KOSTELANETZ

On Innovative Performance(s)

Three Decades of Recollections on Alternative Theater

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On Innovative Performance(s)

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by

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

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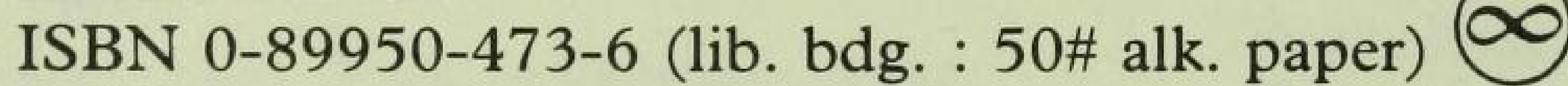
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Especially for Frances Alenikoff
Always lovely, long a faithful friend

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The sign of successful new theater is that the audience is torn between fascination and the impulse to walk out in disgust. The anxiety of new theater is greater than with other new art because theater demands a response in public, and its medium is exceptionally close to the animal and social behavior of life. The same anxiety, by the way, is felt even more by the players than by the public, as any one who has rehearsed new theatre with conventional actors can testify. Therefore, it is *only* from small, intensely personally involved groups, and a small public of the like-minded, that we can expect new theatre to emerge.—Paul Goodman, "New Theatre and the Unions" (1959).

> For the creative writer the major problem seems to be to know the patternings of the grain; and these can hardly be discovered in rich color without understanding of the many sequences of the American tradition on the popular side as well as on purely literary levels. The writer must know, as [T. S.] Eliot has said, "the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind"—Constance Rourke, *American Humor* (1931).

Here there arises the crucial distinction between *acting,* in the old art, and *enacting* in the new art. Edmund Kean *acted* King Lear; today we *enact* our rituals of performance, stressing the materials of performance more than our own identities. You do not come to a John Cage concert to hear the Great Fuggitutti perform the Master's Immortal Masterpiece. You come to hear certain sounds which will be meaningful to you, to see and hear certain things which will enrich your cultural or esthetic experience—Dick Higgins, "Postmodern Performance" (1979).

> One of the pleasures of middle age is to *find out* that one was right, and that one was much righter than one knew at say seventeen or twenty-three—Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934).

[illegible]

The sign of successful new theatre is that the audience is torn between fascination and the impulse to walk out in disgust. The anxiety of new theatre is greater than with other new art because theatre demands a response in public, and its medium corresponds closely to the animal and social behavior of life. The same anxiety, by the way, is felt even more by the players than by the public, as anyone who has rehearsed new theatre with conventional actors can testify. Therefore it is only from small, personally involved groups, and a small circle of the like-minded, that we can expect [illegible]. [illegible] "New Theatre and [illegible]" [illegible]

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[illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible] understanding of the [illegible] can [illegible] on the [illegible] as well as the [illegible] levels. [illegible] — [illegible] (19[illegible])

Here there arises the crucial discrepancy between audiences of the old art, and audiences in the new art. [illegible] today [illegible] of performance, [illegible] of performance [illegible] our own [illegible]. [illegible] John Cage [illegible] to hear the Great Fugue [illegible] Mozart's [illegible] which will be [illegible] to you, [illegible] which will enrich your cultural or aesthetic experience. [illegible] "Post-Modern Performance" (197[illegible]).

One of the pleasures of [illegible] is to find out that one was right, and that one was much [illegible] [illegible] (19[illegible])

Preface

> What [Stephan Mallarmé] was doing was discovering abstract ballet. He's constructing a way of looking at a piece, at a tiny fragment of it and then at the whole thing, with nothing in between, no connecting links in between of narrative or form. And that's very true to experience because it's actually what you do when you're at the ballet and you sit there, and there are flashes that come to you as if in slow motion like a landscape of lightning at night and then at the end the whole thing comes to you in a very big way inside yourself—Edwin Denby, in conversation with *Ballet Review* (1969).

Around 1960, just a few years after I learned to think culture important, I began to type notecards, each 4" by 6", sometimes using both sides, where I described and evaluated performances I had seen. Most of these notes were made the day after the performance. In the years that followed, I found myself consulting these cards, initially to refresh my memory of their subjects, but also to see what I thought of them back then. What impresses me most now is how conscientiously I treated this process of notemaking (and how I could not marshall such seriousness today, in part because I never became a regular reviewer of things I cared little about, but mostly because I am now more predisposed to *forget* what is not important).

I have gathered some of those notes here. As I witnessed artifacts that are no longer available, perhaps the notes make another contribution toward my continuing intellectual history of that special time. The notes are arranged alphabetically by artist, with performances by the same artist listed chronologically. I have added as a kind of introduction my 1977 essay on mixed-means theater, drawn upon research done a decade before for *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (1968; reprinted 1980), as well as some other relevant essays about alternative theater. Serving as a kind of coda are my contemporaneous notes about Merce Cunningham performances, as well as modern dance, that I consider part of the alternative theater and partly something else. One theme that runs through these pages is my growing preference for nonliterary theater, if not my greater understanding of its particularities.

Unless otherwise noted, the city in which these performances took place is New York, N.Y. *Theater* is spelled however the performers spelled it at that time. As many people discussed in these notes were known to me personally, I often use their first names. What I chose not to include here, saving them for another book, are the essays on the art of radio in North America.

I'm grateful to H. R. Brittain for brilliantly editing my manuscript and to Janey Iadiapolo for additional assistance, and to Natalie Ellen Gerber for her first-rate proofreading.

A book with so much detail about contemporary figures will surely contain misspellings and other minor errors of fact. If only to prepare for a second edition, the author welcomes corrections and suggestions, by mail please if they are to go into a single file, to P.O. Box 444, Prince St., New York, NY 10012-0008.

Richard Kostelanetz, SoHo, New York, 14 May 1993

Mixed-Means Theater (1977)

> In order to read the old art, knowing the alphabet is enough. In order to read the new art, one must apprehend the book as a structure, identifying its elements and understanding their function—Ulises Carrión, "What a Book Is" (1975).

Mixed-means performances differ from conventional drama in de-emphasizing verbal language, if not avoiding words completely, in order to stress such presentational means as sound and light, objects and scenery, and/or the movement of people and props, often in addition to the newer technologies of films, recorded tape, amplification systems, radio, and closed-circuit television. Some mixed-means theater incorporates spoken language; but if words are the principal means of communication, the result does not qualify as a genuinely mixed-means work. Americans dominate this art, especially within the English-speaking world; and it has been my contention that the best American theater, in contrast to British Theater, has always regarded the prerogatives of performance as more important than the literary text. (The U.S. has thus historically had both a lively theater and a negligible drama.) In my judgment, most of the strong theater I saw in New York in the past dozen years has been mixed-means performances.

Consequential mixed-means theater has been done by collectives (ranging from USCO to the Open Theatre), by sometime theatrical directors (Ken Dewey, Michael Kirby), but mostly by individual Americans who were initially trained and/or involved in other arts: painting (Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Al Hansen, Red Grooms, Robert Rauschenberg, Carolee Schneemann); sculpture (Claes Oldenburg, Robert Whitman, Robert Watts), choreography (Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, Ann Halprin, Elaine Summers, Meredith Monk, Mimi Garrard); music (John Cage, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, Ben Patterson); film (Stan VanDerBeek); architecture (George Maciunas, Robert Wilson); and poetry (Vito Acconci, Jackson Mac Low). This new theater grows out of discernible, though secondary, traditions in all the arts it encompasses; so that particular performances tend to reflect not only an individual creative style, but also the original artistic interests of its author.

The mixing of presentational means is probably as old as theater itself. However, whereas such post–Renaissance forms as opera and musical comedy emphasize poetic language against a background of song, setting, and dance, the new theater mixes the various media in distinctly different ways. In contrast to, say, both Diaghilev's spectacular ballets and most multi-media rock concerts, where the various elements complement one another—the music clearly accompanying the singer or dancer, each coinciding with the other's beat—in nearly all mixed-means theater the components function independently of one another in space and nonsynchronously in time. Furthermore, whereas the activities in classical theater assume the shape of a continuous flow, the relations between successive events in the new theater are usually disconnected; and if the rhythms in the old theater march at a steady beat, in mixed-means performances the pace of a particular piece is customarily irregular. John Cage's *Variations V* (1952), which is described ahead, clearly qualifies as a mixed-means performance. A better example of a borderline case is the Open Theatre's *Terminal* (1969), a highly choreographed performance about death that uses a rather negligible text that was actually composed, in collaboration with the performers, during the piece's original rehearsals.

One reason why the theater of mixed-means seems so different from literary theater is that most of the former's creators intentionally exclude any signs of past art. In addition to abandoning such traditional theatrical contexts as auditoria, for instance, they also tend to eschew especially skilled performers, such as actors or acrobats, for more "ordinary" people. Nonetheless, even those consciously artless mixed-means pieces are still basically theatrical in that some people have agreed to perform for other people, who may or may not have agreed to become an audience. This new theater announces its existence not by the environment in which it occurs but by the purpose of its participants. As the late Ken Dewey put it, "People gather together to articulate something of mutual concern." This last definition successfully encompasses both certain strains of modern-dance and the street performances we have come to call "guerrilla theater."

The new movement was initially called "happenings," in acknowledgment of Allan Kaprow's resonant coinage for his own post-painterly performance. Although this word seemed a particularly apt description for the miscellaneous, if not chaotic, character of Kaprow's own work, it was hardly an accurate term for the entire movement. (To make semantic matters worse, happenings got vulgarized to mean, as Kaprow observed, "any kind of rather casual and usually innocuous event.") First of all, all works of mixed-means theater follow some kind of script, consisting not of dialogue but of physical directions, which reflect in turn a definable intention. Only a few allow unexpected events to occur; and even fewer attempt, as Kaprow did, to involve their audiences as participants. Back in 1968,

I preferred to call such work "the theatre of mixed means" (in a book of that title) because that term isolated a crucial compositional characteristic; but more recent examples of nonliterary theater, especially in the tradition of "conceptual art," have revealed the limitations of this definition. My term described, for one issue, a theater of abundance, whereas minimalism has been the artistic rage these past few years.

The mixed-means epithet hardly expires the number of new phrases that are necessary to talk sensibly about differences *within* the new theater. In my book, I define four distinctly separate genres, so to speak, of mixed-means performance: pure happenings, staged happenings, kinetic environments, and staged performances. What makes the genres differ from one another is that each uses time, space, and material in a particular combination of ways, as well as offering audiences a specific kind of theatrical experience.

In pure happenings, the script is so unspecific that unforeseen events can be incorporated into pieces and/or prescribed events can take place in an unplanned succession. That is, although a piece's author may instruct his or her participants to do certain things, the directions are so approximate and autonomous that the resulting actions will occur in an unrepeatable manner and will have an unpredictable effect. This means that activities in a pure happening are not improvised but *indeterminate.* A typical instruction in Kaprow's *Calling* (1965) reads: "At a garage, a waiting auto starts up, the person is picked up from the concrete pavement, is hauled into the car, is taken to the information booth at Grand Central Station. The person is propped up against it and left." In doing this piece, Kaprow directed separate groups to perform comparably approximate specified activities all over New York City—in the streets, in telephone booths, in the major railroad terminal. The second day's events were done in the woods of suburban New Jersey.

Here, as in other examples of the genre, a pure happening envelops an audience of accidental spectators, initially mere bystanders on the scene, who are induced to feel that they, too, are participants in a significant process. Kaprow considers their experience, as well as the subsequent retellings of that experience, to be post-facto parts of his piece. As pure happenings have open or unfixed dimensions, in both space and time, they are usually not performed in theaters, which function to close off a space and to impose a measure of focus. Instead, these pieces have exploited natural open-space surroundings, such as a bathing beach or even an entire city. In this category also belong "events," most of which are destined for private performance. This last genre was particularly favored by the Fluxus group, an international post–Dada movement with bases in Germany and in the U.S. An example is George Brecht's *Word Events* (1961), which reads in its entirety: "*Exit." Kaprow's pure happenings are meant

to be as formally disorganized and serendipitous as life itself; but just as a work of representational art is considerably different from its original model, so a realized pure happening creates a heightened experience that is discernibly above the normal run of life.

Staged happenings differ from pure happenings in one crucial respect —they occur within a fixed space, usually on a theatrical stage. Otherwise, as in pure happenings, the actions and interrelations of participants can vary from performance to performance; and the script is sufficiently indeterminate to ensure that events can never be precisely duplicated. Most of John Cage's post-musical concerts are staged happenings, as the performers are offered only approximate instructions for creating a predictably miscellaneous aural and visual field. Yet since Cage, unlike Kaprow, forbids his spectators from participating to create the theatrical effects, the audience's role is more observational than participational. In Cage's *Variations V* (1965), done in collaboration with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, the stage is filled with a network of vertical poles (actually theremin) that respond to the physical proximity of the dancers by generating autonomous electronic sound. Thus, the more figures there are on the stage, and the more frequently they move, the more chaotic is the aural mix likely to be. Meanwhile, films by Stan VanDerBeek are projected on four overhead screens, along with kinetic collages composed of changing slides and looped film footage. The result is a chaotically structured performance field—organized disorganization, rather than disorganized disorganization—that is rich in miscellaneous activity. Never losing its rhythmic and spatial irregularity, and yet continually interesting and innovative in detail, *Variations V* is also the epitome of that peculiarly American contribution to a European tradition called "opera." The Living Theater's *Paradise Now* (1968) could also be classified as a staged happening, though it differs from Cage's work in encouraging audience response.

Kinetic environments are, like staged happenings, fixed in space and unfixed in duration, but their components and/or activities are more exactly planned and precisely executed. Essentially, they create a constant, intrinsically interminable, enclosed field of multisensory activity through which spectators may proceed at their own pace. In addition, where one stands or sits in relation to the whole can determine the kinds of perception he or she has. In the mid-sixties, USCO, a collective of artists living in Garnersville, New York, created mixed-means environments of music, taped noise, paintings, sculptural machines, electronic audiovideo instruments (such as televisions or oscilloscopes), and projected images (both on slides and on film), all of which induce the experience of sensory overload. In *The Theatre of Mixed Means,* I regarded kinetic environments as a kind of theater; but in a subsequent essay on "artistic environments," which is my term for esthetically defined enclosures, I placed them as one genre

within a larger form of artistically defined space. Like so much other truly avant-garde art, such works resist precise critical classification.

The last genre of mixed-means theater, staged performances, are as closely planned in conception and precise in execution as kinetic environments; but here the action is customarily more focused, the work's duration more fixed, and the audience's role more observational. Indeed, in all these respects, mixed-means staged performances resemble the format and structure of traditional theater; the crucial difference is that, as noted before, speech is here de-emphasized and the means of expression are thoroughly mixed. Prominent examples of this genre include Alwin Nikolais' choreography which skillfully integrates sound, light, props, and stagecraft with the movements of his dancers; Robert Wilson's masterpiece, *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (1973); Richard Foreman and Stanley Silverman's *Elephant Steps* (1968); Mimi Garrard's *Flux* (1968), which projects film (made in collaboration with her husband, the electronic sculptor James Seawright) onto moving props and live performers: Meredith Monk's *16 Millimetre Earrings* (1966); and most live performances by the sometime poet Vito Acconci. For structural reasons, the audience's experience of a stage performance is akin to that of a dance concert, a vaudeville show, a rock concert, or even standard theater. The following chart graphically depicts dimensional differences among the four genres:

GENRE	SPACE	TIME	ACTION
Pure happenings	Open	Variable	Variable
Staged happenings	Closed	Variable	Variable
Staged performances	Closed	Fixed	Fixed
Kinetic environments	Closed	Variable	Fixed

The themes expressed in most mixed-means pieces relate more to how we perceive than to what we think. In this respect, its relevant "contents" are closer to painting than theater. In Robert Whitman's *Prune. Flat.* (1965), which is a staged performance, prefilmed moving images are projected upon both a stationary screen and white-smocked live performers. Certain images on screen are duplicated live on stage and vice versa, while the texture of the theatrical light, the shape of the perceptible space, and the relations between the elements are all continually rearticulated. These strategies contribute to the piece's major theme, which is the difference between filmed images and live ones, or between kinetic activity and static information; for it endeavors to make us more aware of perceptual subtleties. Whitman himself was originally a sculptor; and like most mixed-means creators, he takes his esthetic clues, as well as his artistic ideals, from outside "legitimate" theatrical circles.

What the various strains of mixed-means theater have in common, then, is a distinct distance from literary theater; and the measure of this separation includes a rejection of the visual clichés of "dramatic" body movement and setting, an abandonment of narrative plot, a format that is comparatively unfocused (as most pieces lack a distinct introduction), a climax or a clear conclusion, as well as visual and aural foci to rivet the audience's attention. Most mixed-means performances also have a structure based upon discontinuous events or images, which usually attain their unity through repetition or incongruous relation; performers who do not play roles (others) but merely fulfill prescribed tasks (themselves), which are to varying degrees less precisely programmed than an actor's activity in theatrical drama; an unfettered attitude toward both the various materials of communication and the possibilities of theatrical situations. In contrast to literary theater, which is predominantly visual (based as it is upon words, which are customarily comprehended visually), mixed-means theater appeals to the total sensorium—the ears as well as the eyes, sometimes the nose as well as the receptors of touch, if not the kinesthetic senses too. In this respect, the new movement contributes to what Marshall McLuhan has characterized as the contemporary drift out of a predominantly visual existence into a multiply aware orientation reminiscent of primitive cultures.

A mixed-means piece usually opens with a sound-image complex that is instantly communicated; and rather than resort to the linear techniques of variation and development, the piece generally sustains or fills in its opening outline. Narrative, when it exists, functions more as a convention than as a revelatory structure or primary dimension, for the themes of a mixed-means piece are more likely to emerge from the repetition of certain actions and/or the coherence of successive imagery. Therefore, the comprehension of a mixed-means piece more closely resembles looking at an unfamiliar street or overhearing a distant conversation than deducing the theme of a drama. The longer and more deeply the spectator assimilates and dissects its sound-image complex and then associates the diverse elements, the more intimate becomes his or her understanding of an individual work.

The ways of presenting mixed-means material are nearly as various as the populace of practitioners; and since the new art's characteristics often leave the eye unsure of where it should look, and the ear unsure of what it should hear, each piece ideally challenges the perceptual capacities of its spectators. The process of understanding such an unfamiliar form of communication appears to involve three separate recognitions, which Edward T. Hall defines in *The Silent Language* (1959) as "*sets, isolates,* and *patterns.* The sets [words] are what you perceive first, the isolates [sounds] are the components that make up the sets, while the patterns [syntax] are

the ways in which sets are strung together in order to give them meaning." Even in miscellaneous material, the mind learns to perceive several levels of coherence; and it should be clear that any presentation that can be defined as one thing, rather than as another, is, by such definition, revealed to have an artistic structure.

Like many important tendencies in contemporary art, the theater of mixed means emphasizes the processes of creation, rather than the final product, rewarding exploration and surprise, rather than the fulfillment of convention. Like the electronic media themselves, the new theater creates a field of multifarious activities that appeal to more than one of the senses. Not only does the new theater return the performance-audience situation back to its original, primitive form as a ceremony encompassing various arts, but it also endeavors to speak internationally, in the universal language of sights and movements, at a time when the old spoken languages contribute to archaic divisions.

In the history of art, the theater of mixed means represents the departure from nineteenth-century forms that the theatrical medium as a whole has yet to undergo. "The theater is always twenty or thirty years behind poetry," writes the French playwright Eugene Ionesco, "and even the cinema is in advance of the theater." As the modern revolt in poetry overthrew post–Renaissance ideas of perception and connection, so the new theater also implies a rejection of linearity and explanatory truth. It asks us to perceive not isolated events in space and time but accidental coherences and transforming patterns in space-time. As life around us becomes more complex, so should the modes by which we perceive and arrange our experience. Perhaps the greatest purpose implicit in the new theater is the initiation of that multiple awareness that enables us better to comprehend what the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion identified as "a principle which is ultimately bound up with modern life—simultaneity," as posed by our comprehensively transforming, thoroughly discontinuous environment.

Though common opinion holds that "happenings are dead," only so do they superficially seem. While few of the visual artists who were prominently involved continue to do theatrical work, the sometime choreographers persist, as do Robert Wilson and La Monte Young. The liberating influence of the new movement also lingers, not only in the theatricality of, say, post-painterly "conceptual art" and Christo's monumental wrappings, but also in the multimedia trappings that have infiltrated more conventional stages—in the renewed emphasis upon performance-values, often at the expense of the literary. The reason for this pervasive impact is easy to identify. The theater of mixed means epitomizes pure theater, whose language of expression is so exclusively theatrical that no other medium can adequately reproduce the art; for only in live performance can a particular work be experienced or finally understood.

Notes on Art Performances, I.

In this ritual, cause-and-effect relationships were completely bypassed, the question of ultimate ends was never raised, and the problem of higher values could be submerged in waves of pathos and humor. Not the happy ending but the happy moment, not the fulfillment at the end of some career rainbow but a sensory, psychically satisfying here-and-now were the results of a vaudeville show—Albert F. McLean, *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (1965).

VITO ACCONCI

Claims (private loft, 93 Grand Street). I'd not seen any of Vito's new performance pieces—at least not since the deep breathing at N.Y.U. a year and one-half ago, which I liked more in contextual retrospect than I did then. Always "experimenting with himself," so to speak, he sets up a situation hazardous, initially to himself, whose results comprise the piece. For example, he had the Post Office forward his mail to the Museum of Modern Art, where he had to go to pick it up. Or he does the same exercise (such as jumping on and off a stool) for a fixed period of time every day. Or he burns the hair off his chest. The term "body art" might be appropriate, because what happens to his body is now the content. "Conceptual Art" is really a more accurate epithet. For *Claims* Vito sat at the bottom of a stairway with a collection of long poles. Blindfolded, he assigned himself the job of protecting his territory—the bottom of the stairway—from intruders. A closed-circuit camera was trained on him, and the results were immediately broadcast ("live") on a TV monitor upstairs, as well as recorded on videotape. Thus, his voice could be heard not only through the door leading downstairs but also over the electronic playback system. He did this for a full four hours, constantly mumbling to himself that he had to protect his territory; but nothing else "happened" or changed in the course of the performance. The audience never numbered more than a dozen people, most of whom were (like me) his friends. (September 1971)

The Red Tapes (The Kitchen). I like the idea of his doing a 140-minute videotape, especially since so much in his new art has been miniature and

thus journalistic. However, this tape is a disaster. The language is splotchy, the audio is muddy, and the pictures are unimaginative, except when the camera focuses upon Vito's face, which turns out to be much flatter on screen than in real life. The principle of the Kitchen's current video program is "Artists' Tapes," which is to say that anything done by a gallery-connected artist is okay with them. Since visual artists are likely to be self-indulgent in unfamiliar media, the results can be appalling. (May 24, 1977)

DAVID ANTIN

Talking (Lassman Hall, New York University). I'd not seen David Antin perform before and was initially impressed by his humor and then by the breadth of his references. However, before he concluded, it became apparent that he was doing little more than simply indulging in old-fashioned verbal improvisation. That accounts for why he didn't pursue the concerns he established at the beginning of his "talk," resorting instead to easy gags and obvious shifts from subject to subject. Essentially, his principal structures are linear narrative and digression. He opened by dumping, persuasively, on the other speakers in this N.Y.U. series (the two Josephs, Beuys and Kosuth, in particular) and then spoke at length about a "third world" committee meeting at U.C.S.D., where he teaches. From here Antin digressed into an essentially silly narrative about sex and money and time in a fictitious foreign country; it had a happy ending. After the performance, I asked David how much of his performance was pre-planned. He told me that he already knew the funny names for the fictitious country's coins (which were derived from Eastern European languages), and that he knew as well that his story would be a romance. What was not planned, by default, were the obvious transitions and other simplicities. I don't think his talk would be as good on the page, which remains, after all, the ultimate test for exclusively verbal literature. I remember [a colleague of ours] telling me that David was "lazy, in spite of his evident energies." In the failure to sustain the high level of his initial discourse is a kind of laziness, if not a smugness that depends upon thinking the audience less literate and less sharp than himself. While I believe that any writer would be wise to exploit his strongest suit, which in David's case is certainly a capability for intimidating speech, he is simply indulging that talent at the expense of other considerations for his words. (May 13, 1977)

BROTHER ANTONINUS

A Reading of Poems (Newman Club, Columbia University). I had always thought W. D. Snodgrass the most moving poet I'd ever seen perform; but compared to Brother Antoninus (b. William Everson), Snodgrass

would look like an under-emotional charlatan. From the moment he comes on stage, Brother Antoninus is terrifying. Dressed in a white robe with a black bib, more than six feet tall and quite rugged-looking, possessed of an ugly mouth that normally falls into an expression of pained guilt, he stalks around the stage, microphone in hand, casing the audience, before he utters a single word. That word is mumbled too quickly and too softly to be understood; but once he starts speaking, he has our complete sympathy. Between declamations of his poems he tells, with a mixture of insights and clichés, of his responses to his first trip to New York and then of his desire to communicate to other individuals. The assumption here must be that since he is above us on a stage, while we came to listen, he has permission to reveal thoughts too personal to tell otherwise. The poems themselves are uneven. However, the one concluding *Hazards of Holiness,* "These Savage Wastes," is a real gem—the story of his attempt to overcome the guilt of a sinful life in order to gain some of the goodness of God. His free verse generally has strong rhythm and sharply emphatic language, which are two qualities marking him as a "beat" poet; but the ultimate thrust of his poetry is personal communication. His poetry succeeds because it is based upon the great confessional integrity of an author who is not ashamed to tell you that he has personally experienced hell in the process of conversion. Why the major magazines don't print more of his poetry I'll never know. I suppose it is because he has committed the double, if contrary, crimes of being both Catholic and "beat." His performance was continually verging on the extravagantly absurd. If he had tripped over the microphone's wire, as he constantly seemed about to do, the audience's subconscious response to him could have been measured. Rather than guffaw at the poet's clumsiness, they would have, I think, been shocked by the self-induced tragedy. I wonder whether he could have gotten away with such a strange show, had he not been dressed in a uniform that marked him as an institutional alien. Perhaps such doubts are academic, because he did what he did, communicating to us in a performance that was extremely moving. (March 8, 1963)

LARRY AUSTIN

The Magicians (Hunter College). Larry Austin has long been one of those composers whose name is more familiar than his work, mostly because the music is not conveniently available and people I know did not particularly hail it. This is one of the best examples of musical theater I've seen in a long, long time, even though two-thirds of the audience walked out before the show's end. I find it hard to describe. On a stage bathed in black light are two screens that apparently swivel with the breeze (the program credits "television," which I apparently missed); and perhaps one of those screens received slide projections from behind. Several very young

people, apparently Austin's own children, go through a number of elementary tasks, as well as sing songs that resound through the amplification system (where soft high notes echo nicely). The total result fits the composer's bill as "a child's musical fantasy performed by the Magic Orchestra and the Magic Audience." (October 1968)

JOHN BARTH

A Reading. (YMHA Poetry Center). Once you begin to appreciate the art of performance, nothing is quite as decadent as a conventional poetry reading, which in most cases is too much like a classroom lecture, down to explanations made simple. Now that my own poems have begun to appear, I've been wondering what else might be possible. A few days after I discovered a method for "reading" my own visual poems (by projecting them on a screen to the accompaniment of a live lecture about them), I realized that Barth had arrived at his own solution, one that is so simple I'm surprised that nobody used it before him (but, indeed, perhaps someone has): reading live to a tape accompaniment of oneself. The pieces themselves consist mostly of devices allowing Barth to show off his talents with language, as well as his pedantry. The first is about Greek mythological figures; yet no one around me managed to follow its narrative at all. This was listed in the program as "composed for monophonic tape and disembodied author," but Barth read it aloud. The second, "for stereophonic tape and live speaking author," consists of a trilogue among three anxious sides of the author—one worrying about the decline of a romance, the second about the impossibility of writing novels, and a third about the state of the culture. Some of the remarks are very witty; the language, as well as certain preoccupations, is indebted to Borges and Beckett. However, the thematic gist, if there is any, seems unclear. What is spectacular is Barth's performance as the live voice, accomplishing subtle and precise entrances with the fluency of a former dance-band drummer. I wouldn't mind hearing this trilogue performance a few more times, if not buying a record. The trilogue also confronts a principal opportunity available to composers today—how to write a piece that is complex enough to be continually interesting after repeated rehearing on record, and yet initially accessible. For the third narrative, listed as "for monophonic tape and visible but silent author," Barth lit a cigarette, drank some wine, and at one point walked off the stage. In the question period afterwards, he said that since his preoccupation was the "turning of self-consciousness into subject matter," all voices were his own. Finally, his system demands an expansion of itself, where the author's voice can emerge from any or many of several loudspeakers, along the line of Edgard Varèse's *Poème électronique* (1958); but perhaps that will be my piece. (November 20, 1967)

PINA BAUSCH

1980 (Brooklyn Academy of Music). This is spectacular; that is its initial quality—spectacular as Robert Wilson has been spectacular. It is particularly effective in exploiting the circumstance of live theater. The floor of the stage is lined with peat moss, which means not only that performers can roll on it, as they often do, but that their movements eschew any percussive sounds. The music is a continuous pastiche in a manner pioneered by Wilson, using, always with taste, Brahms, Beethoven, Debussy, Elgar, Benny Goodman and plenty of both John Dowland and old English folk songs sung by Alfred Deller. Bausch appears to have chosen her cast as a mixed bag. Early in the second act, eleven women are individually introduced, and later in that act each is invited to represent her native country in three choice words. There are two Swiss, a chunky French woman with a Polish name, an Australian (who is the principal comic performer), a German (who makes a point of neither speaking nor understanding English), a Spanish woman, a tall French woman who looks like a model (but otherwise has little presence) and a Japanese. The seven men include an American, a French North African, a Dutchman, and some Germans. (Don't these cosmopolitans get bored living in Wuppertal, the West German city where the company is based?) Into the piece Bausch also works a big bald magician and a paunchy man, at least 55, who does elementary exercises on parallel bars. The most commanding performer is Mechthild Grossman, who has a voice that fills the house and enough humor to identify her native Germany in terms of "Adenauer, Breckenbauer, Schopenhauer." I'm not so sure what the piece is all about. Bausch revealed that its milestone title comes from the fact that the man with whom she lived died in 1980. The lady accompanying me noticed a succession of scenes in which women humiliate men. I was enthralled nearly continuously; I'd like to see it again. I regret not seeing the rest of her first New York season. But why is this called "tanztheater" when there is scarcely any dance? Why is there so little dance when biographical notes make so much of Bausch having studied with American choreographers? (June 22, 1984)

________/**Tanztheater Wuppertal.** *Victor* (Brooklyn Academy of Music). She is a master. It opens with an armless girl coming forward to display her beautiful smile—a smile that, though the girl appears again with her arms, is not seen again until the very end, when she appears armless again. The structure is a series of sketches that have only tangential relationship to one another. I found resemblances to bits in earlier works of hers, suggesting that the cohering focus is her own obsessions/imagination. As usual, the women tend to be stronger performers than the men, and the men are often put in embarrassing situations (such as trying

to apply makeup with the aid of pocket mirrors). The music is a montage of recordings, some of them esoteric. The costuming is rich, ranging from elegant to bohemian; none of the women wears a bra. I was struck by similarities to Robert Wilson—a man high in the rocks shovels dirt down to the stage throughout the performance; a running hooded figure dominates the *Walpurgisnacht.* It went on for four hours with only a single intermission. I wish I kept a more detailed list of the individual events; I'd love to see it again. (July 2, 1988)

________/**Tanztheater Wuppertal.** *Carnations [Nelken]* (Brooklyn Academy of Music). The stage opened with thousands of putative carnations on the stage. They looked real; but since their petals didn't fall off, they must have been fake. Even with the orchestra only semi-darkened, the stage revealed a great depth. I tried to enumerate scenes until I lost track. On stage come performers in formal dress. Some move into the audience, picking out individual spectators of the opposite sex and walking them to the back of the hall. Lutz Förster emerges to introduce, in sign language, the song "The Man I Love." A man pokes a portable (wireless) microphone into his stomach, to record noises there. A man and woman, both formally dressed, come to center stage with packs of dirt that they scoop onto their heads; she cries. A small man jumps into the arms of a larger man, who repeatedly smacks him away. When a woman emerges, the small man tries repeatedly to leap onto her shoulders, always falling down. This is done in silence. Several men emerge in diaphanous dresses. Some prance on all fours. Behind them on a row of tables are six women on all fours, moving to hula music. The guys return to imitate them. One spectacular move has Ann Martin on a guy's shoulders, her long dress falling over his head. As she moves her arms and swings her head from side to side, his legs move as though they were hers. Three guys in gowns, holding hands, walk in a circle, to background music, thankfully softer than usual, of "The Man I Love." Their speech styles combine masculine and feminine. They repeat a cycle of lines. As the stage is filled with boxes, several performers make spectacular moves with armchairs, often moving them from back stage to front. When they sit in the chairs, they rock back and forth in ways that suggest religious overtones; later to different music, the same moves seem comic. Four men, identified in the program as "stuntment," climb to the top of two platforms that have just been erected and leap from them into the piled boxes. Males demonstrate female steps, with Lutz Förster exemplifying this theme by performing in toe shoes over the audience banter until a guy dressed in an official uniform asks, "Passport, please." Men and women, arrayed across the floor, dance in unison. Lutz Förster dominates a series of monologue complaints, concluding with the non sequitur, "I wish you all Merry Christmas." By now the

carnations are mostly crushed. Jan Minarik comes to a table center stage and chops an onion, which can be smelled out in the audience. Another man comes forward to crush the onion bits into his face. Lutz Förster repeats sign language to "The Man I Love." Ann Martin steps forward with a small accordion on her chest, apparently nude above the waist, repeating an earlier image. Förster instructs the audience to stand up and follow his example in extending the right arm out, the left arm out, the right arm across the chest, the left arm across the chest. Förster comes forward to change from his suit into a dress. Each member of the company comes forward to explain how he or she became a dancer. As they assume a tableau in mid-stage, the performance ends. (July 7, 1988)

Palermo Palermo (Brooklyn Academy of Music). My friend M. thought this "absurd" theater in that elements don't obviously jell, there isn't a blatant narrative theme; but I found it lacking the metaphysical symbol, or resonance, upon which *absurd* nonsense depends. The piece was initially commissioned by the Teatro Biondo-Stabile di Palermo, apparently as a commentary upon the city; but it becomes many other things. With so many spectacular scenes I find it hard to remember them all. The play opens with a cinder block wall falling backwards, and the first part closes with dancers in the foreground doing repeated contortions while stagehands clear cinder blocks from the front of the stage. In one of my favorite sequences, a man resembling John Wayne swims on the floor while water is poured on him. He arises to don a robe and then, while sitting in a chair, ignites the newspaper he is reading. (Once again, I find my notes insufficient and wish I had in hand one of those event-by-event summaries prepared by Stefan Brecht for Robert Wilson, whose work Bausch's resembles in its density, variety, and ambitious scope. One reason why Wilson works so much in Germany is that budgets necessary to produce such work seem unavailable here, at least for avant-garde theater.) There are ten men and twelve women, and as before women do strange things to men. Credit for the impressively unfamiliar music goes to Matthias Burkert as "Music Coordinator" and then to "Sicily, Southern Italy, Africa, Japan, Scotland, the Renaissance, American Blues and Jazz, Paganini, Grieg. . . ." (October 5, 1991)

Bandeon (1981) (Brooklyn Academy of Music). In the wake of *Palermo, Palermo,* this was commonly regarded as a disappointment, filled with sparer stages, repetitious movements, less inspired music, mediocre performances. You wondered why Bausch keeps it in the repertory. This time I started to make notes on individual scenes, in the manner of Stefan Brecht, but soon gave up. It opens with the blonde smiling Polish man unable to say anything. On the wall of a dowdy beer hall (knipe) are large

photographs of Max Schmelling, the last German heavyweight boxing champion. Several well-dressed men take off and then put on their jackets. I then remember scenes where women lift women by putting only one arm between their legs. Once again there is a scene where performers move across the front of the stage while the Brooklyn stagehands redo the back. (I can't decipher my notes—next time I'll take a legal pad.) I'd love to see *Palermo Palermo* again. (October 12, 1991)

STEPHEN BECK

Video Presentation (Anthology Film Archives). Nam June Paik intercepted me on the way to the grocery store, and then Kathie Kline mentioned it in front of my house. Even though I had something else to do that afternoon, recommendations like those are far more important in this culturally skeptical neighborhood than reviews or advertisements. The initial piece, *Video Weavings, II,* has hypnotic, metamorphosing geometric shapes that change color rapidly. The syntax of change consists mostly of pulsations, in and out, but the speed of change is stunning. Speaking afterwards, Beck said that he had synthesized directly onto videotape, in live time, from a machine that he took two years to build. (Thankfully, he had a degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science and also did his own music synthesizing for the soundtrack.) This piece was made, he said, last February. To my taste, it already ranks among the masterpieces of Video Art, showing what's uniquely possible in the medium. I hope that the Anthology Film Archives purchases *Video Weavings,* because I'd like to see it again. (May 9, 1976)

EBERHARD BLUM, et al.

