

# PERFORMANCE ART I

Premiere Issue



Ralston Farina's Paris Letter

What is Performance Art?

Richard Foreman's Film

Robert Wilson in Berlin

Carolee Schneemann

Fluxus Revisited

Reviews

\$2.00

# PERFORMANCE ART 1 magazine

A Periodical of Performing Arts Journal Publications

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## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We are pleased to announce the publication of *Performance Art Magazine* with this issue. Our current plans are to publish at least four issues each year, and more if possible. We've started *PAM* with the intention of offering the broadest possible coverage of "performance art" which we recognize as an art world, as distinct from a theatre world, phenomenon.

Though the two audiences at times overlap, in general they have very different expectations in the areas of performing, aesthetics, narration, etc.; they have their own performing spaces, too. Neither theatre nor art publications have single-mindedly focused on performance art. It seems about time that performance art had its own publication so that on-going serious coverage of all the activity it encompasses is possible. We intend to include in *PAM* events which might fall under the categories of performance, video, music, film, readings, and other special activities.

This première issue of *PAM* reflects the general scope of the magazine: a collection of interviews, reviews, artists' writings, photo stories, and reports. In the future we plan to add short essays and aesthetic pieces on important issues, more writing by artists, panel discussions, reviews and features about events throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, and the rest of the world, historical manifestoes, and performance documentation. However, our real interest is in critical thinking about performance art rather than indiscriminating documentation of it.

*PAM* is an entirely independent publication which joins our other periodical *Performing Arts Journal*. When people ask us how the two publications differ, we tend to tell them that *PAJ* is for the theatre world (that is, it covers drama and dance as well as performance in the 20th century), and *PAM* is more art-world oriented covering only current performances. It doesn't really matter, just read

whichever one you like, or both. Sometimes they'll even overlap in places.

The definitions aren't really very important to us. What matters is that the publications reflect the imagination of our times. Most of the provocative work being done, and the new performance ideas that are developing, remain undocumented by any periodical in America. *PAM* is our gesture toward discovering the virtuosity of performance ideas as they are evolving today.

We hope that you will share with us our excitement at putting out *PAM*, and please convey to us any comments or suggestions that you may have for upcoming issues. Enjoy . . .

*Bonnie Marranca  
Lataon Dasgupta*

Publishers

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# DESTRUCTION & DETROIT

## IN BERLIN

### **Robert Wilson's Tale of Two Cities**

#### **DEATH DESTRUCTION & DETROIT**

**An Opera with Music in 2 Acts.**

**A Love Story in 16 Scenes.**

**By Robert Wilson; Music: Alan Lloyd.**

**Presented at the Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer in Berlin;  
February, 1979.**

### **Photos by Ruth Walz**

The good thing about working in Germany is that the city of Berlin would commission an American to do a production on the scale of this one. The city of New York couldn't do it and wouldn't do it for an American, much less a foreigner. And I did like working with the professional actors, that went very well. Also, I was able to paint the decor myself, working in the shops with painters there which I couldn't do here. And I worked with a highly professional team of costume designers, scene painters, so on.

Other things were difficult. The theatre was too small and we had to completely rebuild the space to make a proscenium theatre out of a non-proscenium space. And the technical aspect of the work was the

weakest, which is where you'd expect the Germans to be strongest. Part of the problem was that there was no technical director on the project from the beginning. Peter Stein's last play was over a month late in opening because of technical problems, so my play was delayed because they couldn't start any technical work.

•••

The one area in which they thought I was extravagant, and I was more extravagant than I've ever been, was in lighting. I had three and a half weeks of lighting rehearsals. I did things like paint a white line on a hand, then light one side with a warm light and the other with a cold



## Prologue, THE GARDEN WALL

light. When the man is standing there in the beginning holding a rake, that's how the hand is lit and painted. All that was a bit much for them because Stein lights his shows at night without the actors, and I had all the actors there with the make-up artists and costumes for three and a half weeks setting up everything very carefully. I don't know anyone else who's doing that in theatre. Visconti did beautiful lighting at one time I think, but no one now. In still photography, there's Horst. He spends three hours to light a face with three lamps. I watched him work when he photographed Lucinda and I for *Patio*, and I couldn't believe he really spends all that time moving lights around. Also, I took a lot of stuff from Speer's designs. That lighting in Scene 9 came from this photograph of his Nuremberg staging. There are eighty lights on the floor, parallel beams that point straight up. It makes a wall of light.

•••

Most of Stein's company is in one age range, so I took only four members of the theatre's company, although one had a principal part. And I took Philippe Chemin from Paris. Then I found old cabaret performers, very old ones, and people from the street, like this young girl, twelve or thirteen years old, who had never performed before. We

put together a company of nineteen people, then started working. The first thing I did was direct the whole thing very quickly in one or two days, which is unusual for them. Then I broke it down and started doing parts and detailing them. But once a week I would do the whole piece. The actors found that difficult. Each week, I had an open rehearsal to which people could come, because some of the people hadn't performed before and they could get used to people watching them.

## Scene 3, THE CITY

2G: never be so foolish as to go up in a plane without a  
parachute

they know?

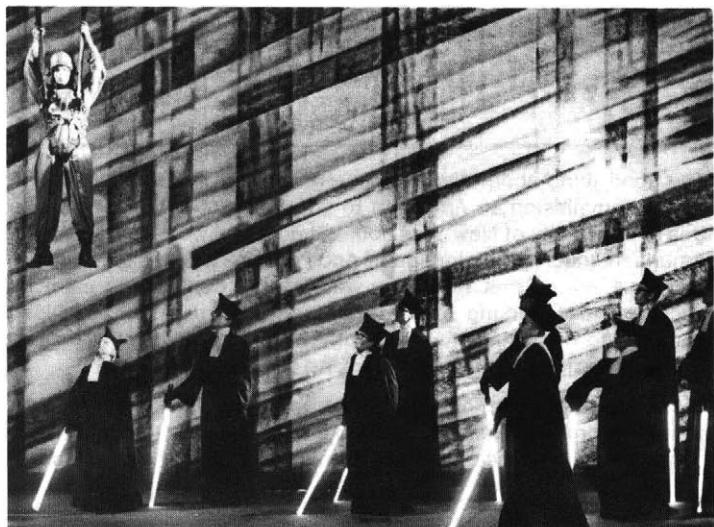
did they remember that?

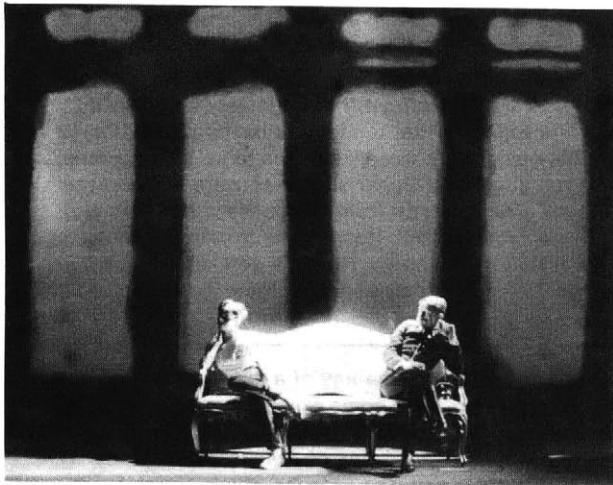
what brave men they were

what heroes

they had no guarantee that they would for sure get back  
to earth

they think I knew a great deal more than I did  
that I had a great deal more influence than I did have  
but that's not me





### Scene 1, A LOUIS-QUINZE INTERIOR

Originally it was intended for Alan Lloyd to score the whole thing and he didn't. So I took the music he had done and placed it where he said, but there wasn't a lot of it. It's a two act piece in which Scene 1 mirrors 9, 2 mirrors 10, and so on. Scene 1 has this Louis XV interior, sort of romantic and soft with these arches, and is mirrored by Scene 9 which has hard lines and very straight ones. I call it a contemporary interior, it's like Nazi architecture. So the decor is different but yet they mirror each other, there are six arches in 1 and six doorways in 9, and so on. I did another sort of structure like that with the music. In some way, the bits of sound mirror each other also. I just colored and textured each scene with music for what seemed appropriate. Then I tried to do what I wanted Alan to do, which is like what Phil Glass did in *Einsteins*, to have a theme introduced here that later repeats and develops and comes back here and there. So I went through and used music by Randy Newman and Keith Jarret as well as Alan's bits, and I used sounds and tapes of the actor's voices.

\*\*\*

The same thing happens with the text. You'll have a theme that's introduced here in the text, then developed. I look at the text as being musical, it's used as much for the sound and rhythm as for what's being said. The text is structured like music, used like a score. For example, in the first scene you had A, B, C, and D parts. Part A is spoken very rapidly and matter of fact, like a news broadcaster who just reports with no emotion. So A and D are presented that way, but B and C have more color and texture and feeling. This textual material repeats throughout the whole piece; it's like a seed.

### Scene 9, A CONTEMPORARY INTERIOR

### Scene 10, A KITCHEN

- 1: what a beautiful elephant
- 2: would you like to take a ride on her trunk?



## **Scene 4, THE RED CRATER, AN INTERIOR DESERT**

1: Brian, yes  
2: Susan, yes  
1: Brian, yes  
**E2:** was ist das  
what's that  
qu'est que c'est  
*[E is an electronic voice]*



## **Scene 16, A WHITE DESERT WITH A BLACK HOLE**



Before we opened, most people were skeptical about the piece because there's not a political message in the sense that they wanted it. All the new German theatre is very heavy in that direction. That was the first question everyone asked, "What is the political content?" I said come and see for yourself. And the longer they said there wasn't any, the more I'd say come and see for yourself. The Germans didn't even know that Speer and Hess were there in the work. Actually, a lot of words in the script are directly taken from things Hess has said and from what his wife has said, too. They just didn't recognize it. It looks like anyone could have said it. It could have been very explosive if it had been known. Now it's sort of out that it's about Hess. I wasn't trying to disguise or hide that fact, or play a trick on them. I just assumed everyone would know.

A lot of the imagery is taken from photographs. Have you seen the show at Marian Goodman's gallery? I worked a lot with that photograph of Hess standing and holding this rake. All those blowups of that photograph in the gallery show was like looking at evidence.

•••

All the people are Brian and Susan. Susan is always 1 and Brian is always 2. If there's a reoccurrence of a man, he's also Brian but he's character 2A. If a third man appears, he's 2B and so on. There's no character who is Hess, they're all just 1 and 2.

•••

The biggest difference between *DEATH DESTRUCTION & DETROIT* and *Einstein on*

*the Beach* is the use of a musical text rather than music. In some ways, it's more elaborate with more props and costumes. It's a bit like *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, it has a certain richness. Maybe it's a little more sparse, too. There were only two scenes where the whole company was on stage.

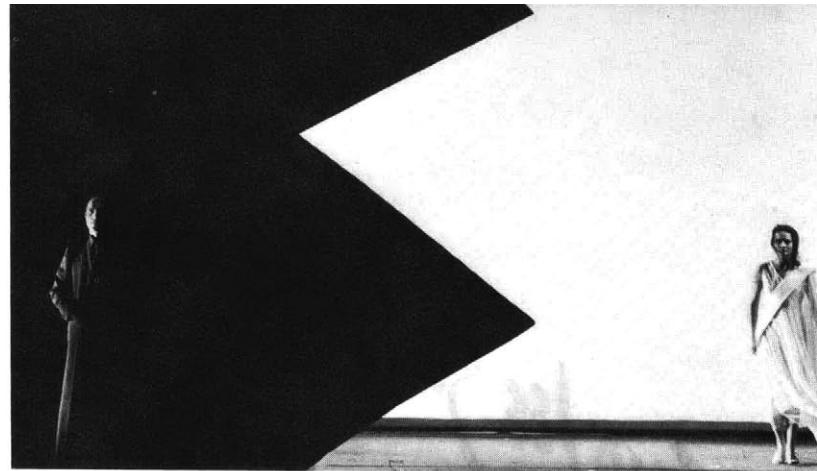
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Stein is very heavy into looking at the text and analyzing all the words, all the possible meanings, and I don't do that at all. I think he's very literary, so we're very different. He saw *Einstein* and liked it. I don't know what he really thought about *Detroit*, he didn't say anything to me about it. His theatre is very strongly leftist and political, maybe there was a question about touching on that subject matter.

**PERFORMANCE ART Magazine is interested in receiving short essays on aesthetics and theory, and reviews of performance, music, video, dance, and literary events from around the world.**

## **Scene 13, A THUNDERSTORM “B”**

- 1: HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?**
- 2: HOW REVOLTING**
- 1: WELL I KNOW BETTER THAN TO DEAL A RICKETY AFFAIR LIKE THIS**
- 2: WELL I DON'T LOSE TOO MUCH SLEEP OVER IT**
- 1: WILL YOU STOP BEING SO UNREASONABLE AND LISTEN?**
- 2: YOU'RE JUST THE PITS IN MY EYES**
- 1: GET OUT, GET OUT! I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN**
- 2: OH H**



It's not coming to New York this year. It may come in June of 1980. Now the idea is to rebuild all of the decor larger to fit the Metropolitan Opera House and re-cast it to do it in English. I hope to have the singer Jessye Norman in that cast. Either I get another composer who can write for her, or I would continue just scoring it for

sound the way I did in Berlin. It's a bit of a problem for the Met when they talk about opera, but I keep saying the text is musical, that's the way it's written and thought about. I'm not trying to tell a story, I'm just trying to make an architectural arrangement of these musical verbal elements. But the Met has to produce it, I can't.

