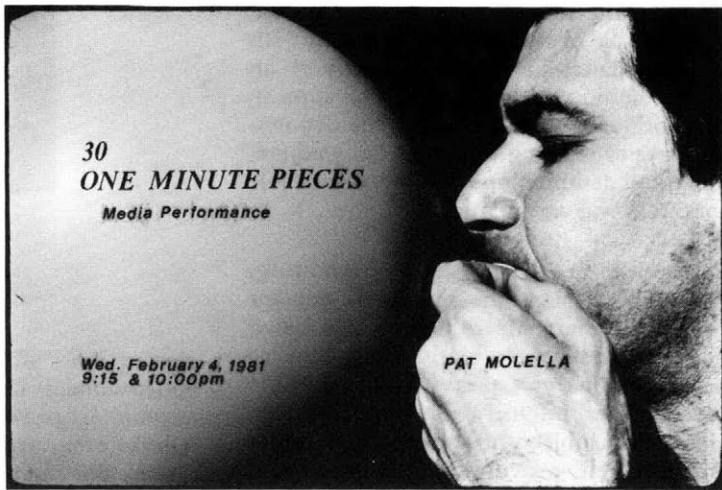


Yoshiko Chuma, *The School of Hard Knocks* (excerpt). Backdrop film of large square white tables in parking lot, in lake, in empty streets, moving about in traffic ... Chuma danced with mysterious dramatic intensity ... manipulated large square white table on stage: tilted it, laid on it, rocked it, huddled under it, finally rolled it off front of stage ... ritualistic throwing of body through space ... tragic in feeling ... very slow and alogical building of material ... audience restless and engrossed by turns ... only pushy dance on program and appreciated for its risks.

Benefit production management: Wendell Beavers, Mary Overlie,
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Photographs during rehearsal—Dunn absent

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“BERLIN CALLING”

Wolf Kahlen’s Video-Performance

Ann-Sargent Wooster

The work of Wolf Kahlen (1940-), Berlin artist and teacher, veteran of over two hundred shows and one of the first in Germany to be involved with video and performance, is little shown in America and virtually unknown by his American peers, many of whom he has helped to show internationally.

Empathy and the act of perception are the subjects of Kahlen's performance and video work. In the late '60s and early '70s he formulated his work in terms of an understanding of certain relationships in the world. He believed that of the two major ways of reacting to a situation—adjustment and assimilation—the more desirable condition was assimilation.

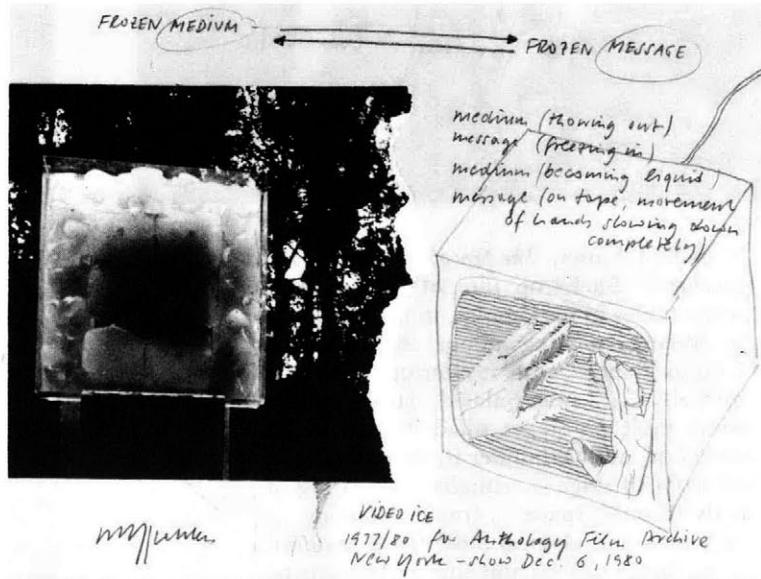
Perception or the process of knowing, especially through the senses, is another continuous theme in Kahlen's work. Using basic devices—parts of the body, simple props, ordinary aspects of nature—the pieces either intensify the bond between viewer and subject, or attack it, breaking it down, thereby proving the seductiveness of art and, by extension, life itself.

In 1969, Kahlen began working first with film and then with video as natural offshoots of his photographic sequences, which he continues to make today (a collection of his photobooks was shown at P.S. 1

during Dec. '80 to Jan. '81). His work with video remains close to the premises of conceptual art prevalent when Kahlen began. Unlike other artists in America who began using the medium at the same time, Kahlen's technological relationship to the medium has remained virtually unchanged from the unsophisticated TV equipment available early in the '70s. He does not think of himself as a video artist, though it plays a prominent role in his work. Video for him is an aid to performance, a way of

demonstrating some of the basic premises of the medium. Eschewing technological sophistication, the strength of Kahlen's work lies in his ideas and their often peculiar, affective power.

Kahlen calls his video pieces “video sculptures,” and many of them involve the addition of other materials to the monitor. In *Frozen Medium—Frozen Message* (1977, shown at Anthology Film Archives, Dec. 1980), a monitor is embedded in a block of



ice. Playing on McLuhan's pronouncements on television as "coolness," the heat of the TV set melts the block of ice. At the same time, a tape of slow moving hands appears on the screen; by the time the ice has melted, the hands have stopped moving, suggesting a transfer of temperature and activity.

Several of Kahlen's pieces further disrupt the usual passivity of television watching. In *I Can See What I Want* (1977), a closed-circuit camera is trained on the viewer, and his or her picture is shown on the monitor. The picture only comes into focus when the viewer nears the screen, enticing him or her to greater proximity. In front of the monitor obstructing the view is a plexiglass box filled with flies. In a living image of discomfort (as in Hitchcock's *The Birds*), the flies appear to land on the viewer's face causing involuntary swatting motions.

Kahlen calls the work he executed in New York during a 1980 Berlin D.A.A.D. grant *Entropies* after witnessing conditions in the city. The word is employed in a more circumscribed fashion than in the early '70s as used by Robert Smithson and others to describe vast, time-absorbing geological cycles. Kahlen identifies entropy as discontinuity—Nam June Paik's "Global Groove."

Two video performances from the *Entropy* series deal with usually unrecognized limits of perception. In one of the earliest approaches, *I Can't Get Hold of Her* (1975, recreated in 1980), the camera tracks various parts of a woman's head—ears, eyes, nose, lips, capturing them briefly before the camera goes out of focus—showing through concrete maneuvers a greater truth: the ultimate inaccessibility of those one is intimate with.

In *Body Horizons* (made in New York and first shown Jan. '81 at the Experimental Intermedia Foundation), two nude women, one black and the other white, view their bodies in sections. The areas they cannot see without the aid of a mirror are gradually filled in with paint, building up a territorial map of each woman's body of those areas. The performance ends when the white woman faces the screen and paints her face black, while the black woman, her back towards us, strokes white paint into her scalp from the neck upwards.

The tape raises several issues and reac-

resemblance to African body painting emerges as the islands and continents of invisibility come into view. Each woman's unseen areas vary radically, causing unusual patterns—a small black triangle on an elbow, a broad lyre-shaped area on the back. The most powerful and successful reaction to the work is the curiosity and self-inspection aroused in the viewer. You find yourself craning your neck and asking the question, "How much of my own body can I see?" It is on the level of empathetic transference from video to personal experience that the tape charts new areas of inquiry in an investigation charged more



tions. On one level, an almost prurient voyeurism is evoked that raises the issue of sexual exploitation. The presence of two figures and the camera makes it a public rather than a private viewing of their bodies; they are being acted on for our edification. This sexually charges the scene more than Degas' roughly equivalent peeping Tom, key-hole views of women bathing. As the performance progresses, a

by the power of the idea than its demonstration.

Ann-Sargent Wooster teaches art history at Kean College.

EYE FIGURE FICTION

Matthew Maguire/Creation Company

Gautam Dasgupta

Photographs by Nancy Campbell

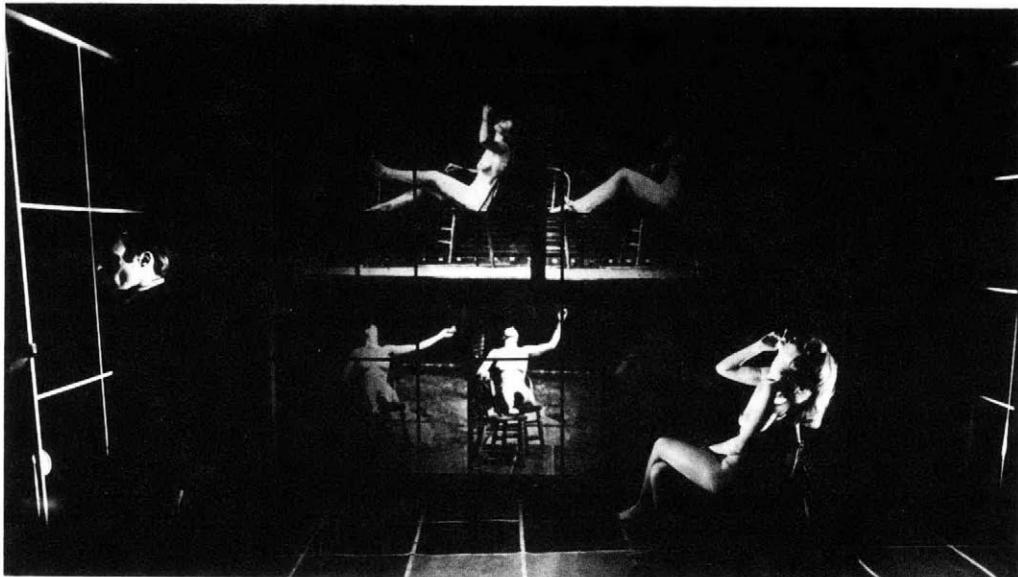
Consider a work billed as a "play in nine frames." The performance space is circumscribed by flats cut out in the shape of a grid; upstage hangs a screen on which images are projected from the rear. Visuals, taped music and voice-overs, and live performers fuse into a vivid theatrical collage to underscore a dense narrative line structured with an obsessive metronomic precision. (Each frame or unit is exactly six minutes long, with an intervening twenty-seven second span to effect transitions between segments.) The narrative, involuted as it is, is not revealed simply through causal connections; it evolves through a complex associative system that relies primarily on a vocabulary of images, supplemented occasionally (and ironically) by language.