Dada Soiree (Clocktower, New York). The elegant program note, compliments of Goethe House, credits Blum with having "reconstructed and designed" the program text, even though those two visual-arts terms don't seem so appropriate here. Sally Rubin, an actress to be sure, read passages from dada manifestos in a conventional voice, and then Blum, initially a flutist with highly developed breathing skills, rendered several sound poems by Raoul Hausmann and Hugo Ball in a staccato style. Blum also did "Gedicht 25," the Kurt Schwitters counting poem. Part II of the program was devoted initially to a silly Duchamp machine by which the ways that little balls fall into a complicated box are translated into musical notes on a simple noise-generating machine. I was a bit disappointed, mostly by the uniformity of Blum's renditions, until I heard the *Ursonate,* which is indeed a masterpiece and the best speech-music I've heard all year. Filled not only with neologisms that echo one another but with shifts among acoustically different verbal materials, the *Ursonate* does indeed observe a musical form, characteristically ending with the letters of the

alphabet recited backwards. To rationalize such sound poetry Blum quotes Schwitters as saying, "I don't want words that are other people's inventions." (March 7, 1976)

LEE BREUER

The Red Horse Animation (Guggenheim Museum). Lee Breuer worked with Ken Dewey in San Francisco and then went to Europe, where he organized Mabou Mines (its name taken from a place in Nova Scotia); and what got me to make the trip way uptown was the announcement crediting their training with Jerzy Grotowski and showing a picture of a three-man company in Samuel Beckett's *Play*. However, this performance was a disappointment, mixing a semi-comprehensible text (in the mode of late fifties' "poetic drama") with lots of crawling over an amplified floor. Since the audience is seated around and above the performers, the staging is original and effective, though dizzying and a bit wearisome; and the performers' sounds are best when Philip Glass, seated just off stage, gets to amplify and modify them. However, the language is deadly, the plot incomprehensible, and the performers, all in their mid-thirties, perhaps too old for this kind of shuffling theater. The audience was bored, La Mama's (Ellen Stewart's) introductory pep talk notwithstanding. I was reminded of the old truth that poetic drama is more successful with poets and professors. (November 1970)

________ **and Mabou Mines.** Samuel Beckett's *Play* (1964), *Come and Go* (1968), and *The Lost Ones* (1972). This was the most spectacular evening of literary theater I witnessed all season, perhaps because of the emphasis upon performance. *Play* was disappointing, because the actors were instructed to speak in rapidly chopped language that was scarcely comprehensible and easily tuned out. One trick was that the performers repeated the entire script. I was reminded of the original New York production, which I saw eleven years ago, and which I remember as superior. The spectacular idea in staging *Come and Go* is putting a mirror on the stage, tilted upwards toward the three women performers in the balcony—JoAnne Akalaitis, Ruth Maleczech, and Ellen McElduff. Therefore, the figures on the stage in front of us are half size. For *The Lost Ones,* essentially a prose monologue read by David Warrilow, the audience is asked to move into a terribly cramped space, which both helped the effect and hindered attention. I'd like to see it again. (March 22, 1975)

The Gospel at Colonus (Brooklyn Academy of Music), with music composed and arranged by Bob Telson. The idea of adapting the Oedipus legend to gospel music has a certain charming vulgarity that seems to miss Breuer, who claims his production is important because, believe it or not,

this is the first time Oedipus is played by a blind man—actually five blind boys (one of whom, however, appeared to be a guide for the others). The trouble is that the gospel singers stole the show, not only from Sophocles (and Robert Fitzgerald's translation) but from Breuer and the principal actor, Morgan Freeman; and where it wasn't stolen, it was only because the performers, especially the lead blind man (Clarence Fountain), were too inept. (Fountain in the first act had a visible hearing aid into which his lines were prompted.) I also found myself uncomfortably reminded of all those predecessors for making white black, such as *Four Saints in Three Acts,* whose racial transfer always seem embarrassing in the face of retrospective criticism. Nonetheless, the audience loved it—or loved something, perhaps the joy of such music in a context as heavy as this. (November 11, 1983)

PETER BROOK, adapter/director

The Mahabharata (The Majestic Theater of the Brooklyn Academy of Music). For some twenty years now I've been hearing about Peter Brook productions that sound like they ought to be marvelous and innovative, but, when you see them, aren't. So when a friend told me that his wife couldn't use the extra ($75) ticket he purchased, I had my doubts. It turned out I wasn't wrong. First of all, for all of the claims typically made for Brook's radical stagecraft, this didn't have it. The most clever bits were the use of clay on the visible surface of the stage (and thus the building of water pools within the clay) and scene-changes on a stage that lacks a curtain. (Others liked the use of fire that I found prosaic.) Secondly, just because something is known to be "poetry" in its original language does not mean it will necessarily be good in translation or on the stage, and this work is no exception to that rule. One trouble with Brook is that, while he is still tied to the speech-based theater, neither he nor his actors handle speech especially well. The actors were recruited from all over the world, and the program note tells us that some of them learned English especially for this production. As a result, some of them sound as though they don't know what they are saying. The production reminded me of traveling in Europe, where one hears a variety of accents for English. The plot was the stuff of soap operas that perhaps have more class in India or Europe than here (and also accounts for why it was played here in the afternoon!). Much turns upon an incredible dice game in which a purported "king" loses everything (selling himself and his family into slavery, for instance). Why he didn't run from patently loaded dice escapes me.

At the intermission at the end of the first act, which ran three hours (a 14th-inning stretch, so to speak!), my friend and I thought about leaving, knowing that there would be no surprises. Since so much commitment was made, we decided to return, only to decide midway through the second

act that we would not stay past the next intermission. We then witnessed a large number of false endings, of scenes that seemed to be conclusions but weren't, so that the most interesting sport was guessing when we had finally reached the end. There was nothing else interesting to do, but by the time the actual end came we were too tired to be sharp and, thus, like the purported "king," lost again, in part because of our own stupidity (this time for staying so long). Another friend whose taste I trust stayed through the third act which she said was even more tedious. She explained that she had stayed in order to visit one of the actors whom she knew; however, so relieved to be out of the theater's prison, she skipped the visit.

The biggest scandal is the number of major benefactors supporting this production—not only the NEA and NYSCA, but such supposedly more discriminating private foundations as Rockefeller, Ford, Gilman, AT&T, Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust, etc. This roster in sum vividly demonstrates the herd mentality of the people making decisions at such places ("if they did it, we will"), all at the expense, needless to say, of artistically more worthy (and needy) projects. For this production BAM opened the Majestic Theater on Fulton Street, two blocks away from the main outpost. Boarded up for twenty years, it was offered to Twyla Tharp, who apparently turned it down. Even in semi-disrepair, it is quite impressive, with acoustics good enough to enable this company to perform without amplification. I look forward to returning to the Majestic. As for Brook, however, never again, I swear; never again. (February 1987)

TRISHA BROWN (SCHLICHTER)

Planes (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Trisha Brown has so far had one of those coterie reputations that bother me in principle, while those pieces of hers that I've seen were trivial and undistinguished. This was different, being quite spectacular. Three dancers crawl along a vertical wall which has holes for their hands and feet, while a film is projected on the wall. The women (Brown herself, Simone Whitman, Michele Friedman) move slowly, while the film has a fast montage, mostly of aerial shots that convey the illusion that the women are suspended high in air, the shots of themselves taken through a fish-eye lens. The use of projected film is nearly as clever as Mimi Garrard's in *Flux.* The form of the piece is otherwise flat; and at twenty minutes or so, it ends a trifle too soon. (April 5, 1968)

LENNY BRUCE

An Evening With... (Village Theater). Bruce believes, it seems, that he can be spontaneously funny all the time. He does not, according to informed reports, prepare his act in any way; yet at his best he can sustain a biting humor that, so they say, is simply breathtaking to hear. Well, this

must have been an off night, because he was sadly unfunny. Perhaps the cause was the pleurisy he said he had last week; perhaps he's out of shape from inaction. Often his voice was barely audible. His worst jokes depended upon juxtaposing the respectable with the obscene—tell Ladybird Johnson that she has "a nice shape," remember that Tiny Tim fooled with pigeons, announce that Sophie Tucker was a ferocious nymphomaniac, etc. Occasionally Bruce can deliver a truly inspired line: "If you shoot me, you'll be embarrassed." Or his mockery of Cardinal Cushing's gravelly Latin at the JFK funeral a week ago. Or his sympathy for Cadence Records, stuck as it now is with 300,000 copies of "The First Family." Or, "I don't smoke marijuana; I already have enough junk floating around my head." "To put people into jail for smoking flowers is un–Christian." "The worst sound in the world comes when the toilet flushes before you do." For a while he stopped joking, in order to deliver a polemic against the incompetence of court reporters who freely omit and change the proceedings (especially to patch up a judge's bad English); but in performance, this fell flat, largely because Bruce himself seemed too uncomfortable with his exposé. In neither his wit nor his black humor is Bruce as sharp or as profound as Edward Albee, for instance; and after watching this one performance, I don't see how he ever will be. (November 30, 1963)

JOHN CAGE, et al.

Contemporary Voices in the Arts: An Illustrated Discussion (92nd Street YMHA). For the first hour or so I thought this was great; but then, as machines started to break down, I began to find the situation intolerable. This kind of development is perhaps the way it should be, and I admire Cage, et al., for wanting to disturb those of us who are predisposed to efficiently slick performance. The New York State Council on the Arts set up an evening-length presentation that has been touring upstate colleges; this was the participants' first encounter with New York's tougher audience. This evening's performance opened with Merce Cunningham dancing to a strobe-light accompaniment; coming late, I missed it. My friend Meredith Monk thought it was simplistic but marvelous. The second event was Len Lye's films. There were, I understand, supposed to be three screens of abstract patterns; but one camera never got started, while a third conked out near the end of the projection. I thought at first that Lye's abstract images were programmed by computer; actually, he scratches patterns directly onto the film, frame by frame. What I saw was stunning; I regret not being able to witness the entire three-screen medium (or message).

The main event of the evening was "TV Dinner//Homage to E.A.T.//(Food for thought)." The eight performers came to a table set with a sumptuous dinner, hooked themselves with standard voice mikes

and contact mikes (attached directly to their bodies, or another sound source), and proceeded to go through a multi-course dinner, talking as they ate and supposedly responding to questions from the audience. The opening image was stunning; the idea of a dinner (attributed to Jack Tworkov, but very Cagean) was very clever and integral to their purposes. Two video cameras recorded the proceedings that were instantaneously broadcast upon the ceiling; images of slides and other films filled the auditorium's walls (that had been covered with white sheeting for the occasion). The result was a classic sensory overload that really hyped me up. However, as invariably happens in E.A.T. productions, the technology started breaking down—odd sounds emerged from the system, and you couldn't hear the speakers.

The sculptor John Chamberlain and a cohort were continually screaming drunkenly from the audience. Stan VanDerBeek and Robert Creeley, the only performers to have static-free mikes, were mumbling nonsense. Cage later came forward and said that he would have preferred that everything could be heard, but added, "I find it interesting that we discover technology working in a way we didn't expect it would," thereby twisting the cliché of the symposium that instructs. Such a statement is, of course, eminently consistent with Cage's philosophy, but he spoke nervously to an audience that seemed far from pacified. The whole purpose of the evening, of course, was to create a situation in which unpredictable things would happen; and sure enough, they did. Tworkov said, almost profoundly, "As I remember my life, nothing important was ever predicted."

Cage said, again profoundly, that in thinking about politics we should start with things and experiences most immediate to our existence—resources and utilities. I liked these dimensions, as well as the overall conception; but I wished Cunningham had talked more, while Creeley and VanDerBeek far less, if not at all. Also, the YMHA's auditorium was not wholly suitable, because, as soon as you grasped the image, the audience wanted to walk around and socialize, as it did in the open space of the 69th Regiment Armory at Cage's *Variations VII* last fall. Once I smelled the aroma of fine food, I also wanted to go up and get a share; and if the dinner hadn't been on a stage above us, I suppose I would have.

Also, people sitting in the back half of the auditorium were somewhat cut off from the entire multisensory experience, although they also had a far better view of the stage. Should I admire everyone involved for risking their reputations in such a mess? I wish that Billy Kluver [chief of E.A.T.] would clean up his technology; the short-circuits that accompany his presentations give the impression not of esthetic adventurousness, which is what he has in mind I think, but of amateurism. (February 1967)

Reunion (Electric Circus). Cage's recent pieces have had an approximately similar strategy—the creation of a variable physical situation in which the performers' movements convey signals to a battery of electronic sound-generators, only some of which are allowed to admit their output to the aural mix at any time. Even though the quality of the mix varies with the materials of the system (as well as whether the machines on hand happen to be working), the result is invariably the same—a chaos of loud sounds or, in this case, random imagery. Here Cage played a leisurely game of chess with a balding stolid fellow; and somehow the placement of the pieces on the board activated a program that selected from the various sources available. I left around 10:00 P.M.; but when I saw Cage the next day, he told me they went on playing until 11:30 when, "I made a foolish move, as I always do." The mix in his *Variations VII* struck me as aurally superior. (c. 1968)

________ **and Lejaren Hiller.** *HPSCHD* (University of Illinois Assembly Hall, Urbana). It was a kinetic environment to end all kinetic environments, for I have never before seen such a large space filled with so much communicative media. In a 16,000-seat sports arena Cage put fifty-nine channels of autonomous sound, fifty-two of which were computer-generated tapes that were composed, largely with randomizing processes, in scales at every integer between five and fifty-six tones to the octave. On top of this were seven channels of harpsichord music composed mostly of fragments of Mozart; and above the microtonal din could be heard snatches of harpsichord music that sounded more like Mozart and post-Mozart than Bach, say, although one could scarcely identify anything specific. Hiller told me that at his insistence the mix's volume was kept rather low, and this made the sound more of a pleasant background than the ear-piercing shrieks of Cage's earlier environmental masterpiece, *Variations VII.* The visuals consisted of an abundance of films and slides, mostly provided by NASA; so that one was subjected to an endless series of images of outer space and of military officials talking officiously (but inaudibly). These visuals were projected upon Visquine screens, 100 feet by 40 feet, suspended in parallel rows; so that they could take projections from all over the space. Spotlights shone across the undulating ceiling of the hall; and in a few places were those mirrored balls, more familiar to discotheques, that distribute dots of light in all directions. The audience largely milled around the asphalt floor of the hall; a few looked stoned. As smoking was not allowed, no pot could be smelled. At times some kids broke into rhythmic chanting that seemed embarrassing in this context. It was a truly spectacular show. I got there later than I wanted, around 8:30, an hour after it began, and stayed to the end, a bit after midnight; my only break from this continuous experience came at the press conference that

Cage and Hiller gave after nine o'clock. Perhaps because both the environmental conception and chaos esthetics came out of Cage's earlier work, it seemed hard to identify Hiller's contribution, aside from expertise in computer-assisted sound-generation; but he insisted to my face that everything in the piece grew out of mutual decisions. I'd love to see it again, anywhere, anytime. (May 16, 1969)

Mueau Ic Siclectrone Rethor (Eisner and Lubin). I knew back in 1969 that John would have trouble surpassing *HPSCHD,* which was his masterpiece of the late sixties; but out of his growing interest in abstracting language, he has evolved a new declamatory style in which fragments of text are scrambled into nonsyntactical sequences and then chanted in atonal patterns. Here he has subjected all the remarks that Thoreau made about music, silence and sounds in his *Journals* to a series of *I Ching* operations. Unfortunately, Thoreau's words get muffled, much as language gets obscured in Cage's 1969 sculptural panels re Marcel Duchamp [*Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel,* about which see my essay reprinted in *Writings About John Cage,* 1993]. My own sense is that Cage would have better fulfilled his purposes if he simply read passages from the text over several channels of tape. Note that the title is a scrambling of the letters in the phrase "Thoreau re Electronic Music," and that he chanted the evening's texts for ninety minutes against a background of three tapes made upon earlier occasions (and I gather that the new tape made this evening will be added to further performances). The result is highly meditative, intimate and beautiful, much like South Indian music, which it most closely resembles, although Merce Cunningham insisted I should recheck Cage's earlier *The Wonderful Widow of the Eighteen Springs* (1942), which also has superficially incomprehensible (or scrambled) language. I also think one of these background tapes was pitched lower than the others, as there was no fundamental key to the piece. As a result, in the most beautiful passages of the evening there was an aleatory, intensely nonchromatic counterpoint. Cage has clearly transcended what might have been a stylistic impasse, but the remaining problem is how one may process language abstractly and still have something meaningful. (Perhaps the theme could be defined as *an abstracted meditation on Thoreau.*) (March 12, 1971)

Song Books, Solos for Voice #3–#92 (1970) (Wesleyan University). This ranks among the great Cagean performances. It opens modestly, with Phyllis Bruce on the right side of the stage, performing something identified in the program as "Cheap Imitation No. 1: 111." My recollection is that she was singing abstractly. David Barron emerged to type a text on an amplified typewriter. Neely Bruce then observed the instruction to "prepare something to eat (1)." These three had performed this before,

but what made this performance different was the addition of Tim Wolf, who was in charge of the electronics that, according to Susan Barron, made this performance better than those preceding it. The general tone was comic, down to the use of masks donned by each performer. One of the best sequences had David Barron cutting up the notes that would make a piece. A contact microphone was attached to a scissor, and the acoustic effect is quite stunning. Neely Bruce, nominally a pianist, did a lot of wonderful garish vocalizations, while all of them from time to time recited Henry David Thoreau's adage that "The best form of government is no government at all," at times adding, "and that will be the kind of government we will have when we are ready for it." I'd love to see them do it again; and barring that, I'd like to see the videotape made by Real Art Ways. The other memorable performances in this Cage festival were William Brooks's arrangement of Cage's *Hymns and Variations* for twelve amplified voices (1979), as performed by the Electric Phoenix from London, and Isabelle Ganz's *Aria* (1958). (February 24, 1988)

JACKIE CASSEN and RUDI STERN

Theatre of Light (727 Sixth Avenue). Jackie Cassen was a painter who had a precocious exhibition as "Jacqueline Cassen" that was written up in a back issue of an art magazine I have, dated perhaps 1962; and Rudi Stern is a few years older. Their first celebrity came from the kinetic display accompanying Timothy Leary's celebrations, but the show that I saw two years ago at the Village Theater [once known as the Loews' Commodore, now known as the Fillmore East] was hardly impressive—mostly splotchy light that reminded me of a Don Snyder performance I had seen at the [Filmmakers'] Cinematheque the year before. This performance is different in style, as the images in most of the sequences are representational; and when the screen goes dark, we are invited to look at a brightly lit tank of tropical fish or a rather interesting sculptural machine with parabolic columns of light that revolve on an axis. The sequences themselves are short and stylistically undistinguished (and feeble as images, compared, say, to the work of the more adequately equipped Joshua Light Show); and because the room was so hot and stuffy, while we were asked to sit on foam rubber cushions, I was continually on the verge of falling asleep. (c. 1968)

JOSEPH CHAIKIN

Re-Arrangements (La Mama Annex). The Other Theater is the latest apparition of the Open Theater and so includes such familiar faces as Joyce Aaron, Paul Zimet, and Tina Shepard. Although lots of collaboration is reportedly involved, Chaikin remains the director, and this resembles earlier Open Theater work most particularly in its willingness to tackle such themes as death, wedding, and sexual failure in inventive ways. In

structure, it is a series of sketches, theoretically written by the group, with additional material by Muriel Rukeyser, Sam Shepard, Susan Sontag, and Jean-Claude van Itallie. My favorite sequences have Tina Shepard and Mark Samuels under a thick black cloth, moving in counterpoint to an outside narrator, and then Tina Shepard by herself, delivering a monologue about her anxiety as she tries to grab first a chair that moves out from under her and then a curtain that bounces in front of her. Another scene had a panel of experts, each wearing glasses, muttering nonsense. (April 1979)

LUCINDA CHILDS

Vehicle (69th Regiment Armory). I'm not sure why Lucinda Childs was asked to contribute to Rauschenberg's *Nine Evenings.* Not only were her previous theatrical pieces undistinguished and, more important, untouted, I did not think her associated either socially or sexually with others in the group. In her intelligent statement she defines dance as a kinetic activity of a certain duration. Here Alex Hay begins in a refrigerator frame suspended an inch or so off the ground. William Davis pushes this contraption around, while Childs performs other rote activities. The motor action is geared to a sonar doppler system that is programmed to respond to fifty frequencies of sound. When any of these frequencies happen to occur on WQXR-FM, a classical music station which became the random sound source, the machinery is activated. This is probably the only piece in the entire program where the machinery assumes more artistic dominance than the performers. That is one reason why many ranked it the least interesting piece. (October 1966)

GEORGE COATES

The Way of How (Brooklyn Academy of Music). This is ostensibly images set to music. Though some of the individual images were stunning, especially in using projections as a complement to human figures, there wasn't enough coherence to the profusion of them. The performers were lethargic and mediocre. The most peculiar thing about the performance was the disclaimer in the program: "There are no pre-recorded sounds used in performance," which was odd because, since the musicians were never visible to the audience, their stuff sounded just like pre-recorded sounds. The music credit goes to Paul Dresher who, if I read the program correctly, was also the sole musician, playing Lord knows what (since he was needlessly invisible). (October 14, 1983)

TONY CONRAD

Victors and the Vanquished (The Kitchen, New York). Tony Conrad's eminence rests on a single work, the first and perhaps still the greatest

flicker film, released, if I remember correctly, in 1965. It consists of wholly black and wholly white frames in continually changing relationship. I've seen *Flicker* (1965) at least twice and would gladly see it again. I remember him also as a violinist in La Monte Young's performing group, a scholarly looking man who reportedly had a B.A. in Mathematics from Harvard and worked as a computer programmer. This Kitchen performance consists of Conrad playing the piano in a repetitive percussive style that apparently drew upon music from many cultures (including a section based on "Chopsticks"). Such music has a decorative quality that reminds me of Terry Riley (who also performed with Conrad and La Monte at the time); and although my girlfriend found it abrasive, I felt I could listen to it for a spell. Meanwhile, on the screen Conrad projects domestic images that had only an abstract relation to one another; on a smaller screen he projects badly typed words that suggest a simple narrative. After the slide show stops, he turns on a videotape. By this time, most of the audience, including the more sophisticated people, had left. I stayed. At the end I asked him about his music and heard a pretentious explanation about "assimilating everything." Since such talk complements his music in driving people away, Conrad is lucky to have a secure teaching position in Buffalo. (December 29, 1977)

JAMES CUNNINGHAM

Skating to Siam (Dance Theater Workshop, New York). This is an odd, essentially incoherent piece full of disconcerting, disconnected movements that simply refuse to make sense in my head. Cunningham turned out to be a more commanding, more masculine performer than I would have thought from knowing him socially, while Tina Croll and Lauren Persichetti did well in supporting roles. What was interesting was that the performers were required to make their own sounds, down to bird noises. (August 14, 1968)

Evelyn the Elevator (Dance Theater Workshop at Riverside Church, New York). Jamie Cunningham (no relation to Merce) seems to construct his pieces as a series of improvisations, each upon one theme; for his instructions to his performances are rarely more than rough (which is why, I'm told, a Merce Cunningham teaching associate like Margaret Jenkins had trouble performing them here). Jamie also freely uses an inventive score prepared by the cellist Gwendolyn Watson, in addition to films and sounds; he allows his performers to make faces. Many moments were stunning, particularly Jamie's solo toward the end (that won him spontaneous applause); yet the piece as a whole failed to cohere for me, or to stick in my head a few days later. In that respect, it was not too different from another piece of his that I saw last summer, *Skating to Siam.* I suspect Jamie is on the verge of creating something better. (November 8, 1968)

The Zoo at Night (Judson Dance Theater, New York). I didn't enjoy this as much as Jamie's earlier work, which had some stunning moments (especially in his solos), because there was nothing special here. There was some fine ensemble work with eight dancers, including the majestic Linda Tolbert Tarnay and Lauren Persichetti, who did some of the best dancing. Even Margaret Jenkins got her chance to excel. There was also a film that I cannot remember, and perhaps some other things; but I was disappointed. (April 26, 1969)

The Sea of Tranquility Motel (Dance Theatre Workshop at Manhattan School of Music). This was the last and best piece in an excessively long evening. Much of the audience had already departed. It was clearly closer to mixed-means theater than Jamie's earlier dance. There were long spoken interludes, usually done by Jamie himself, and they contributed to making the performance more theatrical than choreographic. Also on the program was Tina Croll's *Ground-Work* with its films of the zoo. (November 20, 1969)

And the Acme Dance Company (Judson Dance Theater, New York). Jamie has matured over the few years I've known him, quickly developing the surest mark of success in any art— a loyal following that shows up for every new performance. He has also received more worldly success, including a Guggenheim Fellowship this year. The opening piece, another of his duets with Lauren Persichetti, was stunning, as the nude couple went through a variety of plots and roles, including those of lovers and animals, resting only when some films (usually of animals again) were projected. Although this piece was entitled *Lauren's Dream,* she seemed the secondary figure, in part because Jamie dominated the center spotlight, but also because nudity meant that her pixie face commanded less attention than before. (How acceptable, and undaring, total nudity has by now become.)

Jamie's second piece was more extravagant, using a larger company and a sequence of masks. Again the performers pass through a variety of roles. Linda Tolbert Tarnay is the dominant figure, as she nearly always is when she performs (being six feet tall and impervious, which also accounts for why, I'm told, others dislike dancing with her). There were abrupt changes in the music, from classical to pop, that scarcely affected the choreography; yet everything seemed coherent within the established contextual style. Jamie even has a sequence where the company performs in unison, breaking the tightest avant-garde rule without jeopardizing his integrity. Two of the more stunning sequences have Tarnay wearing an orange toga (imitating Isadora Duncan) and Persichetti wearing mirrored pasties and a silver bikini, surrounded by two men in sexy motorcycle

garb. By such wit is Jamie courting even greater popularity? (December 4, 1971)

Apollo and Dionysus: Cheek to Cheek (New York University School of the Arts). Jamie's choreography used to be witty and exuberant; now it is mostly just exuberant. His company is remarkably athletic, which is strange, because he isn't. (Ted Striggles must have been working with weights to get thighs that look so muscular?) This piece involves the use of masks, which have become a Cunningham trademark, and Linda Tarnay's great height (which can otherwise be problematic for others). There were jungle scenes that struck me as corny, and a marvelous monologue by Jamie himself dressed as a Vassar anthropology professor (female) who gets abducted. The evening opened with group yoga exercises in which I probably should have participated. To my senses, Jamie hasn't been good since *Lauren's Dream* at Judson three years ago. (June 20, 1974)

KEN DEWEY

________ and Terry Riley. *Sames* (Filmmakers' Cinematheque). I found this to be a thoroughly remarkable performance; I only wish I could have gone back for its second showing the following evening, so I could better comprehend what happened. It was, in the end, as thoroughly original and effective as [The Living Theatre's] *The Brig,* as well as similar in its use of found noise (here, simple lines of words that were run through three tape recorders) and its resistance to esthetic expectation. On stage are five young women, dressed in bridal costumes, standing erect and still. A film is projected, first onto the ceiling of the theater and then from backstage onto a mirror on the side wall which reflects it to a mirror on the other side wall. The film shows a young woman in a bridal costume moving through a number of mundane situations—serving coffee at a lunch counter, going into an employment office, etc. The taped sound takes simple sentences, such as "that's not you," and distorts them through overlapping, shifting the speed at which the sentences are repeated, and so forth. At one point the racket became so intense that I covered my ears. Beyond that basic description there is little I can talk about. Although I could identify certain patterns of organization, I found it difficult to discern any purpose, other than the use of a rather important event of marriage in a thoroughly neutral context. I should have asked Ken Dewey, who seemed approachable and articulate, why he portrayed brides? (November 20, 1965)

________ with USCO, John Cage and La Monte Young. *An Art Service* (Temple Beth El, Spring Valley, New York). Rubin L. Gorewitz does the annual accounting for many New York artists who feel indebted

to him. Perhaps to impress his Rockland County neighbors, he got some of his clients to give a performance at his own suburban temple. The result was a mixed bag that Ken Dewey integrated with more skill than some of his materials deserved. The best element was a reproduction of USCO's contribution to the *Lower East Side* exhibition at the Jewish Museum. Although I think this bit could have been done better, it is still impressive, if not moving. Nonetheless, I was told that all the slides, films and sounds were more effective in their original setting. La Monte Young figured out a way to reproduce his musical ideas of chords that generate overtones on the temple organ, but the performance situation here hardly gave him enough time to get his overtones going. John Cage's sermon was so dreadful that I suspected he wanted to sabotage the performance. He told a few stories in a perfunctory tone and then read from Buckminster Fuller's recent essays. Instead of using that halting Gertrude Steinish voice of his, Cage read so quickly that certain words were incomprehensible, and the audience began to talk among themselves impolitely. As the show had clearly lost its rhythm, Ken Dewey directed USCO to start its display earlier than they planned. Once the strobe lights began flashing over John's continued reading, the situation was saved, at least in terms of theater.

Afterwards, Ken told me that his assistant Larry Telles sat down with the two participating rabbis for two hours to ascertain, as is Dewey's custom, what might be the "subtext" of the Jewish service; but what is the significance of their discovery that it had no subtext! (July 21, 1967)

________ **in collaboration with Jerry Walter.** *Elm City Garage Works* (Theatre Workshop for Students, 210 West 65th Street). Dewey's pieces tend to be extravagant, messy, a bit thin, but inventive, humane and nowadays conducive to collaboration. This piece simulated the situation of a factory, where the participants were invited to don overalls, to sign a release from injury and to ask for certain kinds of jobs within the factory. The first sequence involved riding on a floor dolley under a rather dangerous-looking moving umbrella. The second involved sitting in a wheelchair and pushing it across a rather spikey terrain. A third involved riding an elastic rope, as one would a horse. A fourth involved climbing through a network of poles and rubber hoses. Meanwhile, Ken played, as background tape, a rock music collage that Terry Riley had recently put together.

Though I sensed that these materials could have been handled better, it was good to see Ken do a full-scale piece that reminded me of *Sames,* which over two years ago was a persuasive introduction to new theater. (March 4, 1968)

________ **with Ken Jacobs.** *Elm City Garage Works* (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Since the work by this title was clearly an environmental piece that I had seen before, I wondered how Ken would adapt it to the proscenium stage of the Brooklyn Academy. However, since a piece's title in the new theater is *not* a script but an occasion for activity, it opened with an element I had not seen before—a patently fake meeting of the Garage Works' board of directors. Continuing the parody, Dewey himself delivered a lecture on how systems analysis was used to construct the Works, and Ken Jacobs gave a hysterically funny speech full of modernistic jargon. Then Dewey asked for questions from the audience, but refused to answer any of them (his sense of comic timing here being better than I expected). Materials were moved onto the stage, then across the orchestra pit, and then to a woman who brought them to members of the audience, with instructions to cart them to the back of the hall. Then Dewey invited the audience on stage, at which point the piece slid down to its end (I gather, having already left). At first I thought that Ken would wrench the proscenium situation apart more spectacularly, as he did in Edinburgh in 1963 (which was, my, five years ago already), and so was disappointed by what seemed to be a thoughtless improvisation. The performance's producer told me just before the piece began that he wasn't quite sure what Ken would do. (April 12, 1968)

________ **and Terry Riley.** *Sames* (Guggenheim Museum). Now, some seven years after Ken's death in an airplane accident, I remember the earlier performance of *Sames* as one of the best of its kind; seeing it again now, fifteen years later, after the emergence of a new generation calling itself "performance artists," I was reminded of how much better the old mixed-means theater was (or, instead, what an old fogey I have become). I had the same feeling when I saw the reproduction three years ago of Robert Whitman's *Prune. Flat.*, which likewise originated in 1965. The point of my chapter on Ken [in *The Theatre of Mixed Means*] was that he was a traditionally trained theater man who got into the new territory while working with the San Francisco Artists Workshop. That perhaps accounts for why this work has a remarkably conventional dramatic form, with a definite beginning, a climax with media overload (an increase in the number of performance sources) before running down to a single audiotape. The initial image of five women in bridal costume remains stunning (even though by now I recognize its origins in the row of bridal stores that fifteen years ago dominated the Grand Street block where Terry Riley then lived). The piece repeats a film in which women in bridal costumes go through various daily routines, such as walking across a city street and putting gas into their cars. Two differences between the initial performance and now is that there are new women and the theatrical space is different.