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## **Scene 15, A GROVE OF PALM TREES BY THE SEA**



# Carolee Schneemann

# MORE THAN MEAT JOY.

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Carolee Schneemann was the first visual artist to work with the Judson Dance Theatre in the early sixties, where she pioneered her Happenings and body art and developed the personal performance mode of Kinetic Theatre. Her new book, *More Than Meat Joy* (Documentext, New Paltz), is a comprehensive documentary of over thirty performance works and films from 1962 to 1979, and includes letters, journals and essays on performance, sexuality, and feminism. Works such as the celebrated *Meat Joy* (1964), *WaterLight/Water Needle* (1966), and *Snows* (1967) are presented with photographs, scripts, and reflections on their personal and collaborative genesis. At the time of this interview, Schneemann had just returned from performing a version of *HOMERUNMUSE* in Buffalo, the most recent of the solo works which have occupied her in the seventies.

*This interview was taped by Robert Coe in March 1979.*

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*How long have you worked on More Than Meat Joy?*

Two years. This book has been the worst . . . When you're looking for a space to perform, say under a bridge or in a tower, it's promised to you until the people who *really* own it say "not on your life" or you're closed down by the city or the fire department. You fight to do the work somewhere else, or turn it into something so they don't know what it is until it's too late. The thing about a book is that it's a complete form and it's very easy for it to be denied realization. A printer can go halfway through and refuse to continue.

*Your last group work was Thames Crawling in 1970. Why did you stop working with large groups?*

I'm not sure, but what I said in a pamphlet about *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1974-76) was that I didn't want to anymore. One of the things that happened in 1969 when I left for Europe was that I no longer wanted to be in a position of being exemplary, of being the one who saw where we all had to go. I was just going to get rid of everything, not simply a performance group but also technicians,



## HOMERUNMUSE, 1977

rehearsals, schedules, specific performance times. I still don't want any of those things.

I'm feeling a lot of resistance in myself to the framework—in performing art, not theatre—because theatre always has a fixed framework. But if you look at performing art, it's got a kind of docility and yet an enormous amount of internalized fury, anger, rebellion that would potentially, in another kind of society, go to very positive social action: action that would be physical and manifest in terms of life support, cultural coherence. So much alienation and fury indicates to me a breakdown of the utilization of the self and of its integration into a real functioning unit.

*Most of your work seems to be about catalyzing a certain immediacy, something that can make the work usable.*

Up until 1973 it was crucial to me to create a situation in which people's energies could be radicalized so they could become aware of the political nexus around them. A performance work was like a trope for the organized world outside the individual. If the audience could



## GHOST REV, 1965

penetrate a performance and make a collaborative determination of the mutual situation, that could become a praxis for seeing a political situation. We had to construct a set of identifications that were available enough for the majority of the audience to become active—not necessarily so they would "perform" but simply so they would work together in the environment. What would happen normally in that period is that they would absorb a sense of our sensitivity, attentiveness and trust with one another and begin to build their own risks out of that, incorporating our work because they needed it and wanted it and because the other kind of blind, hostile, unrelated reaction wasn't possible anymore.

*I don't think there is much work now that's really challenging people to participate in its ethic to that extent.*

A lot of women's art is. But it's not trendy; the art hierarchies don't necessarily work with it. Some of it has a very specific social base.

*Do you feel mediated against as a woman working in the art world? That's all in the book. Acres of it....*



**EYEBODY, 1963**

*Oldenburg said you had the best body in New York.*

And he also told me to go to Europe to be famous and successful. I didn't understand why he would say that until it was too late to do anything about it. I might have been financially successful, or would have had people backing me financially, helping things happen, which I've never had . . . It's complicated. There were friends who were helping enormously and they were often men because they were only other artists who were in the position to effect anything.

*Has it ever felt difficult to separate people's sexism from their responses to your work?*

I've never been able to do that any which way, but I began very early on to fight for the way I meant it *not* to be separated, in really gross contradistinction to the way others might be unable to see it as something integrated. For some people the female value of the work became the negative center, whereas for me the female value integrated in the work was the positive center, the heart and the core of it. Some people were using cunt-widsom against me; they were using it to be "fascinated" and to deny its more formal values. It was like a constant subjection from a society whose splits, fissures, and contradictions were giving me a certain kind of rage and surge to see where I wanted to push against them next.

It's the same old thing. "Your energy is so masculine but you're so feminine." "After I read about your work, I didn't know you'd be so feminine." "You seem to be able to combine femaleness and creative will." I don't know. You could never just *be*. Lesbian art and women identified women are saying that there's a part of us that breaks away completely and says, "We can't waste time anymore. We're not going to be building in male culture anymore, it's just fatiguing. Diversionary."

*Your response to that kind of involvement is ...*

Positive. But that's not my role, that's not my personal space. I'm more like what Anais Nin described herself as: someone female trying to communicate all that she felt and saw of the female to the male and the male to the female. She felt that she was actively combining with the male and had to speak about that. These are all pieces that fit together. Some people may get furious with me and say you're so heterosexual and you're really betraying all these other things that people care about, but I don't feel that kind of antagonism. There are only certain things we can do and you take yourself as far as you can into them.

The people who are doing other kinds of self-alterations and transformations are making their own shape. You don't have to knock one with the other. That's what male culture is always trying to do. There's the king and the queen, good and bad, winners and losers, male and female: it's all basic binary aggression.

*How do you shape your concern with what people make of your body, the nudity in your work? It can strike one as mythic, iconographic, absurd, erotic.*

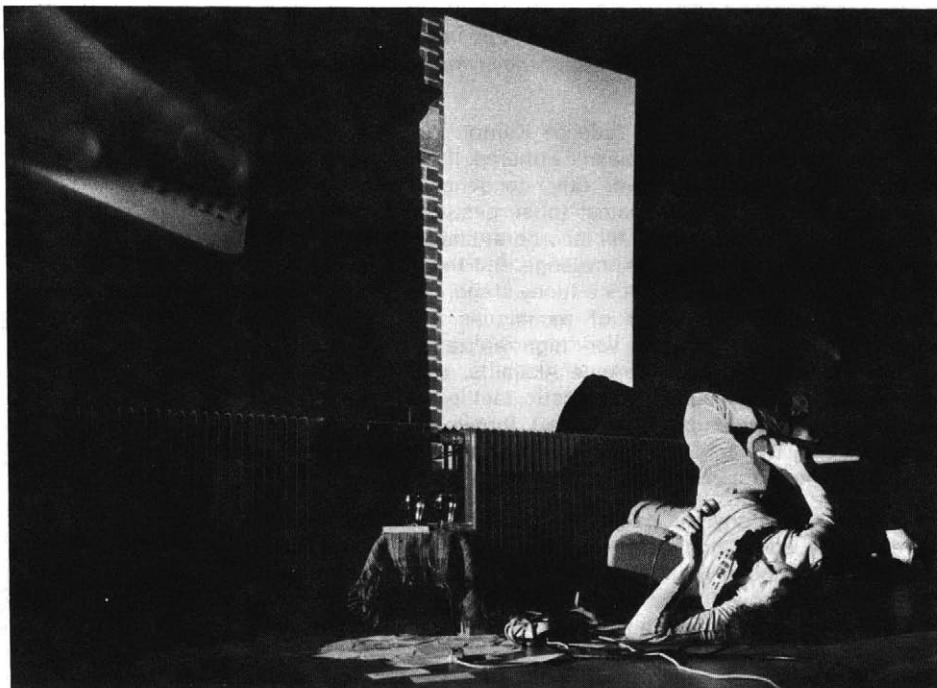
The intentionality is in terms of trying to cut loose of the place where I feel a taboo affecting me or surrounding me. Because I've never had to live them out in my personal life, I've been very aware of them culturally. It's not something that I wanted to do. This has a messianic tone to it, doesn't it?

*How has the nature of the taboo changed since your earlier work?*

It's changed enormously. Everytime I've done *Interior Scroll* (1975-77) the reaction from men in the audience has been most instructive and unself-conscious. One man came up after a performance and said the action had been in the nature of a religious revelation and that he has seen the vagina as the ark of the covenant. A businessman saw it as a kind of ticker tape that his whole life had somehow been on, one that falsely concentrated his sexuality in an exclusively male principle. There are still many ways that the body has to be cleared of mystification.

*How do you think the fact of your attractiveness has affected your work?*

I've had that question before. A woman journalist asked me what if I'd been short, fat, and ugly. Would I have been able to get out there and work with that degree of ease? No, I don't think I could have, but that's one of the things to work towards. To get away from the standardization and idealization of the body. In my performance company I always had people of very specific varieties: short,



## WE PRINT ANYTHING—IN THE CARDS, 1976

tall, plump, skinny, perhaps a man whose arms were "too long" or "too short." But the degree of oppression has been so intensive that it's still possible for women, all women, to make a personal statement through the body. The shock is different now, more primary. It's not so explicitly sexual or sexualizing.

*It would be interesting to see Meat Joy again,*

*with something of the potential for scandal lessened.*

I'm not sure the scandal would be so much lessened now, despite what has happened. Things are more synthetic now; there is more interest in camouflage of the body, or the body as an instrument that partakes of certain symbolic contents. The body is always in costume now. There's an attitude that nudity is too dramatic, too expressionistic.

*People see the naked body as a kind of costume, too. In general, it would seem that performance interested in positive ecstatic excess has largely disappeared. I'm thinking of the Living Theatre and Peter Brook's work in the sixties.*

Otto Muhl, Hermann Nitsch, Tadeusz Kantor. All coming out of Artaud. This branch of theatre hasn't withered. It can't wither; nicely enough, it just got chopped into other tendencies, contrasting or negating ways of reacting against those gestural principles. The people reacting against them still incorporate more than they seem to be aware of or willing to acknowledge. But the psychological attitude is completely different. It's a funny stage, because there's all this development, refinement of techniques and technological systems taking the vision to a very high realization: Foreman, Lee Breuer's most recent work, JoAnne Akalaitis, and Robert Wilson. These kinds of theatre combine imagistic, tactile elements originally introduced in Happenings—blown apart, thrown in, made into vivid configurations. The collage is not from collage sensibility anymore but that is where it came from.

The coolness, the irony, the insights aren't built out of great pleasure or great anger, something with a clear emotional key. It's much more ambiguous. The point is that there's a sociological split in radical theatrical forms now. It's economic. This generates issues with artists who want to do something extremely radical without resources.

What I was going to mention was the mesh now between punk rock and performance, which is exciting and interesting. The energy gets very high again. There are some very good women punk rock musicians, and some of them have come out of painting. It's important that we're out there making that kind of research.

*You see it as research?*

It's psychic research for the whole cultural system. That's part of what we're doing. More popular forms are being used, which is an important part of it, too.

*There seems to be a budding prejudice against non-performers again in certain circles. Robert Wilson's new work, for instance, uses all professional actors from Peter Stein's company in Berlin. Being "avant-garde" is no longer an "excuse," as some people would have*

*it, for being untrained.*

The younger performance artists I'm interested in, like Jill Kroesen, Laurie Anderson, and Julia Heyward, in fact make a bridge.

*There also seems to me to be a growing sense that spontaneity, adaptability, responsiveness to accident or limitations in a given performance situation indicates a lack of seriousness. Especially the whole movement in dance towards interior counting. People who do*

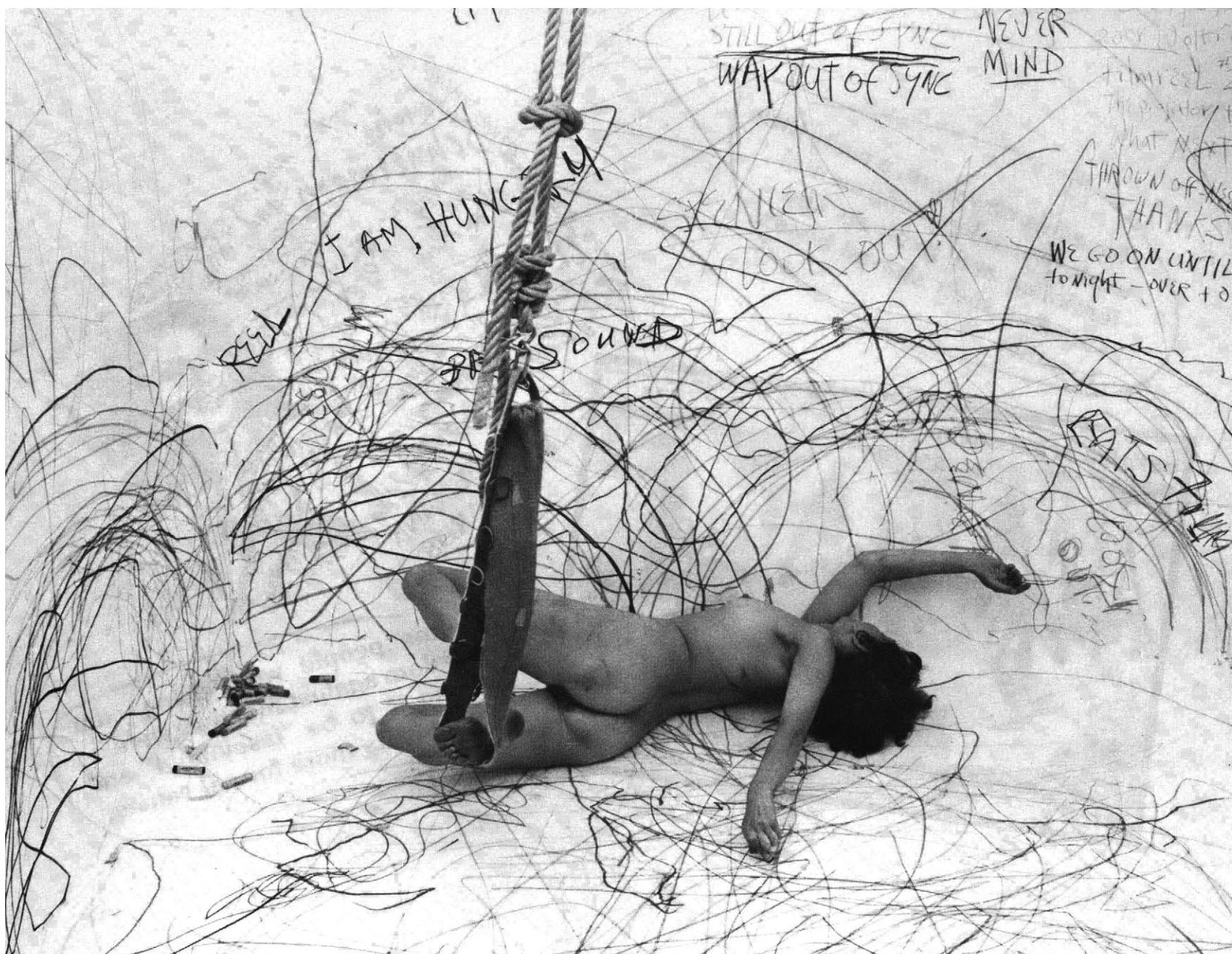
## **WATER LIGHT / WATER NEEDLE, 1966**



I have this new work, a nasty little work that takes sentimental feminism and punk art and smashes their shaved heads together.