The visuals run the gamut from Eadweard Muybridge's studies of motion, Bauhaus human constructions, Gustave Moreau's paintings, Duchamp's "Chess Game," Dore's illustrations of Dante's *Inferno*, Picasso's "Saltimbanques," and artists' renditions of Lincoln's assassination to more generalized projections of war, hunger, deprivation and random out-of-sync duplications of the live events on stage. Four performers (two men and two women) enact (to use an outmoded theatrical term for a work which sets out to delineate new boundaries for a new

theatre) roles of the Booth brothers (Edwin and John Wilkes) and their acting partners (Mary Devlin and Mary McVicker) who, in turn, are portrayed as depicting their favorite bits of business from their favorite Shakespearean plays—*Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard III*—and the 19th-century photographer Mathew Brady. Elsewhere, they render Lincoln's assassination in a realistic style, strut the stage with courtly Renaissance mien, agitate in jester-like, patchwork costumes, announce their presences as anthropomorphic beings (Max

FRAME 1 MOTION	FRAME 2 DESIRE	FRAME 3 LABYRINTH
FRAME 4 MAYA	FRAME 5 BALANCE	FRAME 6 PHRASE
FRAME 7 LOSS 7	FRAME 8 FLIGHT	FRAME 9 CODA

Ernst's "Minotaur" and "Bird-Meh"), and assume running or dancing poses. The pre-recorded voices blurt out stage directions, declaim lines from Shakespeare, and recite excerpts from the writings of Gertrude Stein, William Burroughs, and Wittgenstein, which are also, at times, projected onto the screen. Throughout this visual and aural fusillade, a recurring im-



age traces an indicator on a sine curve that plots the progression of the piece through its nine phases (or spheres) which are Motion, Desire, Labyrinth, Maya, Balance, Phrase, Loss, Flight, and Coda. And this entire experience comes with the enigmatic title *Eye Figure Fiction*.

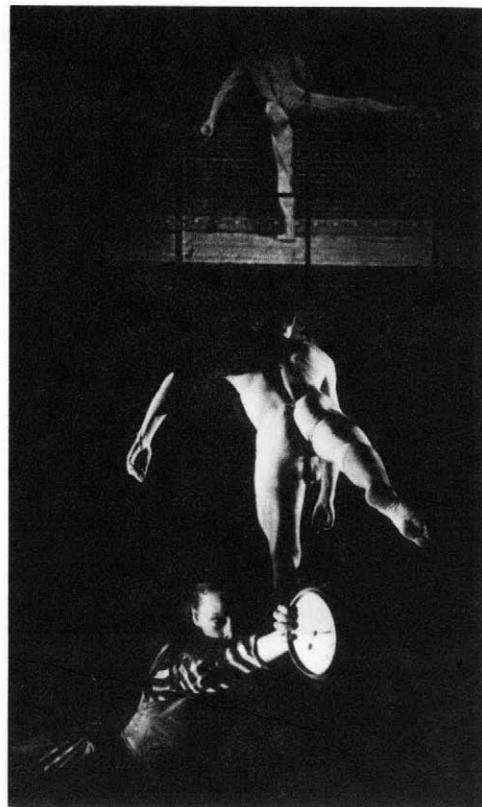
This distinctive work is the creation of one Matthew Maguire, whose imaginative foray into the bewildering labyrinth of cultural artifacts (and historifacts) serves to notate his (and everyone else's) artistic autobiography. The tantalizing analogues generated by the title provide clues to Maguire's penetrating attitude to artistic praxis. The "Eye," the bodily organ that perceives and thus primarily engages the external world to consciousness, is also the inner-directed eye of the Surrealists (Magritte, Ernst, and the collage-creators of Veristic Surrealism are paid homage to in *Eye Figure Fiction*). It is also the camera eye, the mechanism of the disinterested observer, the voyeuristic apparatus employed to enjoy reality vicariously (thus cognate with any audience's relation to any artwork), and, in today's cultural context, its technical capability to erode the supremacy of language and thought and replace it with the ascendancy of the image. And finally, it points to the unavoidable equation of "Eye" and "I" (curiously, the photographer Brady and Maguire have identical first names).

"Figure," in this line of thinking, suggests the geometry (or geography) of a subject while retaining some consanguinity to its sense of solving a problem (as in "figuring out something"). In such discreet ways does the interpretative mode enter into Maguire's work: The eye (as universal conscience) or I (as subjective self) figures (solves) fiction, this last being the purest



formulations, the "I" trying to comprehend the functioning of the imaginative faculty (hence everybody's autobiography), rendered in the performative mode as *Eye* (visuals), *Figure* (landscape, geometry, grids, sinewy curves, props, costumes, and the human performing component—its geography), and *Fiction* (the intricate narrative and ideational strategy employed by the artist).

What this understanding of art practice entails is cogently analyzed by Maguire's fragmenting of the process into nine phases. Note that he entertains the ternary system in the title and its triplication to arrive at the nine phases (each six minutes long and separated by twenty-seven second interludes—all multiples of three), suggesting a mystical symbology of absolute union or balance in the three worlds of artistic endeavor: corporal (*Eye*), intellectual (*Figure*), and spiritual (*Fiction*). To work out this symmetry, Maguire bathes the stage in aspects of each; to illustrate but a few from his abundant visual and aural generosity—Corporal (Muybridge's nudes, themes of war, hunger, the *memento mori* in the Shakespearean excerpts, and assassination), Intellectual (Bauhaus figures, Duchamp, Stein, Wittgenstein, the photographer-empiricist Brady), and Spiritual (the madness of John Wilkes Booth, the "Maya" or illusionary phase, references to Dante, Ernst's and Moreau's visions). And the "Balance" is situated at the epicenter of Maguire's nine frames, a sequence which depicts Picasso's *Saltimbanque* painting, a work that prompted T.S. Eliot's poignant descriptive statement: "The still point where the dance is." It is this still point of aesthetic calm and understanding that Maguire hopes to arrive at through an excess of visionary stimulus and intellectual input—and thus



his insistence on the collage form to execute his ideas, the form that absorbs all and every other form. It is the art of quotation, the amalgam of fragmented experiences, an equivalent to the quintessential modernist malaise of a world where the "center cannot hold."

Maguire's work is far too involved for this brief survey to do it justice. It can only be hoped that this newcomer on the scene (following, as he does, in the footsteps of Richard Foreman and Kenneth King, with whose artistic preoccupations and philosophic premises he has a lot in common) will bring back *Eye Figure Fiction* for a

larger (and much-deserved) audience. It is indeed refreshing to find such talent emerge at a time when solemn words are sounded (perhaps justly) about the moribund state of raw, exciting ideas in this post-seventies (or is it post-modernist?) era. And, thanks to the Muses, it truly is a delight to find a theatre of ideas executed with joyful fealty to color, music, and professionalism on the part of the performers (Andrew Arnault, Caroline McGee, Susan

Mosakowski, and Ruis Woertendyke). Finally, to make such an exacting work palatable to an audience sensitive enough not to succumb to the mediocrity that threatens contemporary art practice, credit must lie with *Eye Figure Fiction*'s creator, Matthew Maguire.

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BETWEEN COVERS

Tony Whitfield

Books by Knowles, Greyson, Applebroog

In a discussion of the early twentieth century in her *Performance, Live Art 1909 to the Present*, RoseLee Goldberg posits that “it was in performance that artists tested their ideas, only later expressing them in objects.” While this is true in the case of artists during that period, the artist in 1980 who has made live art his or her primary form of expression is establishing new relationships to the art object. Three works which can be loosely categorized as “artists’ books” present interesting possibilities for interplay between the art object and the performance medium. In no way are these works pure documentation; yet their contingency upon live art concepts is undeniable and a complete understanding of the books is absolutely dependent on them. This dependency is not necessarily a fault. On the contrary, it should be viewed as a restatement of the frequent aesthetic necessity to dissolve media boundaries as well as of performance principles (if such things exist).

Of the three, *Typings* by Christopher Knowles is the least direct in establishing its relationship to performance. Beautifully produced, embossed in red-gold, in cloth-bound, hardcover, and paperback editions, *Typings* includes sixty or so poems, a play, a number of drawings, and other pieces executed on typewriters and printed from their original typed form. The question that arises almost immediately about Knowles’ work is how are we to come to terms with the work of an artist who has

Typings, Christopher Knowles (\$25 hard, \$12 paper).

Aspects of Contemporary Gay Art, John Greyson (unpriced).

It Isn’t True, The Sweet Smell of Sage, I Feel Sorry For You, A Performance, Ida Applebroog (\$3.50 each).

been mistakenly categorized by such an imprecise and little-understood label as “autistic”? Is it art or merely a curiosity? It is first what it is, the product of a mind which —like any other—flourishes in and falls victim to its own idiosyncratic perceptions at the same time. While Knowles’ poems (and, to a certain extent, the play) may not be literature of a high order, they are language of the first degree. If the warp and weft of poetry are rhythm and repetition, and its fiber the conscious ordering of material dredged from the unconscious, then Knowles’ writing is the stuff of poetry. Beyond this point, however, success can only be claimed for these works vis-a-vis the transformation they undergo in performance.

Although Knowles possesses a considerable ability to imitate and simplify structure (evidenced not only in his poetry but in his drawings), he appears to be incapable of the editing process needed to form coherent statements that hold up beyond an initial reading for content. They become a

fragmentary stream of consciousness. However, when read aloud in performance, as many were last year by Lucinda Childs and Robert Wilson, the effect is mesmerizing. When read exactly as written, these pieces often take on the characteristics of amplified thought patterns, of ideas being formulated despite (and punctuated by) the insidious noise of pop culture. If *Typings* were to be considered as an independent work, therein would also lie its concise description.

Although linked to performance, Knowles’ *Typings* can be considered as an independent work of art if only to its detriment. John Greyson’s recent publication, *Aspects of Contemporary Gay Art*, is inextricably tied to his performance of the same name. In two parts, a calendar of events and a radio broadcast transcript, *ACGA* is the documentation of a performance that used the convention of on-location news reporting to dramatize the struggle to both publicize gay cultural achievement and to underline the numerous methods by which such achievement has been impeded. In much the same way as Orson Welles invented his extraterrestrial invasion in “War of the Worlds,” Greyson creates an invasion of his fictitious gay arts conference by the “hostile other” of the non-gay world in a six-hour radio broadcast from Toronto’s Harbourfront where the ten day symposium was supposed to have occurred.

It must be noted here that this is one of the

rare instances when gay culture is approached as subject matter within the viable constructs of the avant-garde. To do so, Greyson takes as a given the interrelationship of not only all artistic media, but cultural production and political practice, and pieces together a coherent, if fictitious, picture of gays in the art world he has chosen to acknowledge. While some of his choices and omissions for the program are worthy of discussion, Greyson has managed to create a world that should, in a fair fight, stand up against an adversary—i.e., a potent, constructive gay image. This is the basis of his performance and it is set out in the contents of the *ACGAs* calendar, a buff-colored offset pamphlet which is described in its introduction as a “resource of sorts.” Coupled with the unpretentiously bound, typo-riddled, xeroxed copies of this transcript, the calendar becomes more than merely a souvenir from a performance or a piece of documentation. It acquires the object quality of a component part in a potential artifact of an endangered civilization. *ACGA* is the final, reverberating stage of the performance it outlines.

Further extending the notion of the object as a performance element, Ida Applebroog’s books label themselves “performances” in their own right, thereby challenging the notion that performance need, by definition, involve live action on the part of artists. On a very basic level, these works question the manner in which we perceive the world around us. Is experience as we process it kinetic? Or is it, especially in the realm of the visual, a series of imprints? Applebroog’s works at the same time re-invest and subvert the narrative potential of the static image, forcing us to examine the notion of real time, a concept of major importance to most performance art.