In the original performance, the space was a long narrow room, the bottom of a brownstone-style apartment house; so that when the films were projected on the side walls, they were less visible. Here the theater is almost round, so that the sides are very visible. What makes the piece important, then as now, is the clever exploration of media within a conventional theatrical situation. Also, I now see that the tape-delay of "It's me" echoes Brion Gysin's pioneering electronic sound poem, "I Am that I Am," and that in turn both Dewey and Gysin obviously influenced some of my own audio art with that technique. The fact that only this work was redone some half-dozen years after Ken's death perhaps reflects the general sentiment that it was his theatrical masterpiece. My sense is that in the years after *Sames*'s debut in 1965 Dewey got more and more involved with the kind of art busyness that destroyed his concentration, which was already quite fragile; and my suspicion is that, even if he had lived, it would have been hard for him to do as well in a theater again. (January 25, 1980)

JEAN DUPUY

The Visual Energy of Sound (Judson Church Theater). Dupuy is a fortyish Frenchman who won some attention by recently winning a prize from E.A.T. [Experiments in Art and Technology], and this scarcely publicized concert was his first evening at Judson. The first piece, entitled *La Course*, consists mostly of people of various ages and dress running around an audience seated in the middle and occasionally going up and down small flights of stairs placed every 90 degrees of the circle. Meanwhile Jacques Beckaert, a French Belgian composer/writer, chants Robert Ashley's *Wolfman* into a highly amplified microphone. I thought this a simple idea that went rather undeveloped, and the piece just ran down in a kind of entropic manner. The second work was a dull, diffuse piece, titled *The Visual Energy of Sound*, that has three commanding disparate images: Clydeen Malloch, a quietly beautiful girl washing her long brown hair; Steve Paxton walking around dangling a small ultraviolet light (a kind of contemporary Diogenes?) and Willoughby Sharp progressively undressing himself. (November 14, 1968)

Chorus for Six Hearts (Museum of Modern Art). Dupuy's first prize creation for E.A.T.'s Art-Tech show last fall looked so negligible that I whizzed right by it at the Brooklyn Museum and had to be told afterwards that this was the winner. For this performance, Dupuy made six similar machines, and then got six men to provide the various sound-sources. They work like this: Sounds activate a membrane that pushes red dust up into the air within a clear container, while a light directed down from the box's top makes the floating dust particles rearticulate their reflections. For this performance the system starts in response to sounds from various

body parts; in unison, the six men shift the microphone from wrist pulse to forehead to temples to mouth to nose (when they whistled) to throat (while they drank some espresso), etc. The conceit of the evening was to escalate a chorus of artistic machines into a theatrical piece. But the connection between the sounds made by the men and the resulting actions in the boxes was so negligible that I assumed, correctly I think, that most of the activating noises came from the amplification system itself. (January 15, 1969)

Soup & Tart (The Kitchen). Dupuy put together an anthology of very brief events, some of which were quite stunning. I particularly liked Philip Glass, who performed an abstract vocal; Jon Gibson, who played a composition of his own on the soprano saxophone; Joanne Akalaitis, whose event with David Warrilow (exploiting his arrested alcoholism) provided a stunning frame for the evening; Hannah Wilke, who let the art world again see her renowned breasts as she went through a number of poses (some of which resembled Jesus on the cross); and the filmmaker Deedee Hallek who recorded Jean Dupuy's narration of how to make apple tarts against a film of the recipe played backwards. Some of the performers were silly (Charles Atlas, Brendan Atkinson) or irrelevant (Yvonne Rainer). What struck me was how few literary types were in the audience and how it would be impossible to produce a comparable anthology with poets, because every participant would take too long before retiring to the eaves. Because most of these artists are, by contrast, interested in making a concise statement, they feel no need to hog the stage for an unjustifiably long spell. (November 30, 1974)

JEAN ERDMAN

The Coach with the Six Insides (Vandam Theater), adapted from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.* Since her husband co-authored the first guide to *Finnegans Wake* two decades ago, Erdman has no doubt thought long about how to stage Joyce's magnum opus; and although I suppose another kind of adaptation is possible, this seems credible. Since much of the dialogue blew by me, I'll speak first of the music by Teiji Ito, imposing, to my ears, Japanese structures on Irish folk tunes (which would be true to the spirit of the *Wake*).

Erdman seemed strong as Anna Livia Plurabelle, while the choreography, sustained throughout the production, was as unfailingly engaging as the play of colors and lights. All the characters are mythic figures, bearing a whole battery of personas and eternal truths in a single physical person. Until I see it for a second time, this will be hard to write about. (Summer 1961)

The Coach with the Six Insides (Vandam Theater). Erdman demonstrates how dance and speech, music and costume, can be smoothly integrated into something more than a production of a play. Unquestionably the richest and most original theater I have seen all year, this demands of even the most sophisticated spectators more visual, audatory, and linguistic attention than they have ever given before. Even though I was concentrating hard, I suspect I missed more than half of Joyce's puns. How anyone could sustain such a high level of linguistic originality is beyond my imagination. This second time I became more aware of how skilled the production itself was. Each actor competently fills all the roles and mythic significances assigned to him, and, in addition to speaking clearly, not one performer stumbled through the dance figures he was required to execute. (January 3, 1962)

ÖYVIND FAHLSTRÖM

Kisses Sweeter than Wine (69th Regiment Armory). Everyone attending the Art and Technology festival remarked that Fahlström's piece differed from the others in its political content and much larger scale. It struck me as a mess—full of gimmicky sequences that seemed to exploit everything possible, but wholly lacking in focus, coherence or rhythm. There were some good artistic ideas, such as echoing on film actions performed on stage. However, the faulty sound system made all the speech inaudible (which, according to Ken Dewey, was more fortunate than actually hearing it), and one sequence was a pillow fight between a man in a cart and another on foot. Had the piece not gone on for nearly two hours I would have found it less offensive. (October 1966)

RALSTON FARINA

Fun with Time Time (Artists Space). The name, so patently a pseudonym, turned me off long ago, which was too bad, because the little guy is obviously learned and interesting. He told me that his works are concerned with time (and that he went to Princeton), and his announcement for this performance showed in the top frame a drawing that was then cut apart to reveal a second frame.

This image is about the recomposition of space, not time; and in his piece, time became a similarly slippery concept. Nonetheless, it was funny, as Farina (named after a breakfast cereal) tossed Jell-O around, put Campbell's soup on white boards (the ersatz paint recapitulating the history of modern painting, and the like). His short performance piece had a false ending that briefly faked me out, for the final image was a poster of Ernie Kovacs, acknowledging Ralston's indebtedness to television's inspired Hungarian. (May 22, 1977)

KAREN FINLEY and JERRY HUNT

The Finley/Hunt Report (The Kitchen). Eager to earn money in the limited ways available to it, the Kitchen has presented three Karen Finley premieres in the past season. The others I missed, perhaps with no regrets, because this was trivial. It fulfills an NEA Inter-Arts grant that exploits that department's myth that great performances result from the collaboration of artists in different fields, rather than, say, a single artist who works in more than one domain. Finley credits Scott Macaulay of the Kitchen with initiating the collaboration and getting the grant. Finley, whom I'd not seen before, is a reserved, perhaps calculating performer who comes alive only when a fat microphone is put directly in front of her mouth, enabling her to project her songs by old-fashioned ways. As far as I could tell, her lyrics are based upon anger—at men, at cultural conservatives, at racists, at all the currently fashionable targets. With an indistinct face and dark hair cut in an undistinguished way, slightly plump, she resembles many other women, and this indistinction is perhaps a source of her theatrical appeal. Jerry Hunt, by contrast, is a tall, slender, bespectacled Texan whose solo performances depend upon his instinctively manic personality. When he talks to the audience, one is impressed by his ingenuousness, in contrast to Finley's calculation. He seemed deferential toward her, especially at the beginning when she elicited his confession that he was a substitute pianist in one of Jack Ruby's nightclubs. Since real collaboration does not come easy to them, the program is essentially a ping-pong volley of solos, some of which incorporate videotape. One tape shows a visit to Hunt's home outside Dallas, where he introduces his horses (though never revealing with whom he lives); another is a visit to Finley's home, actually in Rockland County, where the most distinguishing mark was the mess of costumes in her bedroom. The best tape contains only the questions that familiar male reporters ask her on television shows across the country. What the largely female audience appears to like best are her songs. Remember that her reputation was founded upon a *Village Voice* feature about her as a new feminist heroine. After ninety minutes, this performance did not end too soon. By no measure was it avant-garde. (June 12, 1992)

FREDERIC FLAMAND and LE PLAN K

Quarantine (Westbeth Theater Center). Le Plan K is a Belgian troupe that has been at various times associated, I think, with William Burroughs and the Living Theatre. I'd seen its pieces before, but had not noted them. *Quarantine* is the best so far. Of the past, I vaguely remember something at Washington Square Methodist Church involving nudity and a later piece in this Westbeth space that involved large aluminum (or tin) props on which performers crawled and banged. *Quarantine* was billed as "a

study of schizophrenia and the modern-day artist." I found a skillful use of an imaginative repertoire of props, which functioned not as extensions of the limbs, as Alwin Nikolais might use them, but as physical constraints. *Quarantine* opens with Flamand and another man imprisoned in clear cylinders, with lights shining down on them. Other sequences involve a large air-filled bag that the performers crawl in and out of; a terrifying sparkle-producing machine; metal appendages to the body (which also serve as percussive instruments); and extended neon lights. In these respects, the work descends directly from Bauhaus theater. Michael Galasso, who provided the music, told me that one of the group's original inspirations was the painting of H. Bosch. The performing space is never focused, no performer is allowed ever to dominate any scene, and the piece as a whole is structured as a series of kinetic tableaus. Three men in addition to Flamand performed, but the magisterial fellow known as "Baba" was gone. (Or perhaps he was minding the five-story factory that the group now has in Brussels.) Lasting roughly 70 minutes, this was one of the strongest and most perfect nonverbal pieces I have ever seen. I wish I could see it again. (May 16, 1980)

"If Pyramids Were Square" (Brooklyn Academy of Music). I'd not seen Frederic's group, Le Plan K, in several years and so assumed its members had disbanded. It seems that, instead, they've become Belgian cultural celebrities touring around the world. On the telephone was Frederic's invitation to see their new production; and since I admired before not only their work but the assumptions behind their nonliterary theater, I went, only to be disappointed. There was no comedy and no terror, and scarcely any spectacle, either in the props or the actors. In its manic lack of inflection the work reminded me of Peter Sellars' recent production of Klebnikov's *Zambesi*, which I had seen in the same space only a few months ago. The action seemed to depend upon the set, a sequence of open wooden squares that were stretched across the front of the stage, those being the square pyramids; but aside from a solo by a new man assuming stances reminiscent of those in Leonardo da Vinci's books, the geometricism had no effect upon the production. What was offensive was the music of Peter Gordon, as always too repetitious and too loud; it drove some people out of the hall. I was reminded of Claes Oldenberg's vision of an American artistic career—if you start to slip in America, you can go to Europe; and if you slip there, you can go to Japan. (March 12, 1988)

PETER FROEHLICH

Merz (Goethe House). Eberhard Blum created a myth several years ago when he performed the Kurt Schwitters *Ursonate* on WBAI-FM; I first saw him do it in the spring of 1976 at the Clocktower. Soon afterwards,

my upstairs neighbor Larry Osgood told me that the classic avant-garde text had another performer named Peter Froehlich, whom Larry had heard in Ottawa, where Froehlich directs the English Theater at Carleton University; and the private audiotape that Froehlich sent me suggested that his performance was indeed special. What I heard last night differs from the tape in that Froehlich appears to have added more pitches to his recital of the text (in acknowledgment, he explained to me afterwards, of Schwitters's own pitched scoring, which is in a private collection in Montreal). A theater man, in contrast to Blum whose background is the flute, Froehlich appears in formal dress, pretending that he was Schwitters. I thought this last move too reminiscent of pretentious one-person recitals of nineteenth-century American writers. Between comments Froehlich performed not only Schwitters's sneezing poems but a Marinetti text as well. He also performed the magnificent *Ursonate*, which I'd love to have a record of, more than anything else in the world. (October 13, 1977)

MIMI GARRARD

Dance Theater (Henry Street Settlement). Mimi Garrard danced with Alwin Nikolais for several years before beginning her own choreography; and while she clearly derives from the Nikolais tradition of limited dance movement coupled with the theatrical use of props, the best pieces here transcend the Nikolais style for something else entirely. First of all, here the machinery works perfectly, and the best pieces are interesting enough to please again and again. I particularly liked *Flux*, which I would rank among the great mixed-means works. To an electronic score by Bulent Arel and a swiftly articulated pattern film (made by Mimi and her husband James Seawright), several women dancers move around with tall panels of wood. On them is projected a film that becomes a front drop, so to speak, continually redefining the colors of the dancers' leotards by mixing with the colors emanating from the film. The movements have a rhythm that never falters, as the elements seem precisely integrated, if nonsynchronous. *Family*, the final piece, eschewed dance movements entirely, though the performers moved as though they were trained dancers. The compelling figure is a woman in a metal frame chair. Here too the activity was more discontinuous than in any other piece. Given my appreciation of Seawright's kinetic sculpture, I expected here, as well as elsewhere in the evening, more complicated technological effects, perhaps even a feedback machine that would work off the live performers in some way or another. Two dance pieces earlier in the program, *Sketch* and *Flicker*, have rather obvious and uninteresting movements, while Garrard as a performer seems too stiff. Earlier theater pieces— *Winter*, *Honey Bear* and *Domino*— are a little too close to Nikolais for my taste, particularly in the movements and the use of props; they are also too cute. (January 6, 1968)

Dance Theater (Henry Street Settlement). One year made a considerable difference, and this was a thoroughly better program than last January's. For one thing, Mimi's dance technique has gotten noticeably better; nothing this time was as embarrassing as some of the solos and duets I saw last year. The bomb is still *Domino* in which the performers manipulate three spotlights that sometimes glare out into the audience—a vulgar trick really more typical of Alvin Ailey or Eleo Pomare. Indeed, the most modest piece, *Sketch*, a solo with a vertically striped costume reminiscent of Murray Louis, is quite proficient. There is a cute duet, *Alla Marcha*. The new mixed-means work is *Frieze*, a very strange and original (and, I gather, still incomplete) piece with four enlarged props that have mummy-shaped silhouettes cut out. The props themselves are wrapped in enlarged newsprint, and two of them can be combined to make a single figure. Garrard also used the back area behind a thin curtain and a strobe light to illuminate female heads attached to poles (a stunning image by itself, but of unclear relation to the others). The choreography is nonrepresentational, yet not entirely defined—perhaps a Nikolais characteristic—and the dominant image is Mimi herself, dressed in flamboyant, old-fashioned clothes. The masterpiece of its pioneering kind is her husband Jim Seawright's *Capriccio*, a film copied from a videotape prepared for the Public Broadcast Laboratory. This is very spectacular, particularly in color (in contrast to the black-white I saw when it was broadcast), with wash-outs, videotape delays, and visual transformations, all against an absolutely blank background. I was amazed (and impressed) to find out that they did this film in only six uninterrupted hours of studio time. Once again they use a score by the most accomplished of the Columbia tape composers—Bulent Arel. Finally, they presented *Flux* again, this time with a slightly different cast; and the film became more clear to me—with regular patterns of dots and stripes, both vertical and horizontal, then rainbows and finally an evening moiré pattern. Six supporting women wear white costumes, while the three lead performers had two-toned outfits whose hues were continually redefined by the color film. (April 21, 1969)

Dance Theater (Henry Street Settlement). Mimi's pieces are among those annual events I would not miss for the world, and her program gets richer every year. This time *Frieze* overcame the technical difficulties that plagued the performance I saw last year, and it was so intrinsically coherent, and yet dreamy and mysterious, that I'd love to see it again. It is also longer, and more inventive in its use of lights and props (especially Eugene Tolchin's mobile sculptures with enlarged telephone-book print on their sides and the shapes of human bodies cut out). The new work, *Trivia*, is full of gags, with dancers playing with Heinz catsup bottles and Mimi herself on a kiddie cycle. *Flux* remains her masterpiece, though by

now less mysterious than *Frieze*, and I noticed that it ends with the same image with which it begins—its title is really its theme. I hope that Garrard does a full-length piece this year, because she's verging on greatness. Also on the program were two strictly dance pieces, one of them a solo; but my own judgment is that Mimi cannot hold the stage alone, either as a dancer or a choreographer. Indeed, strictly as choreography, I get no statement from her work, which is instead about as intelligent as anyone's in discovering alternative materials for performance. (May 2, 1970)

Dance Theater (Henry Street Settlement). This concert opened with a new piece that I would classify as strictly dance. My girlfriend, a sometime dance student, thought that none of the performers could stand right or walk right. Then came the latest of the Garrard-Seawright films made from videotape, *Fantasy for TV*, and we both were stunned. Although excellences in this new work are not sustained as in *Capriccio*, it was full of lush passages, especially in the echoing of colors. Another dance, *Spaces* (1971), involved two predominantly visual ideas—stripes of the costumes (and high panels) and shadows made by training flashlights against parts of the body so that shadows were cast against the panels; but the two visual ideas didn't quite come together. The last new work, *Phosphones*, listed as a "work in progress," resembles Merce Cunningham's *Winterbranch* in being based upon a lighting idea. Here, however, the available lights are programmed to flicker in various ways in response to a tape that was realized at the Bell Laboratories by Emanuel Ghent (a psychiatrist-computer composer whose undistinguished score seems to go in and out of synchronization with the lights). I felt that *Phosphones* could have been more various, it could have used more darkness. As always, Mimi's dancers could have had more interesting things to do with their bodies, especially because they are more visible here than their colleagues in *Winterbranch*. I was as stunned as ever by *Flux*, but regretted the omission from this retrospective of *Frieze*, which I take to be the most mysterious of her pieces. She told me at the end that she would like, in future work, to get out of props and lights. Thinking that would be a mistake, I wondered what she might do if, instead, she abolished her performing company and worked only with machines. (April 24, 1971)

Phosphones (YMHA). I'd seen an earlier version of this at Henry Street last year, and remember liking it in a small way. I didn't find Emanuel Ghent's musical score interesting or much connection between his lighting and the musical score. The innovation here is the composer's putting lighting instructions on perforated paper tape that is then synchronized to the music. What attracts Mimi, I suppose, is that the placement, intensity and color of the lighting can be precisely programmed and thus precisely

repeated, and that these parameters can be changed automatically and rapidly in relation to the music. The program note promises "a degree of subtle interaction . . . which has heretofore not been possible." In spite of the strength of this notion, I found the promised relations imperceptible. The distinguishing choreography for this visual-aural score is not moves but friezes, or dark bodies before a curtain, which is to say stark images for the lights. A sequence near the end, where the dancers come together in a group, seemed too reminiscent of Nikolais. (May 14, 1972)

Dance Theater (Exchange Theater). I don't think Mimi's work is getting better. My favorite pieces are still the old ones: *Flux*, which I didn't see this year; *Alla Marcha*, which has a wit I've not discovered in Garrard's speech; and *Capriccio*. I don't much like *Phosphones*, which she seems to feature, I guess, for having the most sophisticated technological increment. Emanuel Ghent's score still strikes me as inferior, while whatever articulation there might be in his computerized lighting is simply indecipherable, even after several viewings. One new Garrard work, *Spaces*, had striped costumes and striped screens, but she wisely didn't duplicate the moiré effects that enhanced her earlier *Flux*. Instead, the performers use flashlights to make large shadows of their heads on a background screen, making spatial rearticulation the theme of this work. I preferred another new piece, also to a score by Bulent Arel, *Six, and 7*, in which the performers wear skullcaps that flash numbers. Mimi and her husband Jim Seawright also showed the very first of their WGBH videotapes, *Video Variations*, which includes color washouts, visual echoes and reversals but wasn't as spectacular as the second tape, *Capriccio*. One advantage that her work has over Alwin Nikolais's is that its temporal rhythms do not collapse. (April 2, 1974)

Dance Theater (Exchange Theater). I've been following her work loyally for several years now, and it's not getting better, alas. The featured piece was *Brazen*, billed as a "work in progress," and the program flier tells us that "the computer program for the generation of slides was developed by Ken Knowlton," a Bell Labs engineer who had also worked with Stan VanDerBeek on computer-generated films. The speed and precision of the switching is so impressive that I remember liking the machines better than the dancers or the music. The concluding piece, *Dreamspace*, to music by Lester Trimble, has an awful score with an unacknowledged singer. The evening opened with the dance *Dualities*, which like *Brazen* has undistinguished computer-assisted music by Emanuel Ghent. By now, nearly a decade after I first saw it, the humor of *Alla Marcha*, once one of my favorite Garrard pieces, has become predictable and wearing. (May 19, 1975)

Dance Theater (Riverside Church). As usual, she opened with a witty piece, this time a new premiere, *P's and Cues*, which has elaborate costumes of her own design. Next was *Phosphones* (1971), which still strikes me as arbitrary, though elegant. It pains me to repeat that whatever the computer-controlled light composition might be doing isn't perceptible. *Brazen* (1975) has some clever slides that reminded me of *Flux*, which I still regard as her greatest single work, and which I always like to see again. I sense that she is trying to get away from the impression, regularly noted by the few critics following her work, that the best parts of her performance are her husband's achievement. I find that her art hasn't developed in any appreciable way, except away from her husband's, which, given her best work so far, would not be the most propitious way to go. What is most lacking in her, as in her mentor Nikolais, is ideas for distinguished body movements. That's why her work can be so easily divided into spectacular pieces and mediocre ones, and what the former have in common is inventive staging. (February 28, 1976)

Dance Theater (155 Wooster Street). I had not seen a concert of her work in a while, even though I once thought her very good (and she and her husband Jim Seawright live down the street). I was disappointed to find that the strongest, most original and more successful piece was still the *Flux* (1968) that I had always loved. First of all, it is quicker than the other works, with no dull moments; secondly, it also exploits best the unusually deep stage in her studio. Otherwise, I find the limitations of her choreographic imagination embarrassing. The best moves, such as heads peeking out from the slides, I had seen elsewhere, while lots of other moves were too generally familiar. My companion thought the dancers generally inept, even though some of them have been around for a long time. My own sense is that little in the choreography interests them. It also seems that Mimi has gotten herself in a curious cul-de-sac in the politics of NYC dance. Once Nikolais left the Henry Street Settlement, his protégés had nowhere else to perform. Fortunately, Mimi and her husband had purchased a Soho space large enough to accommodate both his sculpture studio and her performance space. (December 17, 1984)

Dance Theater (155 Wooster Street). I've seen her work for nearly two decades now and have come to severe conclusions. Her problem is that she descends from Nikolais and hasn't learned much since. Her anti-expressionistic bias forbids her the Graham repertoire of movements. However, she hasn't assimilated any alternative vision of possible choreography and may not even be trying. So the movements of her dancers tend to be obvious and limited. I'm reminded of a Nikolais dancer telling me that Nik asks only that his dancers improvise their movements during a performance.

Nikolais compensates through his theatricality, through images that are initially beautiful; but his problem is that not much happens after the change of scene. Garrard has similar problems. A fellow critic who had never seen her work thought her more interested in lighting than choreography. Indeed, her best theater comes in those pieces with the most interesting illumination—*Flux*, of course, and on this program, *Phosphones*. The best choreography comes from collaboration with the performers, on this program *Menagerie* (with Felice Wolfzahn and Ginger Gillespie, who were also the best dancers). There was a comic piece, *Exchange* (1984), that reminded me of Murray Louis's *Junk Dances* and thus of Phyllis Lamhut. (December 17, 1986)

Dance Theater (155 Wooster Street). As usual here, the great work was *Flux* (1968), now with a new print (of the old film) that is remarkably clear and thus even more impressive as abstract geometric film. Projected on moving dancers, its kineticism becomes yet more articulate. Otherwise, it is easy to divide Mimi's work into dance pieces that are invariably undistinguished and theatrical pieces that are better. Among the former she had two new ones, both solos to tapes by Michael Bushnell. The first, *Linear Passes*, is for Hilary Easton, who is chunkier than the others; but whether she is any good as a dancer is hard to tell, because I didn't see her try to do anything interesting. Felice Wolfzahn, a small blonde woman, made more of her solo, *Menagerie* (1987); and she is perhaps the best dancer in the bunch. Also new was an undistinguished dance for five women, *Context*, likewise featuring a Bushnell score that I found no better than the dance. Like *Linear Passes*, it features a "light composition by Mimi Garrard," which I didn't notice until I read about it in the evening's program. The better theatrical works both feature Andre Bernard, the most mellifluous voice on our favorite classic music station here, WNYC-FM. In *Exchange* (1985), he reads typical epithets from stock exchange news reports, while four dancers in suits play with briefcases and little balls. The trouble here is that, apart from using epithets away from context, *Exchange* lacks satirical bite. Instead of using American country dances for the soundtrack, she could have used some harsh electronic music (or perhaps even the hysterical screaming that I tape-recorded on the floor of the Commodities Exchange). One of the forgotten virtues of *Flux* is the electronic music by Bulent Arel, whose score with its richer, more various sonic textures makes Michael Bushnell, 31 years his junior, sound like the beginner he no doubt is. (December 19, 1987)

GILBERT and GEORGE

(Sonnabend Gallery). I remember a critical colleague telling me that those post-artschool Englishmen are really exceptional. However, the per-

formance I saw was soporific in ways that reminded me of the Spaniards who call themselves "Zaj," whom I saw at Merce Cunningham's studio a few years ago. Immaculately dressed, with their faces and hands painted red, two good-looking young men assume a series of tableaux, while a taped soundtrack repeats selected words, such as "bad thoughts and broken hearts, broken thoughts and bad hearts," or "dark bondage and human shadow," or, simply, "ready." Meanwhile, the men are standing absolutely still. After 45 of 90 minutes, I walked out. The bespectacled one looked tense, the smaller one looser. Their eyes never acknowledged the audience, demonstrating, I suppose, a certain virtuosity by default (or its absence). This performance accompanies an exhibition of their photographs (of themselves), illustrating perhaps that in certain circles of contemporary art, the attaining of celebrity precedes not just the selling of art but its creation. (March 27, 1976)

PHILIP GLASS and ROBERT WILSON

Einstein on the Beach (Brooklyn Academy of Music). It was an authentic reproduction, and it was spectacular. What struck me most was how classic it had become and how it would always be a classic. Even though Lucinda Childs's choreography replaces Andy de Groat's, it is not sufficiently distinguished to change anything. (My recollection is that Andy de Groat depended mostly upon spinning, whereas this is mostly circular movement.) One stylistic mark of the work is repetition, down to Lucinda Childs' monologue; another is the slow pace. Both these qualities now strike me as terribly dated. Samuel M. Johnson, an elderly black man eight years ago, now seems more infirm than before, but his concluding monologue, delivered from the locomotive cab, struck me as especially brilliant. Some of Wilson's moves seem even more derivative, such as the pseudo-mysterious rectangle that appears from time to time, reminding me of *2001.* The so-called knee-plays seem ever more inconsequential. Toward the end Philip's music appears to get bored with its own style, as each of the instrumentalists takes solos that strike me as terribly unGlassian. I'd like to see it yet again, nonetheless. (December, 1984)

NAN GOLDIN

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency (Aperture Gallery, 20 East 23rd Street). This was an old-fashioned slide show, perhaps forty-five minutes long, designed to publicize a book of the same title, accompanied by a soundtrack mostly of love songs in various styles from opera to reggae. Her title suggested portraiture of neurosis, but instead it was mostly about affection in its infinite variety—young and old, rich and poor, black and white—and about preparing for affection (primping, etc.). Indeed, the photographs were considerably more positive than her title, perhaps because

they were mostly of people at heightened moments. They reminded me more of Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*, which is also about infinite variety (and pointedly sentimental). That recognition made me realize that Goldin's tricky updating comes from prefacing essentially similar photography with a more critical, modish title. The next thought that came to me was that I preferred the soundtrack to the photos, which eventually became offensive. Were Goldin true to her title, she would have avoided any suggestions of sentimentality. (December 20, 1986)

ANN HALPRIN

Dancers' Workshop of San Francisco (Hunter College Dance Bureau). Ken Dewey, Simone Forti and others gave me a good idea of what to expect, but I did not think the performance would be quite so spectacular, so extravagant, so theatrical, so beautiful and so stunning. Halprin broke a primary taboo for total nudity in New York theater, probably once and for all, by having her eight young dancers, four men and four women, completely undress, not once but three times. By the third time, as the audience got accustomed to seeing nude bodies, the performers deposited their clothes in the back of the stage and began to tear up wide strips of brown paperbag paper that was circulated around the area. The scene, brilliantly lit in various ways, turned into an orgy with paper. After the performers became buried in the paper, they rolled off the stage into the orchestra pit, completely clearing the stage of debris. It was among the greatest performances I'd ever seen; so exquisitely done, I'm sure I could see it a hundred times. When I spoke with Ann early in the afternoon, she feared that the police might close the show. "I'll tell them," she said, "that they should wait until the end where the real obscene part is; that way we could at least get the show over with." I sensed that Ann once had a Reichian psychoanalysis, for the piece seemed designed to remove "character armor" not only in the performers but in the audience too. More than one person beside me told me that they wanted to join the romp on the stage. In physical exposure lay psychological exposure; nothing should be hidden. For a second piece the pace and space changed sharply. Ann, dressed in a clown's outfit, moves haphazardly around the floor while someone plays folk guitar and ineptly. Then the group of young performers start moving around the auditorium, even carrying a truck through the balcony, before going down a rope ladder to the orchestra and then onto the stage. While everyone else is on stage, Ann, at least twenty years older than the others, undresses herself while suspended from the bars of a trolley moving behind a screen. Then the kids start rolling over the floor with one another and stamping their feet on wooden plants. This wasn't as interesting. The piece ends with a shadow image of Ann herself, bathing naked, projected forward onto a screen towards the back of the stage. (April 22, 1967)

Initiations and Transformations (City Center). This was the San Francisco's Dance Workshop's first appearance in New York since that 1967 début that reportedly prompted a warrant for Ann Halprin's arrest, but by now nudity has become generally more acceptable. Her kind of choreographic sloppiness hasn't, however. She is historically important for recognizing that one persuasive alternative for post–Martha Graham choreography involves the use of nondance movements (and even nondancers), and that such movements best result from initiating physical tasks within the setting of spectacle (that remains a signature of her work). Thus, in an early piece she had performers carrying chests up an elaborate netting, the theatricality depending as much upon staging as upon the performers. The most stunning sequences in *Parades and Changes*, five years ago, depended as much upon rolls of manila paper and the swirling lights as upon the nude performers. Here too there is nudity and a set of physical exercises; and in the first section, "Ceremony of Signals," it seems that one performer announces an instruction that the others observe. The music comes from a makeshift band of various nontonal sound-sources, such as a washbucket, a bicycle wheel and packing boxes, all of which are beaten in a variety of ways. The result was tonally irregular, but as rhythmically regular as the moves of the performers. The third sequence, "Animal Ritual," requires the performers to imitate animals, and they are apparently allowed to change identities at any time. Striking at first, especially in the dark light, it went on far too long. The evening closed with "Trance Dance" in which performers run around the center stage in a circle, inviting members of the audience to join in. Perhaps because the scene was more forbidding than inviting, the first participants were young braless ladies who were perhaps recruited for the occasion. Ann's company now consists of seven men, six of whom are black, the last Mexican, and herself, because all the other women recently quit. She remains a compelling performer, wholly comfortable nude, despite her fifty years and children who are now adult. However, because the audience was largely white, the performance had an undertone of high class primitivism that I found disturbing. (November 16, 1971)

AL HANSEN

McLuhan Magillah (119 Avenue D). Talking to Hansen before the performance, I found him a bright McLuhanist who believes that contemporary man can absorb several actions at once (thereby accounting for his own professed love of watching several television sets simultaneously, while listening to yet something else). However, what I saw suffered most from an atrophied sense of time and a rather unimaginative use of elements. A mother and her son read comic books to each other; two TV sets blare, one offering just a test pattern, the other a boxing match (and later

a wrestling match); there is a smell of burning toast. Hansen himself spreads peanut butter on the TV; Carolee Schneemann steps forward petting a cat; Dick Higgins emerges to declaim that line of Marshall McLuhan explaining how print enabled Charles Dickens to become a comic writer. Later, they throw rolls of toilet paper into the audience. Perhaps the best joke was the last. Philip Corner asked, "What's happening," repeating it several times. "What's questioning," was the reply. "The happening's over," someone finally said. (January 29, 1966)

ALEX HAY

Grass Field (69th Regiment Armory). Alex Hay is a member of the Rauschenberg family who wouldn't have been included in the Theatre and Engineering Festival if anyone other than Bob was in charge of selecting the participants; and after this performance, I doubt if he will be included again. The equipment here was definitely more imaginative than the artist. Hay had sensitive pickup mechanisms attached to his forehead, chest and arms; so that his movements activated mechanisms that produced electronic sounds. However, Hay's movements are rather limited in range and unimaginative in execution—essentially the laying out of one hundred, numbered six-foot square sheets of cloth. Perhaps because the process of translating action into sound-generation seemed to take as long as two seconds to my ear, it was hard to correlate one to the other; as a result, the piece lost some of the dramatic sense it should have had. When Hay finished, he sat down in front of a TV camera that reproduced his face to the screen behind him. Meanwhile, Rauschenberg and Steve Paxton came out and gathered up the cloths in an arithmetic progression. As Paxton took considerably longer than Rauschenberg to accomplish his task, the audience gave him a hearty round of applause. Neither he nor Rauschenberg looked pleased. The piece was repetitious without using repetition cunningly and so boring that Hay's dealer Leo Castelli, sitting just behind me, said in departing, "This is really very interesting, but we must relieve the babysitter." (October 1966)

DEBORAH HAY

Solo (69th Regiment Armory). This struck me as by far the best piece of the five *Nine Evenings* I've seen so far, because here artistic purposes were dominant, while the technology functioned at the service of Hay's art. The piece was essentially a dance-spectacle, in which the performers, beautifully costumed, both walked and rode floats whose speed and direction were remotely controlled by eight "stationary performers" in dark suits, apparently conducted by James Tenney. The resulting piece has a realized consistency and rhythm, as well as a beauty, that seemed lacking

everywhere else in this Theatre and Engineering Festival. The music, Toshi Ichiyanagi's *Funakakushi*, was an intelligent complement. (October 1966)

26 Variations on 8 Activities for 13 People Plus Beginning and Ending (Billy Rose Theater). Despite its complex title, this is a rather simple piece for lots of pretty women, some of them a little too chubby for theatrical presence, none of them breathtakingly beautiful. They run from left to right, occasionally sprinting up a ramp and then jumping down to the floor; they are almost continually in profile. Like Yvonne Rainer recently, Hay seems intent upon avoiding dance movement; but unlike Rainer, Hay does not vary her fare sufficiently and she lets her work run on far longer than necessary. (February 6, 1969)

WILLIAM HELLERMANN, composer and co-director

Three Sisters Who Are Not Sisters (Newfoundland Theater). I've known Bill Hellermann for years, initially as a virtuoso guitarist. However, I had not seen him as a comic actor until this "performance piece with a text by Gertrude Stein" (from *The Gertrude Stein First Reader and Three Plays* that Houghton Mifflin published in 1948). It opens with three sisters declaring that they are not sisters (and in his own production, Hellermann in white tails plays one of the sisters), while two men who did not look alike, but are both dressed in tails, declare that they are brothers. What is special is the use of toy instruments and noisemakers to provide all the music. I remember a whole arsenal of these, ranging from finger accordions to jumping frogs to balloons that are sat upon to produce a farting sound. The program lists musical selections that include "CHOPS—for virtuoso soloist," but the chops turn out to be rubber imitations of lamb chops that dogs play with. The biggest criticism I can make is that we already have a tradition in New York of farcical interpretations of Gertrude Stein texts. I'd like to see other ways of regarding those essentially open, opportune forms. (December 1993)

DICK HIGGINS and LARRY MILLER, organizers

Fluxfest '83 (SUNY- Purchase). I should have gotten involved with Fluxus, because its forte was gags; but it all happened before I thought of myself as an artist. That was too bad, because my sense of humor is considerably more sophisticated than most everyone's here. (Indeed, given the neo-dada esthetic, it is remarkable how many essentially humorless people were involved in Fluxus.) The best pieces were the visual one-liners. The program opened with "Three Lamp Events" (George Brecht, 1959), in which the stage lights flash on and off three times. Then came Bengt af

Klintberg's *Orange Events No. 16* in which Alison Knowles rolled three oranges across the floor. Later came Emmett Williams's *Counting Piece* in which four performers count the number of people in the audience, Milan Knizak's *Snowstorm No. 1* (ca. 1968) in which two large garbage bags full of paper airplanes are aimed at the audience, Yasunao Tone's *Clapping Music* in which three performers take their bows (while the audience claps, you see!). In Alison Knowles's *Wounded Furniture* (1965), she and a colleague patch up a chair with Band-Aids, as though it were a human being, and Jean Dupuy does a series of choreographed one-liners: As a vacuum removes his beret, a sign drops "good afternoon." As he stands with his back toward the audience, in front of him is a sign that reads, "The future is behind me." It reminded me of an earlier time in the visual arts world when pop art was perceived as a refreshing indigenous alternative to the "European" heaviness of abstract expressionism.