Some people were using cunt-wisdom against me; they were using it to be "fascinated" and to deny its more formal values.



STILL OUT OF SYNC  
WAY OUT OF SYNC

NEVER  
MIND

THROWN OFF  
THANKS  
WE GO ON UNTIL  
tonight - over + o

*Child's or Dean's or DeGroat's work tell me that all that's going on inside them is counting.*

This is a very natural reaction to what went on before, with the randomizing and chance factors. It's like trying to use another part of the brain. It's a re-emphasis that's a compensating balance, more stringent and deterministic and Apollonian. I use chance and randomizing elements to keep out on an edge of uncertainty and discovery, going into a state or a kind of over-drive, with an awareness of how to put things together and move through the unexpected, how to go with it or counter it or absorb it or be absorbed by it. I think that being absorbed by something is what I really want. It's that self-loss.

*When you're enchanted, things are going right.*

I have to go where I don't really know the outcome. I'll make dreadful risks to get there, even to the point of messing up.

*You've written that you see dancers as a physical palette. Do you still see performance that way?*

Painting is my central "language." I think in the language of painting. But my painting was influenced by other processes. I can say I'm a painter but I can't say all that that contains. I was very influenced by music and also by literature.

*You've also written that the body is in the eye. Is there no conflict in your mind—your eye, too—between a painter's approach to performance and your insistence on the sensual, kinetic body?*

Neurological function recognizes itself in terms of imagery. You don't see it in yourself, you do it. The fascination with anything that moves has to do with the primary objectification of our constant physical state. How that heightens, clarifies, intensifies, how it can move and structure itself is through the eye, where one has a chance to experience the look of what one feels.

*Burroughs' notorious adage is that we think in images, that language is a virus preying on a more primary mental experience.*

I agree that I think in images. Semiotic analysis is dead-set against it now, but that's certainly my sense of it, like my infant memories from a basinet: tactile things, color, concrete sensory information.

*This idea of imagery as the primary mental process radically disorganizes philosophy and demotes literature.*

—the august struggle to take imagery into a linguistic form and give us back imagery. It's wonderful. It's a real palindrome.

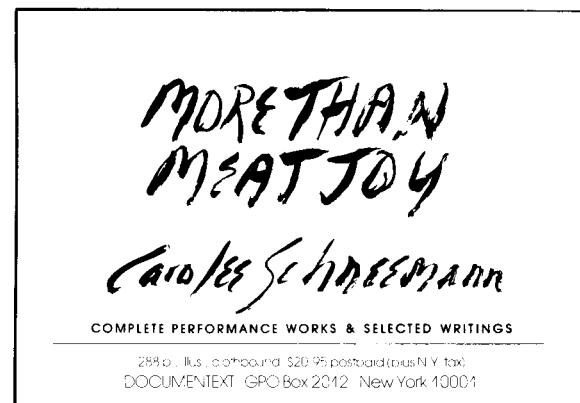
*What are you working on now?*

I have this new work, a nasty little work that takes sentimental feminism and punk art and smashes their shaved heads together.

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**Robert Coe writes for the Village Voice.**

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# FLUXUS



**“The Exquisite Corpse Stirs”**

Text by Ken Friedman  
Photos by Johan Elbers



Fluxus, the intermedial group of artists, composers, and performers, germinated in the late fifties and early sixties as a forum for the presentation of innovative works and projects which could find no other home in the world of the arts at that time. The origins of the group are in several places. In New York, quite a few of the Fluxus people—among them George Brecht and Dick Higgins—studied with John Cage in the famous courses at The New School

THE KITCHEN  
CENTER FOR  
VIDEO, MUSIC  
AND DANCE

FLUX-CONCERT / MARCH 24, 1979

**INSTALLATIONS**

GALERIE LEGITIME by Robert Filliou, modeled by Trisha Power

FLUX-NAVY by Geoff Hendricks 1978

THE BEAN BAG by Alison Knowles 1978

ZYKLUS by Tomas Schmit, performed by Joan Mathews

SILENT TAPE by Ann Trede 1962, performed by Peter Van Riper

TWO INCHES by Robert Watts 1962

**PERFORMANCE**

NATURAL ASSEMBLAGES AND THE TRUE CROW by Alison Knowles, Jessie Higgins and Malcolm Goldstein

Performers: Alison Knowles, Jessie Higgins, Robert Watts

**FLUX-CONCERT**

Organized by Ken Friedman and Larry Miller

1 SNOWSTORM NO. 1 by Mila Knizak 1962

2 TWO INCHES by Robert Watts 1962

3 TWO INCHES by Robert Watts 1962

4 PIECE FOR CONDUCTOR 1965

5 WALL PIECE FOR ORCHESTRA to Yoko Ono 1962

6 PIANO WORK by Philip Corner 1962

7 PIANO PIECE NO. 5 (Flux-version I) by Toshi Ichikawa 1961

8 PIANO PIECE FOR DAVID TUDOR #2 by Philip Corner 1961

9 INCIDENTAL MUSIC by George Brecht 1961

10 PIANO WORK by Philip Corner 1961

11 REMOTE MUSIC by Larry Miller 1963

12 F/H TRACE by Robert Watts 1963

13 DUET FOR BRASS INSTRUMENTS by Joe Jones 1964

14 RAINBOW NO. 2 (In Memoriam to George Maciunas) by George Brecht 1964

15 ONE FOR VIOLIN by Nam June Paik 1962

16 DRIP MUSIC by George Brecht 1964

17 CONSTELLATION NO. 11 by Dick Higgins 1977

18 GONG SANG by Dick Higgins 1962

**PERFORMERS**

Philip Corner, Peter Frank, Ken Friedman, Geoff Hendricks, Tom Bowes, Paul Colin, Joel Gold, Rubin Gorewitz, Reine Hauser, Richard Hayman & Bar Ira, Charlie Morrow & The New Wilderness Foundation, Inc., Gail Perris, Manny Rodriguez, Sara Seagull

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Larry Miller, Yasunao Tone, Peter Van Riper, Robert Watts

The number under each photograph corresponds to its position in the program printed here.

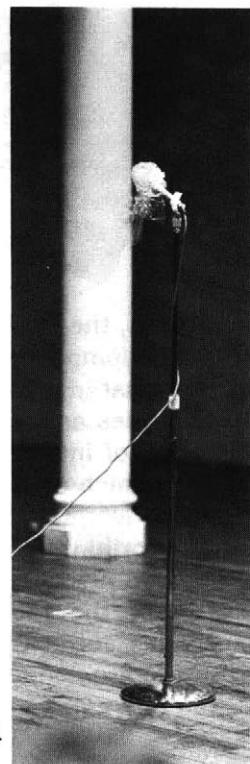
which produced an unparalleled generation of talented Americans. In Europe, independent artists had been working with similar ranges of idea and experience, among them Ben Vautier, Joseph Beuys, and Milan Knizak. Similarly, artists from the Orient such as Mieko Shiomi and Nam June Paik were developing projects which would fall into the areas pioneered by Fluxus.

The exact origin of the name Fluxus is somewhat wreathed in mystery. Open to many meanings—"an outpouring, a gushing forth, a bringing together, a bloody enema"—the first products of the group were

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publications brought together by organizer-editor George Maciunas. The first visible product was not actually a publication of the "Fluxus Editorial Council," the elaborate and never-quite-functional board of editors, publishers and directors, who were to have been "Fluxus," but An Anthology, that exciting seminal and catalytic work (assembled in 1961 but published in 1963 and edited by La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low) which was to influence so much art since its time. While no one knows specifically who "invented"



the name Fluxus, we do know the year in which it was "founded." In 1972, Fluxus West in England arranged a year of exhibitions, concerts, and publications which were highlighted with the October 1972 Special Fluxus Issue of Art and Artists. In honor of the occasion, George Maciunas declared 1972 to be the "Tenth Anniversary Year." Whether it was or wasn't is somewhat beside the point... in his own inimitable manner, George declared it to be so, and no one saw any reason why it shouldn't.

The vital and interesting facts of Fluxus are relatively simple. Fluxus has maintained its liveliness precisely because of the fact that it was an extremely disorganized organization. Its structure resembles structures which could be called "group," "movement," "school," and "philosophy," but it only resembles these structures in part. As a group, Fluxus has been loose, with a great deal of room for initiative and individual development or departure. The members have been free to act at will, and while calls to ideological purity were often made—particularly by Maciunas—no one particularly felt constrained to be pure. As a movement, cohesion came from friendship and respect for individual work and for the individuality and differences of the participating artists, rather than from stylistic or ideological similarities. As a school, the artists and their work benefited from interaction and influence on each other and on the art world at large without developing an academic piety toward themselves or their work. As a philosophy, Fluxus, much like the Zen Buddhism to which it has often been compared, holds within itself seeds for its own death and regeneration—rather than



for a common set of beliefs held by all members—and for that reason has remained vital.

The Fluxus attitudes toward performance have been mixed. There are leanings in the work of some of the artists toward Zen, and toward the ritual or the pure and detached, these being highly visible in the works of Shioiri, Knowles, Paik, Watts, Brecht, and Kosugi. Some of



the artists engage in a more direct existential confrontation with ideas and process, among them Vautier, Kirkby, and Spoerri. Beuys and Knizak deal in ritual and in ceremony often with highly symbolic overtones, while Vostell's performances—which to some degree relate to the other "happeners" in Fluxus—have a content which is both poetic and polemic in feeling. Higgins in his work moves into the realm of sound and tone. Maciunas himself was a devotee of vaudeville and gags, his favorite modern composer being Spike Jones (though his all-time favorite composer was Monteverdi). All the artists' performance works are touched with a casual, intimate attitude running between the loose and free gesture which can become painterly to the austere beauty of the



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tea ceremony. There is a certain use of props and objects characterizing much Fluxus performance in which the object is lodged halfway between sculpture and prop, able to function as both. Much Fluxus performance is, in fact, a sort of Theatre of the Object.

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One of the few truly international art movements since Dada, Fluxus—it may or may not be dead, according to whom you ask—can be said to have had a healthy and leavening influence on the world around it. Our concert at The Kitchen, essentially a retrospective, was organized to

demonstrate not the potential of the works for generating feelings of piety and nostalgia, but to exhibit once again works which were and which remain vital. To some degree they helped clarify the historic relationship of these works of the early and mid-sixties—an admittedly small selection of short works from a total body of thousands, long and short—to the history of performance and performance art which has since appeared. My work *Zen Vaudeville* (1966) is scored for "The Sound of One Shoe Tapping." I like to think of our evening as a few more well-placed steps.



A new work (*Natural Assemblages and the True Crow*) by Alison Knowles for the "Flux-Concert" event.

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Ken Friedman, Fluxus artist, is Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Contemporary Art.

# WHAT IS PERFORMANCE ART?

Laurie Anderson

As an artist, my work derives from language and interval; whether it is expressed in terms of words, images, or music depends on the type of interval, the tone of voice, the content.

I'm not sure what makes performance art different from theatre—but one guess is that theatre tends to be linear and narrative. Traditional plays invent characters, change them, and predict their post-play lives. Performance is freer to be disjunctive and jagged and to focus on incidents, ideas, collisions. If you want to talk about earthquakes in a performance, you don't have to have a character who is a geologist or back from the tropics where an earthquake triggered a love affair or introduce someone who is otherwise suitably motivated to bring up the subject.

In theatre, an actor's job is usually to convince you that he or she is someone else in some other time and place. Personally, I feel closer to the attitude of the stand-up comedian—not only because I believe that laughter is extremely powerful but because the comedian works in real time. Of course, "I'm a real person and I'm really talking to you" can quickly become grotesque—even more of a fiction than theatre—but I still prefer this frame. As in all generalizations, the above is full of contradictions; and in fact, the main thing that attracts me to performance art is that it is full of contradictions of all kinds.

Stuart Sherman

What I do can be called "performance art" only insomuch as a chair can be called a "chair". Therefore, by way of definition, I refuse to remain "seated".