These works are all 6 x 7½ inches regular

format in which a single cartoon-like image, generally one or two figures, is repeated. Seen frontally, either in the context of a proscenium as in the early work or from outside a half-shaded window, these books force their readers into the role of voyeur. Audience participation is not allowed here. In the earlier works, such as “It Isn’t True” or “It Is My Lunch Hour,” the “performers” may be involved in an action but there is no interaction per se. The reader is made to feel that his or her interest in sticking it through until something happens might have prurient overtones. In two of her most recent works, one does find oneself witnessing scenes of less than honorable import. In “The Sweet Smell of Sage” we see a man with his hand raised in the act of assaulting a woman; in “I Feel Sorry For You” a rather forlorn looking woman is seen bound to a chair. Again, however, nothing explicit happens. As in past works, the repeated images are interspersed with blank pages and the books’ titles appear unexpectedly, further confounding the mystery. In their meditations on the unknown, on mystery (or perhaps just plain romance) through situations of seeming inaction, Applebroog’s books are diagrams for performance focusing on catalysts to action, a performance that can only take live form in our minds.

Knowles and Applebroog available at Printed Matter, 7 Lispenard St., NYC, NY 10013. Greyson available from Art Metropole, 217 Richmond St. W., Toronto, Canada M5V 1W2.

Tony Whitfield is a contributing editor for LIVE and FUSE.



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REVIEWS

Molissa Fenley, *Energizer*.
American Theater Laboratory (November).

Prior to Molissa Fenley's *Energizer*, I'd never seen a dance driven by a will to power. From its droning, Zarathustrian opening—a rhythmic electronic score Fenley composed herself—*Energizer* seemed less about energizing the body than about urging it beyond sensual pleasure into some abstract hyperbole of space and time.

Like Laura Dean and Lucinda Childs, Fenley works in an upright, continuous mode, using carefully plotted floor patterns and codified gestures; unlike them, she jacks matters to manic levels and complicates to the point of distraction. Sweeping arms with bent wrists, grinding hula hips, pony-steps or drag-footed runs, frisky leaps, brief interludes of moving partnership, violent spins and sideways tosses of the skull: there's a sassiness, a cagey femininity to Fenley's movement often contradicted by an anxious tension—something unavoidable at the velocity she favors.

Only in a slightly quieter duet in the mid-

dle of the three-part work did I have a chance to appreciate the dance's formal structure and the personal experience of the dancer dancing—those more comfortable preoccupations of dance during the past decade. Fenley's raw athleticism appeals as much to her dancer's mental apparatus as their physical technique: the four performers—Lynn Allard, Pat Graf, Susanna Weiss, and Fenley herself—seldom had a chance to relax behind the perversely complicated design. Often their expressions looked desperate. At other times they seemed caught up in a luscious exhilaration—the kind you get topping out a Harley on an empty highway.

Fenley's avowed interests in polyrhythms and frenetic "walls of dance" plug her into

a New Wave hype she will have to guard against. Assuming her powers of seduction, she won't have any reason to aspire to comprehensibility: "walls of dance" aren't quite analogous to "walls of sound," and *Energizer* hasn't quite arrived at the status of a Big Idea. Though my engagement wavered, I did finally surrender to the formalized anarchy of a truly relentless, compelling work. One can't quite give up on Fenley's potential: she is one of those rare choreographers in whom you sense a potential shift in cultural sensibility. Anna Kisselgoff called *Energizer* "the dance of the future." The question still hanging around is, does it work? But more from this cultural Bolshevik is anticipated.

Robert Coe



Paula Court

**John Bernd, Evidence.
54 White Street (September).**

**Libby Howes, Standing Room Only.
The Performing Garage (October).**

These two performances attempt to reproduce the mind's workings in theatrical contexts; both flounder in problems of material. Howes and Bernd want to show how thinking, remembering, and dreaming are essentially non-linear, that art-making cannot be contained by linear definitions of time. This basically Romantic posture of the artist as *always becoming* often backfires by over-emphasizing the real (and often ordinary) fluidity of subjective experience. A similar dilemma caused Artaud to cry out in pain over his inability to possess his mind "in its entirety." It still seems necessary to limit in order to expand, not "no ideas but in things" but somewhere between the two stances. In this instance, the limiting, or editing, has to do with the "possibilities," the "things," not the framing of them.

The post-modernist frame, call it collage or similitude, is by now a perceptual skill mastered by any downtown audience. The Cunningham/Cage dictum is common currency and is almost certainly both historical referent and personal artifact for both Howes and Bernd. That they don't have to rebel against existing structures presents its own difficulty. So what happens?

Libby Howes uses her body as just another element in a piece which attempts to present various layers of consciousness. This is done with a loose score of domestic actions, slides, bits of film, remembered events, and conversations. At one point, she lies on her bed in front of a fan: summer in a New York City loft. There are also slides of venetian blinds taken from the viewpoint of

Nancy Campbell



someone lying on the bed. In this way Howes tries to jam the temporal signals and so give us a version of how she experiences her own mind. The most interesting and energizing component of this performance score is the music. Motown, soul, rock, and new wave sounds act as historical catalogue to her age and her cultural heritage. When she plays Glenn Branca's "Lesson No. 1 for Electric Guitar" as an ending for the performance, the role of music becomes clearly mystical and optimistic.

But the piece as a whole has a distracted aura to it; none of the chosen images are strong enough to act as clues to Howes' ontological relationship to herself. The slides and film are murky in quality and intent, and an interesting analysis of her relationship to her mother is clouded by street

noise on the tape.

Bernd works in the sparser field of dancing; generally wordless, he attempts a similiar illustration of ontology. He plays a disco tune to get going, then drops his wraparound sunglasses disguised to proceed with repetitive, simple moves. Pivots, rolls, and high-energy jumping limit his dancing voice so that when he becomes the dancing version of pensive, the lack of physical quality differentiation makes him seem a bit precious. He plays a tape of himself reading a selection from Proust's *Within a Budding Grove* concerning adolescent loneliness and I know I am supposed to see the dancing as separate but involved with the words. Still, I am seduced by the richness of experience Proust renders and lose track of Bernd on his way to such verisimilitude. Bernd dances with integrity, attempting more than a simple illustration of an (of any) opaque persona, but is stuck in this piece by a lack of movement invention.

Both works need more information within the frame to equal their rich intents. As of now, they are like rehearsals for the real thing.

Margaret Eginton

**"Dialogues"
Just Above Midtown Gallery (October).**

Although JAM/Downtown, a Tribeca alternative arts center, attempted to bring together the diverse and divergent groups that make up the "downtown," just-out-of-the-mainstream part of the art world, few of the participants made use of the theme—"Dialogues." The performances presented were for the most part "monologues" with passive audience par-

ticipation.

The lack of communication was most apparent on the program that featured a poet, Native-American dancers/storytellers, a fiber artist and a visual artist. The evening began with great promise. At the door, funny sunglasses were sold for about a dollar and once they were on the faces of the purchasers, the audience looked like a campy photograph of people waiting to see a 3-D movie. After a long wait, the program began with Roberto Ortiz-Melendez. He sat down in the large white space and read a catalogue of wrongs without a whiff of originality of thought.

"Echoes of the Past and Present," performed by Marie Antoinette Rodgers and Jane Lind, concerned stories of suffering and death as well as affirmations of Native American culture and eminence. Despite the powerful themes, the piece seemed insincere and ill-conceived. As Rodgers and Lind danced, using minimal props and music, one realized that they were attempting to fuse natural disasters (the past) with national malevolence (the present) as if they were one and the same. It was an odd piece, its saving grace the simple yet resonant poetry of Mona B., a blind Native-American from Oklahoma. Her twangy recitation had the integrity that the rest of the piece seemed to lack.

The last two pieces were by artists. Mary Ann Gilles is a fiber artist whose large macrame sculpture figured prominently in "Mother Earth." The piece was a slide show of Gilles and her interaction with the piece both in a gallery setting and outside in nature. It worked only because of the cinematic fluidity of the slides.

"Eye Sight," took a long time to set up, but was worth the wait. Susan Dallas

Swann works with a variety of media to explore the mechanisms of vision. The piece began in darkness. As she read a text that made her sound like an update of Miss Frances on Ding Ding School, the space was more and more illuminated. The most striking images were of a juggler juggling phosphorescent balls, a simulation of night flying, and the expansion of a curve of light. Her piece wove together a variety of visual elements to make a moving painted space.

Halloween brought out a large and curious crowd of costumed funseekers as well as friends and fans of the performers. The mood was festive but the pieces were mostly serious, a couple very melancholy. John Malpede—who has the face of a Wendell Corey-type B-movie actor—performed "Too Much Pressure." His deadpan

delivery, choice of music, and arch storytelling did center on the dialogue theme. Mostly, his response was to speak of the futility of communication by centering on the manifestations of those afflicted with "hebephrenic schizophrenia"; i.e., laughing when it is most inappropriate. The laughter arises because "the hebephrenic regards the very fact of communication ludicrous and ridiculous." As Malpede stalked in front of an overstuffed easy chair, he gave three versions of a terrifying story of patriarchal manipulation. His piece, despite its brevity, questioned not only the value of communication but the necessity of the family, of ambition, philosophy and art.

Lorraine O'Grady's "Nefertiti/Devonia Evangeline" followed. Nefertiti means the beautiful one has come; Devonia Evangeline was O'Grady's sister. That phrase resonated throughout her piece which connected two women of African descent separated by history, geography, and circumstance. Despite its slow pacing, it filled the space visually and aurally; the slides and the taped narration fused the lives of two women—who both died at 38 under tragic circumstances—through stories about weddings, sibling rivalries, childbirths, breakdowns, deaths. What one learned about Evangeline was that she was loved to death; Nefertiti was hated to death. And yet their deaths were so similar in tone that, in the final analysis, they died because they wanted to change their status as women, as members of the family.

The piece became most evocative when O'Grady stood before the large slide and attempted to resurrect her sister by performing a ritual found in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, but to no purpose. The ultimate passivity of the dead seemed galling to the righteous determination of the living. Then

Paula Court





Paula Court

slides show the daughters of the women—the beautiful ones! Like Ishmael Reed in his novels *Mumbo Jumbo* and *Yellow Back Radio Brokedown*, O'Grady uses Egyptian motifs to enhance and explicate the imaginative lives of Afro-Americans.

Unfortunately, Annie Hamburger's piece followed this one. Too long, too slow, ill-conceived. Hamburger is no slouch as a performer. She had a great presence and her props were interesting, but one never knew just why she was mouthing the words she was saying and moving about. Expressive gestures were not enough, particularly after Malpede and O'Grady.

The final performance was Stuart Sherman's spectacle, "The Erotic." Here was a kind of Groucho Marx whiz kid whipping out objects with the agility of a Sufi master.

The juxtaposition of objects often took on a surreal and unnerving sensibility. At other times, they seemed ludicrous. Sherman was affable throughout, keeping up the patter of tiny objects and engaging the audience. The piece seemed meditative in an odd way and tangential to the theme. For me it was anything but erotic. The objects were too smooth, too diffident, too cerebral to give a sense of passion or its consequence. On this evening of Halloween a more festive ending would have certainly been more appropriate. But then Sherman did give the audience a smile before he packed his table and stalked out into the night.

Patricia Jones

Spalding Gray, *A Personal History of the American Theatre*.