The second half started slowly until Jean Dupuy did something so audacious that it dominated the afternoon. The program said "String Quartet" (1982), and I gather that he had convinced his colleagues that he would do something else. He came to the front of the stage with a manila bag, two well-dressed assistants and four glass plates. On the left was a sign that read, "Ah-Choo//Paper & Noses." Onto the glass plates he poured heaping mounds of grains that appeared to resemble ground pepper. Once the plates were full, he reached behind him for the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner used before; but instead of sucking up the grains, the machine now blew the pepper *out* into the audience. A friend and I, sitting in the back, were amused to see people running into the aisles and up the corridors—amused that is until the cloud hit us, and we too ran for the exits. It would have been a perfect piece for ending the show. (March 5, 1983)

LEJAREN HILLER

An Avalanche for Pitchman, Prima Donna, Player Piano, Percussionist and Pre-Recorded Playback (Hunter College). Hiller first made his name as a pioneering computer-composer (perhaps the earliest), who had a prior career as a chemist (and reportedly a collaborator on Orlon). Nonetheless, the program note announces that his more recent work has been moving toward theater. The tone is slapstick and rather incoherent, while the theatricality is flamboyant and corny. The gimmick is the player piano's piano-roll that "consists of ninety themes from the standard literature 'composed' on an IBM-7094 electronic digital computer and realized directly as a graphical representation of a player piano roll on a CALCOMP plotter." Meanwhile, a soprano is declaiming arias and a drummer is pounding a dance band beat, while someone else is snoring on stage. All this just goes on until the speaker's feigned death ends it all. For my taste it was all too easy in conception and sloppy in execution. (November 3, 1968)

The American Tradition—Performance (1967[1972])

"Americans may realize that scrambling after the obvious in art is a losing game."—Manny Farber, "Underground Films" (1957)

[NOTE: Statements between brackets were added in 1972.]

Few pieties of serious critical opinion go as rarely questioned as the judgment that theater is America's most deficient art. It is an indictment so easily accepted that when critics dismiss even the best of Broadway, or when Robert Brustein explains, "Why American Plays Are Not Literature," most of us, let me bet, grunt with perfunctory agreement. On second thought, however, I have come to believe that Brustein's idea of theater, expressed both in that essay and in his books, is as needlessly limited as his criticism, for only during certain historical periods has theater been primarily tied to literature. The primitive theater was closer to rituals that were better expressed in human pantomime than in speech, which was rarely used at all; and this broader definition of that word survives to this day, when we sometimes speak of "theater" as existing as soon as some people perform for the benefit of others—whether in an auditorium, on the streets, or under the sky.

What makes Brustein's discontent irrelevant is that it is based upon a European notion that theater *ought* to be literature, rather than upon an unencumbered observation of American experience. As native scholars have persistently discovered, the old arts tend to assume new forms in the new world. For instance, our most successful artistic fusions of music, plot, dance, and speech have occurred not in opera, but in the indigenous genre of musical comedy. This observation suggests, in turn, that just as such European ideals for novelistic fiction as the accumulation of realistic detail and the accurate portrayal of manners are irrelevant to our own principal fictional traditions of gothic symbolism and mythic romance, so perhaps are English and French concepts of drama equally irrelevant to our appreciation and criticism of American theater.

An alternative thesis, which I should like to propose, holds that what theatrical genius we have had in America gravitates not to formal theater or literary drama, but to informal theater, where the performer is the dominant figure, if not the director and the author too. In the nineteenth century, as Constance Rourke so vividly notes in *American Humor* (1931), "Americans had in fact emerged as a theatrical race," which went so frequently to the theater that scores of itinerant players flourished. "No [significant literary] drama came out of this broad movement," she notes, for the liveliest theater was, instead, minstrel shows and very short plays, gently blasphemous adaptations of Shakespeare, and scenes from the classics which served as display vehicles for well-known actors. Sketches satirizing current foibles were popular; so were stand-up comics such as William E. Burton and John Brougham, who burlesqued the public personalities of the time. What all these theatrical forms had in common, of course, was an emphasis upon performance values over literary. "The first American playwrights could think of nothing less to compose than Shakespearean tragedies in blank verse," sneers Harold Rosenberg in *The Tradition of the New* (1959). "Had it not been for a will to bad art in order to satisfy the appetites of the street, the American theater would never have come into being."

"Now the theatrical, as opposed to the dramatic," Ms. Rourke continues, "is full of experiment, finding its way to audiences by their quick responses and rejections; its measure is human, not literary." For artistic precedents, this sort of theater is more indebted to the continental renaissance tradition of *commedia del l'arte*, for instance, than Elizabethan drama (even though Shakespeare himself was by trade an actor). To Ms. Rourke, however, this American informal theater "was conspiring toward the removal of all alien traditions, out of delight in pure destruction or as preparation for new growth." Paradoxically, the American plays of the nineteenth century, which long ago passed out of collective memory, are still preserved in print, for scholars and students to examine. The actual performances of informal theater are, in contrast, lost of us forever, remembered only in literary evocations and second-hand imitations, by now mostly on film. The tragedy is that pure theatrical genius, unlike dramatic literature, cannot be effectively reproduced in another medium; and even film, which offers the closest semblance, is finally too two-dimensional, as well as formally fixed, to evoke the incomparable depth and electric communication of a brilliant live performance. Plays can be read, but theater must be seen and heard.

Early in this century, the principal heir to this native theatrical tradition was vaudeville, a hybrid performance format that could encompass, as Albert F. McLean writes in *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (1965), "just about every form of entertainment known to man"—a gamut that ran

from satirists to magicians and included playlets. As late as the 1920s, even such discriminating critics as H. L. Mencken and Edmund Wilson often found more artful and lively performance in vernacular theater than in the work of native playwrights. Wilson, for one, not only wrote appreciatively of Harry Houdini, but he once recommended "The Minsky Brothers' Follies as still among the most satisfactory shows in town." The American cultural truth appears to be that out of sub-artistic purposes and "vernacular" aspirations will occasionally come works that discerning minds subsequently identify as the best native architecture, the best industrial design, and even the best theater.

After World War I, the work of Eugene O'Neill gave American literary theater its first claim to high excellence, a claim that would later be revived early in Tennessee Williams' and Arthur Miller's careers and then, more faintly, with Edward Albee. In the twenties, coincidentally, many of the featured stage performers entered the movies, which, as Harris Dienstfrey notes, began three decades before "as a turn in vaudeville." These sometime vaudevillians created a cinema where, again in contrast to European practice, performers often become the primary element—the Marx Brothers, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin. The last not only acted in his films but he produced and directed them, sometimes composing the accompanying music as well. Filmmaking did not, however, completely assimilate the performance tradition, which persisted in live theatrical circumstances around the country.

The greatest theater of the thirties, I understand, came not from the play-oriented Group Theater, whose history several memoirs have transformed into myth, but in Olsen and Johnson's mixed-means *Hellzapoppin* (1938) and from Orson Welles' Mercury Theater, which emphasized performance possibilities over loyalty to any text. Like the nineteenth century itinerants, Welles even rewrote classic works for the sake of a spectacular performance. Indicatively, one of the greatest films of this period, *Citizen Kane* (1940), had Wisconsin-born Welles, perhaps the sole living native theatrical genius, as its star, its director, and its co-author too. Performance theater, needless to say perhaps, has usually been more popular than literary in America.

In 1947, the novelist and esteemed theater critic Stark Young, his literary biases notwithstanding, judged that Martha Graham's choreography was "the most important lesson for our theater that we now have," and two years later Eric Bentley, then an assertive young man, identified the best theater then current in New York as José Limon's *The Moor's Pavanne*. In my own short theater-going life, the past decade, the best native works I found were, first, the Living Theater's productions of *The Connection* (1959) and *The Brig* (1963), both of which haunt me to this day. In those pieces, the requirements of effective performance all but suppress

the script, so that more than one critic has questioned whether the director Judith Malina or the respective playwrights, Jack Gelber and Kenneth H. Brown, should deserve credit as the true "author" of the performance. Indeed, in The Living Theater's most recent productions-in-exile—beginning with *Frankenstein* (1965)—the directors have pursued the inevitable result of their predilections and have become the sole authors of the evening's performances. Into this performance tradition also fall recent radical "street events," which incidentally echo, in more ways than one, the eminently theatrical Boston Tea Party.

My other most satisfactory and memorable experiences in recent American theater have come in those activities often lumped under the term "happenings," which, as not all examples utilized chance developments, I prefer to call "the theatre of mixed means." This new theatrical art, let me suggest, is the contemporary heir to the performance tradition of American theater; for not only is an author usually his or her own director and performer but various forms of communication are also employed—sound, movement, film, sculpture, odor—to create a hybrid field of presentational activity. If speech is used at all, either it is not coherent enough to carry expository meaning, or it functions as an ironic background.

Rather than linear narrative, the new theater presents a succession of sequences that relate to one another in various ways. In this respect, the form of a mixed-means piece is closer to vaudeville than literary theater; for in the former, as McLean writes, "Not the happy ending but the happy moment [i.e., ideally at every point in the performance], not the fulfillment at the end of some career rainbow but a sensory, physically satisfying here-and-now were the results of a vaudeville show." Also in contrast to literary theater, whose proscenium situation focuses the audience's perception, most new theater creates several lines of activity, all of which usually diffuse the spectator's attention. Whereas the most prominent American playwrights have been melodramatists, to various degrees of heavy-handedness, performance theater generally avoids such focused and dichotomous (i.e., melodramatic) interpretations of experience; and like the best American fiction, it similarly eschews any naturalistic claims.

In the past two years, the most significant experiences I have had in theatrical situations came at mixed-means performances, such as Merce Cunningham's *Winterbranch* (1964), John Cage's *Variations VII* (1966), Cage and Cunningham's *Variations V* (1965), Claes Oldenburg's *Moviehouse* (1965), Key Dewey and Terry Riley's *Sames* (1966), La Monte Young's *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* (1964), Meredith Monk's *16 Millimetre Earrings* (1966), Ann Halprin's *Parades and Changes* (version VII, 1967), Robert Whitman's *Prune. Flat.* (1965), Mimi Garrard's *Flux* (1967), USCO's kinetic environment at New York's Riverside Museum (May 1966), and Kenneth King's *M-O-O-N-B-R-A-I-N with SuperLecture*

(1966). [More recent masterworks in this vein include the Performance Group's *Dionysius in '69* (1968), Cage's *HPSCHD* (1969), Mimi Garrard's *Frieze* (1969), Meredith Monk's *Juice* (1969), Robert Wilson's *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* (1969) and *Deafman's Glance* (1971), James Cunningham's *Lauren's Dream* (1971), Alwin Nikolais's *Scenario* (1972), and Murray Louis's *Hoopla* (1972).] All of these theatrical presentations, in my judgment, more successfully exploit the possibilities of the performer-audience relationship than any literary drama I saw in this period. Precisely this kind of directly engaging, immediately responsive, possibly unpredictable communication is indigenous to live performance; it cannot be duplicated in the mechanical presentation media.

To be more specific, all these performances effectively engaged my attention. They were more interesting, not only because their patterns of activity were significantly different from run-of-the-mill theater but also because their themes, in the intellectual sense, were more relevant to my experience. Most also offered a more expansive and multi-sensory perceptual experience than the highly focused presentation of television or traditional literary theater, and that impression too reveals their superior exploitation of esthetic values indigenous to live performance. Finally, all of these works were more responsible to the act of inviting an audience to observe one's latest artistic activity, and that after all is precisely what *theater*, as distinct from reading, is fundamentally all about.

Contrary to the smug assertions of uncomprehending critics, the theater of mixed means is full of serious meanings; but in contrast to literary theater, which depends primarily upon language to convey its themes, the new theater communicates through kinetic arrays of images and movements, all of which, in realized work, evoke some kind of coherence. As great choreography has long demonstrated, words are not necessarily the most effective medium for profoundly articulating either meaning or emotion. In mixed-means theater, messages usually lie beyond the defining power of words, which can only sketchily outline the thematic terrain—as is also true in the criticism of other non-literary art; but certain works suggest meanings that can be reasonably summarized in sentences. Claes Oldenburg's *Moviehouse* suggests, among other themes, that the miscellaneous activities in the seats of a movie theater can be more interesting than the focused actions on the screen. Robert Whitman's *Prune. Flat.* demonstrates that kinetic images appear more real than static ones, regardless of whether they are filmed or live. USCO's environmental pieces usually present a plethora of universally basic images and symbols, portraying mankind's common humanity through ecumenically comprehensible "languages." Carolee Schneemann's *Water Light/Water Needle* (1967) realizes a polymorphously perverse mono-sexual utopia similar to that imagined in Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death*. Nonetheless,

precisely because the new theater of spectacle and space employs different means of communication, it deals with a world of themes and experiences unknown to literary drama.

Such a large artistic gap exists between the theater of mixed means and literary drama that authors of the former often doubt if their presentations should be regarded as "theater" or whether their work has any relevance at all to conventional stagework. Of the artists mentioned above, only Ken Dewey [and some members of the Performance Group] has had much training in literary theater, or regards himself as working out of a distinct theatrical tradition; but when Dewey's own work became too eccentric for the repertory company that once employed him, he dropped out. Cunningham, Halprin, Monk, King, and Mimi Garrard were all originally dancers; John Cage and La Monte Young were initially composers; Oldenberg, Schneemann, and Whitman were first known as visual artists. The three core members of USCO—Gerd Stern, Steve Durkee, and Michael Callahan—were, at their beginnings, respectively a poet, a painter, and an electrical engineer.

Not one of these artists finds formal literary theater worth much of his or her time. Instead, they go to movies, to concerts of dance and music, and to performances of mixed-means theater. Oldenberg for one confesses a particular liking for old American burlesque. Cunningham and Cage's *Variations V* could be regarded as an American-type opera—a potpourri of various arts and their practitioners. Moreover, behind this new theater stand many artistic influences, as well as particular images, drawn from more mundane arts, if not from non-artistic activities. USCO's environments, for instance, are surely indebted to the esthetic example of a sublime church service; Allan Kaprow insists upon an analogy between his orthodox "happenings" and children's games. Just as Merce Cunningham as a dancer probably owes more to Fred Astaire than to classic ballet, so his *Field Dances* (1963) takes more of its esthetic cues from football games than anything previously seen on a "dance" stage.

Why should the excellences of American theater be so radically unlike the best of Europe? Let me suggest that the causes lie partially in our perceptibly different attitudes toward theater; for the fact that we spell the word differently—*er*, rather than *re*—symbolically indicates larger discrepancies. When Americans, both highbrow and low, gather together, they feel more comfortable in informal atmospheres—in sports arenas and at parties. "Legitimate theater" they regard as a forbidding temple, to be entered only on special (and expensive) occasions. Another possible explanation is that our primarily puritan religious traditions have inhibited the development of serious public presentations. In contrast, the English have a more intimate feeling toward highbrow environments, such as theaters or art museums. Less awed by them than Americans are, the

English regard public cultural activities as natural extensions of their everyday lives. Not only do they go to the theater more often than Americans, but many of them enjoy regularly gathering with friends to recite plays—a custom that in my experience is all but unknown in America. In contrast to Europe again, America's best formal arts—fiction, poetry, painting, and the essay—are those that are privately created and privately appreciated. Let me also suggest that the following pair of statistical comparisons exemplify larger cultural tastes. While American concert attendance is less *per capita* than European, we purchase more records on the average. Serious music we prefer to enjoy at home, while we favor informal arts in the company of strangers. Perhaps then the answer to Robert Brustein's condescendingly European question—"Why American Plays Are Not Literature?"—is nothing more complicated than this: "Because they are American."

These observations imply that much of the recent effort to rehabilitate American theater may have been hopelessly misguided. Foolishly perhaps, we have come to admire directors who write serious critical essays, as if their haughty prose signified a greater theatrical talent or a deeper commitment; but all too often, such director-critics field leaden productions of European plays. Similarly, American foundations have recently disbursed generous sums to scores of playwrights, novelists, and poets to *write* for the theater, while one program required only that novelists and poets just attend (!) performances and rehearsals. All these gestures presume, I think mistakenly, that literary folk should infuse even more literature into a theater that is already ponderously burdened by literary baggage; for as should have been predictable in advance, these efforts have so far borne little fruit. In contrast, no major foundation, until recently, ever aided Merce Cunningham, whose financial position, despite his éminence, is still precarious; and I know of no creator of mixed-means theater who has received grants for his or her theater work. (Most of them, instead, do other kinds of art to support their theatrical activity.) Likewise, the well-intentioned efforts to create "a Negro theater" disregard the fact that a perfectly excellent one already exists, in vaudeville forms, displayed regularly in such places as New York's Apollo Theater or by the marching bands of certain black southern colleges, as well as in rock and roll performances. Only ignorance of such traditions could enable anyone to say that Black America has no theatrical culture of substance. Indeed, to paraphrase Constance Rourke, Black Americans, as hyper–Americans, tend to be very theatrical people.

Let me also suggest that so much of what passes for "theater criticism" today is similarly half-blind. How can so many critics today pretend to write definitively upon the state of American stage art without mentioning the theater of mixed means, or at least dropping evidence that they

have seen its major performances. Too much of, say, Brustein's critical writing about American theater represents the wrong-headed attempts of "professors of dramatic literature" to cope with a theater that at its best today is not literature at all—indeed, never has been, and perhaps never will be. More often than not, such critics win the admiration of literary editors who have little connection with, or interest in, theatrical experience, or are scarcely responsive to the possible excitement of live performances. Perhaps we should recognize once and for all that the European ideal of literary theater, like continental notions of opera and the novel of manners, will not thrive on these shores. Just as Americans created their indigenous "opera" in musical comedies, vaudeville, and even Cagean spectaculars, so we excell at our own kind of theater—not of literature, but of performance.

Notes on Art Performances, II.

DAVID JACOBS

Wah Ching Box Works Assyrian Air Fair, Baby (Allan D'Arcangelo's studio). Though Allan Kaprow invited me, with a scrawled "Do come!" on an announcement, I was surprised to find so few people attending. An innocent middle-aged lady from *Life*'s Modern Living Department was there, along with her photographer boyfriend. She said that David Bourdon had told her to call him if the performance turned out to be good. Like other examples recently, it made me realize how snotty and unadventurous the established mixed-means practitioners (and their admirers) are about auditing others who work in the medium, others who are not their intimate friends. Jacobs worked with sculptural materials pumped by air—some belch regularly, others bounce in place, some occasionally let off noises. He skillfully introduced his anthropomorphic figures one at a time. With coherence both visual and aural, I liked what I saw, however thinking that these machines would be more effective in an environmental situation, with the sculptures surrounding the spectators, instead of sitting before us. The noises were too loud for my taste. (December 1, 1967)

VASILY KANDINSKY

The Yellow Sound (Guggenheim Museum). I liked the idea of finally realizing the script that Kandinsky wrote in 1909 and published in the *Blaue Reiter Almanac* (1912), accompanied by his essay on dramatic theory. It is my suspicion that Harris and Roz Barron, along with their Zone Theater of the Visual, took some liberties with the text. The piece is divided into five "pictures" and two larger parts. The first is predominantly abstract, as two large head shapes move across the stage, sometimes with three geometric shapes and a large female figure. What's interesting, I suppose, is that the abstracts and the anthropomorphic shapes have equal status. In another sequence, out of a black abstract begins to emerge a phallic shape whose vulgarity I found incongruous. It was a good idea to have people move these abstract objects, and I liked the lighting. However, Gerald Shapiro's score was not only uninteresting, but it became offensively loud toward the end. (May 17, 1972)

KAZIMIR PASSION

Kazimir Passion (The Kitchen). The poster was striking: On a bright red background was the logo of Coca-Cola with the familiar profile of Lenin and a quote purportedly attributed to him: "It's the real thing." The performance opened with loud Soviet music. Then came a home-made film about a figure wearing a box over his head, and painted on the front of that box was the face of Lenin. The film portrays this figure walking about New York—directing traffic, entering SoHo galleries, etc. Next was a parody speech in English by Victor Tupitsyn, all within a four-part format titled ("Solemn Opening of the Communist Congress." Next was the ballet in which the figure playing Lenin, his boxed head intact, comes on stage while a ballet dancer moves around him. The comic highpoint is a speech by Alexander Kosolapov in which he screams Russian phrases and then waits for English translations. His epithets are exaggerated insistence that artists must be ideologically correct. The mostly emigré audience laughs twice—first for the Russian versions, then for the English. For the finale, Alexander Drewchin, who plays Lenin, comes out looking like Brezhnev, with a sickle in one hand and a sledgehammer in the other; generally a strong performer, he does a little dance. Slides on two screens, and in the corners of the stage, add to the satire. The whole is charmingly ironic, in the tradition, familiar by now, of Komar-Melamid paintings, if slight. The problem is that such humor is too easy in America, too easy to appreciate as well as to do, no less for Russians than Americans, no matter how difficult it may have been in Russia. That is to say that their avant-garde resembles our old hat, alas. (November 7, 1982)

KENNETH KING

Blow-Out (Bridge Theater). This is just a solo excerpt from what was, I'm told, a longer and more exciting dance for two people that Kenneth did at Judson Church some weeks ago. When I first met him, at a Christmas party last December, I thought him intelligent, ambitious and discriminating. As a choreographer he is as bright as bright can be. Here he wears a black leather jacket, tight black pants and shades; on his hands are rubber gloves with elastic strings running from each of his fingers to moorings on both side walls. The opening music is some Vivaldi, I believe; and the performance closes with the same piece. In the middle is a constant beeping sound. His feet permanently in place, Kenneth does a series of slowly evolving contortions that, juxtaposed against the much faster sound, create enormous dramatic tension. When the music resumes, he does some frenetic motions that include him shaking his long hair. I'm not sure what the piece is all about; I wish I had seen the entire work from which it is taken. What I did like is the excellent use of kinetic space on this small stage, essentially at the end of a standard-width brownstone. Among the

most exciting performances I'd seen all year, it reminded me, especially in its atmosphere and juxtapositions of pace, of Merce Cunningham's *Winterbranch.* (June 9, 1966)

M-o-o-n-b-r-a-i-n with SuperLecture (Gate Theater). For almost a year now I've regarded Kenneth King as the most intelligent and promising of the younger dancers. Whereas his *Blow-Out* was among the best mixed-means pieces I'd seen all last year, this piece ranks as the best seen this year by someone trained in dance. King opens with a film (whose imagery I've forgotten) and a sound collage possibly on a tape loop. Then he emerges in the costume of an old man, which he proceeds to remove piece by piece, occasionally donning parts of the outfit later in the piece. Halfway through starts a tape by King, a "SuperLecture," that contains a witty discussion of his artistic feelings as well as occasional parody of both James Joyce and Marshall McLuhan (reflecting particularly the strategy of puns as insight). I'd like to see this alone in print [and did reprint it in *The Young American Writers*, my anthology, 1967]; for in the area I am most competent to judge —prose style—King's achievement is enormously original. My major criticism of the performance is that elements did not sufficiently interact—what did that slow film of a cobra devouring a rat have to do with anything else? I must see it again and take closer notes. (November 11, 1966)

M-o-o-n-b-r-a-i-n with SuperLecture (Gate Theater). This time I managed to scribble sentences from his stunning prose, which I would now describe as taking off from all sorts of styles, ranging from McLuhan to advertising: "Mr. Clean has become everybody's super-secret rough-fantasy fuck." "That's what I like about circular arguments; everything connects." "The tape recorder abolishes point of view in the dance as the camera abolishes it in the novel." "Kant began blowing minds and reprogramming circuits." The final line is, "I hope that when the lecture is over, like it is right now, everybody will go home and forget about it." Again I could not find any principle to tie the pieces together, but now I'm not so sure that everything should make a clean package. A rat appears in the film and at another point King dons a rat costume; however, the piece is scarcely about rats or rat behavior. Even in the development of the piece, King consistently denies all the roles he appears to be playing; and the result of all his activity is a rather nonsensical collage—a kind of dance of the absurd. The piece defied my expectations, largely because I had not before seen a choreographer use his or her speech as a score. (November 1966)

Print-Out (Judson Memorial Church). This piece opens with a heavily repetitious Bob Dylan song, and then Kenneth on tape reads some of his own densely Joycean prose. Given the surface difficulty, King was wise to

project his words onto the wall to the left side of the audience (itself seated at the end of the same gymnasium in which some of the early "Happenings" took place). After about a half-hour of this, Kenneth's associate plays various kinds of music on a record player. From time to time Kenneth emerges from behind a white screen, suspended from a basket at the opposite end, to do some light lifts that draw attention to his flickering feet, while his long hair flops. Toward ten o'clock he ran along the right wall of the gym, took a quick bow before the audience, darted behind the screen to get his briefcase, and walked out a side door. Those who remained behind clapped in his absence. Throughout the piece, only a candle was flickering; it was the liveliest thing going. Michael Kirby afterwards commended Kenneth for having the guts to present something so minimal; my girlfriend thought he was simply out of his mind. I was relaxed enough to feel comfortable, though I hardly liked the piece. I think Kenneth has probably gone about as far as he can in this minimal direction, but he may well surprise me. (May 27, 1967)

A Show (Judson Dance Theater). In the reference he wanted for a fellowship, I wrote that Kenneth has the most unerring capacity to realize a crazy idea; but here I think he misses, probably because he did not give his idea the full consideration it deserved. The piece opens with a man sitting in a chair with gauze wrapped around his head. Identified as "Sergei Alexandrovitch, the young Russian dancer (from Leningrad) who was discovered by Zora A. Zash," he looks like Kenneth but turns out to be someone else. A woman looking like a Beckett bum comes out and moves around him, her movements halting and deliberate. Much later, after Kenneth himself enters from the very back of the hall, the purportedly Russian figure exits. Then Kenneth would from time to time do those exercise steps familiar from the Judson-gym version of *Print-Out*. He moves so beautifully that watching him dance is always a pleasure, but I got the impression that he was improvising for as long as Jeff Norwalk would play various records. The show went on far too long, and many people left before its end. (January 4, 1968)

Farewell Performance (Judson Dance Theater). The program says that the performance is produced by "Mansion House" and that it is dedicated to "Jain Air." While a farewell for Zora A. (for Astor) Zash, it becomes an occasion to introduce another of Kenneth's characters (or personas), Yen Ying. This piece has considerably more dancing than its immediate predecessor a year ago (though the two were far too similar for comfort), and it is better. It has a tape with a fine monologue delivered by Kenneth, in language more flaccid than that in his *Print-Out*; perhaps it depends too much upon plot for me to follow with comfort. (In fact, as I write these

notes, I remember little about the tape.) Kenneth's theme, here and elsewhere, appears to be the ambiguity of appearance and reality, as even the sex of his character remains unclear; and at one point he speaks of wanting "to make himself known by making himself unknowable." Of course, the assumption of this piece, like everything else Kenneth has done these past two years, is the end of dance in this multimedia age. "Remember the warning: We are touching the beginning. We're going backwards." Another theme is that the source, or instrument, of language is the body. Kenneth dresses himself up in a variety of costumes, including one consisting of padding that transforms him into a fat man with a narrow head. This piece began at 5:00 P.M., just before sunset, partly to incorporate its changing effect upon the beautiful stained glass in the Judson nave. He exited by following a beautiful woman, who was dressed in a black pants suit and carrying a light, while the loudspeakers played Richard Strauss' *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, a musical characterization recently memorialized by Stanley Kubrick's *2001.* Kenneth crowds his surprisingly large audience into the area under the balcony and then hogged too much of the floor space for himself, creating an extremely stuffy atmosphere. Not only did I nearly fall asleep, but fellow critics left prematurely. (March 9, 1969)

The Phenomenology of Movement (Part I: Being in Perpetual Motion) (Eisner and Lubin Auditorium, N.Y.U.). For the past two years, Kenneth has been doing "terminal" pieces about the impossibility of dance in our time; and since this theme would obviously lead to a dead end, he got out of it by introducing personas who have other preoccupations: Zora A. Zash, Sergei Alexandrovitch, Yin Yang and now Don Wand. Here he has also begun a new piece that will apparently have many parts—"The Phenomenology of Movement," which is also, if I remember correctly, the title of a manuscript he mentioned last year. In this work, parts of the text are read on tape while Kenneth and Ann Danhoff, a skinny voluptuous creature, do light steps across the floor. Unfortunately, she isn't quite as lithe as he is; and whenever they move together, her clumsiness becomes too evident. The patter is full of puns and allusions (that generally don't make sense to me), and it seemed intent upon going on forever. Yvonne Rainer left around 10:30, and I departed about 11:00. When did it end? (October 24, 1969)

The Phenomenology of Movement: Part III (in progress) (Metropolitan Duane-Methodist Church). This extends the piece whose first part was given last October at N.Y.U., where Kenneth plays a tape recording of passages from his manuscript "The Phenomenology of Movement," while sporadically dancing his flutter steps across the floor. Again, Ann Danhoff did her best to keep apace, and she is clearly getting better. The only punc-

tuation in this repetitious structure is the slow movement of a wheelchair across the gymnasium space, from back right to left front. Then Elaine Luthy, dressed in black, gets out of the chair and slowly walks off stage. I couldn't follow King's philosophical text, and I wonder if it is conducive to hearing, rather than reading. This time I stayed to the end of the performance, which ran only two hours. The piece is dedicated to Kenneth's neighbor, the dance critic Edwin Denby. Though Kenneth insisted in the program that it not be written about, I would betray my own experience (as well as my admiration for his work) if I didn't. (May 15, 1970)

Inadmissleable Evidentdance (The CIA Scandal) (Washington Square Methodist Church). In Kenneth's annual performance, the only real changes from last year were that the second half of his tape contains a linguistically straightforward visionary polemic and that in place of Ann Danhoff was Elaine Luthy, an attractive blond woman who tried to do Kenneth's steps but seemed constantly about to fall on her face. Kenneth himself moved as mellifluously as ever, within his limited choreographic vocabulary. Though the program announcement promised only two hours, the performance actually went on towards midnight, without any intermission, driving even Kenneth's loyal friends (e.g., Edwin Denby, myself) out of the hall. The talk developed an analogy between the CIA and the Great Answering Agency, which is some kind of superduper communications machine. It is my fear that Kenneth may have overtaxed his fans' accumulating patience. (May 14, 1971)

Metagexis (Video Exchange Theater). This continues in the vein Kenneth developed long ago—he dances to a tape of himself reading a text that is witty, pretentious, and ultimately incomprehensible. Meanwhile, he appears in outrageous costumes, first as an old man and then with a bandana over his head. I'm less impressed by Kenneth's pieces than I used to be, in part because I currently find his program notes far more interesting, as art, than his show. Like the performance itself, Kenneth's writing is obscure, frequently incoherent, fragmentary, goofy, and allusive. His choreography consists of shaking one's limbs loosely while spinning through a circular pattern. During the first act, Kenneth performs with one woman who struck me as superior to the two who appeared in the second act. This is the first time I noticed that Kenneth never dances with other men. (April 4, 1973)

Praxiomatics (597 Broadway). What distinguishes Kenneth from other mixed-means practitioners is his use of language—not common language, like most "artists" would write, but uncommon philosophical language that he customarily puts on tape that plays while he dances. This time he

also did some live recitation, including a brilliant duet with Lynn Varney. His writing is full of neologisms that remind me that Kenneth has been the principal practitioner of conceptual dance. As usual, he moved spectacularly well, as did Liz Pasquale, who had appeared before in Robert Wilson's *Joseph Stalin* and who reminds me of Ann Danhoff in both her physique and characteristic movements. This text came from *Time Capsule ("The Yellow Book")*. I wish I could see it again. (May 25, 1974)

________ **and Dancers/Company**. *How To Write (Digital Picnic)* (St. Marks) is described in the program as a process-generated dance based upon texts by Gertrude Stein, which Kenneth read on his own for the composer William-John Tudor to process. However, Kenneth's tape, made at home, was so riddled with sibliants that Tudor had to run it separately. The dance itself is filled with marvelous bits, including the recital of Steinian texts, which are barely audible, in part due to the difficult acoustics of the space. Mary Lisa Burns is a particularly accomplished dancer. My notes tell me that the second part represented more style, more comedy, more wit, and more departure from previous King work. My other impressions are that the choreography is limited and that Kenneth still does his characteristic moves better than dancers half his age. *Sooner or Later*, identified as a premiere, has six video monitors in addition to live processing equipment and marvelous costuming; but the video imagery becomes redundant, in part because it couldn't compete with the live dancing. Tudor's music is, as always, sonically rich. Here too I have a sense of the beginnings of a departure that I hope Kenneth will pursue. (April 11, 1987)

________ **and Dancers/Company**. *If Iphigenia* (St. Marks Church). Whereas Kenneth's pieces have customarily been verbal and witty, this was, instead, an evening-length super-elegant work choreographed to a "new age" electronic tape, apparently for processed voices, by Constance Denby, *Novus Magnificat—Through the Stargate.* (The process of choreographing to music, rather than speech or film, also represents a departure for Kenneth.) I found *If Iphigenia* histrionic, as though its choreography were responding excessively to the music; and the shiny costumes credited to A. Christina Giannini seemed similarly extravagant. The choreography I didn't understand and suspect that it reflects a historic by-way previously unfamiliar to me, perhaps Doris Humphrey. Anne Lall takes the role of "Figure of Iphigenia," while Kenneth himself plays "Figure of Orestes." As she is beautiful, at times reminiscent of Carolyn Brown, this may be the first time that Kenneth as a performer didn't upstage his company. Nonetheless, I prefer his other kind of work. (March 6, 1988)

Dancing Wor(l)ds (Dance Theatre Workshop). He did several solos, remaining continuously on stage, even changing his costumes before us. *Patrick's Fourth Dansing Dance* is a straight solo, a premiere "for Isadora," to the fourth movement of Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. Though his movements are unfailingly elegant, gone is the flutter step that marked his choreography for so many years. Next is *Word Rain* in which he recites tongue twisters as he moves; this remains my favorite, if only for the mouth-body virtuosity. Most of the later pieces involve more talk than movement; he even revived *Mr. Pontease Tyak, Philosophy in a Nutshell or, Who's Kidding Whom?* from 1973, where he does riffs on philosophical concepts and language in an accent that is a wholly affected mix of Slavic, German and Yiddish sounds. The part after the intermission was devoted to *The Tallulah Deconstruction*, a tour de force in which he mimics Tallulah Bankhead as she gets drunk. I think this tiresome, even though Kenneth loves it (and is apparently making it his major current project). In the end, the evening seemed to be a display of unique virtuosity, which doesn't mean as much as it used to. In the post-dance discussion, Kenneth suggested that everything he did was dance, even the writing, much as I think that everything I do is writing, even my videos, both of us standing in contrast to Cage's polyartistic synthesis of esthetic nonhierarchy in several media. (Feb. 13, 1992)

MICHAEL KIRBY

Bleecker Street Alogical (Loft Theatre Workshop). Michael Kirby is one of the more extraordinary people I know. In addition to teaching basic English courses at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, he has written a book on Happenings and one of the great essays on the esthetics of the avant-garde (collected in his newer book); he also makes a sort of sculpture and produces theater. This piece starts out as a series of skits performed by seven young actors, most of them St. Francis students. This opening sequence becomes a fixed body of material that is subsequently manipulated. Each set of lines is read by other actors who declaim them in radically different ways, and sometimes in a different order, until at one point an actor begins to declaim the play's concordance of words in alphabetical order. The evening moves from simple realism to complex fancy, only to close with the available lines recited to musical accompaniment. The result is quite stunning; I could easily see it again, even though I know in advance how the play works. I also see how it could be a very useful pedagogical exercise for students preparing to make avant-garde theater. (April 25, 1970)

Eight People (Common Ground). In the years since I wrote about him before, Kirby got his doctorate, moved first to City University and then

to N.Y.U., where he became chairman of the graduate drama department and editor of *The Drama Review*, his personality changing from bohemian to academic. He nonetheless formed "A Structuralist Workshop" to perform Structuralist Theater. This play opens with his rendering the manifesto that is also published in the program. The radical assumption is that the revelation of structure can be the most important element in theater, relegating "any and all other aspects of a performance to lesser positions." The play itself is dry, portraying obscure interactions among the eight performers, often speaking languages other than English. I sensed the working out of a charted plan that, had it been published in the program, would have become more clear. Given my own conceptually similar efforts in fiction I feel close to both the intentions and deficiences of this work. (March 9, 1975)

Photoanalysis (Structuralist Workshop). One clever theatrical move involved the use of slides as a visual prop, and the play's theme is the various ways by which three speakers relate to the slides on the screen behind them. The man in the middle, expertly played by Ted Hoffman, clearly misunderstands the scenes behind him. The responses of the other characters are less definite, in part because the women players are less expert, but also because they were evidently distracted by the awful rock music coming from a neighboring loft. I was reminded first of the objectivism of Alain Robbe-Grillet, especially in the characters' observations of photographs, and then of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* in establishing narrators whose perceptions we understand to be defective, and finally of Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." Since the good idea appeared to go on too long, perhaps Kirby should consider doing a series of shorter works, each based on a different structuralist idea. At least in presenting his alternative esthetic, shorter plays would be more effective. (November 20, 1976)

BILLY KLÜVER, et al.