Dick Higgins

After twenty-four years of doing what would now be called art performances—proto-Happenings, then Happenings, then Fluxus and now "art performances"—I no longer need any definition for myself about what I am doing. I focus on my material—things or ideas or both—and let it find its own form. When I was younger I needed new terms to help give myself an identity. But now I only need terms to, as it were, let other people in on the secret of what I am doing, to help them make their own taxonomy so that the new forms won't give them any obstacles and so they can appreciate its suitability by its relationship to other, similar work that is going on.

Most of my work is, however, a fusion, conceptually, of one or more medium and is, thus, "intermedia" as opposed to "mixed media." Opera is a mixed medium, for instance: one always knows which is the music, which the "book" and which the mise-en-scene. In my works I compose music with words, I make graphic images of gestures; and that is the world of intermedia. There can be a dance element to my sound poetry, a literary element to my lyrical pantomimes. Thus any taxonomy or classifications have no inherent validity for myself, while I am doing the work, as they did when I was just starting out. Instead, I try to figure out the meanings of terms like "dance" or "theatre" or even "art performance" to the audience at hand, and to use their definitions wherever possible, combining these as necessary to make a description that will not baffle but will invite each new audience into my work.

Charlie Morrow

PERFORMANCE ART  
THRU DOING (WHILE BEING OBSERVED)  
② "SELF-OBSERVING"  
IN PERSONA / ART SELF

# WHAT IS PERFORMANCE ART?

## Eric Bogosian

Performance is theatre and the line between does not exist. Performance art is a variety of theatre with certain distinguishing traits. Since the form is still "evolving," the best definition is that provided by the NEA: "performance occurring in a visual art context." Pretty vague ... performance is no more "visual" than any other kind of theatre. The work of Colette or Oldenberg is visually dynamic, but the same could be said of scene designer Josef Svoboda (who has been making a purely visual theatre for half a century) or the director Meyerhold (known for his constructivist settings on the early soviet stage).

Most performance art is "non-literary" which means that it is lacking a pre-written plot/script. But again this kind of theatre is not known. Artaud wrote the theory for it, and The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre and Grotowski attempted to manifest the dream. Not to mention experimentation earlier in this century.

Time and characterization baffle performance artists the most. Rarely does a performance "build" since it does not rely on a plot for time structuring. The structure is often a "process" structure or simple repetition. There is no tension since what is going to happen is obvious and the audience's job is to wait it out.

Not to say some artists don't know how to use time. Robert Longo's 8 minute piece at Franklin Furnace was succinct and gripping; once the visual point was made, the performance ended ... character is often the performer's character in "real life." For example, Laurie Anderson plays Laurie Anderson; Kathy Acker plays Kathy Acker; Jill Kroesen plays Jill Kroesen and so on. This is lovely when it works, but it depends upon charisma rather than manipulation of a plastic element of the work.

As performance artists learn more about theatre, they often mimic basic forms, forms that lend themselves to fast writing, few rehearsals and easy laughs. More and more frequently theatre forms akin to cabaret, vaudeville and the high school skit are seen in galleries and "spaces." This can be successful as in the case of the hilarious Kipper Kids (who are well rehearsed, I'm sure). Or dreadful. In the latter case "performance art" is simply bad theatre and not worth watching. Two suggestions to budding performance artists: 1) learn your history (who was Bob Whitman anyway?); 2) learn your medium (it's called theatre).

## Robert Ashley

It's hard to think of doing it without an audience. In other words, it's just like the others, except without the symbolism that you've put a lot of exercise into it.

## Joan Jonas

### A THREE/FOUR DIMENSIONAL POEM

Consider a particular space until the eyes blur and the edges move and translate this vision for an audience, using various devices to alter the visual field.

Layers of sound determined by the limits, the boundaries, the distances, accompany the activity of the performer (a language of gesture/a state of mind). Persona is made with masks, costumes, and described by objects as symbols. Like a drawing, the final image emerges—the audience is witness to this drawing (and drawings within the drawing)—a ritual. A myth in pictorial form.

## Jean Dupuy

Qu'est-ce que c'est que "performance?" Performance? Something to do with SPORT (in French). Art Performance? In American language? Avant-garde activity during the seventies in visual art.

# PARIS LETTER

(in the form of  
an interview)

Ralston Farina



*So you spent five months in Paris. Tell me about it.*

The American Center for Students and Artists, Boulevard Raspail, which is run by a new administrator very interested in performance art—Don Foresta—is beginning a new direction. They asked me to teach there and to be the specter of that new direction.

*And the idea of the new direction?*

To erase the old image, whatever that might have been, and to create a new image of an international avant-garde university.

*What happened?*

We were depending a great deal on the French press. We gave a press conference and I did a performance for it which was very well received. But weeks and weeks went by and I never saw anything in the press. So they were obviously content for the American Center to keep its old image.

*So what did you try to do besides win over the press for the American Center?*

I was negotiating with the Beaubourg Museum. That was still in the works when I left. I did receive a letter from a dance school, CID, something like Cultural International Dance, which asked me to do two lectures. After the lectures there was such a positive response they booked me for ten weeks beginning in September.

*This school is in Paris?*

Yes. It's an all-around dance school, modern and ballet. There I was teaching timing. The class I taught at the American Center was called the Aesthetics of Time, "Esthetique du Temps," because the French don't have a word for timing. After having six translators work on it, we still couldn't find a word for timing. The course started out being called Serial Pattern Design, then it became the Aesthetics of Time, then we decided to call it the Anatomy of Spectacle. Each time we did a publicity campaign we changed it, because we weren't communicating. The dancers and choreographers absolutely appreciated the need for timing, but the artists didn't understand what "performance" was. There's no word for that in French either. So we had a hard time with that, explaining what performance was to young artists who didn't have the slightest idea except for a few things

they've read in magazines. And when people only do performances from magazines instead of seeing performance, it will be very one-dimensional. Which is why, in fact, so much performance around the world is one-dimensional.

*Did the dancers associate you or what you were teaching with John Cage's ideas?*

Yes and no. In my press release, there was a quote from Cage talking about my work, so they knew he admired what I do. The man from *Humanité* said my notation system reminded him of Douglas Dunn's. He was quite surprised when I said I'd never ever seen it. I don't think it occurred to him that Douglas had danced with Merce Cunningham and that Merce and John work together, and that I'm a former student of John's, so the connection had nothing to do with Douglas Dunn.

*What kind of artist performance did you find Paris?*

Beaubourg had a resident performer who was teaching there, and she was cutting herself with razor blades.

*Gina Pane?*

Yeah. I never saw it. I heard she was teaching rudiments of first aid. Someone said her first class was telling students that before the performance you should put alcohol on your arms to prevent infection.

*Do you have any idea why Europeans find body art so fascinating?*

There was an international show called Art Corporeal at Beaubourg organized by a South American man and it was a joke from what I saw. I thought I was back in 1969. Vito Acconci was there, and when I came on the Soho scene, he was doing all that.

*Did he present a live piece at Beaubourg?*

He showed a videotape. And then they had this big debate about whether body art was art, and what was performance, which was hard because they don't have a word for it.

*But do other artists do other kinds of performance besides body stuff?*

Out in front of Beaubourg they have three fire-eaters, guys who lie on

glass, a guy who plays a saw like a violin. Then there's the other crowd who cut off their penises and piss on themselves, that's about it. My intention was to bring happy art to Europe! The last time I was there, I was accused of not being a serious artist and that's absolutely true, I'm for happiness, I think there's enough seriousness. I've no desire to see somebody cut themselves up for a show. To me, performance is art, not just a spectacle. That's the difference I think—the Europeans are attracted to spectacle. I think performance is a Soho thing, and only has any veracity or meaning in Soho.

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*Did you ever see a performance in a gallery in Paris?*

As a Frenchman would say, "What's a performance?"

*I know of one gallery that sponsors performances, Farideh Cadot, but most of the artists are American.*

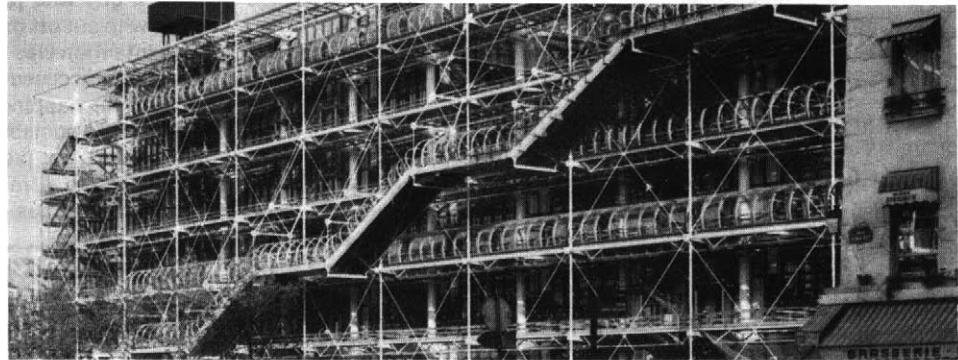
Yeah. She was having some performances, I missed them. But Paris is still a painting town, or so it seems to me.

*Paris is conservative about all performing arts, not just performance.*

Right. I think there are two problems. One, the French are very inhibited. And two, there's no place to do performances other than the American Center and Farideh Cadot Gallery. And when artists do have a chance to perform, they often abuse it in the name of some political consciousness. For instance, Jean Dupuy had a performance festival at the Louvre and someone threw a smoke bomb at the Mona Lisa. That probably set back performance in the Louvre for a thousand years or so. Hermann Hesse said something I've always liked, that to use art in the service of politics is like driving a nail with a light bulb.

*If there was a stronger interest in performance, wouldn't places begin to emerge?*

They complain that they're not subsidized the way spaces are in New York. A lot of people who would not have been allowed to perform in a gallery in New York were able to work in alternative spaces, and subsidies make those places possible. If there weren't alternative spaces, there would be many fewer performers. And now that I have some



distance, I'm able to say that there are simply differences in culture, and you can't compare them and expect cultures to match up to each other's ideals. It's not really useful to compare our culture and France's because you see all these deficiencies in French culture. If you just compare it with their own culture, there are no deficiencies. They have their bread, wine and cheese, and that's what they want. They don't want America.

*Is "time" different in Paris?*

Before I went to France, somebody told me that the French conceptually define time as though it were weather, that they see time changing like seasons. I didn't particularly feel that, nor did I have to use the idea to communicate about time. Henri Bergson, who wrote some of the most important things ever written about time, termed it physics time. Psychological time, subjective time was French, but because of circumstances, he was rejected. His ideas on time are absolutely brilliant, accurate, and good.

*And there was his cousin Proust, a literary*

*time artist.*

I doubt if the French gained as much as they could from them.

*When you were teaching, did people have trouble understanding your concepts since they had no object to go with the theory?*

I refused to show them my performance, because I didn't want them to do what I was doing. But I had no problem, because I had spent months before the class researching the psychology and the mathematics of how to describe what I had been working on for fifteen years. There was no communication problem.

*Did any of your students give performances?*

Yes. I had a student do a performance which we put together five minutes before he did it. The technique I taught was so strong that it worked absolutely. It was so purely designed, pure because based on computer theory, that the performance would be interesting no matter who did it or how it was done.

*In terms of your work, which is performance, it's not that Paris is behind the times, but it doesn't sound like fertile ground for a performance missionary.*

I wonder if I were to deny that I am a performance artist I would lose my chance to be in this magazine. When I was a child I was an entertainer, I used to do a magic act. When I was about twelve, I did a professional mind-reading act with my father in a nightclub. When I came to New York, I decided to do art and not theatre, not entertainment. But around the time when conceptual art became popular, I got very interested in the concept of time and especially in terms of the composition methods of John Cage and Schoenberg. I wanted to be a composer but I wasn't interested in music, I was interested in pure composition. So I began experimenting with the idea of time, and just as a throwaway, because I had had this experience as a child, I would do what you called "a performance."

As far as I'm concerned, the people who typify performance, like Laurie Anderson and Duka Delite, are part of a genre that is popular now. I would say that only part of the work I'm doing has become popular, the performance part that I pioneered. What I'm really working on has not even come about yet, but probably will come about in Paris with my students, and that's working directly with time. So I consider myself a time artist, not a performer.

*Why does that have to happen in Paris and not in New York?*

Because I gave away some of my trade secrets to some students. I taught them how to compose time, how to notate, analyze, and synthesize the time-art experience. This was taught at the American Center for what I think was the first time anywhere in the world. Readers, correct me if I'm wrong.

*Do you know about Robert Dunn's classes in the early sixties?*

No.

*I don't know exactly what was taught, but what I've read about them sounds not unlike what in general, not in particular, you're up to. It was a composition class for dancers based on Cage's methods.*

There's a difference between what I teach and what I do. As an artist, I use time as my medium, I give a temporal presentation. I don't dance, but dancers can learn from my experiments with time and use it to enhance their timing. A lot of art performers, who are basically entertainers, could really do with learning something about timing.

*And you're doing all this in Paris, not New York.*

You just made a temporal statement. I'm not in Paris, I'm in New York now. I did it in Paris because there are more cafes in which to do research. When I thought about organizing all my notes and theories, I wanted to do it in a very aesthetic environment like Paris because they do.



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If the art world lived up to any of its propaganda, it would have to criticize most performances because they're not very unique or very original.

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have a certain sensitivity to things, and I wanted to absorb some of that feeling. If they ever picked up on time as an art form, they would be the best in the world at doing it. If they learned American technique and applied it to that sense of finesse, it would be fantastic. I wanted to try to pick up on that sense of finesse, to capture finesse as a phenomenon and learn how to express time with finesse.