The Performing Garage (November).

—, *Nobody Wanted to Sit Behind a Desk*.

Economy Tires Theatre/DTW/American Theatre Laboratory (November).

Sylvia Palacios Whitman, *Lee Towey, N.Y.*

American Theatre Laboratory (November).

Both Spalding Gray, very much the New Englander, and Sylvia Palacios Whitman, an Argentine, have an interest in storytelling and personal history: Gray seems compelled to tell his own story in a series of monologues, while Whitman orients her latest theatre piece around the reminiscences of Lee Towey, a woman who worked her way from roller skating for the phone company through being personal secretary to the elder John Rockefeller to a

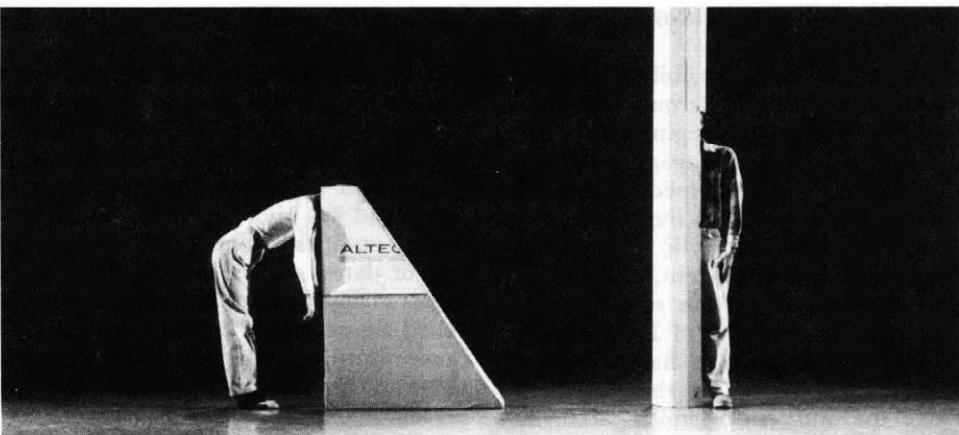
position with a Wall Street brokerage firm.

The fanciful imagery and atmosphere of Whitman's piece is close to the sensibility in novels and stories by South American writers: a bird was pulled from the paper flames over which a man had warmed his hands and was pinned to a canvas flat bearing the outlines of a house. A woman did a sort of dance with a branch, from which leaves magically grew at both ends. A blue veiled figure glided across the stage in a canoe. But by far the most compelling element of *Lee Towey, N.Y.* was the lady herself.

Lee Towey is a sixty-ish, gray-haired, clear blue-eyed woman. She carefully describes Canal Street, where she was born, and the changes she had seen there over the years. She was dignified, and reticent about her personal life, yet charming in her alliance and complicity with the audience. (Both Towey and Gray took obvious pleasure in the audience responses to their revelations.) When she talked about the Rockefellers, half an oversize paper elephant was hung against the back wall. Why? Because the elephant is an emblem for Republicans, which the Rockefellers are, or because elephants, like Towey, never forget? Is this a piece about memory, about time passing, changes occurring?

The slow-paced unfolding of the dreamlike, contemplative images in Whitman's piece, which did not bear a clear associative relationship to the Towey story, tended to accentuate the contrast between the parts and styles of the performance, rather than suggesting a unified perspective.

Spalding Gray, on the other hand, seduces us with a narrative line. He is an experienced actor and *raconteur* (these are his fourth and fifth monologues), and combin-



Lee Towey, N.Y.

ed with his candor is a skill for manipulating and tantalizing the audience. His dry humor is captivating, his disclosures startling. He knows how to pace a story for variety and effect. He also leaves you wanting more, taking obvious pleasure in maintaining your interest in him.

Gray is interested in the story not only as a recounting of events, but as a way of revealing personality. This is done, in his most effective monologues, by the way the material is structured. When, in *Nobody Wanted to Sit Behind a Desk* (nominally about his father, but actually about how he got to the ATL performance site/situation), he reads a newspaper clipping about nuclear war and another about a woman who saw the face of Christ in a tortilla, we are introduced not to random, whimsical concerns, but to metaphors for his deep preoccupations and to the structure of the piece. The entire monologue—basically the story of where he went over the summer, interspersed with appropriate flashbacks and ending on the ATL stairway—is punctuated by Gray's experiences of deep anxiety due to nature fears (bears, snakes, earthquakes), social fears (he sleeps with a

knife in the murder capital of the States, somewhere in California; he wants shoes to make him feel like a man when confronted by others who conform more strictly to the requirements of our hyper-male culture), and by his encounters with crazy people: DANGER, as he sees it. The casual, humorous presentation allows Gray to externalize the real anxiety (which contains elements of attraction) he feels in the face of insanity, which can be considered as the potential chaos of natural forces unleashed in the psyche of an individual. The rhythm of the story is generated by fears of destruction, of things out of/beyond control, items as irrational as a logical discussion of prolonged nuclear war or the appearance of Christ in a tortilla.

In *A Personal History of the American Theatre*, Gray used a specific but random structure for the monologue. Cards with the titles of about forty productions with which he'd been associated were arranged in a clear box. He would pick a card and reminisce about his experiences while working on that play. After going through the cards, he showed head shots and other photographs from his early acting career, the most ir-

resistable of which was surely that of Gray as satyr. Throughout, Gray was seemingly sincere (did he fabricate the stories about the friend who administered the poison in Guyana and the friend's father who shot himself over Nixon's resignation?) and, as in *Nobody....* did not hesitate to expose his own clumsiness and vulnerability.



Nathaniel Tilston

There is a shape to Gray's storytelling, a definite pace. Although the monologues are apparently only loosely structured, the framework gives the story a curve, a gesture, which is essentially a movement out from himself to the audience, then in again, drawing the audience with him. At the end of *Nobody....* he told how once he went looking for his father to be punished, and found him on the edge of the sea. The father and a brother had found a bottle there. Gray tells us there was a message inside, but he doesn't tell us what the message was. After raising our expectations, Gray retains his power by not telling us everything. As long as he is doing the talking, it is his show.

Lenora Champagne

Ericka Beckman, *Out of Hand*.
Collective for Living Cinema (November).

Out of Hand is the third in a Beckman trilogy of Super-8 films based on the ideas of child psychologist Jean Piaget. Like the earlier *We Imitate, We Break-Up* (I have not seen the other film in the series), it uses a subjective camera eye to present what its character *thinks* rather than *says* (as in voice-over) or *sees* (as in point-of-view and reaction shots). This unusual mode of first-person narration, called "mindscreen" by Bruce Kawin in his book of the same name, corresponds neatly to Piaget's basic thesis that children are active participants in the creation of their reality, not just passive receivers of information. So *Out of Hand* adds a third element—consciousness as narrator—in both style and subject to the more ordinary formula of viewer-to-film relationship.

What does this theory actually look like? Beckman calls *Out of Hand* a "search" film in which a small boy looks for a lost object. We see a series of discrete images and events as if this character was shuffling through them in his mind for clues as to what is being sought. Many of these vignettes are nightmarish: a brightly lit and apparently empty house glows in darkness, doors are barred, boxes and blocks fly in every direction at super-speed, a figure runs hard to stay in the same place, shadowy figures break through a door and carry away another struggling figure, all objects—houses, blocks, doors—constantly shrink and grow in size. These pictures may be dream-like, but the cinematic techniques are hardly dreamy; they are rendered in Beckman's trademark combinations of fast edits, choppy rhythms, furiously-paced animation, primary colored objects in surrounding black space, and an accompaniment of insistent drumbeats and repeated chants of short

phrases ("where is it?" "gotta get it").

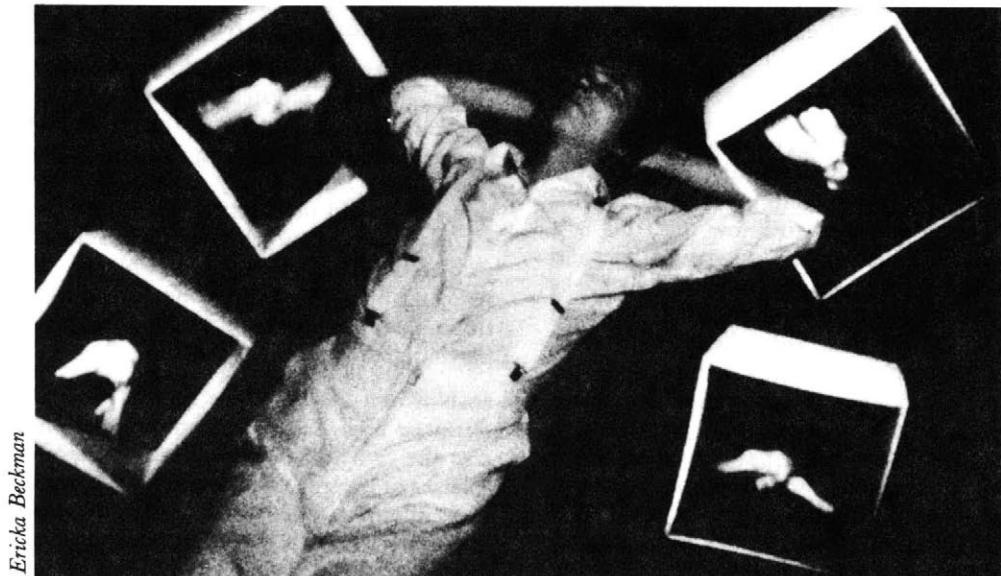
So goes the first half of the film. To this point, *Out of Hand* exfoliates like Piaget's insightful, woozy writing, its knotty conceits by turn exhilarating and puzzling. Then, unexpectedly, a sustained focus shows up. The camera fixes on a "boy" (played by adult Paul McMahon) who might have dreamed the preceding sequences. In a world of magically mysterious laws of physics, he looks for "it" in his toy chest, moving with jerky, mime-like movements. A rocking horse pitched over his shoulder hangs suspended in mid-air, bobbing. He throws blocks into the air and they seem to develop their own means of propulsion; a military figure, a kind of stop-and-go traffic cop, is required to direct their flight. Finally, the boy finds "it," a U-shaped block. "It" becomes the handle for a shield with which he fends off a steady stream of flying blocks. He repeatedly looks through the doorway of a furnace made in the shape of "it."

Through these various functions, he apparently remembers the name of "it" (for the viewer, "it" remains a versatile U-shaped block), thereby finding "it."

The film's extended look at this boy stretches Beckman's initial method, and we begin to follow a more familiar kind of mixed narration in *Out of Hand*'s second part. Unlike her previous work, this section edges, however slightly, toward dramatic narrative. That move may disturb formalist fans, but *Out of Hand* picks up a sense of play from this interest in performance which fills out the film's weighty ideas.

One of the last images is of the boy surrounded by animated cubes but sleeping soundly, as if the resolution of his story had quelled their willful tyranny over him. *Out of Hand* ends as the adventure of a boy, not of blocks, and is all the more provocative for alluding to that kind of simple tale-telling among its several complex cinematic strategies.

John Howell



Ericka Beckman

Men Together: Gay Performance Festival.
P.S. 122 (November).