Nine Evenings: Theatre and Engineering (69th Regiment Armory). Not until the last evening did I think the nine-act show might be considered a success, for this time the machinery worked well enough to give everyone a good idea of how fine this whole series could have been. Until then the technology had been so deficient that nearly every performance included the experience of technological failure along with whatever the nine participating artists might have intended. Yet none of the artists took the expectation of mechanical disaster as an excuse not to do either of the two performances scheduled of his or her piece. After the last performance, the artists blamed the engineers for the general sense of failure; I didn't speak to any of the scientists involved at that time. However, back on the fourth

night, one of them told me that only on the third evening were they able to use some master machine; prior to that all circuitry was done by hand. (I think I heard that correctly, though it sounds embarrassingly amateur.)

What makes the failure more distressing is that the levels of technology employed seemed neither very high nor very contemporary; most everything used here was available a quarter century ago. Another problem was that the technology was not sufficiently dramatized, because the processes they chose to use were needlessly slow. I suppose the fundamental success was earning public respect for effort—that the collaboration between Bell Labs scientists and prominent artists actually came off and then that so many people showed up to watch nine artists publicly work out their collaborative processes. The largest crowd came to see Rauschenberg, whose first performance was nearly mobbed, thanks in part, *mea culpa*, to my own feature article about him in the *New York Times Magazine*.

My own favorite was Cage's *Variations VII*, which was the only one not only to make the whole place jump with joy but also to allow for technological failure. He telephoned out to several sound sources, such as a crowded restaurant, the mynah bird cage at the Bronx Zoo, a whisper telephone attached to a vacuum cleaner, and simply kept the lines open throughout the evening. He then had aleatory devices for changing the volumes of individual incoming sounds and thus continuously rearticulating the outgoing mix. Thus, even if individual circuits broke down, as they probably did, there would always be enough sound coming in for his work to succeed. (Cage's strategy is elegantly simple: If you know you need at least eight distinct sources to make your piece work, plan to have ten or twelve.) After that, I liked Deborah Hay's piece, although its use of technology was minimal, and finally Robert Whitman's and Robert Rauschenberg's. David Tudor's was, I was told, much better on the night I didn't see it. Both Alex Hay's and Öyvind Fahlström's struck me as total bombs; Lucinda Childs's didn't jell. I would have rather seen certain mixed-means creators outside the Rauschenberg family use these Bell Lab machines (and technicians), but I suppose that those people who succeed in making the practical arrangements, as well they did, should have the spoils. (October 1966)

ALEKSEY KRUCHONYKH

Victory Over the Sun (Brooklyn Academy of Music), with music by Mikhail Matiushin; stage & costume designs by Kazimir Malevich. Originally produced and directed by Robert Benedetti for Cal Arts, for the LA County Museum of Art exhibition, *The Avant-Garde in Russia 1910–1930*, this climaxed one of those spotty "New Wave" seasons at BAM. I arrived five minutes late, to a theater where nothing before had started on time, and thus had to sit on the side and back for this terribly short produc-

tion. The costuming was incredibly inventive—with performers outfitted in geometric skeletons that stood out from their bodies and thus made them into something else, perhaps robots. Unfortunately, their lines were muffled, at least from where I was sitting, so that what I heard was neither coherent nor inspired nonsense. The music missed me. Most of the performers were students at Cal Arts a few years ago, reminding us that only universities have the resources to stage such historic recreations in America today. Who is this Benedetti, who has apparently had such a distinguished academic career—the Herbert Blau of his generation? Because the production was so short, and so odd, I would have felt more comfortable if it were done twice (as it should have been, given that nothing else was offered us); for I would now like to see it again. Perhaps there will someday be a videotape I could take home. (November 25, 1983)

KUSAMA

Self-Obliteration (Cooper Square Theater). A gossip columnist in the *Village Voice* has been giving his readers after-the-fact reports on Kusama's events in which she paints the bodies of naked men (and sometimes women). A *Newsweek* arts reporter told me of a performance around the corner from my house. Notwithstanding that the small theater was packed, the show was slow to start, even though five males were undressed and, so to speak, waiting (perhaps for a VIPublicist to arrive). Some undistinguished rock is playing loud enough for me to need to stuff my ears with tissue, while a rather contemplative film made by Kusama herself and also titled *Self-Obliteration* is projected onto a small frame in a sheet tacked up against the wall. Apparently, the appearance of five naked men waiting for a small Japanese woman to paint their bodies with dots is supposed to inspire some secondary phenomena, perhaps a girl or two joining the Dionysian scene; but nothing of that sort happens during this performance. Instead, a sixth kid, only the second uncircumcised, comes out strapped to a cross. Meanwhile, the two prettiest men start necking with each other on the theater's floor where most of the audience cannot see them. At one point, a black man enters, dressed approximately as a cop; but rather than strip down entirely, he wears canvas longjohns that enable him to lower his zipper and sometimes bare his sex. There are several ladies traveling in the entourage, helping set up the show; but none of them participates in the exhibitionistic action. It would have been interesting to see whether, as in Ann Halprin's piece, naked men would come to blend visually with naked women. Kusama had a reputation some years back as a creator of environments, some of which were reproduced in Allan Kaprow's book [*Assemblage, Environments & Happenings*]; but this sort of stunt won't get her recognition in any media heavier than *Newsweek*. (March 2, 1968)

Self-Obliteration (Fillmore East). The printed program acknowledges Kusama's obsessive environments from the fifties in the course of crediting her with "naked happenings" in which she gets numerous kids, most of them male and apparently homosexual, to strip naked while she paints them with polka dots. Though one heard at times cries of "strip Kusama" or even "fuck Kusama," she manages to remain fully clothed. On a stage far larger than where I saw Kusama before, participants mostly paint one another; the prima donna is a long-haired transvestite who strips down to bra and panties before revealing the absence of breasts. Towards the end, Kusama commands her group to lie down on the floor and kick their legs to the audience, revealing their assholes, which becomes the centerpiece of her show. In the background she runs several large projections, including one, perhaps predominant, of her own face and body fully clothed. This performance lost rhythm and ended rather quickly, to the smallest audience I've ever seen in this cavernous theater since it became the Fillmore East. The program note includes such statements as this from Kusama herself: "Self-destruction [not "Obliteration"] is the only way out—but after self-destruction comes Resurrection, a new life of oneness, peace and happiness with the other beings of the universe." Where and how she gets her performers to participate in such abnegation mystifies me. I assume some of them live around here [the East Village], even though none of their faces are familiar. (December 6, 1968)

STANLEY LANDSMAN, et al.

The Magic Theater (Automation House). I finally saw what I thought might be the most extraordinary collection of artistic environments and came away disappointed. James Seawright's *Electronic Peristyle* (1968), whose concept impressed me enormously, simply is not responsive enough to outside sounds for me to make much sense of it; I got the impression that some of the time the machinery wasn't working. Boyd Mefferd's *Strobe-Lighted Floor*, which also seemed conceptually impressive in conversation with the artist, was cancelled, because Automation House had only one-third the space of the Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, where this exhibition began. Charles Ross's *Prism Environment* is installed not to be an environment, which is to say an encompassing space, but, ugh, simply a window display. Terry Riley's *Time-Lag Accumulator* was also too obscure in practice, and Howard Jones's *Sonic Game Chamber* was just too slight, though his principle of making something that responds to the audience is conceptually superior to machines whose activity is autonomous. Robert Whitman's *Vibrating Mirror Room* is here not a room but two mylar surfaces, about three feet square, that vibrate in response to pulsating sound. If one is standing before it, his or her image also vibrates. The single most successful piece is Stanley Landsman's *Walk-In Chamber*, which extends

Landsman's favorite sculptural device for a "light box"—the illusion of infinite lights behind the glass. This is created by putting a mirror behind a row of lights and then a one-way mirror. By completely surrounding the viewer with eight such light boxes—around, above and beneath—Landsman creates the illusion of the viewer's being suspended in space. The only faults making the *Walk-In Chamber* less than an absolutely persuasive illusion are one's shadowy reflection on the glass and the fact that the lights tend to fall away in a regular order that is contrary to the chaos of the stars. (By turning the mirrors at slight angles, Landsman could have realized asymmetry.) As an effective static environment, especially in contrast to the kineticism elsewhere in the exhibition, the *Chamber* was a relaxing place (space) in which to sit. (1970)

LATERNA MAGIKA

(Expo '67, Montreal). The Laterna Magika of Prague was reportedly among the first to mix filmed images with live performers; and compared to American mixed-means performers, these Czechs integrate their elements with comparative slickness. Figures literally move in and out of the screen, more than once creating ambiguity about image and reality. The mood is comic, if not diversionary, as the film portrays the Laterna Magika itself coming to Montreal and then making a film there. Later, while a quintet plays music, a gaudily dressed conductor moves in and out of the screen. At times, the sound is shrewdly circulated throughout the large auditorium; more than once lights are projected out from the screen into the audience, their sources connected to the images on screen. The trouble with this Czech group is that, clever though individual gimmicks are, they hardly exploit the possibilities available in their medium. (September 1967)

TIMOTHY LEARY

The Reincarnation of Jesus Christ (Village Theater). This was the most pretentious farce I've seen all year. Leary's sermon, on behalf of his new religion, was facile in exposition, vulgar in tone, unenlightening in content, faggoty in delivery; nothing could have repelled me more. To make matters worse, the heralded "synchronized cinema" of Jackie Cassen and Rudi Stern consisted, no kidding, mostly of pictures of Leary himself chatting with admirers; the only departure came from using negative film as a variation to positive. The use of extrinsic lights was not imaginative. The music was repetitious guitar-playing, along Indian patterns. The only inspired surprise came in the middle of the film, when a siren began to blow. Leary came out to announce a police raid, which became the cue for his lecture on expunging the police from themselves. Theatrically, it was all terribly amateur. As the entire concert lasted only an hour and a half, in

a venue accustomed to three-hour performances, I was scarcely alone in wanting my money back. (November 1966)

JEAN-JACQUES LEBEL

Polyphonix 7 (Museum of Modern Art). It must have been John Giorno who midwifed this shotgun marriage between the "Kulchur" poetry patron Lita Hornick and Jean-Jacques Lebel, he bringing his pals from Europe, she introducing hers from NYC; and the contrasts were generally embarrassing. Among her people, the strongest was Amiri Baraka (né LeRoi Jones), whom she introduced as her first good friend in poetry. Now grey and bespectacled, Baraka still read in a grandly old-fashioned theatrical style a political poem with agreeable prejudices. On the first night I went, Rochelle Owens was weak, Lewis Warsh weaker (with some sort of dumb anti-Israeli diatribe that included the falsehood that the Jews drove out people who had all lived there two thousand years). John Giorno is a classic one note, with one technique for his writing, one technique for his reading, one technique for his performance choreography, etc. His idea of "structure" is repeating something to death. While his show has gotten stronger within its limitations, it is nonetheless needlessly constrained. John Cage read a memoir in the form of mesostics. I thought it terribly nostalgic and him terribly frail (though afterwards noticing that he looks stronger when he likes what he is doing). Tahar Ben Jellon was introduced as a North African-born psychoanalyst (later reduced, by JJL, to a social psychologist). His Arab poem was striking—even John Cage liked it; but then he read a French poem that was so prosaic that we both wondered about the quality of the Arab poem. Bernard Heidsieck did something interesting about the letter K; I gather that a knowledge of French would have been useful here. On the following day, Tibor Papp used slides with English words that were projected on a large white card held above his head and his white jump suit. The production concept struck me as clever, though the words have escaped my memory. Rochelle Kraut was as trivial as Lebel himself and Joelle Leandre (who, Higgins said, can be an astonishing bassist), together making a words and music duet that reminded me of jazz poetry from three decades ago. Helen Adam read ballads. The conclusion of Wednesday was Eberhard Blum's rendition of the Schwitters *Ursonate*, which is a classic act no one can follow—perhaps the greatest individual verbal performance I've ever seen. On Friday, Ashbery and Koch were familiar. Gherasim Luca read French poems that had enough internal consonance to sound like poetry (unlike the New York Schoolers). Despite all the individuals imported here, despite the prestige of the venue, this was a trivial festival, in which the two groups remained apart, that will surely have no effect upon the practice of anyone's poetry, let alone upon a larger audience. (October-November, 1984)

LES LEVINE

White Noise (School for Visual Arts). I've heard Levine's sculpture characterized as theatrical, even though I'd hardly regarded it that way. The first of his explicitly theatrical pieces I've seen, this was stronger in conception, which was extraordinarily clever, than his execution, which many members of the audience found uncomfortable. Upon entering the theater, the spectators had a silvery hat made of soft cellophane material put over their heads; in addition to having vertical peepholes for one's eyes cut out, the hats could be seen through. Once the lights went off, moving pictures, perhaps on a loop, flashed on the front screen, while two carousel projectors in the front flashed a succession of variously colored lights directly at the audience. These lights reflected off the mask-hats onto the darkened theater's walls. Those who sat directly in the beam of colored lights had a painful experience that I suppose represented a visual equivalent of white noise. As nothing happened after the opening idea, I left long before the piece was over. (November 17, 1967)

Photon: Strangeness Four (Theater Workshop for Students, 210 West 65th Street). The weakest of three events in a series, Levine's attracted the smallest interest, perhaps because it looked as though he did not put as much effort into his work as USCO and the Ken Dewey-Jerry Walter collaboration. Even worse, the night I went, Levine turned off his machinery a whole hour before closing time, and in its stead gave a commentary that was unjustifiably pretentious. Here he has a field of vertically suspended wires, or strings, set in a vibrating motion by a network of ropes running overhead, and on the floor he places a dozen or so perambulating machines shaped like inverted soup bowls with single-spoke antennae. However, since the floor tended to slant toward a certain corner, the machines flocked that way, only to be retrieved by the band of assistants customarily surrounding Levine. (March 4, 1968)

THE LIVING THEATRE

The Brig (Living Theatre). This is the most extraordinary production I've seen all season. Beneath its surface simplicity it is a play difficult both to appreciate and to understand. On the surface, we find a Marine prison camp represented by a large wire cage within a barbed-wire compound. Twelve soldiers are guarded by four extremely sadistic guards who force their charges to do menial tasks, to obey stupid rules, to stand up straight while being punched in the solar plexis. The intention is obviously dehumanization; so that when one prisoner cracks up, our sympathies go out to him. The presentation is offensively aggressive, the stage noise atrocious (foot stamping, unison shouting repeated upon command, all in the military, or pseudo-military, fashion). The intention is to make the audience

experience some of the process (even though our seats are separated from the compound by barbed wire). Perhaps the point of the production is that mankind can adjust to practically anything, "mankind" thus including the audience, some of whom should have walked out when prisoner #6 went crazy and was taken away on a stretcher. As usual with Julian Beck–Judith Malina productions, the direction is inspired and the staging functional. It takes guts to put on a play like this, and that quality the Living Theatre has in abundance. (May 1963)

The Brig (Living Theater). One should always see a brilliant experimental play several times before one writes a definitive review of it. The first time one is so dazzled that he or she is liable to get things wrong and to miss subtleties; only on later viewing can one better analyze how the play works. After seeing *The Brig* for the second time, I am embarrassed by what I wrote about it last summer. It is, I now think, not a work of accident but of genius, but I cannot yet tell if most of the genius belongs to the playwright (Kenneth H. Brown), the director (Judith Malina), or to some angelic being born between them. This time I could discern that someone has made a music of military noise. As the prisoners individually shout their requests for permission to cross a certain white line, I could hear a fugue developing; then on the right two soldiers are stamping their feet in 4/4 time. At another point, two soldiers sing the Marine anthem ("From the Halls of Montezuma. . ."), while others make noises until the effect is dazzling. The closest analogue in the history of art is Edgard Varése's *Ionisation* (1931), which pioneered in making a music entirely of percussive sounds. This second time around I also noticed the brilliant choreography in moving twelve big men behind the barbed wire and playground fence. This time I noticed how really funny the play can be—it's a humor reminiscent of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, where any accident breaking the rituals of discipline can be appreciated as a joke. Thus, when the new prisoner in *The Brig* says, "permission to cross the white line, please," instead of "sir," we cannot help but laugh. Another kind of joking exposes the vicious irony of army commands. At the end, the sergeant screams at his bunked-out men, "Are my men all asleep?" And twelve voices scream back, "Yes, sir." A graduate student friend of mine argued that *The Brig* was not Art because you could not sit through it a second time. Well, the truth is that you can (I have), not only for the effect it has upon you but also for the grating, controlled music that provides a blatant, yet subtle leitmotif for the entire production. (September 1963)

The Brig (Midway Theatre). After the Internal Revenue Service went about its dirty business and then the landlord expelled the Living Theatre

from its Fourteenth Street home, they moved their show uptown to the smallest of Irving Maidman's theaters. The new place lacks the great unfinished upstairs lobby that gave the old Living Theatre a unique personality, as well as the barren interior that made the stage noise so resonant. Here carpeted floors are acoustically deleterious, even in a half-full auditorium, cutting down the offensive racket that is necessary for the performance to be effective. This time I became more aware of the biting irony that runs through the play—the guards speak paternally of "my house," "my hotel," "my maggot," and near the end of the show the prisoners are forced to sing, "We are proud to bear the title of the United States Marines." This time I noticed how small moments have enormous significance: a guard thinks of sex in terms of violence, another prisoner apologizes for his mistakes by speaking into a toilet bowl, one beaten prisoner proves his "toughness" by suppressing the wish to cry. Throughout the performance something is always moving, and something is always sounding. The narrative line is a day in the brig, but there is little narrative action. The form of the performance is spatial, as meaning comes primarily through the repetition of action, rather than the development of plot. Very much as in musical theater, movements and sounds are effectively integrated into a coherent kinetic whole. The inspiration behind it all seems to be Antonin Artaud, the French actor/madman who wanted in his book, *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938), to move away from its classical emphasis upon language to performances in which sound, movement, and other nonlinguistic factors would be equally important. In this different emphasis, *The Brig* introduces something new to American theater. (February 1, 1964)

Frankenstein (Brooklyn Academy of Music). They are really extraordinary, genuinely unbelievable, now that Julian Beck and Judith Malina have a theater, performers, and physical resources worthy of their visions. This piece opens with the company on stage in yoga positions, staring at the audience that had been asked to wait in the lobby until performance time; and the effect is quite disconcerting. The silence breaks with the announcement that the beautiful woman in the middle will levitate, which of course she doesn't. That failure prompts the company to pounce on her with the fury of a primitive tribe, wrapping her in a net, depositing her in a coffin and then carrying that coffin up one aisle and down the other and finally behind a screen, where we can see her shadow being pierced with nails. In the second act is a Frankensteinish operation whose animate result we never see. In the stunning third act, members of the troupe distribute themselves throughout the audience. After the lights darken and the audience is seated, they are arrested by actors dressed as policemen and brought onto the stage, to be imprisoned one by one in the "cells" of a

spectacular three-story setting that is here dressed as a jail. Before long the policemen start arresting one another, until the jail is entirely full. Then two guards are mugged (with gruesome violence), and fire breaks out in the jail, causing the prisoners to flee. The Living Theater has continued the tendency noted five years ago of minimizing the kinds of "poets'" scripts they would have favored before, now preferring nonliterary performance; for here, despite the literary base of Mary Wollstonecraft's classic novel, expository language is minimal. In the second act, Julian Beck reads, through grating amplification, from cards that each have a single word of sociological jargon, his declamation overemphasizing each syllable; and at another point, a woman stationed near a microphone reads the headlines and opening sentences from the morning newspaper. The staging is magnificent, as no one else has used the vertical possibilities of the proscenium stage as well (in addition to lights flashing into the audience). At times the noise attains the rhythmic quality familiar from *The Brig*, for they manage to get the most stunning music, as well as original choreography, out of the mechanical tasks assigned to the performers. (October 5, 1968)

Antigone of Sophocles (Brooklyn Academy of Music). This is the Living Theatre's current semblance of *Women of Trachis* which they put into their repertory several years ago—the dud play in an otherwise fertile crop; and like that earlier Sophocles play, this is never worse than when it is most literary. Part of the problem might be the circuitous origins of the text—translated from the Greek into German by Friedrich Hölderlin, adapted by Bertolt Brecht, and then translated into English by Judith Malina (who, don't forget, was born in Germany). From the opening moments, when droning actors on stage attempt to freak out the audience, the choreography is usually marvelous; and as the violent action progresses into the audience, grunts become more expressive than lines. As in *Frankenstein*, the actors move in and out of their official roles. The finale has chants against a drone, Gregorian-style, offset by an underlying beat established by a bearded, dark-haired, generally quiet fellow who pounds his dungareed thighs and makes regular clicking noises with his mouth (as a one-man percussion band, so to speak). The ending has the company staring in fear directly at the audience and then progressively moving back to crash their bodies against the rear wall. Julian Beck is commanding as Kreon, as is Henry Howard as Megareus. Less assured, but good, are Judith Malina in the title role and Rufus Collins as Tiresias. However, Jenny Hecht, a sexy sylph with long frizzy hair, is all but inarticulate as Ismene, the sister of Antigone. (Come to think about it, the last strong actress, rather than actor, seen in a Living Theatre production was Olympia Dukakis many years ago, perhaps because Malina's self-conception

forbids any other woman's upstaging her.) The only memorable line in the writing (or translation) is repeated so many times that it cannot be forgotten: "Anyone who uses violence against an enemy will turn and use violence against his own people." (October 11, 1968)

Mysteries and Smaller Pieces (Brooklyn Academy of Music). This is a collection of sketches, all of them distinctive. In the opening one, the males of the company constitute a raggedly dressed, but rigorously precise, company of soldiers marching around the stage, in ways that demonstrate, as the Living Theatre often does, the paradox of the anarchist directors brutalizing their associates. (There is a sequence in *Paradise Now* where the actor Peter Weiss gets manhandled. Most people were shocked, but he told me the following day that it did not hurt at all.) Then there is a slow walk through the audience chanting regularly a poem by Jackson Mac Low that consists of familiar epithets like "Stop the war," "Freedom now," etc., all of which of course, invite both unison and antagonistic responses. Then there is a circle of performers droning "Om," into which spectators lock themselves, ritualistically participating. In another scene eight or so performers all stare directly into the audience while making funny motions and funny sounds. At the performance I attended, a little kid wandered on stage and stole the show, but you cannot help but admire the Living Theatre's willingness to create situations in which unexpected responses can contribute to theatrical success, mostly because both format and tone are so flexible. After the intermission, a tall wooden box with four distinct compartments frames four actors posing as cameos while lights flash at them. (This part was, to my mind, cute but weak.) Then seven figures, mostly male, distribute themselves on two sides of the stage. One performer does animalistic movements from one side to the other, while a performer on the other side tries to imitate him before initiating his own movements. (This was less striking; and the evening I saw it, the seven performers, who are instructed to stop only when they feel like it, went on far longer than most of us could tolerate.) The evening concludes with a fantastic sequence during which the performers suffocate on stage and in the aisles. Then their bodies are brought up on stage and neatly piled, in the most vivid portrayal of a post-atomic holocaust that I have ever seen in a theater. (Even this sequence exemplifies the Living Theatre's tendency of letting everything go on far too long.) As before, the production seems designed to make most sane people walk out before its end. There, and in the allowance for interruptions, lies the risk of their performances—when they do it as planned, nothing is safe. That's how far out they are. (October 17, 1968)

Paradise Now (Brooklyn Academy of Music). This was without doubt the most incredible theatrical performance I've seen in years; it moved so

far beyond current activities that I cannot quite believe they got away with it. The piece is an open-ended display of contrived pandemonium that encourages audience response and participation more successfully than anything else I've seen. It opens with spectators seated on the stage and with several performers going through the audience repetitiously screaming such phrases as "I don't know how to stop the war," "I am not allowed to take off my clothes," etc., until one of them has a fit, prompting the others to stop, pause, and then collectively generate another epithet. Then they strip to the barest costumes, which means brief bikinis for the women and loincloths for men. "We show each other where we are at," one character announces. The rest is incendiary when it isn't interminable, for the anarchist revolution they have in mind is as much psychosexual as political. There are various activities that encourage the audience to come on stage as well (which is also, curiously, the only place where people are allowed to smoke). Indeed, actors come down the aisles asking if we want to talk to Julian Beck, the co-director of the group. During one particularly languid sequence, I hied up to the stage myself to find Beck seated in the middle of a crowd of people, explaining anarchism primarily to one woman; but since this performance eschewed amplification, no one else could hear what he was saying. Toward the end Beck announces to the audience that this production offered glimpses of the postrevolutionary world. Spectators are encouraged to stand on a low platform and, in an image as powerful for those who watched as for those who participated, literally leap off the stage into the arms of eight performers who, four across from four parallel, have locked their arms to create a kind of net. Perhaps because the tone of the piece is so aggressive, only the converted could wholeheartedly cheer this production. The theme is liberation, which is certainly dramatized vividly; but I question its effectiveness—if many people left more liberated than they were when they came. (I doubt if it had much effect on the busload of suburban housewives seated around me. Conversely, I also noticed that younger spectators' attempts to pick up the sexier members of the company, both male and female, were rebuffed.) What is sure is that this piece reveals the possibilities of nonliterary, mixed-means political theater. For that alone, I'd like to see it again. (October 16, 1968)

Paradise Now (Poe Forum [an abandoned RKO theater on 167th Street], Bronx, NY). My ex–Catholic girlfriend found the production less like Paradise than Purgatory, because the evening is transiently unpleasant as the audience is continually challenged to move onto a higher level of existence or, if not, decease. This time I was less persuaded by Julian Beck's assertion that we had seen vignettes of the postrevolutionary age, although he has moved closer to a utopian theater than anything else I know, except

perhaps the Catholic Mass. Actually, the production is very Protestant (or more inclined to individual anarchism) than communitarian, as anyone with a loud enough voice is allowed to address the audience. This time the structure of the piece became more clear to me—a series of open-ended sequences to which the audience is invited to respond for as long as they can; but once the pace of their responses runs down, the group begins another provocation. As a result, the quality of an evening's performance depends less upon the company's behavior, which is fixed and limited, than upon the interactions between the performers and the spectators—not only the audience's responses but also the group's reactions to those responses. The trouble by now is that, over ten weeks after the New York debut, the audience knows what to expect and what it can do. In this performance, the stage became so crowded with hip-looking young people that practically nothing could be seen from the audience (and scarcely anything but the audience could be seen from the populous stage). As a result, the whole thrust of the Living Theatre's presentation evaporated before an audience that could not be successfully challenged. Several times members of the troupe tried to clear the front of the stage, if only to make a space in which they could perform; however, the savvy spectators simply filled up the space. Only once did the company successfully get its action going —in the middle semi-intermission when Rufus Collins got into a screaming argument with a bearded man over the issue of free care in the nearby Morrisania Hospital. What happened, in short, was that this particular audience undermined Julian Beck's assertion that "anything that anyone does is perfect." I wouldn't want to see *Paradise Now* again unless I could be assured that the audience would remain in its proper place, but that restraint alas would compromise the gist of the performance. (January 1, 1969)

The Archaeology of Sleep (Joyce Theater), directed by Judith Malina, with setting, costumes & lighting by Julian Beck. It was a thrill to see the Living Theatre again, even if a decade and a half has passed, and the baby daughter of 1968 is now a sexy young woman who resembles her mother, Judith Malina, in her black hair and pale skin. Here she plays "The Sleeping City," which in this performance is identified as "New York," though I assume it could be another. Otherwise, the cast is entirely new, even though some of them physically resemble previous LT performers. The most striking is Stephan Schulberg, a large ugly man with a deep voice. Of the three new productions I have seen so far, this one best engages the audience. Though that confrontational tactic continues to offend theater reviewers such as Frank Rich and John Simon, it strikes me as utterly appropriate at exploiting those possibilities that make live theater different from film or television. (And, of course, the fact that it continues to offend

remains one index of LT avant-gardeness.) Julian Beck's setting, costumes and lighting are, of course, spectacular, reminding me at its best of his unforgettable early work with Brecht's *In the Jungle of the Cities*. The theme here is that in sleep one finds freedom and, thus, anarchist truths unavailable to normal regimented life. That can be easily interpreted as a plea for the release of the Freudian id. (January 1984)

The Yellow Methuselah (Joyce Theater). Adapted by Hanon Reznikov, from both *Back to Methuselah* by George Bernard Shaw and *The Yellow Sound* by Wassily Kandinsky, this has spectacular sets, costumes, and lighting by Julian Beck. The idea of mixing two different, but contemporaneous plays is so good this should have been spectacular, but one problem with the Living Theatre has always been Judith Malina's conception of herself as a superstar. Simply, whenever she tries to handle a long speech, the stage falls dead. Beck, by contrast, is stunning, and surprisingly handsome in a succession of wigs. Oddly, he can handle a long speech, mostly by pausing and underacting, whereas she tends to overact. (In my memory is John Simon's nasty crack from a quarter-century ago that it is inevitable in the Living Theatre's conception of things that the Widow Begbeck should be played by Judith Malina, even though she has as much to attract the British army as a randied yak.) The remainder of the cast is uneven; and when there is too much talking to do, as here, it becomes clear that some of the performers cannot speak English well enough to articulate thought or emotion, let alone be clearly understood. Whereas such subtleties might be lost upon European audiences, here they are glaring and, alas, embarrassing (even to me, who has a taste for imperfect, accented English). Another problem is the general heaviness which appears to reflect Reznikov, who came that way, if the program note with all of its polysyllablic declarations is to be believed. Towards the end of the performance, the man in front of me (the playwright and theater administrator Jeffrey Jones) began to giggle continuously; from time to time, the person next to him (Stuart Sherman) chimed in. Before long, my date too had fits, mostly over dramatic extravagances that, as the play went on too long, became yet more excessive. This was disappointing, in the ways that Living Theatre productions of old-fashioned plays were always disappointing two decades ago. (January 1984)

The Antigone of Sophokles (Joyce Theater). Based upon the German translation of Bertolt Brecht's adaptation of Frederich Hölderlin, translated into English by Judith Malina, this production credits both Malina and Julian Beck with direction. When they dance, the Living Theatre is marvelous; when they chant, they are stunning, especially when they speak over percussive sounds that accentuate their speech. However, when they

do the traditional theatrical business of articulating texts, they bore; and since this play was mostly speech, it was mostly boring. And Judith Malina is especially dull when her histrionics are no more than histrionics. Allan Ginsberg, whose ear for poetic speech is more sophisticated than my own, found in the text the Living Theatre's critique of the American invasion of Grenada, but it must be remembered that this play was on the LT's schedule fifteen years ago when it could have been interpreted in relation to earlier American invasions. (I have no memory of it, unlike *Paradise Now*, and thus doubt if it was any better then than now.) At worst, the acting is amateur, as Beck and Malina for all their experience as directors appear unable to elicit professional recitations from most of their new associates. Perhaps the problem with the speeches is Judith Malina's translation; I wonder what Stefan Brecht thinks of it. (While I sympathize with Beck and Malina's ambition to assume all theatrical jobs, both clearly do some things better than others, and some things better than each other. When they betray their radical political and esthetic ambitions, they pander not to the audience but, oddly, to terribly conventional aspirations for theatrical artistry.) The strongest moment here was the closing, where the company comes to the front of the stage in a row that stretches from end to end, as though they were about to take a bow; but as soon as someone in the audience claps, each begins to assume a horrified look, as though he or she is witnessing an unimaginable atrocity. For such unforgettable moments, we must tolerate the garbage in between. (January 1984)