*As a temporal expatriate, what do you think about the performance scene in New York now?*

Some of it is just bad theatre, bad entertainment. If the art world lived up to any of its propaganda, it would have to criticize most performances because they're not very unique or very original. There are a few people who do some original things, but I haven't been impressed very often because I've been around a long time. If you see more of the root than of the plant, something's wrong. I want to see the flower, I don't want to see the root. And if the root is somebody else's root, why would I want to see imitations?

*That's called graft.*

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Ralston Farina is the original Time/Time artist.

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# AUTO-INTERVIEW

**Richard Foreman  
talks to himself  
(and whoever else  
is listening) about  
Strong Medicine  
(un film)**

**Photos by Babette Mangolte**

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*Richard Foreman, I am struck by the intensity of feeling, the sense of anguish that the characters in Strong Medicine seem to express, an anguish greater than a mere recitation of the story might lead one to expect. Can you tell me what the hidden source is in your film of this anguish? The reason for your choice of this atmosphere, this subject matter?*



I want my work to be always placed at moments of anguish, because only at those moments is there a certain level of intensity—which I need—so that I can re-apply that anguish-produced intensity to other concerns. To turn that intensity into a kind of fuel, for a kind of “high-pressure” consciousness which is the artistic aim.

For me the work is a delineation of paradise! Not that the situation portrayed, the fable, portrays an ideal or even happy and desirable place or adventure. Paradise is here and now in our ever present (but usually dormant) ability to use the instruments at hand, within us, our perceptual, mental, spiritual faculties in such a way that the world we are thrust into, with all its anguish and stress, is RE-SEEN, RE-EXPERIENCED on another level, in such a way, from such a new angle, that what is painful in the world is transformed within us into a kind of divine food that feeds us, feeds the body and soul with energy and delight.

My work is always a tale of anguish, the picturization of a free-floating anxiety that I believe /S the daily world in which we all swim together. I am not interested in simply lamenting and documenting how terrible it all is, how much people suffer. I hope that my method is, through the exigencies of art, to show by formal example (embodied in the structure and methods of the art-work) how to transform the "negative aspects of experience" within us, so that we can be awakened and aesthetically "delighted" and freed by the very energy that was originally stimulated in us by anguish, fear, and all the other negative emotions life itself produces in us.



Energy is the key. Human beings are so constituted that our "best effort" is usually called forth in times of crisis, trouble, shipwreck. Otherwise we tend, when things go well, to simply sit in the sun.

I am drawn to those situations which evoke the quake and vertigo of psychological shipwreck. At the crucial moment of energy-release, I catch that energy as it surfaces to deal with catastrophe SO THAT I CAN THEN DIVERT IT into the form of renewed perception which is art.

The characters within the work itself, especially Rhoda, deal with their own problems in a parallel way. Rhoda responds to crisis with a physicalized "expressiveness" that is a transformation into concrete terms of the hostile motives she is experiencing.

She receives a "blow from the world" and that blow goes right through her—re-emerging with great energy as "twisted" phrases (coming out as paradox, non-sequitur, etc.) or gestures or movement that aim at re-making the limits of the psychic or physical space in which she finds herself. She is dealing with HER moments of crisis almost as if she is trying to make them . . . a work of art herself! Using body, voice, gesture, etc.

**I find for myself the essence of the film experience to be kinetic rather than visual, and it is that kinetic plastic sense with which I choose to ravish myself in film.**

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**My work is always a tale of anguish, the picturization of a free-floating anxiety that I believe IS the daily world in which we all swim together.**

*Richard Foreman, your work for the past ten years is considered among the most important avant-garde theatre in America and Europe. What is the difference between your film and your theatrical work?*

My theatrical work grew not so much out of a love of theatre as a medium, but simply from the AVAILABILITY of the theatre as a place to work out in concrete, physicalized terms certain issues which are of burning interest to me.

I have always been passionately concerned to delineate or evoke that tenuous area where "what one is" partakes of the flow of life passing through one's mechanism. On stage I have been concerned with a lucid obliteration of the distinction between actor and act. I have created a kind of theatre where the performer is scattered over the field of action, and where actions are re-distributed so that one feels the whole stage is articulating the particular theme or narrative.

My film deepens these formal concerns, aiming at a kind of constructed and obsessive circularity, in which each character circles his own actions, doubling back on them so that we (and he) can be seized by the energy of unconscious motive turning into a structure evoked by





the residue of overlapping experiences. Experience turning into "that which builds the available categories of the mind."

Art is properly concerned with copying and amplifying its own effects: a kind of "chasing after one's own tail," in which circular absurdity sets up a sort of "resonance" that lifts and delights the spectator, awakening him to a sort of essential poetry.

I find that in film I am able to realize my dream of a work in which formal concerns and thematic, psychological-philosophical concerns interact and become one. The camera moves and jumps, moment by moment, in the same way that the external world "jumps about" inside us as we are exposed to it.

Whatever program we think to carry out in life is ALWAYS, at ALL MOMENTS, superseded and swamped by first one aspect of the world that lives through us, then another such aspect, then another and another. The world inside us keeps jumping from one of its facets to another and the camera (my camera) circles and moves about things to create a harmony and counter-point and mutual resonance between its jumping and the internal jumping of world-within-us that IS human living.

The camera allows me to probe deeper into my current artistic concerns. In fact, I have a new film project ready to go. Basically, it's a story about the kind of delirium that film itself can induce—an attempt to be LUCID about that delirium. I'm also under way with a large television project and, of course, I will continue doing theatre. Next year in New York, for Joseph Papp, I'll be doing a new opera with my musical collaborator Stanley Silverman, and starring Kate Manheim, to be titled *Africanus Instructus*.

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## THEATRICAL AND FILMIC SPACE

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*You have a unique use of space in theatre, a way to create sudden juxtapositions of shallowness and great depth. Can we look for that in your film?*

There is a radical difference between theatrical and filmic space. I suppose most people will expect my film to exploit an exaggerated sense of the depth of the image, as my theatre does, but I find for myself the essence of the film experience to be kinetic rather than visual, and it is that kinetic plastic sense with which I choose to ravish myself in film.

In the theatre I have been making pieces which, I think, one "watches and listens to." The space of the stage is a marked-off space, beginning where the audience ends and the stage begins, and extending (through the help of illusionary devices) to virtual infinity. In addition, there is a certain "un-marked" or "dead" space which lies between the individual spectator and the front of the stage area (filled by a section of the audience, not part of the aesthetic component of the theatrical event).

Film is a radically different space experience,

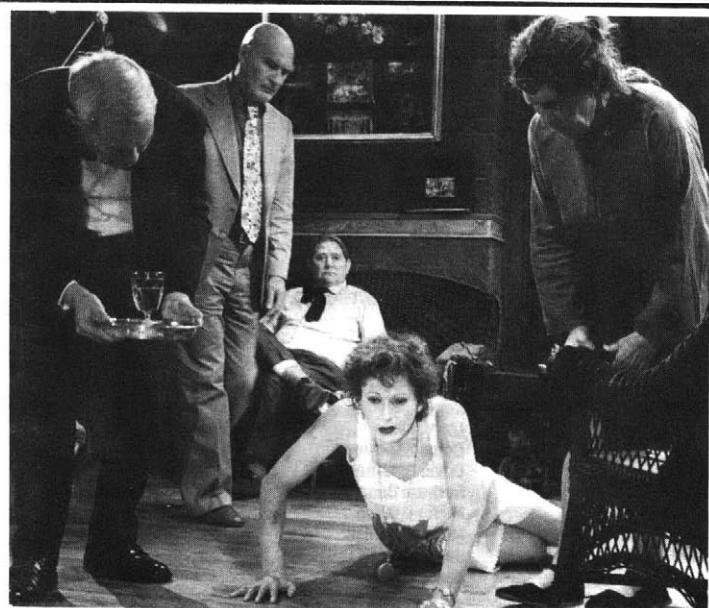
and the film image (and that structure built up in time as image succeeds image) exists to fill, with varying degrees of amplitude, that imaginary cone or pyramid which begins at the eyes of the viewer (if we understand eyes here to stand in for the entire perceiving body). It widens until it reaches and matches the edges of the frame of the distant screen. I really believe that there, at the screen, the film space stops. With a certain ambiguous softness, it is true. Nevertheless, it stops.

A wide panorama view in a film, a long shot, may refer to miles and miles of deep space, mountains in the distance, etc. But the kinetic reality for me as a viewer is that of being presented with a GENERALIZED surface

### **Art is . . . a kind of "chasing after one's own tail"**

which fills me with the bodily feeling of "wideness of gaze." A GENERALIZED surface at the far end of the room (at the end of my cone of vision).

Next a close-up of a hand or face or object makes that surface LESS generalized and, coincidentally, fills my body with the material of having an object close and focusing the eyes in a convergent wedge. In being more specific, also, that image is an EXTRACTION FROM the gentle flatness of the panorama view, and the object in close-up bulges out from the screen, to fill, to virtually STUFF FULL that cone between viewer and screen.



For me, then, the film is a syncopated articulation of that jump, that implied choice and EFFORT, between the flatness of the long shot and the bulge into the spectator's space that is the close-up, with the various mediating twists (experienced in the viewer's body as his "cone space" invaded by images and sounds) administered by the variety of movements of all kinds registered by the film image.

And the cone between viewer and screen is experienced as a part of the viewer's internal somatic system, and he experiences the film bodily, as if his own intimate body were being handled and manipulated by the rhythms of the ever changing film-space articulation.

My film is an effort at creating a rigorous relationship between the narrative and the MANNER in which that narrative is delivered—INSERTED one should say—into the spectator's body by means of the special, almost bas-relief like, spatial aspect of the film experience.

And this does have a profound effect on the narrative itself. The

characters of the film, especially the heroine Rhoda, reflect in their own body and actions an unconscious awareness or manifestation of the way space is available to them, waiting to be filled. Physical, emotional, and mental space.

Many of Rhoda's decisions as to what "next move" to make in a given situation are choices, really my choices, that try to handle the envelope of space in which she exists with a sensitivity to the potential of *FILLING THAT SPACE SO IT WILL PULSE AND EVOKE VISCERAL RESPONSE WITHIN OTHER BODY-SYSTEMS*—all that to reflect in Rhoda's actions the very same kind of "actions" that I perform, on screen as a filmmaker to affect the spectator's body.

So the character is acting in HER world parallel to the way I work on my aesthetic material. Then the narrative and the film-space are welded together and the film, even in its story and in the psychology of its characters, is about organizing that space between subject and object in such a way that the *space between* pulsates and feeds the "participating" bodies. In that way, we grow a new world.

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# REVIEWS

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**Winston Tong, *Nijinsky* and *Bound Feet*.  
La MaMa ETC (March).**

The San Francisco performance artist Winston Tong lays claim to the exotic, playing on archetypes and stereotypes, essaying "otherness" like a chameleon, or a charlatan. Last year, he presented three pieces, *Wild Boys*, *Bound Feet*, and *A Rimbaud*. These pieces were astonishing for their refined power. This year, Tong presented two pieces, a "reformed" version of *Bound Feet*, and *Nijinsky*. The notion of the exotic should not be dismissed in discussing Tong: the tension of his work derives from the collision of multimedia technology with an aestheticism founded on a fin-de-siècle decadence. As with the punk-rock movement (to which Tong has affinities, as highlighted in *Wild Boys*), the "datedness" of the sensibility, and the consequent narrowness resulting from the displacement of relevance, are compensated by *extremity*. The notion of the dandy (pace Baudelaire, Duchamp, Warhol) is accentuated through the direct invocation of the

gilded sphere of symbolist art (ergo Rimbaud and Nijinsky), and the iconic presentation of the problematic realm of sexual ambiguity (ergo *Wild Boys* and *Bound Feet*). The issues of domination and subjugation, of exemplary madness and enforced role-playing, of license and rigidity, are indicated through a panoply of devices which are designed to veil, to enshroud, to distance.

The most impressive piece which Tong has presented has been *Bound Feet*, a remarkable amalgam of puppetry, mime, and audiotape involving a re-enacted ritual of the ancient custom. In the current version, Tong has added a film to begin and to conclude the piece; however, the considerable achievement of the piece comes from the empathetic imposture of Tong as an old woman crippled by feet-binding. Through the deployment of two dolls, Tong creates an erotic drama which highlights the theses of mastery, servitude, and desire.

Attempting to define the attraction of this work, one is forced to reflect on the fascination of detachment. The art of Winston Tong does not call for naturalistic involvement;

rather, his work derives a powerful impetus from the many ways he distances the audience: through the dissociation of text and action, of puppets, of image and narrative. Significantly, when his work is most "direct," as in *Nijinsky*, there seems to be a lessening of intensity. By insisting on the discretion of uninvolvement, Tong forces the audience into an active partisanship.

Daryl Chin

**The Theatre of Mistakes, *Waterfall*.  
Paula Cooper Gallery (November).**

Stepping out of an aesthetic time warp, The Theatre of Mistakes, an English collaborative group, presents a wonderfully anachronistic process piece in *Waterfall*. The work is built around the sixties formalist icon of structure, an attitude in which an idea about structure is both method and subject. The performers, seated on a pyramid of chairs, rhythmically and systematically transfer a bucket of

water, cup by cup, from the floor to the top of the stack. When the higher bucket is full, it is poured in a cascade back into the bottom one.