Over the past few years Gay Art has become the subject of increasing discussion among critics and artists alike. Beyond the obvious moralist's stumbling block—prevalence of highly (homo)erotic imagery—which has distinguished it from art produced by other minorities, a great number of the critical issues it poses hinge on its relationship to current styles and its potential to further the development of post-modern aesthetics. To paraphrase the poet Jane Cooper: if it is going to say dangerous things, it must say them with charm. (For "charm" read: clever acknowledgement in the form of a standard which, almost by definition, is extrinsic to its content.) In *Men Together: Gay Performance Festival*, the attempt to fuse gay content and the stylistic language of the avant-garde became the fundamental link between the most interesting works. Organized by Tim Miller, this festival sought to present works that examine gay experience in terms that force the expansion of its expected artistic context.

Post Modern Faggot, a collaborative work by Miller and John Bernd, opened the festival. Its first section gives us all the information we need to know that this is a Lower Manhattan art event. Miller and Bernd are first seen sitting with their backs to the audience, perfectly still, wearing black, Lower East Side cheap, chic overcoats. They then begin a repetitive approach/avoidance dance sequence that brings to mind every minimal piece you've ever seen. Movement patterns soon break from abstraction and become a cruising/courting ritual. Miller then sits and begins to read a long passage from *Swann's Way* in which Proust discusses in florid

Kirk Winslow

Post-Modern Faggot



detail his obsessive love for Gilberte. Against this, Bernd performs a solo that is equally one-tracked. For both Bernd and Proust emotion is translated into focused adherence to detail. Miller then performs a solo which is as rough and viscerally reactive as Bernd's was cerebral.

The performance evolves through shifts in language, both physical and verbal, passing from the expounding of theory through its degeneration to finding viable forms for interaction. Surprisingly, although we are told the sexual orientation of the two performers, what characterizes their relationship to one another is never explicitly sexual. In not being so, it hones in on affectionate, mutually supportive possibilities particular to gay friendship.

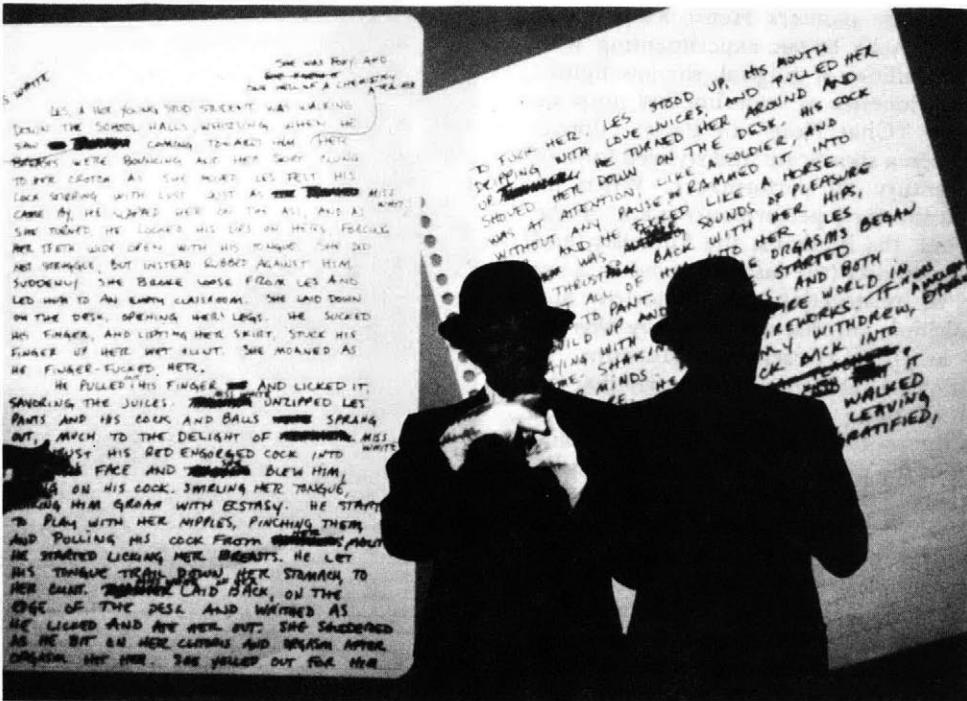
In Norman Frisch's *Short Lessons in Socially Restricted Sign Language*, communication is also the central issue. Constructed around a series of pre-recorded lectures, the limitations of various forms of sign language and how they relate to sexual development are discussed. With the aid of an interpreter,

Tavoria Rae Kellam, the lectures are signed in either American sign language, the colloquial system used by the deaf to communicate among themselves, or signed English, the formal language used in pedagogy. While visual aids flash on the screen behind Kellam, the lessons move quickly through sexual vocabulary to sex related concepts and their approximations in various forms of sign language, to the reading of texts and the translation of a dialogue between a sex therapist and his patient.

From the lectures we learn that the incidence of homosexuality is unusually high in deaf men, and that this is attributed to a state of "arrested adolescence" due to isolation, a less than efficient means of socialization, and abnormal subjectivity. The only gay man in this performance (Bruce Hlibok) becomes the test case for that assessment of homosexuality as pathology. His actions are sequences so illogical, however, that they neither mock nor affirm the suspect theory.

Contrary to *Short Lessons...* which is constructed around the imparting of information, Jeff McMahon's one-man, "active text performance" is totally dependent upon the conveyance of its irrationality. *Smile at Knife* is a schizophrenic monologue distilled from the anxieties of a boy who is mugged in the city. The narrative explodes with anger and self-loathing, with both liberal and fascist impulses. McMahon assumes, simultaneously, the roles of victim and attacker.

This piece's inclusion in the festival at first seems odd since there is nothing explicitly homosexual about its content. However, it becomes something other than the voice of a typical urban dweller—that of a gay male who (like women) has been taught



Short Lessons

helplessness and inferiority, and given the justifications for his victimization.

In *Faggotsubway*, written by Eric Gabriel, the subject again is power, the power that lovers give to one another and how it shifts in balance at different times. Comprised of two poetic monologues, the work is extremely self-conscious in its use of a quasi-sexual rhythmic structure and finally breaks under the weight of romantic metaphor.

Hackneyed symbolism is also the downfall of *Two Men Dancing*. In their opening piece we are presented with a sinister version of the Catholic Mass, complete with masked clerics and lots of chalice passing. The whole procedure in its bastardized form seems pointless and interminable. Neither an occasional sloppy dance phrase, nor the

appearance of an aimless hippie in shades, nor a final flash of adorned jock strap is enough to rescue it from tedium and give it the label of poor satire.

Despite *Men Together's* qualified successes and obvious failures, it managed to identify a group of artists who have declared themselves heirs to the post-modernist tradition, convinced of the necessity to broaden the range of that tradition's sexual politics.

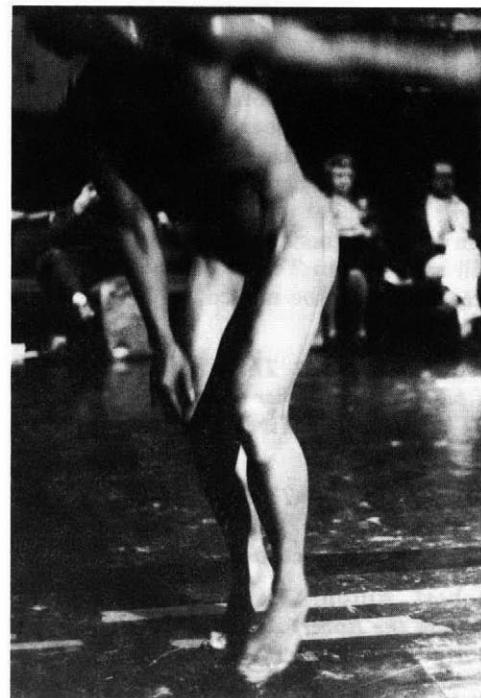
Tony Whitfield

Min Tanaka, *Drive On*.
P.S. 122 (November).

Almost everything that could be said about Min Tanaka's earlier New York appearances was said by the artist himself. Daring the cold in outdoor parking lots,

airy lofts and galleries, naked except for brown body dye and a sheath over his penis, Tanaka entered slow motion trances to transform himself into a sieve of flesh, a funnel for the environment and our attention. Rigorously conceptual, starkly "existential," Tanaka's minimalist performances offered powerful experiences of a body native to a particular time and place—their only limitation being their pure reductiveness.

In *Drive On*, however—his recent improvisatory solo—he established himself as an extraordinary "mover," dignifying a raw animal nervousness and opening himself to a range of interpretations. The initial and continuing surprise was his mercurial grace; his unaffected powers of concentration were already familiar to me. He entered the P.S. 122 space in a sweat suit,



Nathaniel Tilson

tossing a bell into the air, checking out the "body weather" before entering busy, punctuated fits of movement.

No sense of rehearsal or work-in-progress to this improvisation: dancing with his spine at a sixty degree angle to the floor, gesturing with insect precision, Tanaka's delicate, ecstatic control of weight had a primitive authenticity which was staggering. Moving to the rear of the space, he stripped down and crawled back towards us naked, on all fours, his head wiggling and bobbing, his arms reaching hesitantly under himself; Tanaka gave this familiar exercise a fresh interest. Rolling on his back into a fetal position, I had the illusion of watching someone in the process of being born. Later, as the lights darkened, the sweat glistening on his body seemed to turn it to a burnished gold.

Tanaka is clearly a major solo improvisor, bearing comparison to another master of the form: Steve Paxton. The only problem was with flautist Robert Dick's accompaniment: copping phrases from Edgar Varese, honking breathily and nattering all over the keys, Dick ought to have paid more attention to his partner's cool precision. Tanaka will return from Tokyo next year; he is a presence not to be missed.

Robert Coe

Bruce Schwartz, *The Rat of Huge Proportions and Other Works*.

DTW/Economy Tires Theatre (September/October).

Robert Moran, *Through Cloud and Eclipse*.

The Kitchen (October).

Robert Anton, *Sculptures and Designs from the Robert Anton Theatre*.

Bette Stoler Gallery (October).

Ever since turn-of-the-century cabaret ar-

tists like the painters Henri Riviere and Caran d'Ache began experimenting with the possibilities of guignol, shadow figures and marionettes at experimental outposts like the "Chat Noir" in Paris, puppets have been a significant and stylized form of 20th-century art performance. When we look at the early performance pieces of the Dadaists, the Bauhaus, the Futurists, and Constructivists (the last displayed in a recent re-construction of Malevich and Matuishin's futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun* at the Hirshorn Museum in Washington, D.C.), we see clearly that the roots of these performance styles came from the mechanical and transformational idiom of the puppet stage. So much of performance, especially its wooden and manipulative presentational style, owes a great deal to the simple narrative and the sculptured elegance of puppet theatre. It's a form full of unending delight and surprise, quickly absorbed and immediately embraced. But it demands from the performer the highest degree of skill as a solo performer. Personality isn't on display, but craft is.