The One and the Many (Masse Mensch), by Ernst Toller (Joyce Theater). Translated and directed by Judith Malina, with setting, costumes and lighting by Julian Beck, this turns out to be another illustration of the old Living Theater problem, where Judith Malina takes a starring role that should have been given to someone else, preferably a person closer in age to the putative husband (here played by Christian Vollmer, but who should have been played by Julian Beck himself). Worse, she then recites her own translation, under her own direction. However, Malina is by now too frail a figure, with too small a voice, to be the firebrand suggested by her lines. Worse, she looks and moves too differently from the rest of her company to appear as one of them. (More than once I sensed that she suffers from a bad back.) On the other hand, there are brilliant moments here, especially in the orchestration of human sounds (recalling what I had forgotten—the early influence of John Cage), and then in movement, lighting and setting. Reminded of their previous productions, I thought this most resembled *The Brig*—in sound and in the dominant imagery of vertical bars. It also capture the momentum of revolution without being realistic, and that I suppose is what connects the production to German expressionism. (January 31, 1984)

The Tablets, by Armand Schwerner (The Living Theatre), adapted and directed by Hanon Reznikov. I've long treasured Armand's *The Tablets* as a masterpiece of ironic literature, really one of the best long poems of our time—an elaborate comedy, in progress for the past two decades, about modes of incomprehension. The basic concept is that of fragmentary tablets that purportedly contain Sumarian writings, none of which can be completely understood, some of which is quite contemporary in erotic content. Of course, the tablets are no less fictitious than Armand's commentary. Why anyone should want to stage this exercise in the possibilities of print mystifies me, but I suspect there must be an interesting story. In the history of the Living Theatre I detect two styles of production—one highly inventive, as in *The Connection* or *Paradise Now* (which I associated with Julian Beck, now gone), the other bombastic in favoring continuous high theatrical declamation (which I associate with Malina). Whereas Schwerner's exploration of the problems of noncomprehension would favor theatrical invention, Reznikov (as Malina's current husband) here resorts to the latter, favoring as well the verbal assaults upon the audience for which the Living Theatre has long been famous. What results is intermittent brilliant writing, accompanied by intermittent strong images and intermittent strong sounds, amidst a general confusion and fuzziness. What gives away the ineptness of the production is the absence of audience laughter. It's been a long time since I've seen anything very good from The Living Theatre (still using the British spelling); but if only to acknowledge what they've done before, I'd go again. (June 30, 1989)

MURRAY LOUIS

Junk Dances (Henry Street Settlement). This piece is Louis's primary contribution to mixed-means theater of the past few years. Its score is a collage of found sounds, including some in other languages. In addition to moves that can only be characterized as slapstick, there is a use of props reminiscent of Louis's partner Alwin Nikolais but more comic, including grocery bags and bits of female clothing. The costuming is also inventive. Both Louis and Phyllis Lamhut, as the leads, display their comic talents. Indeed, the major influence upon their movements appears to be Charlie Chaplin. Though the tone suggests parody, I could not tell for sure what was being parodied. (February 1, 1969)

Intersection (Henry Street Settlement). This is the second of the new works that Louis did on commission for the National Endowment for the Arts, and it was considerably better than his other new piece, *Proximities*, which struck me as a mess. The gimmicks are slides projected on a back screen and movements made with only one shoe on. Four members of the company are dressed in paper-strip costumes with high-paper headdresses

that mask the body (another characteristic Nikolais technique). They become harpies intimidating a semi-competent, perhaps tipsy individual, played by Louis. One notices here and elsewhere that Louis plays not specific characters but character-types (a bias reminiscent of Chaplin). The piece ends with Louis obliterating himself into a city crowd. Notwithstanding its fun, imagination, and technological fluency, the piece is slightly too long and choreographically negligible. It suffers from the problem that has plagued Nikolais's work as well—the absence of choreographic invention comparable to the inventive staging. (February 15, 1969)

Dance Company (City Center). The mystery of Murray Louis is this: How can one piece, *Junk Dances*, be so truly extraordinary while everything else is less distinguished. The masterpiece is still a masterpiece, even on third viewing; and the gags I knew were coming are still effective. The root is parody, or comic juxtapositions (as in having Christmas lights go on while Galli-Curci screams her top note); and there is wealth of comedy in Phyllis Lamhut's fluttering eyelashes, etc. I could enjoy it many times again. *Landscapes* (1964) strikes me as thin; *Intersections* (1969) is mostly ugly, as four characters with weird silver makeup emerge from projections on a back screen, and Louis himself plays a drunk who eventually disappears into the back screen. *Proximities* struck my girlfriend as a parody of George Balanchine's *Symphonic Variations*, down to the score by Brahms (which here requires union musicians) and a company of six dancers. However, a Nikolais dancer sitting a few seats away insists that the real subject is *touching* because individual dancers bounce in and out of the piece. Louis himself is strong enough as a performer to command the stage alone successfully, as is Lamhut; and both Raymond Johnson and Sara Shelton are better than any of the individuals currently behind Carolyn Carlson in the Nikolais company. Though Louis's choreography tends to be more interesting than Nikolais's, his stagecraft remains undeveloped. Though Nikolais remains the superior theater artist, none of his individual pieces is quite as brilliant as *Junk Dances.* (May 16, 1970)

Dance Company (Lyceum Theater). It was good to see his *Hoopla* again, as I especially liked it the first time around. To my mind, it is Louis's greatest single piece since *Junk Dances* (which is no longer in the repertory). However, this time I noticed that much of the comedy depends upon props, that much of the inspiration seems to come from corny movies, and that the opening parts are better than the later ones, which become too circusy and thus seem corny. *Interims* (1963) remains a beautiful piece, in part because it features Phyllis Lamhut, who remains (even at forty) one of the six great female dancers in the western world. This year's premiere is *Porcelain Dialogues*, which is a very elegant choreography composed to

Tschaikovsky, all done in light blue lighting. I abhorred it almost from the opening steps, but those around me, including a few dance critics, think it fine. Its old-fashionedness reminds me of Merce Cunningham's *Second Hand*. In comparison to *Hoopla*, I think this piece is a disappointment. (February 19, 1974)

JACKSON MAC LOW

Simultaneities for Musician-Readers, Audiotapes, Videotapes (The Kitchen). As always, Jackson's work is terribly uneven, and its most distinguishing mark is, simply, his going on way too long. By the end of this three-hour concert, less than ten spectators remained. Nonetheless, I rank Jackson an important poet, whose three decades of experimentation deserve respect. The best work was *A Threnody for Sylvia Plath*, a stereo tape collage assembled from comments made at the National Poetry Festival in Michigan in 1971. I suppose it might have been a more effective documentary if the individual voices were introduced by name, but the bits and pieces conveyed a total artistic impression. Fortunately or unfortunately, Jackson played only part of a longer, 26-minute tape. My second favorite piece was *A Word Event for Carlota Schoolman, on Her Name* in which Jackson moves from comprehensive words to musical sounds. On two video monitors he played two different renditions, shot at two different distances, of this piece, while he performed a third rendition live. This concept represents a technological advance over John Barth's *Title*, which used only audiotape; but as usual for Mac Low, it went on too long. *Counterpoint for Candy Cohen* consists of eight superimposed layers derived from a speech fragment that Candy Cohen said in introducing the show at the WBAI Free Music Store last spring, but Mac Low's mix was much too scrambled for my taste. Two pieces had music and words for an assemblage of musicians, including Sharon Mattlin on recorder, Peter Gordon, Rhys Chatham, Armand Schwerner, and Arthur Russell. One of the tapes involves a succession of outer-space slides whose images are, by now, all too familiar. The first piece in this last vein was *Heavens* (1974); *Simultaneous Numbered Asymmetries* (1961) was the second. The final work was incomprehensible renderings of *The Black Tarantula Crossword Gathas (for Kathy Acker)*, who manages to inspire art as dreadful as her own. (April 17, 1975)

ALVIN LUCIER

(Museum of Modern Art). The idea of *Chambers* involves bringing a number of sound generators into the performance area, thereby transforming it into an environment of ever-increasing noise. Then the performers pick up conch shells distributed about the hall and play them out the door and down the stairs onto the street, where the piece ends. The

program asserts that "both the performers and the audience hear the larger or smaller environments in reference to the sound characteristics of the portable resonant environments." However, the piece strikes me as simpler than that. (January 15, 1969)

MABOU MINES

Animations: Red Horse (1972) & *B*Beaver* (1974) (Performance Garage). One reason why I've neglected the Mabou Mines was an abysmal Lee Breuer production at the Guggenheim Museum three years ago. I remembered that earlier performance as self-consciously inscrutable, and these are scarcely better. Someone (probably Lee Breuer) seems asphyxiated by the idea of "poetic texts" that I find impossible to follow. Much of the choreography is striking, though at times too dangerous for my taste. In *Red Horse* are a few pieces of music, which the performers generate among themselves, that I liked. JoAnne Akalaitis is particularly stunning in the first piece. The second appears to be a vehicle for Fred Neumann, a bulky guy who believes himself to be a beaver and suggests this artifice largely by speaking with a stutter. The major problem, to repeat, is that I could not tell whether theatrical language is supposed to be expository or abstract. They think the latter; I think the former. (March 3, 1974)

Animations: Red Horse (1972) & *B*Beaver* (1974) (Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds). I went a second time in part to test my perceptions, and they weren't too different. Once again, I had trouble following the lines, which were too opaque for my taste (and which, unlike more profoundly mysterious art, didn't become any clearer the second time through). I gather that the first piece has something to do with becoming an artist. As before, of the two, I prefer its choreography, lighting, occasional music and acting. The second piece is essentially a monologue for Fred Neumann, a forty-eight year-old actor who married Francis Fergusson's daughter and then spent most of the past decade in Europe dubbing films. He imagines himself a beaver who wants to get certain information out of the library, and most of the group's movements function as a counterpoint to his monologue. (Akalaitis has an especially strong solo.) I gather that Lee Breuer was a buddy of Ken Dewey's on the fringes of San Francisco theater in the early sixties and that he chose, like Ken, to compose his own texts for a performing group of fairly constant membership. However, no one's verbal powers seem equal to the group's choreographic strengths. (March 17, 1974)

GEORGE MACIUNAS, et al.

Flux Harpsichord Recital (Anthology Film Archives). It was a spectacular joy—a Fluxus production at its best. The opening act was Beth

Anderson playing La Monte Young's *Composition 1960, No. 13*, which turns out to be terribly straight baroque music. (What kind of open instructions allowed that to happen?) Next was Maciunas's *No. 14* (1975), in which a beach toy is inflated in the bed of a piano. In Toshi Ichiyanagi's *No. 5* (1961), three performers bang the wooden outsides of a single harpsichord, in response to a score. Nam June Paik's *Lesson* consists of a lecture in his inimitable pidgin English on the most appropriate way to place one's feet in order to arise and then bow before a nobleman. For George Brecht's *Incidental Music* (1960), Paik piled children's blocks on a harpsichord's strings until the blocks fell down and then taped down a few of the keys. In Dick Higgins's *Constellation No. 4* (1960), several performers made one sound apiece whenever Larry Miller hit his top hat. In George Brecht's *Center* (1962), three performers put a board on a basketball and then a harpsichord turned sideways on the board, which, to no surprise, they help balance. In Joe Jones's *Flux Harpsichord* (1975), eight little motors are suspended over the harpsichord bed, some of them occasionally striking the strings. Yasunao Tone's *Geodesy for Harpsichord* (1963) is a long, somewhat boring piece about climbing a ladder and then dropping on the harpsichord things that don't make noise. Robert Watts' *Trace for Harpsichord* (1975) invites the audience to aim ping-pong balls at the bed of the harp, while the performers throw the balls back at the audience for more attempts. Tone's *Harpsichord Piece for Sixteen Fingers* (1975) has eight performers tap only two of their fingers on the top of a closed harpsichord. Alison Knowles's *Twenty-Eight Pole Limas* involves tossing lima beans over a harp bed covered with a piece of paper and then picking them up with tweezers. For George Brecht's *Symphony No. 3*, Yoshimasa Wada falls off a chair in the course of approaching the harpsichord. For Tomas Schmit's *Keyboard Piece No. 1* (1962), Larry Miller piles pieces of wood into a precarious construction and then tilts the top of the piano, so that all the blocks fall off. For his own *66* (1975), Miller cuts out of a large piece of paper the shape of a harpsichord and then passes the harpsichord through the hole. The theme of the evening was, of course, using the harpsichord for everything except that for which it was initially intended. A good time was had by all. (March 24, 1975)

MANHATTAN PROJECT

Alice in Wonderland (Performing Garage). I like this production even more than some other similar works I've seen recently, for it looks very finished and tight. What impresses me is how they sustain an extremely high energy level for ninety-or-so minutes, the performers surely exhausting themselves through a variety of physical activities. (In this respect, it was too much like slick Broadway musical comedy. I recall at the health club an actress, specializing in such theater, telling everyone that

she had to build up stamina before beginning a provincial tour.) Here, however, the director André Gregory invites us to sit on the performing space's floor, to the edge of the acting area. I could scarcely be alone in finding it disconcerting to look *up* at the performance. From time to time I feared that a performer might fall into my lap, and at one point the mad hatter bopped my head with a soft hammer. Such close proximity increased my suspicion that the dominant emotion (or effect) of the piece was hysteria. What bothered me most was the presence of André Gregory himself, only a few feet away, mouthing the performers' lines, much like a prompter at the opera. However, prompters, unlike Gregory, are customarily buried beneath boxes, so that the audience won't be distracted by what they do. Even though the verbal text is based upon Lewis Carroll, opening with a declamation of the *Jabberwocky*, this production has lots of contemporary commentary, including an allusion to a huckster who currently does successful appliance ads on local television. Here, as elsewhere in the downtown theater nowadays, I found the choreography far more effective than the declamation. By no count is the Manhattan Project as innovative or consequential as the Mabou Mines, and in truth neither plays in the same league as the Living Theatre. (March 28, 1974)

SALVATORE MARTIRANO

L's G.A. (pronounced "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address") (Electric Circus). Ben Patterson insisted that Martirano's recent work ranked among the best mixed-means pieces; and since I respect Ben and liked earlier Martirano music, I hied on over to the Electric Circus, essentially a discotheque. Preceding Martirano was a number of pseudo-avant-garde acts, most of them apparently affiliated with the University of Illinois; none of this vaudeville was worth seeing again. The Martirano piece opens with outerspace footage on three screens (the films coming from Ronald Nameth, which also collaborated with Cage). On the left side, in front of the left screen, is a man dressed in a space suit. Then the movie passes through sequences of war atrocities while the sound track generates war-atrocity noises. The piece closes rather melodramatically with rebirth imagery to the accompaniment of an organ; that last bit of sentimentality practically drove me out of the hall. Disappointed. (May 12, 1969)

Robert Wilson (1977)

Now the theatrical, as opposed to the dramatic, is full of experiment, finding its ways to audiences by their quick responses and rejections; its measure is human, not literary.—Constance Rourke, *American Humor* (1931).

Last December, less than two weeks after the second (and final) New York performance of the opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), Robert Wilson told me that he was "writing" a new theatrical work—a one-person piece that would represent another departure in his remarkable, original theater. After his collaboration in *Einstein* (principally with Philip Glass as the composer and Andy de Groat as the choreographer), and after working with scores of performers in his earlier theatrical works, Wilson planned something conceptually simple, about ninety minutes long, with just himself as author, director, designer, and sole performer. "I feel like I want to go back to myself," he told me, "and see what will come from me."

Unlike most dramatists, Wilson typically begins his theater pieces not with a plot or a character or a line of resonant dialogue but with a setting—to be specific, not with words but with a drawing. Back in December, he said, "I've had the idea for a long time of a room with lots of books, all placed neatly in shelves, and something slicing through the shelves. There is a telephone, and a telephone wire. There is a scrim or gauze over the front of the stage, and images are sometimes projected on it." At this point, Wilson was spending his mornings working on the script—or, more precisely, writing lines for a character (to be played by himself) in a 9" by 12" ledger book that he always carries with him. "I sit down," he explained at the time, "and wait until words come to mind."

He knew at the beginning that this new theatrical piece would be scored rather precisely, not only in its language and setting, but also in its gestures and lighting; indeed, it would be possible for someone other than himself to perform it. "I start with the set. I know the light, the color, the costume and a feeling about a guy being in a room with all those books." He paused to reflect. "I'm thinking about having a tape of words and sound effects going on at the same time and of asking Alan Lloyd to write music for piano that would go on the tape." I asked Wilson whether he had

any sense of larger themes in this new piece. "No, I haven't gotten to the ending yet," he replied. His imagination and visual intelligence seemed to precede his analytical sense.

In January, when I saw him again, he reached for a pencil and paper, and then drew a stage set that had three tall windows through which the audience could see the ocean. Several minutes after the play's opening, he said, the stage would suddenly change and the windows would completely fill with books. At this time, he was also condensing his script into a fifty-minute performance, he was thinking about inviting another performer, probably a woman, to repeat the same lines for a second act. Wilson was also hoping to film a separate version for television presentation. "You wouldn't see what you see on the stage. They are different boxes," he told me. "What works on the stage box wouldn't work on the TV box." The play's title, he knew by then, would be *I Was Sitting on the Patio This Guy Appeared I Thought I Was Hallucinating.*

In February, Wilson rehearsed the piece, making decisions about which lines to say when, where to sit, and how to move. As is his custom, he worked quickly, trusting his initial reactions. In April, he took *Hallucinating*, as we will call it, on the American road, presenting it in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and San Francisco, in addition to Austin, Texas, where he had entered college eighteen years before, and where I happened to be teaching for the spring semester.

By its sixth performance, the play is physically more or less as he described it. The set is black and rectangular, with Wilson himself lying on the chaise, dressed in a white shirt and black trousers, illuminated mostly by beams of light that came from backstage. Wilson changes the configuration of his legs and then draws his hand to his face. The backdrop changes precipitously, almost as if God were exercising his peremptory rule; and the shelves seem filled less with books than with vertically even rows of cardboard letter files. (The image reminds me of the shelves of Presidential papers, as seen from the ground floor of the University of Texas's Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.) After several minutes of silence, Wilson's protagonist addresses various people who are not present; and though he talks at times into the telephone, one senses there is no one at the other end. He speaks calmly, in simple sentences. Compared to earlier Robert Wilson productions, *Hallucinating* is starkly austere. There is no dancing, little music, no crowds, and only two theatrical machines—a small movie screen suspended in the upper right of the proscenium and fed from a backstage projector (in lieu of the gauze initially envisioned) and a microphone, clipped to his shirt collar, giving his voice a peculiarly distant resonance. "I wanted," Wilson told me after the performance, "to get rid of all the theatrical furniture."

Hallucinating is also simpler and more accessible than other Wilson

productions. Its dominant content, announced in the final word of that title, seems to be the protagonist's hallucinations. The images appearing on the screen are what he imagines; the voices on the tape are those he thinks he hears. His language jumps wildly, from one subject to another in succeeding sentences. "The reindeer are getting restless. There is a mechanical drummer." Later: "Do you want to know something ridiculous? I ran into a brick wall. It makes a difference." At a yet later point, the audience sees on the screen a little dog that the protagonist describes as being 5' 11" tall!

After forty minutes, the stage blackens suddenly, and Lucinda Childs appears in Wilson's place. She repeats the same lines, in a more animated, emphatic fashion. As the monologue is by now more familiar, it becomes clear that one theme is a nervous breakdown. I was reminded of the marvelous short stories of Irvin Faust, who is likewise concerned with the portrayal of extreme mental distress. However, one crucial difference is that Wilson has the courage to put psychology on stage. In several ways, *Hallucinating* is different from previous Wilson theater, which has usually emphasized physical performance over verbal script and exterior experience over interior states.

Hallucinating opened in New York at the end of May 1977, Off-Broadway (rather than Off-Off-Broadway), and the production there was scarcely different from what I saw in Austin. Technical imperfections, which were so obtrusive in Austin, were expunged by New York, while the individual performances were stronger and more defined. (The reviews in New York were more laudatory than those in Austin.) I enjoyed seeing it a second time, and would have liked to have seen it once again, had not the show's commercial producer precipitously closed the show over a slow Memorial Day weekend.

Hallucinating represents yet another development in Wilson's theatrical career. Born in Waco, Texas, October 4, 1941, he presented skits in the garage of his family house. As a student at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in the early sixties, he designed and made gigantic puppets that were used in the closing play of Jean-Claude Van Itallie's trilogy, *America Hurrah* (1965). While at Pratt, he also rented the Peerless movie house, across the street from Pratt on Myrtle Avenue, and presented midnight theatrical pieces. He must have made an impact upon the cognoscenti, because the person introducing us, when I first met Wilson at a Merce Cunningham concert early in 1964, was the eminent theatrical director and writer Gordon Rogoff.

In the spring of 1965, Wilson presented at Pratt a piece called *Clorox*, which had a large number of performers (thus presaging later Wilson theater), in addition to two hundred objects. The sponsor of this work was not Pratt's theater department but the dance department, which insisted

that the evening's program include the disclaimer that *Clorox* "is not considered dance." As Wilson amiably recalls, "I had a lot of enemies at school." Rogoff remembers another undergraduate piece that had a backdrop entirely of tin foil. "There was obviously a view of time and space that for most of us was relatively new," he recalled recently. "Bob was clearly not interested in the notion of the 'actor.' A dance and painterly impulse was moving in."

In 1967, Wilson started to present his performance pieces in Manhattan. One, entitled *Byrdwoman*, had three parts. The first involved too characters bouncing on boards in Wilson's Spring Street loft. For the second part, Wilson rented trucks filled with hay and took the audience around Manhattan. The third part took place outside in Jones Alley, a narrow L-shaped street that runs south of Bond Street and then east to Lafayette Street, in what is now called NoHo. "The strongest image, for me at least," Wilson remembers, "was forty figures dressed in fur coats bouncing on boards in Jones Alley." Another piece at the time, *Theater Activity*, was presented indoors at midnight in the Bleecker Street Cinema. It has four sections, each twenty minutes in length. The performer dominating this concluding section was the dancer-writer Kenneth King, whom Wilson identified as the principal influence upon his work at the time.

In 1968–69, Wilson organized the Byrd Hoffman Foundation, named for a character in a childhood piece of his; and this not-for-profit institution became the principal sponsor of his subsequent productions.

"When I did *The King of Spain*, all those pieces came together," he recalled recently. He rented the Yiddish Anderson Theater on lower Second Avenue for two evenings, early in 1969. He recruited performers from the classes in painting and body movement that he had been teaching in the Jersey suburbs and from the frothy pool of people like himself—adventurous young artists in New York City. I remember that in this work the stage set is particularly marvelous—a Victorian sitting room with several incongruous details, such as a vertical opening in the back wall that ran from floor to ceiling. One by one, an assortment of unrelated people come on stage and either sit perfectly still or execute simple tasks largely oblivious to one another. The principal performer is a middle-aged blond woman, who opens by doing physical exercises and then drones an inimitable monologue, suggesting she might be drunk, and finally plays prosaic songs on the piano. I remember losing interest until two pairs of awesomely huge white furry legs, suspended from the theater's ceiling, moving gracefully across the front of the stage, unacknowledged by the impervious performers. The sparse audience applauded enthusiastically.

Later that year, Wilson presented a more ambitious piece, *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud*, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. With it, in my judgment, Wilson realized his mature style. He combined things

that were not normally found together (not even on prior theatrical stages) and then allowed these things to perform apart from one another. The structure echoed painterly surrealism and collage. Most actions were very slow, comparable to the speed of a baseball game; but, as in a baseball game, elements here and there were always changing, the parts suggesting new relationships. Always something was happening on stage; always there was something new to see.

In the opening tableau, for instance, an elegant young black woman sits absolutely still on a chair with a black bird perched on her hand, while a man in an old-fashioned bathing suit runs back and forth across the rear of the stage. Compositionally, the runner's continuous movement becomes a "ground bass," so to speak, for subsequent visual activity. A fake tortoise begins to move across the stage, two bare-chested women begin to move slowly across the sand, and a low humming background sound suggests that this might be a silent movie. Kenneth King emerges in a baggy outfit (reminiscent of the figure in the Michelin tire ads) and does a shadow-boxing dance, kicking up the sand.

Out comes a chorus of black mammies, in all shapes and sizes, with padded bosoms, padded buttocks, and kerchiefs, waltzing across the stage, more or less in unison, drawing deserved applause and providing a temporal climax for the tableau. Wilson's work was already much bigger than anyone else's, by the measure of the size of his staging and the number of props and people (not two black mammies, but forty!); and this taste for the extravagant remains a continuing signature. "It was," Wilson jokes, "like Louis the Fourteenth or something."

The rest of *Freud* is similarly slow in time and rich in visual detail. Whole sections of *The King of Spain* were incorporated into this new work (the huge fur legs now waltzing in a visual-rhythmic echo of the mammies). However, one element is a silent, gray-haired, gray-bearded gentleman who patently resembles Sigmund Freud. His name is Michele Sondak, and Wilson "discovered" him in Grand Central Station. At first, Sondak, a designer and woodworker by trade, rejected Wilson's invitation to appear in the young man's next theatrical work; but later Sondak agreed. (In general, Wilson likes to use people whose appearance declares their identity.) Wilson's *Freud* production exhibited an extraordinary sensitivity to theatrical values, as well as the possibility of realizing a performance art that was neither dance nor drama but something primarily visual and architectural—an art that would articulate in the universal language of images and movements, rather than in the national languages of words. Certain French critics classified Wilson's theater as "silent opera."

In retrospect, Wilson explained that he was initially moved by Freud's confession of a severe depression in his seventies—after he discovered he had cancer and his grandchild had died. His play, Wilson elaborated, "has

simple images from Freud's life. I thought of the beach as being the early period of his life, the drawing room as the middle period, and the cave as being when he was older. It's almost that simple." The theater's seats were filled for *Freud*; it later had a successful European tour.

His next major piece, *Deafman Glance* (1971), began with Wilson befriending Raymond Andrews, a twelve-year-old black deaf-mute who had disrupted Wilson's class in Summit, New Jersey; and one result of their friendship was Raymond's central role. This piece opens with a handsome young black woman killing two of her three children, the spared one (Andrews) being lifted in a swing and suspended high above the stage, a spectator for the entire piece. In *Deafman Glance*, like its predecessor, the bare stage slowly fills with people (and props) who bear little visible relation to one another, who appear oblivious to most of the others, who perform without words or music, and whose individual actions are mostly done slowly. Wilson made the audience's experience more difficult by disallowing any intermissions. One of the more stunning sequences involves an armless dwarf with uneven legs, who draws the audience's attention as he moves a prop around the stage. Wilson echoed Todd Browning's film, *Freaks* (1932), in incorporating such a "hidden" figure into a public performance. I thought *Deafman* was as good as *Freud*, if not better.

Wilson gathered unusual talent around him, and he discovered performing competence in unlikely people. Scarcely an authoritarian director, he lets his performers make many of their own choices, if not invent their own parts; and these individual contributions are worked into the whole. "Sometimes you say, 'Don't do that'," he told me. "Or you wait until the person realizes it. Or you select what a person does, and piece it together. It is a very delicate situation." The works are also elastic enough to allow for sudden mishaps. When Raymond Andrews suddenly decided one night to attend a swimming meet, instead of performing in Brooklyn, "I had to find a black kid on the street, and I did." When Sondak could not perform one evening, his role was assumed by the choreographer Jerome Robbins, one of Wilson's more prominent early advocates.

In the spring of 1972, I saw at the Byrd Hoffman studio an intimate performance called *Overture*, which turned out to be the beginning of a twenty-four hour piece, also called *Overture*, which was presented in Paris the following summer. That larger *Overture* became in turn the beginning of a seven-day piece, *Ka Mountain and GUARDenia Terrace*, presented in Iran at the end of the summer 1973. The initial *Overture* was offered in two three-hour parts—the first at 6:00 A.M. (which I could not make) and the second at 6:00 P.M. The latter opens with Wilson's grandmother, Alma Hamilton, then in her late eighties, speaking about her youth in Mississippi and Texas. A stout young woman then reminisces about her own youth in Iowa. One repeated motif concerns the burning of wood, which

is done first on the stage (leaving a charred odor for the remainder of the performance), then repeated as description in Mrs. Hamilton's monologue, and finally repeated again live on stage. The principal figure of the second half of the evening *Overture* is Edwin Denby, the sixtyish dance critic, who performs as a cowboy in one amusing sequence, climbs a ladder to escape from an animal in another, and provides an aural ground bass for the final minutes by reading aloud the last section of John Ashbery's *Three Poems.* The most striking image is a jungle of cut-out animals, all dancing about—perhaps a visual echo of Edward Hicks' famous American painting of *The Peaceable Kingdom.* Some bits of *Overture* were marvelous to me, but the stage was too small for Wilson, who then worked best with plenty of people and plenty of space. I regret missing the *Ka* production, which was not two and one-half hours with a single intermission, like Broadway theater, but 168 hours with uncountably many intermissions.

The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin (1973) was, in my experience, Wilson's masterpiece so far. The most abundant performance I have ever seen, it ran for some twelve hours, with six long intermissions; it filled the stage of the Brooklyn Academy of Music with over 140 performers and many props. Its initial three acts incorporates much of *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* (including Mr. Sondak), its fourth act has much of *Deafman Glance*; but instead of putting Raymond Andrews in a swing, high above the action, Wilson now has two characters, one male and the other female, playing Stalin and his wife. *Stalin*, like other Wilson theater, is best summarized not in encompassing terms but with a few memorable details. In the fifth act, as dancers move around the stage, one performer gives an effectively concise summary of dialectical materialism, itself spoken against background music drawn from various sections of Fauré's *Requiem.* In the last act a chorus of ostriches dance in unison. With *Stalin*, the theatrical style that Wilson had been developing—with its temporal slowless and visual abundance—reached its apex. It had to be seen to be believed.

There have been other productions since then. *A Letter for Queen Victoria* struck me as a terribly wordy throwback to conventional theater (and suffering from many of its worst faults). For Wilson, by contrast, *Queen Victoria* "is my favorite piece; I can see a future in it. I thought the structure more interesting. It was a more severe work and therefore less accessible." The conceptual advance of Wilson's *The $ Value of Man* (1975) was staging it in the round and having a large number of performers repeating their brief lines over and over again in a cacaphonous chorus. Above the chorus could be heard amplified monologues by Christopher Knowles, a "brain-damaged" teenager, whom Wilson had previously incorporated into key sections of *Stalin.* In the summer of 1975, I saw *DIA LG* in which Wilson and Knowles talk to and apart from each other. In the background is the sound of a local rock radio station, and Knowles turns on and off the

portable cassette player that he carries with him. This performance I found aurally abrasive; its language was mostly incomprehensible. I began to fear that Wilson was indulging his idiosyncrasies, without creating the larger structures of his best theater; but this tendency was, of course, reversed with the opera *Einstein on the Beach*, which I found a truly spectacular work [described elsewhere in this book]. Since this last piece will not be videotaped, once the show is over the magic is gone, though memories of it linger.

What Wilson created is a theater based on movement and sound, rather than spoken language; and although activities on stage often seem arbitrary, they are in fact quite carefully blocked out (and even written down). As far back as *The King of Spain*, Wilson remembers, "There is an additive process, with layers and zones of activities and images and time. You would see something happen upstage and then something downstage that would relate in terms of image or rhythm." Not only were placements on the stage blocked out in parallel layers (away from the audience), but events were timed and performers were instructed to count. "In *Freud*," he explained, "the turtle takes twenty-two minutes to cross the stage; the runner takes eighteen seconds, Freud 6 1/2 minutes. The woman sits in the chair for thirty-one minutes." Rather than having a clock on stage, Wilson suspends a chair on a wire in the center of the stage and lowers it slowly. To the audience, it seems to be another autonomous Wilson prop with a stage life of its own, but to the performers the chair is a cueing block, a chronometer, whose distance from the floor measures time. Thus, when the chair reaches the stage floor, the performance ends.

Wilson remembers *Ka*, by contrast, as "more spontaneous, in an open space. The audience would walk right through the performing area. I wrote the piece in six weeks or so; and as I was writing it, I was also rehearsing it. The performance is not so calculated. I'd be quick to say, 'Okay, that's it'." In *Einstein*, by contrast again, there is less layering of the stage and less visual interest. It is "flatter," he says, more two-dimensional. "The train, say, is more of a cut out. This is because *Einstein* is an opera, and there is singing. Music is about hearing."

Since Wilson's plays are long and dreamy, spectators frequently doze off, the actions on stage sometimes intruding into their own dreams; for Wilson frequently meets people who tell of seeing and hearing things that, the artist is sure, were *not* there at all. In general, because his art is structurally diffuse, different people remember different things about each performance. I discovered, in talking with Wilson, that I had forgotten whole episodes he thought important, while remembering other details he considered minor. He is also a master of multiple symbolism—of presenting images that suggest several interpretations, each of which is as valid as any other. "I didn't think anything necessarily about Einstein," he explains,

sort of, "but people saw how everything relates to the man Einstein. Of course, there are things particularly about Einstein—the clock, the compass; there is an eclipse of the Persian bowl with a big black disc. I kept in the back of my mind that he liked to sail and he was a dreamer, so I had a bed. He has so influenced the way we see that everything we see through his eyes."

Wilson has also become more discriminating in populating his pieces. Through *Stalin*, he would include "whoever came around the Foundation. Suddenly you had a hundred people, and all those rehearsals. We never said to anyone that they couldn't be in the piece." Wilson's theatrical works incorporate such a variety of talents, experiences, and presences that diverse humanity itself is a distinguishing characteristic of Wilson's theater. With *Queen Victoria*, however, he became more selective, and he began *Einstein* with the conscious restriction of a dozen major performers. Nonetheless, the processes of choice remain serendipitous. The young boy in *Einstein* lives across the street from the Hoffman studio. Past Wilson pieces exist merely as diagrams and snatches of dialogue amid other verbal notes, and it is these "scripts" that, along with the accompanying photographs, ought to be collected into a retrospective book.

Innovative in some respects, Wilson remains conservative in others. Nearly all of his productions take place on proscenium stages, which he calls the "nineteenth-century frame around the picture. The edges are very defined. I like those formal theaters where you sit down and look up and see the stuff. I'm very old-fashioned." Confirming this impression, but adding a critical twist, Gordon Rogoff speaks of *Einstein* as "Nineteenth Century Fox Presents, with all that great huge furniture. It reminds me of operas of the nineteenth century—a rough equivalent to the settings at Wagner's Beyreuth. The impulse behind it is not dissimilar."

Getting together with Wilson is not easy. He is always on the move, if not around the country (or the world), then at least around New York. I found him in his downtown Manhattan loft, just south of the Holland Tunnel, overlooking the Hudson River and the gray-brown New Jersey skyline (that also appears in his plays). Until two years ago, he lived above his foundation-studio's offices at 147 Spring Street, SoHo; however, the expanding enterprise forced his bedroom out and further downtown. Wilson shares this newly renovated, uncluttered, rented space with Andy de Groat, the short, slender choreographer responsible for most of the dancing in Wilson's recent works. The loft's main room is tastefully spare, with a single large laminated table, several homemade chairs, suspended incandescent bulbs with visible filaments, and an ancient radio ("that was here when we moved in"). The concrete floor is painted gray, the walls white. Their cat is black and white. Its master is more inclined to spend money on his theater than on himself and has few personal possessions.