Like all such process works, what you see in *Waterfall* is what you get. There's no development other than the playing out of the system, and no narrative since even the minor suspense of the ending is blunted by a program note which telegraphs the epiphany. Instead, attention is carried by events generated from the structure's functions, such as the continuous rhythm and variations played on it. At a couple of points, the ritualized pouring briefly halts while the performers relax, talk informally, and even drink some of the carefully handled water. From such tinkering with the ongoing machinery emerge *Waterfall*'s small pleasures.

*Waterfall* adheres to the process dictum of a reduced, simple task on which to work systematic permutations. What results is a static composition of mild abstraction with white costumes, de-personalized roles, and repetitive action, all to further emphasize the priority of formal arrangements over any trajectory stemming from subject matter. As a form, this set-up resembles an imagistic poem more than a discursive narrative (a systemic poem is used to time the piece's actions). *Waterfall*'s one hour length, however, aspires to the latter's effects and thereby dilutes a strong impressionistic impact. Such a length appears to stretch its brief insights on a frame that calls for a more expansive and overall view. After some twenty minutes, the novelty pales and an initial wonder fades into ennui as one waits out the inevitable end.

Since Idea governs the performance, the weight of "interest" falls on execution, and these performers exhibit a consistent precision throughout. In an approach also typical



**WATERFALL**

of most process work, the group creates a collective identity based on interior absorption in a complicated ritual. While hardly acting, their presence registers as something beyond matter-of-fact doing (the other process performing choice), motivated by a system complex enough to require a con-

stant attention to avoid mistakes. Here a touch of the exotic impinges, as British accents, unknown personalities, and a clearly strenuous discipline figure as a subtext of color to an American audience. That the action of *Waterfall* creates a nominal ritual does not diminish the considerable skill with which the performers present it.

John Howell

**Deborah Hay, *The Grand Dance*.  
Danspace at the Third Street Music  
Settlement (March).**

Deborah Hay's work in the 1970s has been amongst the most problematic of art created under the rubric of "modernist art." In a manner similar to, but far from identical with, Beckett, Hay's art has evolved to a point of tracery: *the existence represents the moment of dissolution*. Her recent solo work derives from a kind of reverie: the performance is evocative in belonging to memory while in process.

When Hay, who has spent years developing precise forms for the deployment of large groups (culminating in *Ten Circle Dances*), began performing solo dances three years ago, she would spend a large part of the performance talking to the audience. The idea of "the dance" as a direct address involved a derangement of the usual terms of the art form. (As Douglas Dunn remarked in a performance, dancing is talking, talking is not dancing, dancing is not talking.) Hay is attempting to communicate the contours of a *sensibility*, a task which necessarily puts a strain on the formal limits of an art not usually involved in such holistic aesthetics. Recently, her work has been accompanied by the presence (and active participation) of musicians, most notably Bill Jeffers. The collaborative

nature of this venture cannot be overstressed, as Jeffers provides a counterpoint which reflects and advances the movement possibilities.

In her recent solo, Hay was involved in a series of movements which went from a highly theatrical manipulation of brightly colored cloths to an extended movement tapestry entitled *The Grand Dance*. It is a series of movements, developed by Hay for her work with large groups, which are imagistic renditions of states of being. For Hay, these states are a daily imperative; her concentration on these images asserts her seriousness of intent. Among the images are: The Star Walk, The Dance of the Celestial Bodies, The Rock Dance. As the titles indicate, these movements are attempts to formalize the notion of a communion with the elements, the universe, the cosmos. In her way, Hay remains committed to an ethics of dance, the prototype of which can be found in the "manifestoes" of Yvonne Rainer from the 1960s. For both the intensity and the passion of her performing presence, and the singularity of her visionary concerns, Hay's example remains an edifying one. For all the "mysteriousness" of her ideas, there were frequent moments of humor, of lyricism, and of beauty which made the concert enjoyable. The music provided by Jeffers was multivalent, both skillful and soothing, and Hay remains a precisely tuned technician of dance.

Daryl Chin

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Connie DeJong, *Science*.  
Franklin Furnace (March).

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Connie DeJong's *Science* is another section of her ongoing series of journal-like novels which shuttle between fabulist adventures

and autobiography. Here, the free and easy narrative strings together tales set in Arabian deserts, California cities, and a farm on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The viewpoint moves around as well, beginning with an "I" who turns out to be a horny genie, then changing to that of "Betty," a simulacrum of a character who seems only barely removed from DeJong herself, and finally ending with an omniscient narration of Betty's boyfriend Buzzy's amour with a Madame X. All this switching occurs through sentences butted together rather than through any causal connections. A typical splice is the end of Betty's sequence when she asks Buzzy to take her to the airport: "It was ninety-seven miles to the airport one way, and on the way back, Buzzy stopped to see Madame X." From there, DeJong simply adopts Buzzy's point of view.

So *Science* resembles a collection of different kinds of anecdotal vignettes, from an *Arabian Nights* satire to the cultural clichés of life in California, from sexual fantasies to thinly disguised comments about real people and events. This mélange contributes some notion of variety, thereby sidestepping the question of any thematic analysis or development. At the same time, DeJong's conversational language style further camouflages the shifts between narratives to unify, at least on the surface, such disparate material. In fact, the collage's frame rests strongly on DeJong's low-voiced, monotone recitation. Although memorized and delivered directly to the audience, as a performed reading *Science* exhibits no preoccupation with subjective memory but serves merely as the occasion for a plain narration which glues together the pieces.

The matter thus presented is an amiable version of an educated, mildly bohemian life in which the narrator's attention wanders, as does the story's point of view, among

whatever crosses its field of focus. Of these subjects, the large dose of autobiography sticks out as problematical, especially in performance. Suspended in an ambiguous state between pseudo-revelatory confession and actual reportage, this "factional" element fits uneasily into *Science*'s casual tale-telling style. I would say that this is a purely personal opinion except that a good part of her audience seems in the know to the extent of addressing real people by their "fictional" persona. This is a tricky if fascinating area, and DeJong is yet to have hit on a firm stance. Just as the constantly shifting point of view within a homogeneous style hints at uncertainties of attitude, so does this private/public confusion cloud any real sense of direction in the some thirty pages of *Science* presented at this reading.

John Howell

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Toby Armour, *Dance for a Shaggy Princess*.  
Theatre for the New City (March).

Aileen Passloff, *Micro Modus*.  
Theatre for the New City (March).

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Humor in dance is one of the most difficult propositions to accomplish. Too often, what should be a careful orchestration of incongruity becomes a careless mélange of mistakes, and what should be an exhibition of wit and precision becomes a display of stupidity and grossness. However, there have been a number of genuinely gifted wits in the field of modern dance; within the last quarter of a century, none was as accomplished or as influential as the late James Waring. From the deadpan put-ons of Yvonne Rainer to the dadaist dissociations of the early Lucinda Childs to the blithe insouciance of the late

Arlene Rothlein, the heritage of James Waring is one which has enriched dance with comedic potentialities.

Aileen Passloff and Toby Armour are two of the most illustrious inheritors of the Waring legacy. Their recent evening at Theatre for the New City was composed of a new solo by Passloff (to a score by John Cage), and a short play by Armour (directed by Passloff). The solo by Passloff was in the mode of tragicomic lyricism which had been predominant in the work of the late Katherine Litz, i.e., a "serious" gesture is continued until the original intent is deflected through the absurdity of the movement's completion.

In *Micro Modus* a woman sits in anxious meditation. She shifts and squirms in her seat. However, with each shift, her movements get more and more elaborate. What began as a shift in weight from right to left becomes a filigree of tics, twitches, and twists. Finally, the simple shift has become a baroque ensemble of the most intricate busywork. The woman's adherence to her burgeoning gestures defies the logic of necessity and begins to suggest a helpless surrender as her body runs away from herself. Running, however, in place all the while!

The short play by Armour was a delicate piece of whimsy in a style of hyperbolic non sequitur which distinguished many of the early works of Maria Irene Fornes and Rosalyn Drexler. The literalization of metaphor (as when the Princess describes a wife's lot as a dog's life . . . and then begins to bark uncontrollably) and the ingenuousness of compliment (as when the Princess is praised for having a nice tail) present amusing counterpoints. Sudden bursts of "illogic" follow deftly and decisively. *Dance for a Shaggy Princess* was well-paced,

well-performed by an energetic (at times, acrobatic) cast, and so well clear of any object remotely resembling sense that the entire affair managed to stay afloat for the duration.

Daryl Chin

**Pooh Kaye, *Thick as Thebes*.  
The Kitchen (November).**

Pooh Kaye's *Thick as Thebes* adds a dash of theatre to her kinesthetic understanding. A veteran of several years of collaborative work with Simone Forti, Kaye's work grows out of improvisation rather than any conceptual framework. That the tone of this piece is finished rather than in-process is an unusual step for this brand of downtown dancing. *Thick as Thebes* is expressive without being narrative, simple without being tedious, and

utilizes theatrical costume and decor to create a drama of impressions.

Arclike dirt tracks sculpt the Kitchen's unwieldy space. The light is amber and dim. Onto the dirt creep the four dancers (Claire Bernard, Yoshiko Chuma, Pooh Kaye, Nina Lundborg) wearing cloaks of dead leaves over earth-toned pants and tops. Crouching, they begin to shake and crumble their cloaks as if shedding skins. Then quietly they crawl into the center space.

What follows is a deliberately paced series of physical images in uneven unison. The dancers lie in fetal positions, eyes closed, and tremble. They propel themselves forward on their buttocks or jump off the floor from their backs. Lifting shirts, they touch belly buttons. Backs arch and twist, undulate parallel to the floor. Splitting into duets they show us how a simple foot gesture can grow into bird behavior. Later they ritually throw

**THICK AS THEBES**



dirt into their partner's face, pleasurable receiving and returning the impact of a spit. Impressions of animals and children abound but nothing is representational. Each image is indicative rather than literal—each is rooted in kinesthetic impulse. The drama in *Thick as Thebes* arises from the realization of physical desires.

Much of the movement is rough and on the edge of violence. One especially remembers Chuma's catapults into the air. This is jumping just to jump, and Chuma can throw herself in one lump sum. All four women are very centered, sure of their own mass. Weight is not held, it is balanced in the way a child is, at once relaxed and excited and attached to the ground. A sequence involving simple running-jumping-smacking bellies together becomes exhilarating. At the end they bury their faces in the dirt and come up smiling.

Formally the piece is awkward. Events remain separate rather than joined. Fortunately, Kaye seems to have logged many hours in the studio with this group and stripped away any weak material. Rich as it is, *Thick as Thebes* resembles a string of beads; its dramatic material demands a more pointed use of time and space. Still, it's inspiring to see a young choreographer enter theatre-dance through the back door of improvisation: a welcome alternative to the downtown dance—no to spectacle—tautology.

Margaret Eginton

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Peter Rose, *the circular heavens*.  
The Kitchen (April).

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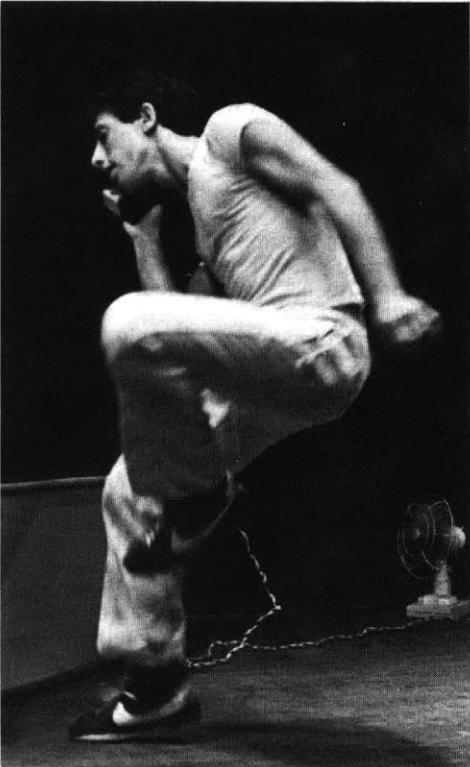
By the time the audience enters the seating area the performing space has been completely fixed with props in a kind of surreal situation: hotplate, basketball, fan, toilet,

shopping cart, tape recorder—and dangling from the ceiling a plastic leg, trash can lid, toys. These are some of the "found" objects in Peter Rose's personal landscape. I say "personal" because it seems certain that *the circular heavens* expresses Rose's own vision of life and art, and that the objects and how he uses them have "meaning" for him in an autobiographical sense. The piece manifests the conceptualized self in performance.

Yet, one of the commendable features about his "performance activity" as he calls it, is that it is not self-indulgently personal—there is very little language, for one thing—but evolves instead in carefully thought out structures of continuous imagery. Most of the images and activities have to do with water, dressing and undressing, construction and deconstruction, identity and non-identity, and they develop in several different areas within the performing space as a whole.

A kind of anarchic fantasy, *the circular heavens* begins with a videotape in which a young man/mental patient talks about a physical disorder and ends with that person (now performing) running an electric saw through a sheet of paper from a music stand. With its heavy rock music (Eno, Fripp, and others play throughout the piece) as aural accompaniment the image is a startling gesture of violence and aggression that reinforces the "new wave" aesthetics of the work.

True, Rose's piece has a hard edge to it—more so as it progresses—but the overriding feeling of *the circular heavens* is of a certain delicacy of emotion. (Often the music's lush emotive quality makes it sound like a Philip Glass score played on a calliope.) What makes this such a forceful work—there were actually bravos at the end!—is the in-



*the circular heavens*

tensity and conviction Rose projects as a performer in a scenario built on the spontaneous outbursts of raw energy.