Bruce Schwartz, a California artist making his New York debut at DTW, became an immediate hit in an otherwise uninteresting fall season. He reached back in time to the medieval puppet stage in creating his piece *The Rat of Huge Proportions*, a bawdy, Faust-like farce of Eleanor l'Amour who sells her soul to the devil for a piece of cheese. Full of ribald puns and simple delights, Schwartz draped himself in a portable puppet stage that made him look like a box with feet. Only his voice, music and sound effects emanated from within as he manipulated ingeniously created hand puppets on a tiny stage. Unlike most performance art, *Rat* was a testament to pure illusionism.

Schwartz created an entirely different



Schwartz

mood in the second half of the evening when, this time in full view of the audience, he worked a series of elegant rod puppets, constructed by Schwartz from Victorian models, through different musical, dance and narrative turns. Schwartz's various Pierrots, ballerinas, geishas, and beautiful black slaves were manipulated with the skill of a Japanese Bunraku operator, but came across as somewhat too precious in their lament.

However, Schwartz, for all the possible limitations in his material, is an evocative artist skilled in movement and faultless in the design and execution of his miniature world.

Robert Moran's *Through Cloud and Eclipse*, commissioned by Berlin's DAAD in 1975,

is a contemporary shadow-puppet show that was just getting around to its New York premiere. With cut-out puppets designed by Donald Case, the piece draws on the tradition of the Javanese *Wayang Kulit* shadow-dramas, but only in the mildest ways. Moran is best known as a composer of new music and has created large-scale musical events for several cities around the world. Here he was working in miniature and appeared clearly outclassed by the form he had chosen to imitate. Javanese shadow-dramas, with their ornate and lacey figures, are elaborate, compelling adventures that are performed throughout the night for upwards to 12 hours. Moran's 80-minute work, distinguished *not* by its visual delights but by the pre-recorded tape loops that accompanied the piece (a new score written by Moran for the Kitchen and performed by the University Philharmonia, SUNY Buffalo) seemed much too crude and simple for a work that has been in existence for 5 years. But Moran says that this tale of the character Hammi's search for the Knowledge of Life is only Part I of a larger epic work.

As the manipulator behind the screen, displaying the cut-out figures before ever-changing scenic projections, Moran's skills were conventional and unsurprising. Partly a spoof on the fable form ("Hammi accidentally comes across a travel agent, who sells him a ticket to the Magic Carpet Airlines' flight to the Knowledge of Life"), but mostly sincere in its child-like simplicity, *Cloud* worked a minor vein in the rich possibilities of its form. The whole performance vocabulary of the *Wayang Kulit* was here touched on in a mediocre but generally reverential way.

Robert Anton, who came to performance through work as a scene designer, has been creating his own unique form of miniature private performances for over 10 years.



Anton

Because his performances are so intimately selective (usually for about a dozen people) and are presented irregularly in his upper West Side apartment, his name and popularity have by now a small cult appeal. Intensely private and given to mystical themes and occult imagery, Anton's puppet theatre is a lavish display of inch-high miracles. His evening performances are full of marvelous transformations that tie into a personal mythology that Anton has been perfecting over the years. It can only be appreciated in the viewing.

At the Bette Stoler Gallery, Anton displayed several of his puppet creations (six clown heads no bigger than eggs) and scenic designs for future theatre and film projects. The detailed facial features of his heads were startling in their expressiveness to the point of being unnerving. And after having seen others like them in performance, one remembers being struck by their fixed stares. Anton's other designs have a Cocteau-like appeal but seem more like exotic and fantastical doodlings, rich in color but short on possibility. One sequence, though, was particularly arresting: pencil on vellum sketches for a series of Elizabeth I puppets that were fiercely or-

nate, grotesque, and rich in their design and execution. Like other items in Anton's catalogue of effects, these items in particular seem to be modeled on the designs of Japanese Kabuki theatre.

Michael Earley

Edouard Lock and Dancers.
The Kitchen (October).

Karole Armitage and Rhys Chatham.
Tier 3 (September).

Marta Renzi and Dancers.
The Kitchen (January).

Jim Self and Dancers.
Dance Theater Workshop (October).

All of these choreographers embrace theatre. They put movement into dramatic contexts, employing the full range of theatrical conventions from music, costumes, and decor to character and story as narrative. In these dances, kinetic invention is only one element among many.

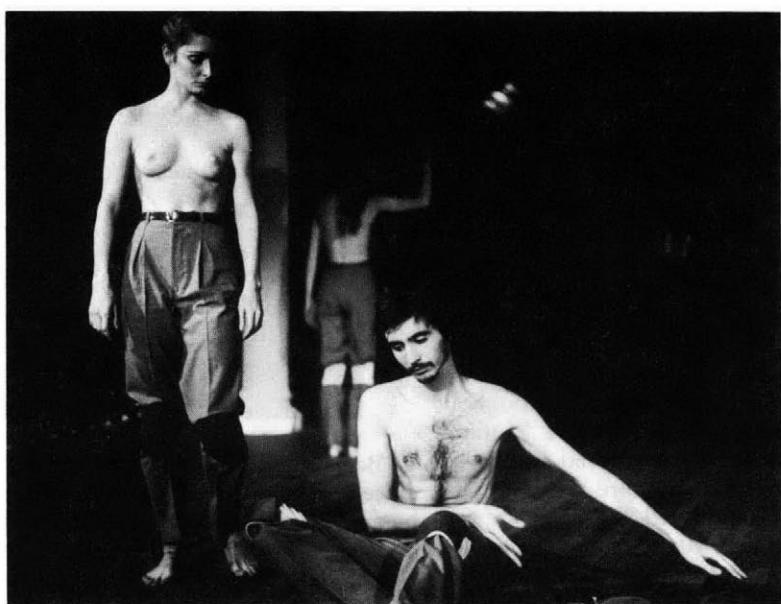
There are two major questions about such work. Is it reactionary? The use of familiar forms and methods may be part of the cur-

rent conservative careerism; it may also be a natural reaction to some twenty years of stripped-down dance. Secondly, is it only entertainment? Theatre in dance implies entertainment, and that imprecise term has historically meant dance which fails to push its limits or challenge its audience. But theatre-dance can be a style as difficult to pull off as process, improvisational, or architectural dance.

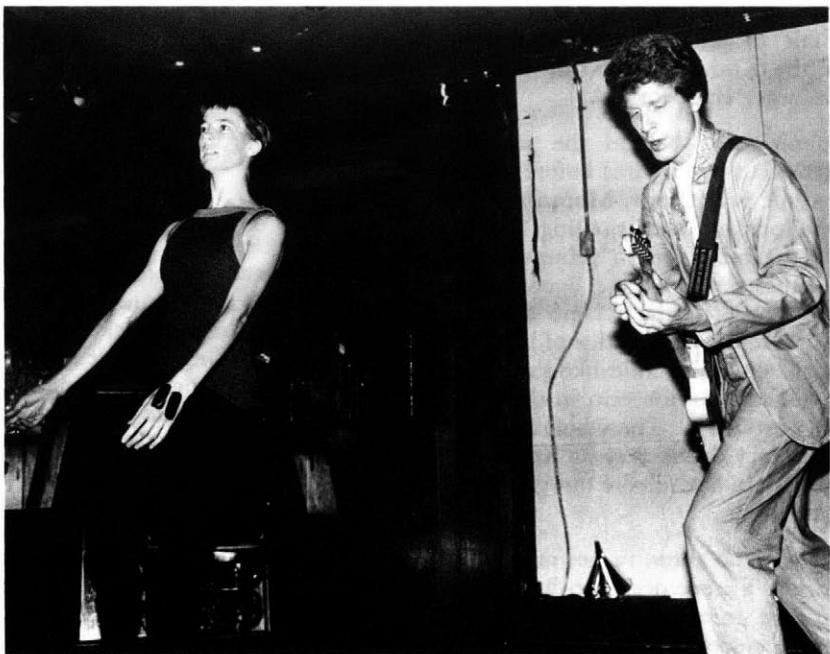
Edouard Lock and company are from Montreal, and their *Lily Marlène in the Jungle* exemplified a particularly French notion of a contemporary dance-theatre, one which tries to synthesize ballet vocabulary and modern dance's dramatic purposes. Among that mode's trademarks are extreme shapes done sleekly, distorted but recognizably balletic combinations with bits of pop dance (tap, disco) and large ordinary movements (rolling, falling) thrown in, and sensational material presented with a glossy veneer in a super-serious mood (this genre's ne plus ultra: Bejart). So the evening-length work essayed a most hilarious *and* brutal subject, Weimar Germany, in a glazed manner that was all Taste and Style—in a word, mannerism, an approach which generated no kinetic or dramatic power.

One psychological mood—alienation—was expressed throughout in the work's schematic structure: thirteen "modules" of phrases for different groupings of its five dancers. That statement was repeated by its emblematic gestures; two favorites were a pointed finger followed by a kind of shivering attack and a fall to the floor, and a slo-mo blown kiss to the audience. When not "on," its chickly-coiffed, pretty performers sat at a table set with wine and roses in the rear of the space, and constantly changed into red, white, and green t-shirts over their tailored gray pants (early on, there were tasteful bare breasts).

Paula Court



Lily Marlène



Armitage, Chatham

Paula Court

The "jungle" was a Kitchen swathed in black plastic, lit by harsh lights, with a dirt-filled runway on its floor. A "blind" musician wandered around playing snatches of '30s tunes on an accordian. The only laughter which relieved this enervated, humorlessly decadent scene was that of a German woman near me who seemed amused by this *Lily*'s improbably Gallic *gemut*. More effeted symbolist than raucously Dada or Brechtian, this dance's method was hopelessly out of sync with its nominal subject.

At the other end of the synthetic spectrum, Karole Armitage and Rhys Chatham work at a conceptual/punk dance-music fusion. Here you have a dancer from the Cunningham company—where music and dance exist in the same space and time, but the dances are not choreographed to the music—who wants to dance on the beat with a guitar player. Chatham's music, formerly "experimental," is now a hybrid in itself, played on electric guitar with trappings of rock style plus a simplistic conceptual attitude. By presenting this collaboration in the funky (and now defunct) Tier 3 rock club, they underlined their attempt to put smarts into a club act.

The dance took place in the social room upstairs, a very small space. Without any traveling room, the movement was limited to flung arms and leg gestures, slow plies, and off-balance torso twists. The first section began with swinging arms that increased in speed to flailing; ditto Chatham's music as he repeatedly struck one guitar string. Then she de-tuned the guitar while he played on. In the second part, Armitage posed at a slower tempo while Chatham stroked chords which created shimmering overtones in the small room. By the third section, the severely limited vocabulary found the dance reduced to high kicks and the music to rock

chord progressions.

For the most part, this collaboration showed itself as only Idea, and not a very big one at that. The freakish costumes (Armitage's knit vest and sheer black tights, Chatham's polyester green suit) were as self-conscious and tentative as the performances. What seemed at least novel for its first fifteen minutes dissipated in an hour.