Wilson himself is tall and gangly—well over six feet, with large hands, long arms, and a loose-jointed posture. With short hair and a well-formed face, he somewhat resembles the television personality Chevy Chase. He often wears crewneck sweaters over collared shirts (how fifties collegiate!) and jeans (how sixties!) over long cowboy boots (how Texan!). As he talks, he frequently pulls on his fingers or rubs his eyes; his hands appear not to know what to do with themselves, unless he has a pencil and paper in them. He often draws as he talks, especially when discussing his own works.

Wilson seems a deferential, naive, tentative person with an underside that is strong, sophisticated, and aggressive. This mixture is reflected in his directorial technique. He is also adept at getting people to help him and at soliciting professional advice. (Two favors were asked of me during our talks; I proposed a third.) His conversation is sunny, if not platitudinous; he likes almost everything. He is invariably late for appointments and continually misplacing his glasses. Everyone calls him "Bob."

When he is in New York, he usually works in the mornings at home, in an open-ended alleyway four feet wide and eighteen feet long. Here he has his long work table and his childhood collection of Amerindian and pre-Columbian flint stones on three glass shelves high above the table. Beside his notebooks are three recent books—Buckminster Fuller's *Synergetics*, his friend Paul Schmidt's translations of the complete Rimbaud, and the painter Georgia O'Keefe's memoirs. At least once a day he gets to 147 Spring Street. Here can be found his foundation's executive director, and it is from here that he solicits bookings. In the U.S. at least, he is his own agent.

On the surface, this is an unlikely terminus for a lawyer's son from Waco, Texas, who was a desultory student in the public schools. "I hardly got by," he remembers. "I was shy, afraid to assert myself. I didn't have close friends. I felt insecure about school. I couldn't spell. I couldn't read. I didn't do math well. There were no art subjects." He also stuttered, which he remembers as "speeding in space." He developed a private interest in painting; but when I asked where in his immediate environment it came from, he had no answer. He never studied music or dance, though one might think he did; and he speaks no languages other than English, though he claims to "understand" people speaking in foreign tongues.

He went down the interstate highway to the University of Texas at Austin in 1959, joining a fraternity and majoring at his family's insistence in business administration. "But it was clear to me that I wanted to be a painter. So I started painting. My teachers weren't encouraging at all. One of them told me I wouldn't be a good artist. It was so discouraging, yet in some ways I'm thankful he said that. I got within one semester of graduating, but there were all these courses I could never pass—organic chemistry and accounting. Academics were so painful to me. It was such

a nightmare to keep up with them." He punches his hands into his knees. He still speaks of himself as a Texan and returns home at least once a year to his widowed father in Waco or his younger sister in Lubbock. His sense of theatrical scale, he suggests, has something to do with his origins. "I think that space is in my head."

In the summer of 1960, he visited New York for the first time and found a job in a Newark paint factory. "I went to museums for the first time. The first paintings I liked there were Cezanne. I don't know why I responded so strongly. Maybe it's architectural." He went to Europe in the summer of 1962, and from there wrote to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, asking to be admitted, and received an acceptance by mail. At Pratt, he found a world different from what he had known before. "I felt I was involved with a community of artists." His favorite teachers were Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, the architectural historian, and the painter George McNeil, whom Wilson remembers as "a very spiritual man, who talked about dance and music and architecture. He was very encouraging. I did very well in school for the first time." He left Pratt in 1965 with a degree in interior architecture. "I was painting all the time I was in Pratt, and I secretly wanted to be a painter." Though he subsequently became known for something else, Wilson has nonetheless exhibited his sketches and sculptures in both Europe and the U.S.; most of the visual works he exhibits are derived from his theatrical pieces.

Wherever he is, Wilson tends to see a lot of theater, and he pays particular attention to qualities of performance. He had seen Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land* three times this past fall, not for its dramaturgy but for the stellar performances of John Gielgud and, especially, Ralph Richardson. He remembers liking Bert Lahr "when he ate potato chips on TV" and Jack Benny "who was perfectly proportioned for television." He admired Barbara Harris's performance in Bertolt Brecht's *Mahagonny* several years ago and Mick Jagger "more than I expected." Eclectic in his enthusiasms, Wilson speaks as highly of the underground New York dramatist Jack Smith as of Marlene Dietrich. "The first thing I noticed about her [Dietrich] was her gestures. She could hold her arms in the air for three minutes while singing a song. That's very unnatural, but it did not seem that way." Another idol is the French actress Madeline Renaud, especially in her solo performances in Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*. "She never burdened you with the efforts she had gone through to do that role. It was so simple, yet so complex. She performs for herself. I think the best actors do that."

Not unlike other American Avant-garde artists, Wilson has always found Europe more receptive to his work than his native country. Whereas *Deafman Glance* had only four performances in the entire U.S., there were fifty-eight performances in Paris alone. (And the European version of *Deafman* was six hours long, incorporating portions of *Freud*.) Also, while

reviews in Europe have been usually ecstatic, those in the U.S. tend to be more censorious. "Whenever you do anything publicly," Wilson responds amicably, "people attack you." In the U.S., his theater has won praise largely from people in the visual arts and dance; in Europe, his admirers have included Louis Aragon, Peter Brook, Eugene Ionesco, John Dexter—the literary and theatrical crème de la crème. In *The New Yorker*, Wilson was profiled not by its regular theater critic but by Calvin Tomkins, whose specialty has been the Cage-Cunningham-Rauschenberg avant-garde.

Typically again, *Einstein* was initially sponsored mostly not by American institutions but by a phalanx of European cultural agencies. The Byrd Hoffman received $140,000 from two French festivals for the initial performances, $75,000 from the Venice Biennale for five performances, $50,000 from a Dutch consortium for four performances, $33,000 from the Belgian National Opera and local private sponsors for two performances, $29,000 from the Hamburg opera for two performances, and $15,000 from the Theater of Nations (plus $8,000 from the U.S. State Department) for two performances in Yugoslavia. The U.S. National Endowment for the Arts contributed $30,000 at the beginning and $30,000 more, long after everyone else, for two performances at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. "You pour all your energies into these few performances, which have become special for everyone," he muses. "You just go on." One might also wonder why American cultural officials seem to be working undertime to make America look philistine?

The difference, as Wilson sees it, is that European cultural institutions put more emphasis upon contemporary art. "We must have equal support for the arts of our time. I want to put it into the mainstream of American theater." He also laments the policy of the National Endowment for the Arts, unlike European cultural agencies, not to provide funds for foreign performance companies to come to the U.S. or even, as Wilson did in Europe, to create new works in a foreign country. Without European intelligence about essential support, he concludes, *Einstein on the Beach* would never have happened.

To those who have suggested that *Einstein* received more patronage than necessary, Wilson replies, "For a contemporary opera to be created on a scale we did it—forty people on an international tour with thirty-three performances—it is unusual that it could be done for so little money." Needless to say perhaps, grants and outright gifts never quite meet expenses, and even after the success of *Einstein*, the Byrd Hoffman Foundation is presently a hundred thousand dollars in debt. One of Wilson's least pleasant jobs is deciding which creditors come first.

The influence of his theater has been international. Nearly every serious drama magazine in the Western world has recently published one long article, if not several, on his work. A French publisher has issued a critical

book entirely devoted to it, and another was prepared for the Venice Biennale. Wilson's imagery and composition show up in European theater pieces; his presence is also reflected in the theatrical works of his sometime American collaborators, such as Richie Gallo, Kenneth King, and Lucinda Childs. Nearly everywhere in New York avant-garde theater one can recognize Wilson's influence—not only in the literary theater of Richard Foreman and the Mabou Mines, but in the nonliterary theater of, say, Stuart Sherman, and in the activities currently called "performance." Foreman identifies Wilson's influence primarily in the breakdown of narrative, while JoAnne Akalaitis, a principal of Mabou Mines, recently told me, "It is very hard to get past Wilson, because his images are so strong. I find myself always seeing Wilsonesque pictures."

What he has done, simply, is realize a radically alternative way of making theater—one that is predominantly visual, instead of verbal; architectural, instead of representational; extravagant, instead of modest; perceptual, instead of emotional; theatrical, instead of literary. As such, his pieces belong to the great tradition of American theater, from minstrel shows and vaudeville to the present—an indigenous tradition that, in contrast to the best European theater, has always emphasized performance over script, intelligent improvisation over precise planning, vernacular processes over codified forms, and theatrical values over literary. The best American theater has been not formal but informal, where the performer is the dominant figure, if not the director and the author too. Wilson belongs securely in this native tradition. Because he has realized this alternative so well, his theatrical productions rank, in my experiences, among the masterpieces of the past decade.

Notes on Art Performances, III.

MEREDITH MONK

16 Millimetre Earrings (Hunter College). I saw this at Judson Memorial Church last year, but did not write about it then. That was a more propitious space for its elements, and certain things might have been more memorable then. Unquestionably, it is the most extraordinary solo performance I've seen all year. The piece opens with Meredith sitting on a chair draped with a white cloth, her back to the audience, with her reddish hair draped down over the cloth. Strumming a guitar, she sings a few notes. Meanwhile, a tape of patter starts, and she picks up some hairpins. The tape continually describes actions other than those she does; and at one point, there are three elements superimposed on the tapes. At another point she shouts against an echo of herself. Then comes a black and white film of her face, slightly cross-eyed, as always. By putting magnifying glasses in front of her eyes, she produces on screen the most amazing distorted image. When that is done, she puts a basket on top of her head. Around one side of it is draped a cloth which becomes, in effect, a screen for a color film of pretty much the same phenomena. This is the only point where I thought the piece lost its pace, because the film not only repeats an earlier event but it goes on too long. Perhaps she could have introduced more interesting sound elements at this point, because I already noticed that she is capable of bridging visually static sections with extraordinary tape. When this is done, she goes over to a large chest in the left rear of the stage. Once she immerses herself in the chest and closes the top over her, a film of a doll-child burning appears on the screen just behind the chest. Monk arises out of the chest and stands in front of the projected flame, her own chest bare, while a tape plays on her own beautiful, if conventional, rendition of *Greensleeves*. She then takes her bows with a robe on. The preparation and expense involved in this piece must have been enormous, with three films and several audiotapes. I gather that she spent seven months working up the elements for this piece. It was obviously a breakthrough—literally levels above her previous work—that will no doubt create for her a following of people who will attend her next presentation. (January 30, 1967)

Blueprint (1), Overload/Blueprint (2) (in two parts, Judson Memorial Church). The first section of this two-part work was disappointing—an acid-head piece with minimal motion and a heavily repetitious rock accompaniment. After much darkness, the lights go on to reveal Monk and a man sitting stiffly in a pose taken, to my sight, from Marisol's sculptures. They pull their hands out from under their armpits to reveal something (I can't remember what, perhaps because their hands are bandaged). Then with halting steps, they arise and exit out the side door. Outside the window, in back of the gallery, we see wigs of their hair hanging on a tree. The audience is so disappointed with seeing so little that they take a while to exit.

I had my doubts about returning several weeks later for the second part, only to be pleasantly surprised. The second section is spectacular, nearly as fine as *16 Millimetre Earrings*. Not only does she use her space well, but she handles a multiplicity of materials deftly and theatrically. A woman with a red wig walks across the floor of the meeting room to the left aisle and through the audience. Then the man enters and dumps feathers on the floor. Then Meredith appears in a ballerina's costumes and, sure enough, pirouettes around on point. (This bit leads me to believe some autobiographical expression is her aim, as before.) I can't remember now the exact order of the sequences; but at one point a little girl goes up to the balcony and plays the organ (as Meredith might have done, at a similar age), while the man manipulates the foot pedals beneath her. At another point Meredith brings a naked, crying baby down the right aisle. Another sequence has her moving on point in nonballetic ways. The third part, in the Judson Church gym, comes after an intermission. However, this, like the first part, suffers from a paucity of activity. Meredith is up in the gym's balcony, rocking in a chair, while minimal activity transpires around her. I would like to see this again. I was distressed to notice that only one older mixed-means artist (a woman) attended this piece, probably because the others are too snobbish to believe that anyone not part of their original gang would interest them. (November 11, December 5, 1967)

Title (Billy Rose Theater). I have ambivalent feelings about Meredith's work; for a while I very much admired her *16 Millimetre Earrings* and recognized it as a breakthrough, I have found other works of hers to be outrageously pretentious and suspiciously self-indulgent. For one thing, she has become a moot anti-intellectual—a posture that her contemporary and sometime collaborator Kenneth King would never indulge. For another, her ambition often gets in the way of her activity. This work put me off, although it has attractive elements. One good idea is putting live displays in the theater's lobby, mostly of performers wrapped in corrugated

cardboard that they break through before the show's end. Another is the onstage attempt to telephone people in both San Francisco and Montreal, so that their voices, as well as the Bell operators', are fully audible to all. A crowning stroke is the emergence of a dyed-blonde matron who, when she gets to center stage, declares, in a slow voice, "I am Meredith's mother," and then walks off the stage. At another point Meredith announces that she will hold herself stationary for two minutes and she proceeds to do just that. A later moment has an audiotape of two people, sounding as though they are naked and (to judge from their giggling) high on pot, measuring each other, including sexual anatomy. The final sequence has Meredith dancing on stage in boots, I guess to hide her uncomfortably stubby calves, and glasses, I assume to correct her cross-eyedness. Merely displaying a body that would be subpar in most dance groups measures Meredith's courage, or madness. The movements are easy and gentle, perhaps reminiscent of the things that Kenneth King does remarkably well. I could not, however, make much of the evening. A mutual friend of ours told me that this piece was originally done three years ago. If so, why present it now, especially if its indulgences are so evident. (February 5, 1969)

Juice: A Cantata in Three Installments (Guggenheim Museum). I admired the initial idea of presenting a single theater piece in three distinct spaces and, thus, at three different times; I look forward to seeing the remaining parts. During the first section, the audience sits on the floor of the museum, while the performers become visible in the upper tiers of America's architecturally most distinctive museum. The articulation of space, people and light, each element with its own rhythms, is marvelous (as are the sounds, culminating with Julius Tobias cutting wood). During the second section, members of the audience are invited up the ramps to inspect thirteen simultaneous tableaus of performers doing various things, none of them more interesting, alas, than the Roy Lichtenstein paintings that hang on the walls beside them. For the last section, the performers move to the ground floor, while the audience remains in the tiers looking down at them; but that angle is too dizzying for my acrophobic head. [I neglected, alas, to write note cards about the second or third parts.] (November 7, 1969)

________, with Don Preston. *A Raw Recital* (Whitney Museum). Meredith's work has been very erratic—some pieces, such as *16 Millimetre Earrings* (1966), have been considerably better than others. Even within the three evenings of *Juice* were discrepancies in quality, with the third part (just a display of materials) being inconsequential. This concert of unusual vocal sounds descends from the second part of *Juice*. A mutual friend told me that Meredith is trying here to overcome an earlier psychological block

(about her mother's singing career) to become a singer in her own right. (That accounts for why she asked the *New York Times* not to send a dance critic. The music department decided, however, against covering her.) *A Raw Recital* is a sound and image piece that opens with Monk and Daniel Sverdlik in a Victorian setting around a keyboard attached to a loudspeaker. She sings excerpts from J. S. Bach's *Bist du bei Mir*. Through nine successive tableaus, the image becomes ever more eccentric, while the sound floats off into freaky obligatos. These last sounds weren't meaningful to me, though I liked the atmosphere of the piece. (April 29, 1970)

Vessel (in three spaces). This is Meredith's first New York extravaganza in two years; and just as *16 Millimetre Earrings* represented an advance in her art, so did *Juice*, which successfully introduced me to the idea of staging a work at three different times, in three different places. In the latter case, the first two parts were compressed into a single evening—a weak first part in her own loft introduced the characters and some musical themes (a freaky kind of scat singing). In *Vessel* the pace is terribly slow—lumpy and drawn out—and the decor is reminiscent of Robert Wilson's theater in its largely nineteenth-century images coupled with the unrelated lush costuming of the performers. The second part, done in the Performance Garage at 33 Wooster Street, is better, with a livelier sense of time and more visual cohesiveness. Meredith continually introduces the line that seems to be her theme: "I am alone on earth. I have always been alone." Along a high left of the space edge is an old-fashioned audience; along the high right are the tableaus. Perhaps the most exciting sequence has a chorus of performers making odd sounds in response to a ground bass provided by a star performer previously unfamiliar to me, a Mr. Ping Chong. This sequence is repeated later. The third part was done in a huge parking lot between Wooster and West Broadway, just north of Canal Street. The audience is seated in bleachers, and across the street is St. Alphonsus Church, where I think Erwin Piscator had his first New York City theater. On the pavement lie a large group of performers kicking their legs in the air and making unusual sounds. When they arise, three people, symbolically lit, move across the lot and later go under the three arches of the church.

Meredith then sings at the organ; and, as before, whenever she commands the stage, she goes on far too long. Edwin Denby, sitting beside me, felt that the space was too big for Meredith, who neither filled it well nor exploited its possibilities. As before, I was more impressed by her ambition than her execution, but her earlier multispace *Juice* was more coherent than this. On the other hand, some of *Vessel*'s more stunning moments are bound to stick with me for quite some time. (October 29 & 30, 1971)

Education of the Girlchild (The House, 597 Broadway). You see the influence of the new feminism in women-created art that explores female consciousness; and since Meredith inclines toward autobiographical expression anyway, how could she resist? As the audience enters, she is dressed and made up as an old lady, sitting still in a chair. (This feat of concentrated endurance reminded me of similar stunts in earlier pieces of hers.) The piece develops by her progressing down a white cloth, laid out as a train, becoming younger as she moves forward. There is an audiotape of either a piano or an organ (I can't remember which), and Meredith does a lot of singing, which is becoming even stronger and perhaps the dominant dimension (more successfully than in that *Raw Recital* done at the Whitney Museum a few years ago).

Perhaps I missed all the feminist implications that a few liberated ladies beside me were talking about; but as always, I liked the concept and the execution. (April 22, 1972)

Education of the Girlchild (70 Grand Street). It opens with the performers, in white face, gathered around a table, and it proceeds slowly through several scenes. One section involves a six-foot tall woman painted all purple. The second half presents Meredith singing her idiosyncratic solos. There is a frame tale, as well as a repeated image of a child's drawing of a path that did not flow into its destined hole. As I write these notes, nearly a week later, I don't remember much more, except that I thought it remarkable that her work should remain so symbolic and expressionistic at this time of minimalism and conceptualism. Thanks to feminism, esthetic/career opportunities available to women seem greater than those for men of comparable talent. Indicatively, the audience was filled with women whom I didn't see at other performance art. (June 13, 1973)

Education of the Girlchild (70 Grand Street). This is the third time I've seen this piece, and it's getting better and better. I found the first act a bit slow—several women initially gather around a large table do a series of womanly things. It ends with Meredith in a tableau toward the back of the stage; amazingly, she stays there throughout the intermission. The second act is Meredith's solo about the ages of women, progressing counter-chronologically from old age to youth. This tour de force is done as a series of solos in that unique singing style she has evolved over the years. Probably because the imagery is very feminine, women tend to be moved more than men; but I remain awed by her singing. Several years ago Meredith told me that she had sufficient charisma to command a stage by herself. At the time I thought she was deluding herself, but, of course, she proved me wrong. (November 25, 1973)

Quarry: An Opera in 3 Movements (La Mama Annex). It starts slowly, as Meredith's pieces tend to do; but it becomes more spectacular. At the opening are tableaus about "Lullaby" (movement one). Then a lot of performers, mostly kids, enter for "March." The best passage is a film directed by Meredith herself. Out of rocks in a quarry emerge human performers, scaled to the size of ants. As the effect is astonishing, one wishes that the live part of this piece risked the same disruptions of scale and perceptions. The music is by now stylistically familiar, though not as spectacular as the second half of *Education of the Girlchild.* There were plenty of references to Jewish dreams. I found it extraordinary in its best parts, but uneven as a whole, and regret that I don't have more to say here. (April 17, 1976)

JOHN MORAN

Jack Benny! (La MaMa, a Ridge Theater Production). Moran is billed as a young man from Nebraska who writes his "operas" in a few weeks. The initial charm of this one is that its sound is entirely on tape, all drawn from recordings of the soundtrack of the historic Jack Benny television show, now processed (with permission?) through the digital sampler and other audio technologies to produce a modern sound that alludes to the older one. While this tape is played, figures on stage mouth the lines roughly in sync. Given this structure, Benny's own lines are assigned to different performers on stage. Thus, Benny is initially two women in a box; only later does he become a bespectacled gray-haired man carrying a violin. The work has several scenes, separated by breaks that replay commercials from the 1950s; and I sense that though Moran was born in the mid-1960s, he wants to say something significant about the 1950s, much as I at roughly the same age wrote pompously about the 1930s. To my mind, this dimension was less successful. The show lasted only an hour, and I wondered, first, whether his soundtrack could survive on disc (because the same acoustic material is repeated too much) and then how far Moran could take his clever technique. (October 21, 1989)

MAX NEUHAUS

Three Hours of Sound Construction (Carnegie Recital Hall). Neuhaus strikes me as one of the more interesting practitioners of sound environments. His piece on the loft roofs of the Bowery last summer was really one of the best of its kind. Before that, he had a distinguished career as a percussionist with avant-garde ensembles. This piece, however, suffered the familiar tragedy of so much electronic work in the Cagean tradition—the machinery didn't work; so whereas the first half of the concert was mostly silence, the second half had just buzzing noise. The idea was to construct on stage, in the course of the evening, a sound-generating machine that would supposedly produce increasingly complex sound. Meanwhile,

Neuhaus's hand movements in putting the machinery together would be reproduced on a screen facing the audience. As the physical limitations of an auditorium cut across the grain of an essentially environmental piece, one wanted not to look at the screen but to go on stage and see what everyone was doing. To an orthodox Cagean, mechanical failure does not matter, not only because not working can generate surprises that are perhaps interesting, but also because an artist should not sacrifice his conception for the sake of interesting the audience. I disagree. (January 8, 1968)

ALWIN NIKOLAIS

Vaudeville of the Elements (Henry Street Settlement). I initially found this very impressive; but once the novelty wore off, I was disappointed. Nikolais has very clever theatrical conceptions, with a startling use of color, abrasive sound scores, and some ingenious adaptations of electricity. I admire him for doing everything himself—choreography, lighting, audiotape, costumes, and so on. This evening, the opening and closing dances are the most effective. However, he tends to let his conceptions go on longer than necessary; the scores are terribly repetitious and basically unimaginative; the costuming has little variation in tone; the dancers' movements are not particularly original. In other words, Nikolais has avant-garde theatrical impulses that push beyond his capacities for choreographic realization. Thus, the entire performance suffers from undertones of vulgarization. The dancers themselves are hardly outstanding. Much to my surprise, given the youthful quality of the work, the man emerging to take his bows is white-haired. (May 5, 1966)

Dance Theatre (City Center Theater). I hadn't seen Nikolais's work for over three years, and his art hasn't really changed that much. While the costuming is breathtaking, the scores are clumsy, the movements are uninteresting, and the lighting is surprisingly static. However, the result is extremely theatrical. I suppose I should have included a chapter on him, as well as perhaps another on Merce Cunningham, in my book *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (1968). Not only is the dancing as such uninspired, but it seems that Nikolais lost many of his best dancers to the company named after his long-term partner, Murray Louis. Only Carolyn Carlson is outstanding here. Also, as his female dancers have gotten much larger, moves originally intended for Phyllis Lamhut and Luly Santangelo now belong to such huge women as Jeanette Stoner and Claudia Melrose. The real Nikolais innovation is the use of props and costumes as extensions of the dancers' bodies—in *Imago*, extended arms; in the "Noumenon" section from *Masks, Props and Mobiles* (1953), elastic sacks that reveal only the body's extremities. The "Tensile Involvement" section of the same 1953

piece has a great sequence with string. "Tower," which is the third act of *Vaudeville of the Elements*, is slicker and more representational, if not plotty (with the process of building a tower, and so forth). The new piece, *Tent* (1968), suffers from an excess of dead time. However, the lighting is marvelous, as are the costume changes. Indeed, the changes themselves are far more marvelous than what falls between, so that you wondered why Nikolais doesn't insist upon speeding everything up. Finally, Carolyn Carlson, despite a smile that seems painted on her face, is clearly one of the most accomplished and beautiful dancers of the age. (December 2, 1969)

Dance Theatre (City Center). The new piece, *Echo*, is really beyond the 1965 works—the lighting is more various while the dancers have less presence (except for his star, Carolyn Carlson). The second part, Carlson's solo, is really the most continually interesting, strictly choreographic sequence I've seen from Nikolais yet. Lights are projected onto her to make different shadows appear on two screens behind her. Also flashing on the screen are silhouettes of herself. The title here is really descriptive of the theme of the piece, although I now find other sections less memorable. The evening opened with the complete *Somniloquy* (1967), with performers carrying lights and occasionally performing from behind a thin screen. The piece depends upon playing moving lights off static people, or vice versa (with green bands projected up from the floor). In between it and *Echo* was a *Divertissement* of three set pieces from the night before—the "Mantis" with the extended arms from *Imago* (1963), "Noumenon" with three women encased in sacks from *Masks, Props and Mobiles* (1953), and "Tensile Involvement" with the strings from the same early piece. (Since these sections were already familiar to me, I wondered if other sections from those pieces could also be replayed.) No one in the company can equal Carlson, who could be a superstar if she would abolish that expressionless smile and accomplish more interesting body movements. She is best at stretching out her long skinny body and then moving her appendages within that frame. As a theatrical magician, Nikolais remains very good, but he seems to neglect the problem of what alternative kinds of movement might be interesting in our time. (December 4, 1969)

Dance Theatre (City Center). I wish that Nikolais would abolish those self-anthologies with which he insists upon opening each evening. They are probably quite effective in introducing his preoccupations and history with audiences in the provinces. However, most people here have already seen his bag bit, "Noumenon," or the rope piece, both from *Masks, Props and Mobiles* (1953). The only gem in this series—or at least the only one conducive to interesting variations—is Carolyn Carlson's solo from *Somniloquy*. She is one of the few New York dancers who can successfully

command a stage all alone. On second thought, most of these openings depend upon props as extensions of the body, but Nik is no longer emphasizing this. *Tower*, by contrast, is almost vulgar—from crowd scenes confronting the audience to the explosions that end it (how pseudo-timely!). It also has a patently evolutionary plot. *Echo*, which I saw in its premiere last December, is a gem, rich in stagecraft, with a great solo for Carlson against projected images of herself. The general blackness reminds me of Merce Cunningham's *Winterbranch*, as does the alienation expressed in Carlson's great solo. However, the second half of this *Echo* runs on far longer than necessary. The trouble with Nik's work is the absence of any real esthetic risk or scandal comparable, say, to the use of electric fans in Merce's recent piece. Nonetheless, Nikolais has clearly moved away from the extensions concept, which is probably exhausted, and into a truly mixed-means theater. (April 30, 1970)

Dance Theatre (City Center). The new piece, *Structures*, is a gem, perhaps the first Nikolais I've ever seen that is almost devoid of dull sections. Indeed, previous experience suggests that Nik favors spectacular scene-changes to compensate for the absence of movement ideas. Here, the props are screens, which the performers constantly manipulate in various ways, finally putting them atop one another into structures (like *Tower*). The piece ends with an apocalypse of bodies flying through the air (and the structure falling down, as in *Tower*). I'd very much like to see this one again. Also on the program was *Tent* which uses slide projections for a series of witty illusions. Carolyn Carlson remains one of the great dancers, but her favored male lead, Bob Beswick, is not as competent as his predecessor, Emery Hermans. (May 1, 1970)

Dance Theatre (ANTA Theater). The company's composition has changed radically with the departure of Carolyn Carlson and Jeanette Stoner. There are no longer any female soloists, while the newer women are considerably smaller. This means that Carlson's solo in *Echo* is assumed by Mr. Emery Hermans, who remains the most accomplished male dancer. However, since the solo does not work for him, perhaps Nik is wrong in his belief that roles in his pieces can be sexually interchangeable. *Echo* seems based upon a lighting idea, and the best passages rely on shadow. *Tent* depends upon the tent itself as a changing screen for spectacular light changes; so that it can become a mountain, clouds, and so forth. *Tower* is based upon the prop out of which the towers are composed. While *Echo* seems weaker than before and, thanks to new sections, longer too, *Tent* seems stronger this time, notwithstanding dead spots in the middle. As few performers in the company now can command a stage with their movements alone, Nik doesn't seem to be thinking much about that possibility. (February 27, 1971)

Dance Theatre (ANTA Theater). *Divertissement II* contains three bits I'd not seen before—the first from *Sanctum* has five male performers in rope cages with swinging tops; the second has three women in hoop costumes that make them walk in a Balinese fashion (a trio from *Vaudeville of the Elements*); and the last I can't remember. *Structures* was disappointing this time though—the wit had gone, the gimmicks were no longer surprising. The new masterpiece is *Scenario*, which had its world premiere this season. It resembles *Echo* (1969) in its complete abandonment of plot, for the root idea appears to be projecting light on people. Some sections reminded me of scenes from The Living Theatre as the performers made shapes before flickering projections. The use of abstract projections on moving people reminded me of Mimi Garrard's *Flux*. I liked the variety of *Scenario* but could not discern its gist, or its root, and so look forward to seeing it again. (March 1, 1971)

Dance Theatre (Brooklyn Academy). The new piece, *Foreplay*, is very peculiar Nikolais. Not only does it avoid props and lights but it also introduces the theme of sexual difference that is quite contrary to his earlier assumptions. The title, first of all, is unusually explicit (and that too is uncharacteristic) although I gather that it was originally titled something like "Introduction to a Prelude." The wit here is more typical of Murray Louis than of Nikolais. *Sanctum* is based upon an elastic prop that wraps around the body. Also on the program was *Interims* (1963), a Murray Louis piece performed with Phyllis Lamhut, which is very fine, as well as choreographically more inventive than Nikolais's own work. The classic move has Lamhut supine on the floor with her head wagging from side to side. Early in the piece she executes a spectacular stunt by moving across the floor solely on her thighs and hands. (January 22, 1972)

Dance Theatre (Brooklyn Academy). The opening night included a fine revival of the group dance of *Sanctum*, which depends upon an elastic encasing cape, this time using a larger company than before. It provides a good illustration of how the specifics of Nikolais choreography follow from his choice of prop. In "Boulevard" from *Imago* (1963), also revived, the props are cups placed on the performers' heads and billowy costumes without arms. They determine the performers' movements not by extending them, in traditional Nikolais design, but now by restricting them. I still find *Scenario* the best of Nik's recent pieces. Here lights, rather than props, shape everything. Several op-art passages remind me of Mimi Garrard's *Flux*, except that where she realizes kineticism through moving visual patterns, Nik projects steady lights upon dancers whose movements generate kinetic action. The dance now ends with slides of the nude image of each dancer being projected directly on their bodies. (How voyeuristic

Nik has become at sixty!) Gone from the company are the great dancers capable of doing solos, but perhaps *Scenario* is finally dancer-proof, so to speak. (January 25, 1972)

Grotto (Brooklyn Academy). Nikolais is now giving his colleague of 25 years, Murray Louis, more of the evening to show his own work, in joint performances. What makes this move doubly gracious is that Nik's choreography seems weaker by comparison (which is inevitable, at least for a critic). The problem with Nik's work is still the collapse of time, which invariably occurs again and again in the piece, always for the same reason—after a spectacular change of scene, the dancers' movements are so uninventive. Seeing *Sanctum* for the umpteenth time, I could be stunned once again by the lighting and the costuming, as well as by the elastic prop that goes around the dancers' bodies. This is real theater, I say to myself; and it is. *Grotto* depends mostly upon slide projections, which are fair, and a special prop of diaphanous sheets suspended from the ceiling. The movements favor athleticism, perhaps because the dancers improvised them that way; but nobody in the current company is capable of dominating the stage by himself. Last year I identified two new directions in Nikolais—the avoidance of props and the introduction of sexual themes; but neither informs this piece. (February 17, 1973)

Dance Theatre (Lyceum Theater). Until recently Nik has always made a point of avoiding sex in his pieces, indeed barely distinguishing men from women. (That accounts for why Emery Hermans could inherit Carolyn Carlson's solos.) However, in the course of abandoning props, he has become interested in nudity—more precisely, in projections of nude dancers upon their live, clothed selves. In this respect, his new piece *Cross-Fade* echoes *Foreplay*, which was premiered within the last year or two. Some of the new projections are fantastic, as he works nude figures against silhouettes with amazing fluency, in addition to his customary abstract projections. Nonetheless, *Cross-Fade* is also too long for itself, while much of its sound is too vulgarly blatant, at least for my taste. (February 12, 1973)

Dance Company (Lyceum Theater). The best part was *Divertissement* which included this time a duet I'd not seen before, "Alphabet" (from *Allegory* [1959]), in which two dancers do semi-gymnastic moves against lucite screens. Some of their moves are contorted and therefore emotional. Next was the solo from *Sanctum* (1964), in which Rob Esposito fills the role originally choreographed for Murray Louis. Then came the mermaid piece from *Vaudeville of the Elements* (1965), where props once again limit movement. Then came the big bag piece *Masks, Props and Mobiles* (1953), now performed by three men (unlike the last time I saw it, when three large

ladies did it), and finally "Tensile Involvement," also from *Masks*, etc., which is another name for the great rope piece that must have been stunning twenty years ago. For the most part, *Tent* is scary as hell, especially with the explosion at the end. *Scrolls*, billed as the new version of a 1967 piece, has the contrary Nikolais idea of the prop as not an extension but a foil. Here, as elsewhere, Nik has no qualms about revealing how his illusions are done. (I keep returning to Nik's new seasons with the expectation that I shall finally see something truly great, something fully worthy of his talents and visionary ambitions; but I'm always disappointed.) (February 16, 1974)

________/**Murray Louis**. (Joyce Theater). The first of two successive evenings opened with Group Dance from *Sanctum*, in which sixteen performers are given seamless elastic material, perhaps three feet wide, that becomes at once an extension of and a resistance to their bodies. The opening image is so strong you can hear a gasp emerge from the audience; and at other moments in the evening, especially after a decided change of image, the gasp can be heard again. The first program concluded with *Mechanical Organ*, which is Nik's title for seven pieces drawn from various sources. My sense of Nik remains, after twenty-five years of watching him, that without interesting ideas for body movement his theater depends upon scene changes and/or short pieces to survive.

Louis is a different case. He premiered *A Fine Line*, a brilliant solo for himself, to music by Witold Lutoslawski. Even at sixty-five, Louis remains a continually compelling performer, perhaps because he is the only modern dancer to have learned from Charlie Chaplin the impact of the slightest well-timed moves that seem central to his choreography. (*Junk Dances* depends upon it as well.) His trouble as a choreographer is that his signature moves apparently have not been taught, to my recollection, to anyone other than Phyllis Lamhut. Louis's *Dramatis Personae* depends upon the prop of a profile face, which, if I recollect correctly, the dancers hold in their hands; that device provides a certain wit. His *Blue Streak*, also a world premiere, this to Mendelssohn's music, is another group dance lacking both props and distinctive choreography and is thus a complete dud, redeemed only by the performance of a male dancer (apparently Alberto Del Saz) with an unusually muscular chest. (You sensed he might have been lifting weights.)