Rose demonstrates an astute dramatic intelligence by building his piece around the idea of character, however much that character changes in performance, and by structuring scenes with a specific rhythm. In his eccentric use of props Rose in a way reminds me of Stuart Sherman, but Sherman

is more a formalist while Rose seems to follow mythopoetic interests. In this respect he shares a kinship with Spalding Gray and Elizabeth Le Compte's work, particularly *Nayatt School* which has the same kind of uncontrollable rage, and interest in personal imagery.

Rose is a very young man. As someone remarked to me upon reading his bio note in the Kitchen program, "Is it possible to have been born in 1955?" I look forward to following Peter Rose's development as a performer/thinker.

Bonnie Marranca

**Stuart Sherman, Eleventh**

*Spectacle (The Erotic).*

56 Lispenard Street (January).

Stuart Sherman's latest work takes a deeper step into his dense and abstract performance concerns. He has discarded the notion of portraits for this title and replaced it with a resounding "The," the definite article, and rather than locating his subject in the noun, people or places, he has taken on the adjective, namely, "The Erotic."

He still works with a number of short pieces, in this case twenty, each about two minutes long, but in the *Eleventh Spectacle* they are all the Erotic, for none have specific names. He now performs from a fixed spot using smaller objects, and although this restricts his potential for exploring large spatial qualities, it allows him to increase his all important speed. His props are a black fold-away table, which he stands behind and performs upon, a black fold-away stool, by the side of the table, and a black case, which sits on the stool and contains a carefully chosen and astounding variety of objects.

It is not by accident that Stuart appears to

complete his lists, for he is a master at exhausting the possibilities for the potential of the object. During his performance, for instance, they are shaken, squeezed, pierced, broken, dropped, thrown, torn, cut, wrapped, twisted, crumpled, rolled, slid, jerked, held, released, flicked, marked, drawn, read, painted, rung, blown, tapped, rubbed, played, brushed, combed, swept, worn, drunk from,

tickled, scored, wiped, smelled, looked at and listened to, pulled and pushed, folded and unfolded, taped down and peeled off, magnetized together and pulled apart, clipped and unclipped, laid out and gathered up, balanced precariously or easily, rested on each other, put upside down, the right way up, on their sides and anthropomorphized, all with a clear sense of describing, forward, back and side, circles and spirals, verticals and horizontals, over, under, in, out, around, through, above and below, his gestures being large, small, frozen, repetitive, changing chameleon-like, additive, subtractive, formal, relaxed, smooth, jerky, mechanical, slow and fast. You name it, he could offer to pay those who come up with categories that he hasn't considered, without fear of losing any more than small change.

These, however, are the formal constituent elements of the work, for he is not concerned with offering a potpourri of possibilities or a formal category of characteristics, but rather a dynamic aesthetic, and his poetic inspiration is expressed in the construction of the individual two minute pieces. These extended motifs are similar to movements in a symphony but are koan-like in their explosiveness. Each has its own individuality where a predominant theme is recognizable, such as inside and out, movement and stillness, attraction and repulsion and opaqueness and translucency, as well as subplots of color, weight, number, size, etc. It is here that these terms are questioned, for he pulls them apart and destroys expectations and attempts at fixed meanings. In dealing with inside and out for example, not only does he illustrate a startling interchangeability, but he will set up and then demolish the boundaries and thresholds of these phenomena until the whole thing seemingly flickers and vibrates with its discourse. After 20 such pieces and 40 minutes of this



abundant and joyful play, one is left with a certain perception-fatigue.

As much as Stuart is the operator he is also the operated upon. His mouth, nose, ears, eyes, shoulder, hands, stomach and feet are all objects to be dealt with in his scheme, as are the sounds of a word, an imitation of a machine, an exclamation, a breath and an expression of pain or pleasure. There are times moreover when his whole body comes into play and he will, for example, use his motionlessness against an operating clockwork object and then freeze the object while his body moves, and explore the possibilities of them both moving or being still together. He never outwardly responds to his audiences cries of recognition, their laughter at his audacity or splendid logic, but on occasion they become part of the order of things with a formal glance or smile in their direction, and one realizes that they too are considered as an object of the Erotic.

Many would have it that the erotic, sex, is a substitute for everything and the instigator for all drives, but Stuart with his inimitable translations and joy of interchangeability would posit that it is equally true that everything instigates sex and everything you see is The Erotic.

Peter Stickland

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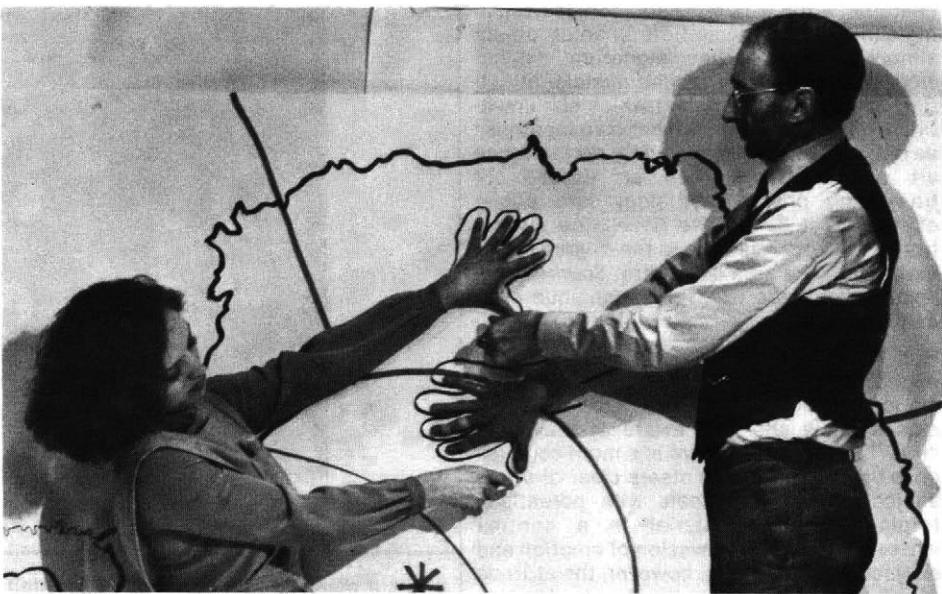
JoAnne Akalaitis, *Southern Exposure*.  
The Performing Garage (April).

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Eleanor Antin, *Before the Revolution*.  
The Kitchen (February).

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Originally, my intention was to write a review of Eleanor Antin's *Before the Revolution*, but after seeing a recent performance of JoAnne Akalaitis' *Southern Exposure* (not a Mabou



SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Mines production though perhaps an anti-Mabou Mines piece) it seemed to me worthwhile to look at the two works together for the more provocative crossovers of performance art and theatre ideas each suggests.

Essentially, Antin "theatricalizes" performance art while Akalaitis carries performance art concerns into theatre. Coincidentally, both use Romantic material in a way that is un-Romantic. Antin creates a cast of "characters" in a narrative that stars a black ballerina in the Ballets Russes. Akalaitis structures her work around a lecture-slide show based on explorers' accounts of travels to the South Pole. The interest in documentary is obvious in each work yet both act to deny the content of their narratives.

These pieces illustrate the really different and confusing areas in which each type of performance situates itself. (For example, what in theatrical terms seems overly decorative and mannered in Akalaitis sits fairly comfortably in the context of the current art world interest in pattern painting.) If it can be said that *Before the Revolution* is so sloppily executed, it is because as a performance artist Antin doesn't understand the nature of theatre. Akalaitis, on the other hand, is more astute and like most knowledgeable theatre people highly skilled in technique and theories of performance and narrative. Yet, *Southern Exposure* strikes me as hollow at its center because it is only technique—a narcissistic work in love with the sound of its voice and the image of its

gestures. Antin is narcissistic, too, in assuming she can pass herself off as an art object simply because of her "signature" on her work. She makes the foolish mistake of setting up a theatrical context which she unwittingly demolishes through her own ineptness as a theatrical presence. Surely performance art can be more than an excuse for translating private mythology into public obsession. If *Before the Revolution* suffers from a lack of technique to the degree that it moves into the area of theatre, *Southern Exposure* manifests excessive technique even as theatre.

Had Antin decided on the camp style she might have gotten away with her performance by the mere fact of letting the audience know she was aware of playing a "role." *Southern Exposure* is a more complex case because Akalaitis steers clear of art as subject matter and deals with potentially tragic theatrical material in a context where irony seems an evasion of emotion and subject. In both pieces, however, the attitude of the performing strategies is not clearcut, and one of the reasons this is so is that the narratives are not given a credible social context.

Watching both pieces I was surprised by the acceptability of naive performance (in Antin's case) in the art world, and (in Akalaitis' case) by how much theatre audiences are becoming seduced by glossy images. Indeed, the two artists' approaches offer very different viewing experiences. One kind of performance is based on the idea of the authentic (untrained), the other is based on artifice (skill); one looks rough and homemade, the other is technologically precise; one offers the performer as herself playing a role, the other shows the performer in a role; one documents the performer, the other a moment in history. If style means one thing to

Antin, it means its very opposite to Akalaitis. At the very least their two works demonstrate the difference between the artless and the artful.

The paradox the two pieces suggests is that while Antin—and other performance artists—desperately needs to develop more sophisticated ideas about performance, Akalaitis reflects a mannerist, even decadent, phase of theatre that appears as infatuation with technique, unsupported by a world vision which can move her work beyond the surface. I think both pieces indicate that the world of performance is ready, indeed poised, for a breakthrough, to unite the two seemingly contradictory aesthetics. Which will we be served up: the raw or the overcooked?

Bonnie Marranca



BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

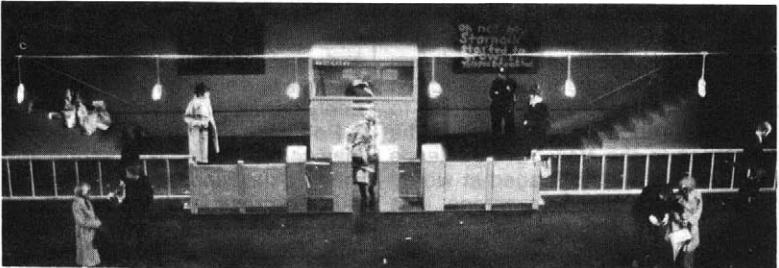
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Cindy Lubar, *Everyday Business*.  
Pace University (April).

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*Everyday Business* is a play of small events in the lives of thirty-six people during the course of a year; real life speech and situations are cleaned up and pared down to the succinct. Its structure is based on three locales and four seasons: an office building lobby in spring and winter, a city street in summer, and a subway station in the fall. Roaming through these archetypal spaces are businessmen, secretaries, young professional women, a psychic, two thieves, a policewoman, a bag lady, a female firefighter, and a free-lance researcher taking notes for an article on "casual relationships between women in public places." No aspect of New York behavior seems to escape Lubar's gen-

**EVERDAY BUSINESS**



tle wit and incisive comment.

The actors have characters to play, roles obviously shaped by their real traits. (Lubar includes a program note explaining that much of the dialogue resulted from set improvisations.) This is non-acting acting. However, tone is not one of individual personalities presented raw. Instead, they play distanced versions of themselves.

Likewise, Lubar works at a distancing of voice and action from emotion by pre-recording most of the dialogue. To time performance action to a pre-recorded tape is difficult, and occasionally the dubbing becomes clumsy. For this reason, when the actors occasionally speak live, the definition is blurred, creating an awkward effect. But what does develop is a cinematic sound quality in a proscenium use of space, interesting for the juxtaposition of live reaction time and canned voice. When someone doesn't quite make it to the right spot in order to deliver a taped line, the theatrical illusion is broken. Because sound and action are out of sync, the imaginary wall disappears.

With such devices as uneven unison of action, repetition of language in theme and variation motifs, cloning of characters, and sometimes outright vaudevillian routines, Lubar architecturally edits her view of New



**THE KIPPER KIDS**

York private and public life. She at once respects an image and points out its surface artifice, which is why the audience laughs with *Everyday Business*—it is laughing at itself.

The play's very sociable tone is witty, endearing, and stylistically successful. The dancing is happily kept within the range of simple gesture and tempo, and is performed well by strong natural movers. Michael Riesman's music is pleasant although sometimes too reminiscent of Philip Glass.

Lubar's strength is her sense of everyday time, which is not the attenuated time of Robert Wilson. Visually, the family resemblance is stronger. A certain spiffing up of ordinary place and clothing key the aesthetic shared by Lubar and Wilson. But whereas Wilson's recent works (*Einstein on the Beach*, *Patio*) set isolated props and objects in starkly minimal modes, Lubar fills the stage with color and almost homely decor (by Lubar and Christopher Knowles). The atmosphere is one of fertility rather than order. Most importantly, Lubar's keen sense of humor keeps *Everyday Business* from being overly sweet.

I have the feeling that *Everyday Business* was so thoroughly conceived and re-conceived by Lubar and her cast that its dialogue, decor, and movement could be geometrically graphed. Yet it's a play that is playfully chaotic in its reportage: a homemade dream.

Margaret Eginton

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**Bob & Bob.**  
**The Kitchen (January).**

**The Kipper Kids.**  
**The Kitchen (November).**

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With the idea of performance art as vehicle for entertainment as well as aesthetic expression gaining credibility among those committed to a visual art-theatre interface, it is not surprising that several artists have begun to realize work in cooperative pairs. The prototype, of course, is Gilbert & George, whose persona projection—campily self-conscious in their self-proclaimed “sculpturality” and anxious to keep up those British traditions of the stiff upper lip and the pub crawl—had to be masked in the early

seventies rationalizations about performance and body art being some form of "sculpture." With that post-minimalist cant by now discredited, other tag teams have joined G & G, providing the Saturday evening art world with enough demonstrations of wit and timing to make for a kind of mini-revival of vaudeville.