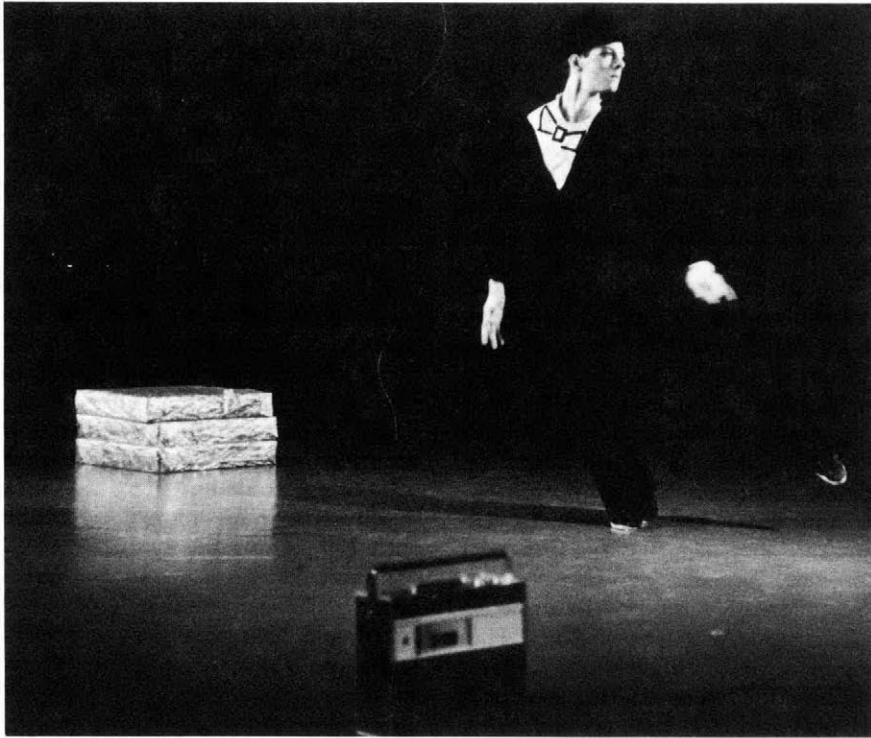
Marta Renzi's program was theatre gone awry, all show with not enough business. In *What Do You Do, Dear?*, Renzi and Cathy Zimmerman repeatedly got all dressed up but had nowhere new to go. Five brief duets presented some David Gordonish foolery with a chair, Tharpish couplings and tangles, and Dunn-like strings of non-sequitur phrases. These references were assumed and dropped like the different kinds of fancy dress clothes which the two put on and took off in front of the audience between dances. Quotation was about all that happened with these allusions. In fact, the dancers seemed to be quoting their own dancing, performing at such an unvarying slack tempo and with so little energy that they looked as if they were only marking. Nor was much done with the contrast between Renzi's short, chunky physique and Zimmerman's tall, skinny one—the mismatch was simply there. And the dances didn't relate to their accompaniment—Thelonius Monk piano tunes—either structurally or dramatically in any emphatic way; the music just played along with the dancing's vaguely playful mood. All of this wasn't much of a build-up to what was clearly meant to be a socko ending, a sixth duet to Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man" performed in the dancers' personal clothes, and a reprise of the first duet danced by five duos.

The Drunkenness of Noah drew on one of the Biblical hero's less publicized adventures,

that of being seen naked by one son (later cursed) but not by two other sons (later blessed) who cleverly backed into his tent. (This tale not to be confused with that of the drunken Lot and his two lascivious daughters, Gen. 19.) Dressed in raggedy rags, Renzi, Zimmerman, and Peter Stathas entered the room backwards and dumped a bundle of cloth on the floor. In her program note Renzi left out the fact that the two sons had entered with a cloth on their shoulders to cover up Noah, so unless you remembered your Bible, you could have thought this bundle represented the Ark's captain. Then the three "sons"—two of them women—hurtled around in a way which conjured up all sorts of Oedipal anxieties. Here the movement quality was more interesting: roughhouse with lots of jumps, swinging arms, and running. However, the phrasing wasn't especially clear, neither was the use of space, and what unfolded was a short mood study too vague to stand up to its juicy source.



Nathaniel Tilestone



Now for the good news. Jim Self combines a quirky theatrical flair from a performance background with a physical precision from Cunningham in whose company he danced for three years. Although his dances look to be laid out within conceptual structures and with abstracted images, they are fleshed out with economical and expressive movement, flamboyant costumes, and witty props. Four examples:

Uproots—'20s Expressionist solo for Self. Dressed in a Caligari-like costume, Self works with isolated actions in isolated body parts, mostly torso and semaphoric arm movements. There are spasms of quick movements and slow gestures reminiscent of Mercisms, but they are carried out with Self's own characteristic attitude of amused

inner attention.

A Domestic Interlude—'50s bedroom romp. Wearing pastel pink pajama outfits, Self and Ellen van Schuylenburch circle in a seductive mating dance, collide, then sink to the floor. After lying down for a while, van Schuylenburch rises, performs an invigorated solo, then Self rises and the action heats up to another collision/brace, then fade out. A clock radio placed downstage gives both time and mood with its blue light digital numbers and low volume muzak.

Marking Time—trio for two fauns and nymph. Self (yellow fishnet jumpsuit), van Schuylenburch (red dress with seashell designs), and Joel Luecht (blue unitard

with skeleton painted on) are undefined but colorful, individualized characters in an equally vague but energetic drama of surprising entrances and exits.

Scraping Bottoms—another Expressionist/Dada Self solo. In a Schlemmer sharp-angled, bulky black suit, complete with baggy pants and top hat, Self shuffles around in a landscape of random objects. He pushes along a phone book with his feet, names body parts, pulls change out of his pockets and scatters it across the floor, punches on a cassette tape of distorted disco music, wanders in a slow-mo waddle, throws glitzy cushions on the floor, and falls down. A whimsical, absurdist sketch.

Each of these dances makes a distinctive dramatic statement out of its assemblage of "found" elements. As dance, these works are less about movement invention than about the dramatic uses to which movement may be put. They are so theatrical in fact that one might quibble about a lack of kinetic push and shove—it's all very controlled. However, as theatre, Self's dances are vivid, often comical, and altogether original. Costumes by Frank Moore.

John Howell

**Joel Hubaut, Joelle Leandre, Tamia; *Une Idee en l'Air*.
Grommet Studio; St. Mark's Church
(November).**

Une Idee en l'Air (translation: "an idea in the air") was a remarkable series of performances and exhibitions by French artists, organized in France by Philippe Cazal and coordinated in New York by Jean Dupuy, a French performance artist who lives in New York, and Livet/Reichard, who made arrangements for performance and exhibition spaces. Throughout the month of November, approximately 27 French artists showed their work at what is a near-

complete catalog of “alternative” art spaces: Artists Space, The Clocktower, Fashion Moda, Franklin Furnace, Grommet Art Studio, White Columns, Alternative Museum, Creative Time, and P.S. 1.

The individual artists who hailed from all over France showed a vitality and idiosyncratic originality that suggests a real cross-fertilization between New York and French performance sensibility.

For example, the performance by Joelle Leandre, a talented bass player who displayed an affection for as well as knowledge of her instrument, contained aspects that seemed somehow quaint. She performed a piece called “Taxi” during which she read a text while playing the bass. Even though her voice took on musical sounds, the text remained an essentially literary element; however, she was a strong, commanding musician. Her more light-hearted, witty pieces (another involved her doing monotonous floor exercises, until her bass was pulled across the floor on a string, at which point she began screeching wildly; non-experimental music equals boring exercises/her own compositions equal radical, exciting work) contrasted with a more sober, concentrated focus on the instrument itself. She explored the bass, obtaining high sounds by playing harmonies below the bridge, plucking and bowing at the same time. She used a drumstick to get hollow percussion sounds, providing punctuation with her voice. At one point, the instrument even looked like a warm, friendly sculpture.

During much of the performance, Leandre worked with/against a tape of her own voice or of the bass, a device which was used frequently by artists in this series. Tamia also sang vocalizations against a tape of her own voice. Her work, although more “ethnic” (one suspects a North

African influence), is reminiscent of Meredith Monk’s. Although I find the purity, range, and power of Monk’s voice, her control, and the complexity of her musical compositions more accomplished than Tamia’s, the ambition and achievement of the French vocalist are unquestionable. A striking aspect of her performance was the juxtaposition of the performer with the setting. Behind Tamia, who was wearing a floor-length caftan, was a flat white wall embossed with a blue and white terra cotta emblem of the Blessed Virgin. The opening moments, with the soft vocalizations, the blue-clad performer standing quietly with closed eyes, the holy setting behind her giving the performance an almost religious quality, were especially fine.

Joel Hubaut was a surprisingly energetic performer. Perhaps because he hails from the south of France, he possessed a vitality and spontaneity rarely seen in French performers. His piece began with a lively and witty parody of Japanese music and the samurai tradition, complete with selected audience members quivering under brown sacks to his Oriental-sounding vocalizations, as he banged a pan with a wooden spoon for a gong effect. Then he shifted to a punk/new wave extravaganza of black and white slide projections as he played an electric guitar accompanied by an ear-shatteringly-loud taped music. In this sequence, by jerking back and forth and moving in and out of the black-and-white projection against the back wall, Hubaut achieved the effect of looking as though he were projected himself. Finally, about fifteen audience members ran across the space blowing whistles until they fell, exhausted, the shrill sound of whistling replaced by the rhythms of heavy breathing. By structuring the three sections so that the beginning is playful, the middle an intense climax, and following it with a

quiet, contemplative end, Hubaut’s performance, in a sense, “came.”

A final note: at the end of Hubaut’s piece, the last three people whistling and running were himself, a woman, and Jean Dupuy’s small son. Finally, Hubaut collapsed and the woman dashed over to a window and dropped onto the sill, her breath making a pattern on the cold pane. But the little boy, with full energy, continued to march firmly back and forth across the space, blowing his whistle, until he was finally carried off. I felt real affection for this accommodation of real-life surprise into the planned effect of the piece’s exploration of the variations and relations between sound and energy.

Lenora Champagne

**Robert Whitman, *Stound*.
Snug Harbor, S.I. (October).**

As is often the case with outdoor (environmental) performance art, the major element of Robert Whitman’s *Stound* at Staten Island’s Snug Harbor was what had been there before the artist. Performed on a chilly night in early October, Whitman’s somewhat eerie setting lay in a dark and moonless swale, surrounded by woods sharply silhouetting the horizon. From a tall projection tower, Whitman trained a searchlight 360 degrees around the wide enclosure, as if placing the leaves and limbs of an otherwise invisible “nature” under the slide of a microscope. After several minutes overcoming projection problems, an image of a rose appeared on a piece of white fabric suspended in a maze of trees above a pond. Time accelerated before our eyes as the rose wilted and died and the fabric sank limply into the water: “Rose,” we thought, “thou art sick.” On a much larger permanent screen, a chrysanthemum underwent the same arresting metamorphosis. More images of natural decay followed, a kind of organic holocaust



Image of smoking shirt on one of the mobile screens.
which seemed to offer a self-reflexive comment on Whitman's own aesthetic of impermanence. Visually, however, the images' outsize scale and dim, Kodak-quality color seemed impositions on the forbidding landscape, inadequate to its alienating power.

More films continued in a stately procession around the swale, projected on fabric held aloft on poles, before the intrusion of man-made events: a window concealed among some bushes was shattered, smoke poured from the wound, and the sound of the vandalism was repeated over a tape.

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Fireworks were set off behind another pond. The live shadow play of performers pounding hammers or sawing at a wrist with a knife were projected on the now tattered fabrics. Films of oil refineries and freeways appeared—one, superimposing freeway headlights on a gently lapping tide, was the single most beautiful image of the evening. A neutral face stared down at these proceedings from the largest screen: a modern-day Dr. T.J. Eckleburg impassively observing a wasteland of man and nature's contrivance.

Whitman's familiar interests in denaturing natural events and naturalizing human ones was perhaps a little too obviously illustrated by all this. The synonymity between human violence and "natural" deterioration urged a pat ahistoricism which I find problematical: I may want to look at an oil refinery spewing fumes in the same way that I view the death of a rose, but I certainly don't want to stop there. In welcoming perceptual experience, Whitman remains silent on important social questions: What is a non-renewable resource and what isn't, for instance? Roses bloom again, but will industrial sinks? What is susceptible to human agency and what is inevitable? And what, after all, do we need to know about what we're experiencing? Whitman prefers to nullify the difference between human and non-human processes—a legitimate option, but not without visual and aural imagery capable of redeeming an indiscriminate social vision through transcendent shock.

Robert Coe

**Robert Whitman, *Light Touch.*
512 W. 19th St. (December).**

The performance space was black, immense (a garage/warehouse), and chilly. Real objects: crumpled paper bags, a bathroom sink, truck stop coffee cups, packing boxes, all represented on film,

were inert characters/performers. The "theatrical" stages were projection screens, an open work space, the garage door opening onto the street, and a stage-within-a-stage of a truck backing into the space, open for loading. The human performers were "workers," loading and unloading boxes, carrying objects about, opening doors, and supervising the backing in of the truck.

Although it can be said that Whitman's piece was in the world of the life/art dialectic, the play of real and fictive, this formulation has become too banal to convey the excitement of the piece. The objects floated in transition among uses and presentations. A coffee cup which was taken from the back of the truck, for instance, was serially and simultaneously projected on a scrim (which at times gently floated in the breeze from the street) and a screen.

It was not always possible to identify the object being unloaded from the truck until it appeared in film projection. The perception of the re-presentation of the object was more convincing and more informative than the object "itself." This became a game of sorts, not so much to figure out what would happen next in the piece, but to decipher *what it was* that it was happening to.

The workers/performers had specific tasks in this piece: to move objects, to drive a truck, to lift boxes. But what is the substantiality of "real" work? To get things done, or to generate a product of ultimate profitability?

Whitman's workers performed their tasks with absolute attention to detail. One task was to carry an open-ended box from the left side of the stage to the truck in the center. The box "contained" the projected

film image of a boulder which moved within the box, occasionally filling the entire space. The precision and nuance of "real" gesture with which this sequence was done was as sensually pleasureable as a virtuosic "theatrical" performance.

The real work was in the realm of recontextualization by literal activity, unaccented and unaffected: not by fictions of character and narrative but by objective tasks. In this, Whitman made his comments on products (things) and activity (work). When brought into the mode of art (play), people, activities, and products slip loose from the determinism of productivity and accomplishment. There is a dialectic between the image of a thing and that thing; both are needed to convince us of the "thingness" of the thing.

We are seduced by our unconscious acquiescence to the process of work to believe in the seriousness of the play in Whitman's work. Assumptions about the value of things and work is shown to be no more than an agreement. What is subversive about this piece is that if the agreement can be dissolved in the process of art, why not in life?

Charles Frederick

Amy Taubin, *In The Bag*.
Collective for Living Cinema (November).

Amy Taubin's *In The Bag* is a metaphorical rendering of rage and an examination of the origins of metaphor. As the film's sole performer, Taubin dumps, sorts, and searches through the contents of a large handbag; then cuts, rips and shreds the various purses, appointment calendars, postcards, and books into confetti. This "narrative" takes place in two locations: on a large table and a bed covered with a blue quilt. In both locations the shots are framed so that

Taubin fills the lower-left corner of the image. Occasionally, a hand will enter the frame to perform such actions as tearing, cutting, or re-arranging. The soundtrack is a tape made at an international airport.

As a narrative the film becomes tedious in its limited visual range. It is a relief to see some very fast editing between the two locations; perhaps the camera movement equivalent of the internal state of someone vainly searching for something, not finding it, and then turning the materials of the search into something other than what they originally were. However, two things happen to the viewer while watching such limited action: first frustration sets in; one doesn't know why this woman is hysterically looking for something, or what she is looking for. The viewers' natural response is one of suspense and a desire to have an answer. Secondly, the objects themselves take on the attributes of character; they inform the viewer about the woman who carries this handbag, about what makes up her personal and work life.

This second kind of suspense is produced not by the action of searching but by our own minds bringing to the film what we already know about such objects and what they signify. In this way the metaphor of *In The Bag* becomes involved with feminism in a neo-Freudian universe. Such objects as H.D.'s *Tribute to Freud*, a postcard of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*, a diaphragm, and several datebooks make ironical comment on the film's action. Taubin metaphorically cuts her bag of feminine role models into confetti and is presumably freed to become her own role model, since now the objects are still the same but also different; a confrontation with—and a transformation of—the other has taken place. In that time has passed and something happens, the film is a narrative though its excitement is dependent upon an

audience who can read the signs.

At the beginning of the film Taubin slyly says "Give me twenty-two minutes and I'll give you the world." In a way she does; the soundtrack taken from airport announcements posits the external world, and the action of the film shows the internal world. But repetition often serves to detach a certain sound from its original environment. So the airport sound serves three functions. It posits the world-out-there as something over which the filmmaker has little control and sets up the first type of suspense mentioned above: the obvious appearance of a woman who lost her ticket and will miss her flight if she doesn't find it. Secondly, the sound ties the two locations together. And thirdly, in becoming disengaged from its own location the sound becomes part of the internal world. It is finally just sound; a woman's voice reading numbers and the names of cities, words which become evocative in themselves.

What is exciting about Taubin's film is the attempt to play with feelings in an abstracted, intellectual context. And just as *In The Bag* is rooted in the notion that any action in time can be considered narrative, it also brings up another interesting notion; when combined with its own transformation, any repetitive action will become visual metaphor, in this case a going forth from the rage that is the film's subject.

Still rage in its potentially freeing and complex nature finally outstrips *In The Bag*'s metaphor, which is artfully well-behaved and overly self-referential, even with the ironic subtext of airports, seventeenth century paintings, and archetypal feminine fantasy traps.

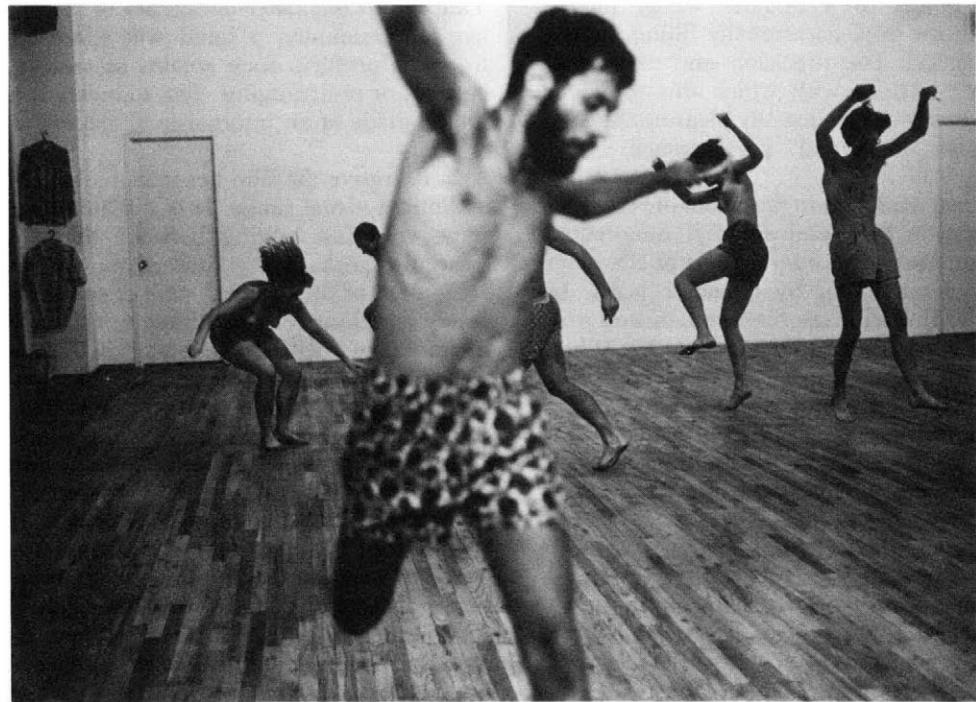
Margaret Eginton

**Johanna Boyce, *Out of the Ordinary*.
The Kitchen (October).**

Johanna Boyce's recent dances are hailed as a revival of the '60s because she uses untrained dancers, recalling the days when choreographers such as Steve Paxton, Elaine Summers, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, et al. featured non-dancers as performers. Using the spontaneous wiggles and twitches of untrained dancers, including a spectrum of size and weight, choreographers in that era were allowed to re-insert a subjective human content the body emanates (the body can never be wholly abstract) while retaining the geometry of minimalism.

Boyce's use of untrained dancers serves a different purpose. Like Peter Pan's troupe, there is more of a sense of play as a life-enhancing activity. She takes the narrative structures of the '70s—such as those employed by the Grand Union—and eliminates their emphasis on process, stylizing their interaction into smaller units; she retains some of their use of language, however. (Performers talk during the performance, make sounds and name objects they are using.) Boyce also relies on older American traditions such as folk dance and forms of precision dancing from the Rockettes to water ballet. Her dances are a picaresque sequence of episodes strung together in a manner similar to the small islands of information/story found on television, especially commercials. The short skits are flawlessly programmed in a casual style that belies their split-second timing.

The performance begins with a Super 8 film, *A Weekend Spent Filming*, that superficially resembles home movies (camera by Holly Fisher and John Schnabel). The "story" begins with a boat trip to an island. In a snowballing effect, glimpses of



Paula Court

people frolicking on the shore appear at an ever-accelerating pace. Ordinary gesture is isolated and parsed, truly capturing the meaning of vernacular movement as dance.

In contrast, the often comic live performance has more of a stagey air. It decontextualizes everyday events and reconstructs them for performance in what is, at times, a bedroom ballet. Starting with the basically comic image of men and women clad alike in boxer shorts, many of the "ordinary" events involve a clown-like preoccupation with clothes (costumes are hung on the wall providing the only scenery). The mechanics of getting dressed and undressed are used as tasks that, with their own built-in movements, become a natural form of dance, much as musical comedy often slides into song from or-

dinary conversation.

Simple props like coins provide a wide range of activities. The performers hold them up like magicians, toss them back and forth, and finally tape them on to the soles of their shoes, transforming them into tap shoes. Each performer then entered into a solo that ranged in style from a strolling soft shoe to a virtuoso tapping. The demonstrations of individual style and personality break with the more tightly scripted sections where the performers are treated as a gestalt. In these moments of individualistic display, recalling American folk dances such as clogging, etc., when each dancer takes center stage to show off their prowess, Boyce's performers create striking kinetic self portraits.

Ann Sargent Wooster