It is easy to figure out why two of the most successful performance art pairs have come out of Los Angeles; entertainment capital of the world, L.A. breeds in any of its ambitious residents or visitors a desire for the limelight. At the same time, the seamy side of this ego-economy is all too apparent to everyone there looking at each other in the glare of the sunshine or the fluorescent lights; the only way to face the fact that you've gone home no more loved than you were when you woke up is to take an ironic view of the whole rat race. To mock it and the hopes and pretensions of those who participate in it is to survive cheerfully the studio-lot atmosphere that pervades even the museums and restaurants.

This pop sociology handily explains Bob & Bob (Andrews & Andrews, respectively). It was easy to see what these two overly well dressed & good looking boys were all about with their filmed interviews—full of limp slapstick, blown double entendres, false modesty, improbable stagings—and their live patter and songs (lip-synced, with strangely-worded lyrics about various nerdy types): Hollywood/television's answer to punk. The deliberately crude amateurishness of punk style is applied by Bob & Bob to the glib, slick organization-man-cum-glamor-boy hero of L.A. playing itself to the boonies—*People* magazine printed on a ditto machine. The rawness of the punk stance and the cynicism and exhausted disgust of punk music are inverted into what seems to be a thorough acceptance of the System. If punks

get off on the heroic banality of Hostess twinkies and "Gilligan's Island," Bob & Bob get off on the *bana/banality* of condominium furnishings and no-preservatives-added chocolate chip cookies. They are out to *épater les punks*—and manage to do so (the surly artist types in the New York audience were nonplussed at best, outraged at worst) without resorting to disco (everyone else loved 'em).

The Kipper Kids are another matter. They reside and work in Los Angeles, it's true, and the L.A. ambiance sustains their hi-jinx the way it does Bob & Bob's. But they are British, teamed up in London (like Bob & Bob and punk bands, in art school), and not just their style, but their content, is as Anglomanic as Gilbert & George's. Silliness, after all, is far more an English trait than an American one

#### BOB & BOB



(compare *Monty Python* to *Saturday Night Live*). So is standing on ceremony, neatness, and exaggerated precision. The Kipper Kids were as correctly borne, neatly reasoned, and finely honed in their sequence of bits as Bob & Bob were left-footed, arrhythmic, and devil-may-care. There was another difference though: the Kipper Kids were as much about skirting grossness and bad taste as Bob & Bob were about keeping appearances overly nice. The Kippers—Harry & Harry, by name—presented their entire evening, from initial gag with egg tethered by elastic string to table (stretch, whizz, splat) to the final, spectacularly elaborate and choreographed tea ceremony, clothed only in jockstraps, sneakers, and the facial paint and putty that renders their visages cartoon-like parodies of themselves. If Gilbert & George are smooth, elegant, and faceless—and if Bob & Bob are perky, eager, and beach-boy cute—Harry & Harry are unshaven, grotesque, and unmasked by their own masks.

I have taken to referring to the Kipper Kids as the "poor man's Gilbert & George," as their behavior and their brand of humor seems derived from London lower middle-class vaudeville the same way that G & G's seems rooted in the understated in-jokes of Oxbridge comedy. But it occurs to me that, of all three of these two-man performance teams, the Kippers also hark back the most directly to traditional comedic modes, specifically to the stylizations of the *commedia dell'arte* and the *Punch & Judy* puppet shows. But, although their routines are more linear than Bob & Bob's constant seguing between filmed ramble and live stage act, or than Gilbert & George's repetitive *tableaux vivants* and insinuations into ordinary street life, the Kipper Kids likewise eschew narrative.

If the Marx Brothers, Ernie Kovacs, and the Goon Show to Spike Milligan and Peter

Sellers all used plot lines as vehicles for their gags, and if, contrariwise, Laurie Anderson, Julia Heyward, Eleanor Antin, and other current performance artists use technical and stylistic formalities as vehicles for their narratives, the Kipper Kids invent personae (sketchy as they may be) as means to the realization of humorous (in fact, often hysterically funny) imagery, and Bob & Bob realize humorous (in fact, often hilariously dumb) situations in the evocation of personae. Are the personalities taking over from the storytellers? No, they are just augmenting the performance art field with another possibility.

Peter Frank

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**Joan Jonas, *The Juniper Tree*.**  
112 Mercer Street, (December).

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Joan Jonas was originally commissioned to produce *The Juniper Tree*, a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, as a children's show. She continued to develop it into a full scale performance piece to evolve a narrative of epic domestic relationships and complex images of transformation in her intuitively arranged imagistic method. Her final solo performance version of the piece walked the line between obfuscation and the creation of truly mysterious effects, a risk inherent in the attempt.

The story (which involves jealousy, murder, a frame-up of a loved one, cannibalism, transformation, epiphany, and justice) is told on tape throughout the performance. The visual images, performed on a stage characterized by a bright contrast in colors of Chinese red and white, and the recorded story line proceed disconnectedly, alternately foreshadowing, reflecting, or recalling each other. Likewise, single images are



THE JUNIPER TREE

manipulated to represent several things. A tin roof swinging suspended on ropes, for instance, suggests a cradle, a window, a falling millstone. A ladder is both a tree and a shamanistic site of transformation (a stunning bit of business when Jonas reverses a red kimono with white lining). Dances and music (songs chosen and sung by Simone Forti) serve to further evoke an associative ambiance.

Jonas's treatment of this tale is full of personal ritual. At one point, she holds a box of human bones, unrevealed to the audience. And throughout a large portion of the piece, she uses the persona of the evil woman in the story to create a kind of witchcraft. At times, Jonas's involvement in this fairy tale with images from personal and universal myth produces merely curious associations; at other times, moments of highly symbolic significance.

Dale Worsley

**Ed Bowes, *Better, Stronger*.  
The Kitchen (March).**

*Better, Stronger* is one of a new genre of videotapes built around cinematic narrative rather than electronic experiment or artful research. Its lavish funding (NYSCA, NEA, Rockefeller Foundation) and WNET sanction (produced for that station's TV Lab) would seem to indicate a real breakthrough for this recent video development. Unfortunately, Bowes' tape barely achieves an unremarkable technical competence despite all the money, and its amateurish acting and incoherent story line display naiveté and pretension instead of any innovative ideas.

As "Lana," a Californian actress flown to New York to complete some film looping, Karen Achenbach races around like Diane Keaton on speed, mouthing a breathless, sing-song dialogue meant to be idiosyncratic and catchy but which seems only idiosyncratic (Achenbach is credited with script collaboration). The rest of the cast struggles to say their lines—all written in that style—much less express anything. Lana's work (we see her loop an argument with a woman weight-lifter) and her adventures (an accident on the street, a visit to an after-hours club) are equally unconvincing in this film which mistakes sheer movement for significant action and an incoherent structure for enigmatic reality. The other non-actors in *Better, Stronger* reveal, in different degrees, every nuance of strained self-consciousness. One exception is a wonderful found object of a family of characters, a heavyweight Italian family named Trapani. A sequence in which some Trapani sons maul, paw, and tease their "actress cousin" Lana while riding around aimlessly in a car has the energy and comic flair of a grounded improvisation.

Apparently, *Better, Stronger* is scheduled for

a future showing on WNET. Too bad, because video as a medium has not delivered on many of its promises, and Bowes' work appears to add a new category to the list of failed possibilities. One can only hope that this indulgent disaster does not totally discredit a provocative if as yet unfulfilled idea of video as homemade drama.

John Howell

Laurie Anderson, *Americans on the Move*.  
The Kitchen (April).

Phil Glass, *Solo*.  
112 Workshop (April).

I should be allowed to talk about Phil Glass's and Laurie Anderson's work in the same breath not only because I happened to attend Anderson's performance and then Glass's solo concert in the same evening, but, more essentially, because they represent two extreme edges of the rather undefined spectrum of American music today.

The important difference between them—which is also a difference between two generations—is connected to the evolution of the very concept of music within modern American art. Even if, in a way, everything changed in the field of music after Cage's first performances in the forties, it seems that the concept of music was somehow stronger than the one of "art object" and was less attacked by "conceptual" reduction. This strength proved to be beneficial for music and allowed it to develop into the first original form produced by white America, which has been variously called minimal, repetitive, or phase music ...

And even though this music has been generally played in lofts and performance spaces, and even though a composer such as

Phil Glass has worked with theatre people like Lee Breuer, JoAnne Akalaitis, and Bob Wilson, and even though he is currently writing an opera, he has not incorporated any spatial concerns in his musical compositions, which remain strictly "bi-dimensional." The solo presented at 112 Workshop was composed of two excerpts from a work Glass is writing for Lucinda Childs and Sol LeWitt, *Dance No. 4* and *Dance No. 2*. The pieces, performed by Glass at the keyboard, were constituted by the alternance of two kinds of musical material, A and B, one polymetric, the other composed of a single harmonic repetitive structure. Their interest derives largely from the tension created between an increased formalism of the composition and a greater emotional content—compared to Glass's earlier works—due to the reintroduction of harmony in repetitive structures (which Glass has been doing since "Another Look at Harmony" in 1974).

Laurie Anderson, on the other hand, belongs to that trend of artists which came to musical composition through the visual arts and performances. Her work is less concerned with musical structures in themselves (some of the ones she uses are very classical); rather, it redefines the relationship between music and instrument, music and human body, music and language. The mental space created by listening to repetitive music is more concerned with what Richard Foreman calls the passive/feminine side of American avant-garde art : a slow impregnation of the self by an alien, sinusoidal, hallucinatory material—material which the listener finally discovers to be similar to his own consciousness. Anderson, however, uses the "analytical-critical" method characteristic of the New York art world over the last few years: collage of heterogenous elements, dismantling of the narrative, and a very specific way of relating to culture and history

that I consider to be typically American. The major problem in the construction of an American history is the necessity of incorporating elements from the history of other civilizations, as "ready-mades" from outside.



Americans on the Move

The title of Anderson's piece evokes precisely the problem of construction of an American space through body movements, language, and voice. "This is the way we say hello in this country, this is the distance between two points." She also evokes colonization—the entrance in a foreign land and the moving around in it—as a pattern for her own views on music and performance: music, and in particular the violin she plays solo, representing the individual subjectivity which reverberates in space to give that space its true dimension, a field for human activity.

One of the "modernist" aspects of Anderson's work is due to the fact that her reflection on the American body and its space is mediated by a specific work on voice—involving distortion of tapes and use of the microphone as of a musical instrument; voice which switches from feminine to masculine pitches; voice which is noise in our body and our first instrument to reverberate in space.

Bérénice Reynaud

**Laurie Anderson, Americans on the Move:  
Parts I and II.  
The Kitchen (April).**

*Americans on the Move* is a formidable work that displays a confident Anderson deftly moving through a technological labyrinth to create a mythopoetic and personal round-up of American history. Poems sung to music accompany a continually shifting landscape (even slides projected on a rear wall "move" ever so slightly) as the cabaret-style evening takes the viewer through an uncharted voyage deep into the heart of America.

Of course, America in Anderson's turf is neither history-book material nor Tocqueville. It is an idiosyncratic and fabulously inventive interpretation that finds the Garden of Eden located somewhere in Genesee County, a Biblical emendation that rests on the findings of atmospheric currents by a "certain American sect." An associative narrative jump-cut sparked off by the word "currents" leads to Anderson's tale about Edison's attempts to discredit Nikola Tesla (the popularizer of alternating current) by electrocuting dogs. This, in turn, lends her weirdly disjunctive narrative another avenue to explore—the American pet syndrome, aptly captured in a hauntingly amplified "Walk The Dog." (These "talking songs" are all accompanied by the ubiquitous violin, by now an integral part of Anderson's performing career.)

The trajectory of her performance moves from innocence (Eden/Genesee) to betrayal (Edison/Tesla) and from domesticity (dogs) to communal (the couple who wave their hands—"This is the way we say hello in this country") and territoriality (cars/gas stations). But Anderson's trajectory is not rectilinear; in the spirit of Tesla, it establishes an unequivocal alternating rhythm that fluctuates between the closed

circuit dualities or polarities that her poetic narration defines. Perhaps that is why her song on the snake charmer—"You're the snake charmer...and you're also the snake"—takes on significant meanings within this context. It is the quintessential closed circuit experience.

The technological maze that surrounds Anderson not only evokes the spirit of America but emphasizes further through connecting cables and diverse gadgetry a pictorial image of America on the move—it is both a closed and fully dynamic circuit. (Note: Alternating current, a closed circuit, was firmly established in America where its use was found expedient to transmit power over long distances; hence its intrinsic relation to distance, territoriality, and geography.) Also, amplification, distortion, body mikes, and other appendages lead to a disruption of space (chopping it up, making it discontinuous, etc.), thereby effecting a sense of "otherness," a feeling of distance, of travel, of a yonder space, and ultimately of a geography. (What Gertrude Stein did for the novel Anderson may well have achieved for a performed event.) Amplified sounds—which is to say "quotation" sounds insofar as it "quotes" the human voice—adds another dimension to Anderson's eclectic aesthetics (musically, hers is a punk/classical/rock stance; theatrically, hers is a Brecht/Godard/Handke stance).

From B.C. to A.C., Anderson takes us along a technological brick road to a haven that resounds amplitudinously with electronic energy and generative ideas. To top it all, the evening comes in a neat package that is a joy to behold. There is little doubt in my mind that at the center of so much performance activity today, the demure figure of Laurie Anderson will be a challenge to all.

**Gautam Dasgupta**

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