For the second night, Nik's *Pond* (1982) had performers on dollys, with a spectacular tableau at the beginning and another at the end. His *Intrados* (1989) had Del Saz and Kay Andersen, another muscular male, working with two hoops in acrobatic ways. Louis had two pieces—*Aperitif (Lerbleu)* (1982), which struck me as utterly pointless, and *Where Phantoms Gather* (1991), which was longer and in certain respects more interesting

than his other work, though once again the parts made for himself as a soloist seem much stronger than those made for others. At one point the stage had five performers, an odd number whose inherent lack of symmetry was immediately striking. I thought this better than Twyla Tharp's current choreography, which I had seen earlier in the week. (February 1992)

HERMANN NITSCH

Orgies-Mysteries Theater (Filmmakers' Cinemateque). Nitsch is a painter born in Vienna in 1938, a stocky guy who in 1957 conceived of a contemporary new kind of "Gesamtkünstwerk," or art incorporating all others arts, as the program informs us. The promotional flier mailed to me promised something spectacular: "The world of the phenomena is understood through synesthesia. Drama (lyric, epic), painting and music combine themselves in a 6-day feast of glorification of existence. The spectator (participant, player) is thrown into a more intensified aesthetic-mystic understanding of the surrounding world." What I saw was a rather clumsy and deathly rhythmless mixed-means piece in which Nitsch poured red paint and water over several piles of kidneys, stuffed other offal straight from the butcher into the pants of a fellow partner, poured more imitation blood down a suspended goat's carcass and then ripped the carcass apart. Nearly everyone around me found the piece incredibly boring, even if the conception was devilish and it did offer some stunning images. (March 2, 1968)

CLAES OLDENBERG

Moviehouse (Filmmakers' Cinemateque, Wurlitzer Building). For this "sculpture in light, time and space, etc., using actual material," Oldenberg asks the audience to stand in the aisles, for the action takes place in the theater's seats. The setting is a moviehouse, and the theme seems to be the natural chaos of such situations. (Are moviehouses on 42nd Street, where this basement theater is located, supposed to be more chaotic than those elsewhere?) There is no continuity to the various actions, which nonetheless have a clear definition. While a projector directs flashing light toward the empty screen, a character in a Santa Claus outfit breaks a whisky bottle; he also continually rummages about in his bag. At another point, he puts on a schmoo headdress. A well-dressed man rips articles out of his *Daily News*. A rather pretty woman repeatedly takes off her coat and then puts it back on. Like the others, she is constantly changing her seat. A man dressed as a doctor stands at the base of the auditorium, facing the audience. First he juggles three balls; then he climbs over the seat to examine one of the spectators, who appears to be okay. The well-dressed man blows some flakes into the path of the light, causing a fluttering

of light rays. Everyone smokes incessantly. Near the end, a youngish man, shabbily dressed, carries a racing bicycle across the seats, from the front of the theater toward its rear, stepping only on the seats. Throughout the piece, two female ushers are distributing cards to the various participants. (Quite possibly, they contain the playwright's instructions to his characters, the distribution of such directions occurring in a chance manner.) This second time I liked the twenty-minute piece more than before, because the aisles were less crowded and I could thus follow all the activities without someone butting in front of me. I could also discern how, despite individually meaningless actions, the piece acquires a logic and rhythm of its own. (December 16, 1965)

OPEN THEATRE

Terminal, directed by Joseph Chaikin and Roberta Sklar; text by Susan Yankowitz. I unfortunately missed earlier Open Theatre productions, I guess because it never put me on its mailing list and, more important, no one I trust advised me to come (so splintered has the avant-garde theater world become). That is regrettable, because this production is very good. The language is minimal, the sound improvised, the performers dexterous, and the direction excellent. It opens with a verbal fugue that depends upon repetition, the word "dead," for instance, being said over and over again. Attitudes toward death are the subject of the piece, though it seems a strange obsession for a company so young. They change into white costumes that reappear from time to time. A horrifying description of an embalming is repeated, the second time with not one but two cadavers. Visual fugues accompany verbal fugues as each performer makes his or her own set of movements independently of, and yet complementing, the others. Everything moves very quickly, and the piece ends, in just over an hour, with the performers crawling along the floor, their voices becoming progressively more incoherent. Art historically, this descends from the Living Theatre's production of *The Brig*, in which Ray Barry, once a footballer at my college, now a performer with the Open Theatre, played a prisoner and, I think, Joseph Chaikin occasionally appeared. (I remember meeting the latter running the Living Theatre's box office.) The fact that this is closer to *The Brig* suggests that later production might be more suggestive a decade later than the Living Theatre's earlier piece, *The Connection*. For *Terminal*, the set is fairly spare, with mobile platforms and plywood planks. Perhaps because the language is simple and rhythmically articulated, the obsessive theme raises the energy-level. (March 27, 1972)

STEVE PAXTON

Physical Things (69th Regimental Armory). Steve's contribution to "Nine Evenings" was so disappointing it became easy for many to attribute

his involvement to a special relationship with Bob Rauschenberg. Yet Paxton is an intelligent man, with a strong sense of where he stands and what he is about. For instance, his title reflects his choreography. He takes certain strains of Cagean esthetics more seriously than Cage, while his dislike of Merce Cunningham, which strikes me as nearly pathological, leads him to eschew any prettiness. Here, the audience is invited to proceed down a plastic tunnel, which along its floor has loudspeakers emitting rock 'n' roll. Then we emerge into a larger space in which nature scenes are projected upon several screens. Walking down another tunnel we come to a large open space devoid of activity but not without grandeur. Down yet another tunnel, we come out of the plastic and into an open field in which, through pocket transistorized receivers handed us, we can hear either bagpipe music or statements against smoking. Ugh. (October 1966)

Excerpts from Earth Interiors (School for Visual Arts). So far I've always regarded Steve as far more intelligent than his pieces, which invariably struck me as far more committed to reduction than creation: a "sound and movement" performance with a tape of an airline hostess and absolutely *no visible movements*, or a tower at the E.A.T. armory show which held minimal interest. This piece was more surprising, as well as the most adventurous and coherent piece in an otherwise mediocre series. Paxton and Trisha Brown walk around and out the auditorium, while a tape plays of Paxton himself talking about the foot and walking. The monologue provides a ground bass that gave the piece a rhythm that his work has so far lacked, while the talk itself has enough interest on its own to make us regret all the interruptions. This is the first time, to my memory, that significant syntactical speech is used in the Rauschenbergian strain of mixed-means theater. (November 11, 1967)

PERFORMANCE GROUP

Dionysus in '69 (Performing Garage). "Somewhat like Euripides's *The Bacchae*," according to the program, this was the most spectacular literary theater of the season, without doubt a step ahead, not only in Richard Schechner's career as a part-time director, but also in the tradition of radical reinterpretations of classical scripts. As we enter the theater, we are asked to sit wherever we can, among two platforms and rafters, while members of the Performance Group do various exercises in the middle of the floor. The play begins officially with an exchange of lines between Patrick McDermott and a woman in street clothes. For the remainder of the evening, the characters move in and out of Euripides' lines and characters. At times, they shift into contemporary jargon, as well as using one another's real names. Since behavior on stage becomes rather extreme, there is a constant argument over the nature of theatrical artifice. Early in the play

is a dance sequence in which the audience is invited to participate. There is also a stunning birth portrayal in which a male body clad only in a jock-strap is passed over a carpet of similarly clothed male bodies that lie, face down, in sequential alternation with five parallel pairs of female legs spread wide apart. (Photographs of the production always emphasize this scene.) Then there is a group therapy sequence in which every question must challenge another company member, as well as include a risk to the questioner. The evening I attended there were some genuine confrontations, mostly between Patrick McDermott and Ceil Smith, another performer with whom he had recently been living; I was told that, thanks to such enticement, this exchange went on longer than usual. After several dialogues in Euripides language, which I tended not to follow, the actor named Bill Shepherd homosexually propositions William Finlay, who has been playing Dionysus; and the two disappear into a trap door. The final major sequence is a frenzy in which the players crawl all over one another and even pull two male members of the audience into their melee. At times past, I gather, most spectators joined. One night, the situation got so messy that the production never reached its false coda (which Schechner reportedly inserted against the objections of the group), in which Finlay declares, "A vote for William Finlay in '68 brings Dionysus in '69," and one of the women passes out campaign buttons reading "Dionysus in '69." Finlay concludes, "Some of the things you thought would happen here tonight have not and for that you should be grateful." (July 27, 1968)

Dionysus in '69 (Performing Garage). We saw *Dionysus* again, the following night, if only to see how things might have changed; and the production wasn't too different, even though Brian di Palma and another cameraman were filming the live action. The theater was unusually crowded, because students had come to see the final performance. Thus, spectators were flooding the floor onto the playing area. Since the group therapy interrogation repeated much that was said the previous evening, Bill Shepherd announced that terminal cue well before anything terrifying could develop. This time I joined in the dancing, but the fondling pile was so far away I could not easily participate in it. I decided it would be more correct to say that Richard Schechner *staged* the piece, rather than "directed" it. Within my categories [from *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 1968], this is not an "environment," but a staged performance; for even though the performing area shifts around the former garage, the design requires that both the players' actions and the audience's attention be spatially focused. At one point Margaret Ryan was pulling the loafers off my dangling feet; and then she stuck her face up to ask some ridiculous questions. I replied by simply trying to stare her down; but my girlfriend, always so conscientious, supposing that I was out of words, responded verbally in some fashion.

I must admit that the experience of being accosted and then addressed in that way did freak me slightly. On the way home we met a small woman who apparently had dinner with the male players, just before the opening; and she said that love radiated among them. However, the night before, Bill Shepherd announced that he had no love for any of the women of the Group. *Dionysus* is undoubtedly one of the major theatrical experiences of the season. (July 28, 1968)

Dionysus in '69 (Performing Garage). I liked this more the first two times I saw it during its first season, although the current addition of total nudity is impressive. First of all, Richard Schechner, as the group's chief, has initiated a perverse ceremony in admitting the spectators into the arena, and I was shoved to the end of the line. Nonetheless, I grabbed a seat on the edge of the performance area. Secondly, he cut out the opportunities for audience participation, both in the dance sequence (ecstasy) and the Dionysian revel. Third, since Election Day is behind us, he cut the political dimension of a Vote for William Finlay in '68 brings Dionysus in '69, which means that the earlier theme of Dionysian, as opposed to Apollonian, politics was considerably muted. Fourth, they cut the group therapy sequence that was so terrifying the first time I saw it, but disappointing the second time, when Bill Shepherd cut it short. Finlay is still the commanding actor here, the only one in the group to achieve a singular voice and presence; and the scene where he is born through the legs of screaming women is still the most spectacular in the show. The fact that most of the actors cannot enunciate effectively kills many of the spoken passages. Though Sam Blazer's narration makes the homosexual encounter between Zeus and Dionysus more articulate, his Anglican pronunciations sound fruity in this American context. (My companion, a sometime actress, judged these performers to be more effective in enunciating animalistic noises than literary words.) What was most effective was the intimacy and frankness of the nudity, not only because the performers displayed themselves in all positions and from all angles, but also because the audience was only a few feet away. One last thing to note: Once you've been freaked out by the Living Theatre, as I was only a few weeks ago, the Performance Group seems rather tame and self-conscious. (December 22, 1968)

Dionysus in '69 (Performing Garage). This was my fourth time with this show, and I found myself even less involved than before. I still cannot follow the Euripides lines or understand their contribution to the evening. The diction of the performers is atrocious, and they speak the words as though they completely lacked real meaning (and perhaps they do, as far as this performance is concerned). That is, since the words have no meaning

beyond a memorized string of verbals, there is no reality communicated by the language. The noises they make are more real, as are their actions; and in the latter are expressed the great themes of challenge, succession, jealousy, murder, orgy, seduction. Details have been changed here so that more happens outside the middle playing area. The nudity has by now become perfunctory. (July 1969)

Makbeth (Performing Garage). Choreographically this represents an advance over *Dionysus*, as the movement of actors within the space is simply magnificent. The set itself, designed by Jerry Rojo, is also spectacular—a network of wide platforms, with the spectators seated only along the edges; so that performers move behind as well as in front of you. The sounds are often subtly magnificent (not unlike those in the Living Theatre's *The Brig*) in this acoustically rich chamber. The pit scene, now played in a real pit, is magnificent. The problem here is Shakespeare, or the failure of real contact between Shakespearean lines and young American actors. William Finlay was disappointing as Makbeth; so was Ceil Smith as Lady Makbeth. Perhaps the real problem is Richard Schechner's professorship, which accounts for why he would want to base his performances on dramatic texts, rather than, as the Living Theatre did in *Paradise Now*, starting a play from scratch, with nothing more than thematic intent. There were only twenty-one people in attendance the Christmas night we went. (December 25, 1969)

Commune (Performance Garage). I thought *Makbeth* better in some respects than *Dionysus in '69*; but, like its predecessor, it suffers from a constraining classic text. So I was heartened to hear that for this play a new group of people (with Joan MacIntosh Schechner as the only holdover) have developed its own text. However, it seems that these new people must be more docile than Finlay, Shepherd, et al. As a result, the text is mostly Schechner's work, full of those glib political interpretations to which he is predisposed, the sum of which is not coherent, even with the oft-broadcast advice that the evening represents "several well-known scenes enacted after supper by the youth of our nation." On second thought, that is a helluva place to identify as a major social battlefield, unless, of course, you come from an otherwise comfortable circumstance in which the family conversation is the central conflict! Patricia Bower can be a good performer, especially when she sings; but the others, six males and a new woman, are not mature. Beyond that, both the setting and the choreography represent a step back from *Makbeth*, alas. (December 25, 1970)

George Rhoads (1988)

> A man I know was remarking recently on the different personalities of his twin sons. One was terribly withdrawn and narcissistic. The other was outgoing, loved to tinker with things, and though an infant, already had mechanical skills terrifying to me. . . . It was clear [to their father] that the narcissistic one was going to be a poet, the tinkering one some kind of engineer. Not so, I think. The century is wrong for it. This is the age of electronic trips, of light shows, of kinetic sculpture. . . . The artist, if not the poet, is going to be the one who likes to play with machines. The other will not even have the aptitude, in the crudist sense, for artistry.—Eugene Wildman, "Concretism" (1968).

They've been showing up all over North America these past few years—these humanoid machines with balls that move around metal tracks and make noises as they go. There's a highly conspicuous, popular one, entitled *42nd Street Ballroom*, in the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City and a second temporarily at La Guardia Airport. There are two in terminal C at Boston's Logan Airport and two more in the mammoth West Edmonton Mall in Alberta. You can also encounter them in shopping centers in Rochester, New Haven, Pittsfield (MA), Watertown (NY) and Kamloops (British Columbia), among other places in North America. There is a big one in the Boston Museum of Science, and there was recently a room full of them at the Queens Museum in New York. To the man who made them, artist George Rhoads, these are "audiokinetic sculptures" that generate sounds as they move.

Gathered around them are always kids of many ages, some of them staying as long as an hour, tracing the many trajectories. Many spectators have brought their friends, sharing the experience of intense concentration in the course of comparing perceptions with one another (and in places like La Guardia, in many languages, one being as good as any other). "The rest of the world is blocked out while you are watching it" is a common feeling; for though individual moves in these machines are simple and clear, from the multiplicity and interconnections come a complexity that requires concentration to be understood. As Rhoads's elegant solutions can be

appreciated again and again, these sculptures do not exhaust attention quickly. Another element of the Rhoads theatrical experience is watching the expression on the faces of others, especially children, because, as the artist puts it, in pieces for public spaces, "the best stuff takes place at kid level."

It is hard to imagine what kind of person created these. My first thoughts were that George Rhoads must be a young man who has barely outgrown a fascination with erector sets, who lives in a stainless steel, high-tech environment. The surprises are that he is sixty-two, born in Chicago, January 27, 1926, the son of a prominent internist, and that he now lives rustically in upstate New York. I visited him in Ithaca. Tall, trimly built, he is a modest, well-spoken man who favors loose shirts, sweatpants, and sneakers or thongs. He looks like a high school physical education teacher on the verge of retirement. Two years ago he moved into a little farmhouse on the edge of Ithaca, after living in places yet farther outside the upstate college town. "I'm glad I came to this area. It's the right distance from New York City. It's a five-hour drive; when you have to go, it's not bad."

He remembers growing up in suburban Evanston, where he took private art lessons and always wanted to be a painter; but he learned just as well from viewing the clocks at the famed Museum of Science and Industry. "What I particularly enjoyed was an exhibit of clock escapements. They were enlarged so that you could see how each one worked." Escapements, he explained, are the movable catches, or levers, that activate the clock's pendulum in response to engaging the projections of a toothed wheel. He also liked a ball-bearing tester which was a box with a glass front, a steel plate on the floor and two sides, each with a single hole. "A ball would come out of one side of the box, bounce into the plate and up into the hole on the other side of the box. The idea was that if the ball wasn't perfectly round, it would miss the second hole." As a teenager, Rhoads built his own barometer and a two-seat Ferris wheel that was twelve feet high. He took watches apart and then made his own clock that, he remembers, "varied only three seconds in a week." He taught himself to juggle three balls simultaneously, a talent he still displays!

Graduating from high school in 1943, he evaded combat by studying engineering at the University of Wisconsin for a year and then spent two years at the University of Chicago, taking an A.B. degree in general studies. Still wanting to be an artist, he studied painting at the Chicago Art Institute and then in Paris. There he met the writer Gershon Legman, who introduced him to origami, or Japanese paper-folding, which was the first art at which he excelled. (There is a chapter solely about Rhoads in Samuel Randlett's standard introduction to origami.)

Back in New York City in the fifties, he married the pianist Shirley Gabis, fathered two children, and worked sporadically at the kinds of

freelance jobs favored by struggling artists—medical illustration, house painting, and furniture moving. Asked if he ever collected unemployment compensation, he replied, "I never had a job that long. I was very poor until a couple of years ago. I managed." Through a gallery, and on his own, he sold his own well-wrought paintings into the sixties, most of them "expressionistic urban landscapes and trompe l'oeil." Some of these, according to his own records, belong to Lawrence Tisch and Leonard Bernstein.

The painter Herb Katzman remembers Rhoads thirty years ago as "a damn good painter who also knew how to take apart and put together watches. He could do building construction." Around this time Rhoads also met Hans Van de Bovenkamp, a Dutch-born artist then living in the West Village, who was involved in sculpting water fountains. Teaching himself metal welding, Rhoads began to make his own kinetic fountains that recycled water through gravity-based systems similar to those he has since used for balls, the weight of water on certain movable elements making them kinetic. Between two to six feet high, these sold for a few thousand dollars apiece. "George is an absolutely wonderful genius," Van de Bovenkamp told me; "he's a visionary in the sense that he can have an idea and think it through." Rhoads plans to return to kinetic water fountains initially with a limited edition of an exquisitely simple sculpture with a pump, four moving parts, and a stationary network of descending trays. The example in his own living room can also function as a humidifier.

By the late sixties, Rhoads, divorced again, left New York City, first to live all year in a summertime shack in Martha's Vineyard, and then in Dundee, New York, some forty miles west of Ithaca. Around this time David Bermant, a shopping mall magnate, began commissioning the first of over two dozen pieces, not only for his own collection of kinetic art, but for installation in his malls, where they had secondary, baby-minding functions. "Shopping centers are busy places," Bermant told me; "I wanted to make them different. George's is the first piece I'd put into any shopping center, because the work is so popular. If you have a sense of humor, you'll love George's work. It always gets a center off to a good start."

Many of the Rhoads pieces now on display in public places, such as the *Magic Clock* once at La Guardia Airport [and by 1990 at the Santa Barbara municipal airport], are actually on loan from the "David Bermant Collection." Through the seventies, into his own fifties, Rhoads worked on creating new devices for his kinetic sculptures, most of which were bought by Bermant, who in turn urged him to make these pieces bigger and better. (It is not for nothing that Bermant ranks among the great patrons of contemporary art.) Rhoads also befriended Robert McGuire, a Dundee English teacher, now in his early forties, who had also briefly studied engineering while an undergraduate. He became Rhoads's principal "fabricator" and is now his business associate.

Rhoads's own two-story house is filled with paintings, mostly his own landscapes, and miscellaneous furniture. In his bathroom are several numbers of *The Smithsonian* (and only that magazine); on his bookshelves are several piles of back issues. Out back is a three-story cinder block studio that once housed an experimental chicken-breeding station. On its ground floor are sculptures; upstairs are his easels. Next to it is the barn that houses farm implements, as well as a small studio where another fabricator, David Parker, makes Rhoads-works. Elsewhere on his property are yet more shacks, mostly smaller, waiting to be renovated. Down the road is McGuire's house and studio, which was the principal fabrication place until late 1987, when McGuire's company, Rock Stream Studios, built from scratch a new studio in an Ithaca industrial park.

For a visual artist currently so prominent, Rhoads has had a remarkably slight gallery career. "He was always an introvert," Van de Bovenkamp remembers, "low-key, shy about selling." Rhoads has had only a half dozen one-man gallery shows in New York City, the most recent nearly a decade ago (where no sculptures were sold); and there have been only three museum shows devoted exclusively to his work, two in upstate New York and the other in Queens. There is no catalog wholly devoted to his art and no prior critical literature in the "art and technology" activity of two decades ago. He has never received any grants for his art. Nor has he ever won any competitions for public art, although from time to time he submits slides of his work for adjudication. A painter I know who has been affiliated with the Cornell University art department for nearly two decades told me that she'd "never heard of him" until recently. The only artists I know who have been long familiar with his name are those likewise involved in technological sculpture. Instead of showing his art in galleries, he "went public," so to speak; and out of a ne'er-do-well career came sudden success.

Some Rhoads audiokinetic sculptures are more complicated than others, but they share several elements. Near the top is a distributor—sometimes an alternating pendulum switch, other times a slanted rotating disk, yet other times a pinboard that feeds the initial supply of balls into several tracks. Depending upon how a ball hits its distributor, it can be sent down one of two or more skeletal ramps into helixes or loop-the-loops, in addition to striking resonantly such noisemaking devices as bells or a xylophone or pieces of metal. As there is more than one path running from top to bottom, several balls can be moving at once, hitting things independently of one another; and while the sequence of sounds down each path is more or less fixed, the combinations of noises are various. "You might call it random," he explains, "or semi-randomness."

As the rate at which the balls are released from the top can vary, sometimes the sculpture is considerably busier than at other times. When

the balls hit bottom, they are gathered into a chute (a "clumper upper") that customarily feeds a motorized chain hoist that carries them to the top for another trip. As the hooks on the chain are unevenly spaced, with clusters of them followed by empty spaces, Rhoads ensures that the flow of balls downward will be variable—sometimes with many, other times with only a few. As with a rollercoaster, a machine is used to assist the process only in getting something to the top; otherwise, all the action depends strictly upon gravity, the principal co-conspirator in his art.

Other Rhoads sculptures likewise have balls of various sizes and tracks and distributors and noisemakers, all participating in an ever-changing sequence of events. However, these creations vary in structure and in complexity. Some he calls "wall pieces," because they have a front and a back and are thus meant to be placed against a wall. Handsome examples appear from time to time in galleries like O.K. Harris in New York or in the 1987 P.U.L.S.E. show of technological art that was organized by David Bermant. Those sculptures at the main terminal at La Guardia airport and in terminal C at Logan Airport are, by contrast, meant to be viewed from several sides. So is the grandest Rhoads of them all, *Ball City*, ten feet square, twenty-four feet high, his second installation in Alberta's West Edmonton Mall.

Two qualities shared by all Rhoads creations are that, in contrast to other artists' machines, their action is *infinitely various* and *entirely visible.* Because the decisions of distributors can be so random, there are no cycles of comprehensively repeated activity, as in some other artistic machines, but, instead, continual, endless variation. On the second issue, Rhoads refuses to use electronics, say, because the energy would thus be hidden. "Machines are interesting to everybody," he says, "but people usually don't understand them, because, as in a gasoline engine, the fun part goes on inside the cylinder. So I've restricted myself to mechanisms that you can see and understand quickly. In this emphasis upon pre-electronic machines (and in, say, his refusal to use acoustic amplifiers), Rhoads remains an old-fashioned technological artist. From the strictly technical point of view, his sculptural machines could have been made a century ago.

What Rhoads has realized is a popular public art, sculptures that are capable of keeping the attention of nearly everyone without sacrificing the complexity that marks their esthetic integrity. At Logan Airport, where two are placed in sight of each other, the more complex one always draws a larger audience. This illustrates, to my mind, the principle that the general public can tell as surely as an art critic which Rhoads sculpture is better. When *42nd Street Ballroom* was first installed, there was a fear that it might be vandalized, or its protective case defaced. But even in the Port Authority bus terminal, notorious as it is as a haven for both crowds and

"looney tunes," that has not happened. "Nobody vandalizes what everybody loves," one artist explained, contrasting this Rhoads with, say, the Richard Serra sculpture in New York City's downtown Federal Plaza, filled as it often is [now was] with graffiti.

Rhoads's sculptures seem to reflect the mobiles of Alexander Calder on one hand and the fantastic contraptions of Rube Goldberg on the other. In the first respect, they are kinetic, with plenty of moving parts. In the second respect, they are elaborate machines with an abundance of comic moves, producing nothing other than the pleasure that comes from observing their operation. Among the esthetic influences on his own art, Rhoads acknowledges Calder, "whom I'd always known about," and Jean Tinguely, the French-born kineticist who was perhaps more famous two decades ago. However, retiring and isolated, Rhoads admits that until recently he never saw a Tinguely "in the flesh; I knew them only from books."

"I've known about Rube Goldberg for a long time," he continues while rolling his own cigarettes with pipe tobacco. "I related to the goofiness of it, the unexpected event, the unlikely combination of elements. His drawings are real wacky, true nonsense, which is never as big in America as in Britain. Edward Lear is also one of my inspirations. But you can't actually make the things that Goldberg drew; that's a severe limitation." Rhoads also acknowledges the influences of such folk art as roller coasters (especially the "large scary one" at River View Park in Chicago until 1967) and carousels (a current favorite being "the big one in San Diego City Park").

The real innovation of his mature art would be his use of little balls, which like water would not only respond to gravity but also would be more controllable (and, as McGuire puts it, "less messy"). Rhoads then designed a series of devices for handling rolling balls, such as, for example, three-point wire tracking and several kinds of distributors, as well as objects through which the balls could pass in resounding ways. Certain elements reappear in different guises: the helix, which is a cylinder with ramps shaped in the configuration of the floors at the Guggenheim Museum; the loop-the-loop that usually propels the ball at great speed into a sound producer mounted above a catch basket. A basket also appears in the "bounce and catch," where the ball is allowed to fall onto a plate from which it bounces up into a basket.

The "stairway of chimes" appears in various forms, including a succession of cowbells in the *Magic Clock* or the xylophone in the *42nd Street Ballroom* that rings the opening four notes of "East Side, West Side." Then there are "dumpers" that customarily won't move until they collect several balls, and the "rock back" that catches a single ball and then leans back with it before returning it to a rolling track, in addition to "a wrap around with tinkle," as he calls it. As the balls roll down their tracks, they customarily

trip switches that in turn strike noisemakers or make something else move, such as a miniature windmill. Near the bottom is often a wok, a large Chinese cooking pan into which the balls fall, making resonant sounds not only when they land but as they also circle about.

Though these basic elements tend to reappear in different guises, some Rhoads pieces have unique devices. In the Allandale shopping center in Pittsfield, MA, golf balls are propelled to the top of the glass cage by an air pump that also animates the ball-tripped pipe organs distributed throughout the piece. In his Ithaca studio recently was the prototype of a spectacular new device called "a rocking drive," an ingenious zigzag series of ramps with flip switches; by rocking severely from side to side, this can send a ball up, in illusory defiance of gravity, from its bottom to its top. Rhoads has also been working on a rotary machine that would likewise propel balls upward. Another planned element will be a version of the pendulum that Leonardo proposed but never built.

James Seawright, a director of the Visual Arts Program at Princeton, compares Rhoads's sculptures to textile mills. "There's a level of mechanical genius behind inventing complex mechanisms; that's what George has. His balls act in an amazing variety of ways, going from one part of the track to another, and suddenly turning corners. A group of balls will collect in a dumper, and all but one will go off in one direction, while that extra ball goes off on its own and does something else. These machines embody almost every basic element of machinery, but the elements are combined in a bewildering variety of ways. You look at one of his pieces and get a sense of overall design, but then you must trace out the details for yourself. The enjoyment comes from seeing your expectations fulfilled. It's like a piece of abstract music with many melodic lines that have different rhythms, but interact in complex ways."

Ever modest, Rhoads discounts the myth of himself as a technological genius: "I know zilch about electronics. I can't fix my car anymore; I wouldn't even try. I really wanted to be a composer, but I couldn't do it. I didn't have enough training. I didn't have the ability." What's your favorite music? "Mozart's *Tenth Serenade for Woodwinds*; it used to be the *Clarinet Quintet*." Your favorite films? "Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* is my favorite movie at the moment, but all the Monty Python films are good. Certain Buster Keaton pictures. Steve Martin's a supreme comedian." Your favorite theater? "Musicals with dancing and singing." This love of musicals reminds us that *42nd Street Ballroom*, say, is supremely choreographic, able in its theatricality to compete with the nearby Broadway shows. (And, thanks to the Port Authority, the Rhoads show is free!)

To Rhoads, the content of his work is indeed theatrical: "Balls having fun doing different things. Later you perceive the organization and the cycles and the sequences. People say, 'Wouldn't it be great if you could

have seats inside the ball and travel down the track yourself'." He speaks of them, not inaccurately, as "a mixture of music, narrative and theater." To my mind, the kinetic sculptures also reflect the painting of Jackson Pollock, so important to many artists Rhoads's age, in being busy all over, in their semblance of randomness and in their monumental size. They are also true to the modernist esthetic that every element should be functional; there is no ornamentation. Rhoads's pieces also fit squarely into what I take to be the great tradition of American art—inventions in the machinery of the medium, which in his case is not just sculpture but post–Calder kinetic sculpture.

Abstract though these works essentially are, they are always on the verge of representing something. I have one friend who finds them metaphors for the human body and balls thus become food that enters at the top before it passes through various by-ways, only to be expelled at the bottom. A woman watching *42nd Street Ballroom* beside me compared it to her four-year-old daughter, "full of activity and out of control." When I mentioned this last interpretation to Rhoads, he replied, "But they're not out of control. They are allowed latitude, but not too much. Otherwise, the balls would fall on the floor." He continued, "Nothing is represented, but you think of different interpretations. The main one I thought of earlier was the balls are the soul going through incarnations. Start with birth at the top and death at the bottom. So each time the ball goes through, it goes a different way; it does different things. It's a model of human existence—a model of collective existence, the picture of many souls in the universe, or one soul in a succession of incarnations." The richness and profoundity of such allusions are measures of their esthetic value.

He reached for a book he had recently borrowed from the local library, Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Shosha* (1978), and directed me to a page where Singer's narrator is attributing certain ideas to the British philosopher David Hume: "Since we are sure of nothing and there is no evidence that the sun will rise tomorrow, play is the very essence of human endeavor, perhaps even the thing-in-itself. God is a player, the cosmos a playground. For years I have searched for a basis of ethics and gave up hope. Suddenly it became clear to me. The basis of ethics is man's right to play the games of his choice. I will not trample on your toys and you will not trample on mine; I won't spit on your idol and you will not spit on mine." As I read those words to myself, Rhoads interrupted me. "This expresses my philosophy."

No more than Rhoads would wrap himself in "artist's clothing," one charm of his audiokinetic sculptures is that they don't announce themselves as Art; their informality makes them more appropriate for public spaces than in art museums. People gathered around them are likely to ask one another, "What is this, a game or something?" I remember once telling

an editor at *The New York Times*, a know-it-all if ever there was one, about "a great work of art within two blocks of your office [on West 43rd Street]." "There's no great work of art around here," he replied gruffly. "Sure there is," was my retort. "Where?" he challenged me. "In the Port Authority bus terminal," I replied, revealing my hand as he sneered impatiently in the background, "the thing with the balls." Without a pause, he exclaimed, "Oh that; that's a masterpiece." The truths implied by such success are that public art succeeds when it comes dressed as "non-art" and, second, when it forces you to perceive over time—when a passing glance would be insufficient. Rhoads's discovery is that public art at its best would be essentially theatrical or choreographic. By forcing everyone involved to rethink the esthetics of visual art in public spaces, Rhoads ranks as a profound artist.

Given that he is essentially a theatrical artist, his very best works are installed in public places. *Tower of Babel* in Kamloops is the tallest and in many ways the most ambitious, including such new elements as a large counting mechanism. In common with another new piece for a Plattsburg (NY) shopping center, *Tower of Babel* has three distinct levels of activity, but certain elements pass between the upper levels. The untitled piece at the Allandale shopping center seems the richest to me, with lots of devices so far unique to it. Golf balls go up a clear tube into a stainless steel catching basket before spiraling down a helix into a complex of switches and dumpers that, as they move, release the stops on organ pipes, whose sustained sounds thus become a counterpoint to the traditional clinking of Rhoads's pieces. Descriptions are scarcely adequate in portraying such activities which must be seen to be believed and, if not at first hand, then preferably not in photographs but, like theater, on videotape.

In the newly fabricated Rock Stream Studio recently was *Global Circus*, initially made in 1982, which was being rebuilt for a six-month installation at World Expo '88 in Brisbane, Australia. It would be tested for a thousand hours of flawless functioning before being sent out. (As the principal problem is balls jumping their tracks, a slow-speed videocamera is trained on the new machine; and on the floor below it is put sand, so that McGuire and his assistants can see exactly where the delinquent balls have landed.) To the poet Kenneth Gangemi, himself the possessor of an engineering degree, "No other artist can claim to attract to his work such an amazing variety of people—young and old, poor and affluent, educated and illiterate, dulled and sensitive. Rhoads may be the most popular sculpture of our time." Or as McGuire puts it, "Public art is more successful when it makes people stop and look."

These sculptures scarcely exhaust the record of Rhoads' inventiveness. Outside McGuire's house is "a pendulum swing," which has not only a chair suspended below but also two pendulums extending up into the

air. The movement of the lower pendulum (the swing) causes the top one to rock in ornery ways that can be felt by the person in the seat. "It's like resonance in music," the artist explains. In Rhoads's own backyard recently was a "hula pole," home from a Chicago shopping center to be repaired. It has switches that spectators can use to control the rotary or rocking motions of each of four different parts, in sum producing gyrations comparable to those of a hula dancer. Also supine in Rhoads's backyard was a thirty-foot-high helix with soccer balls. In his guest room was a striking ball clock, a foot or so high, a few feet wide, that could become the prototype for a fine-arts edition. In David Bermant's bedroom is *Blue Shamrock* (1986) with five spinning circular containers, two of them moving around the others. Bermant, who graduated from Yale in 1940, once commissioned "Boola Boola," an audiokinetic sculpture in which a ball, inserted at the top, strikes xylophone keys that ring out the Eli refrain before hitting bottom.

In the recent Queens Museum show was *Splendule* (1980), which had a little ball suspended from the end of a string, itself attached to a pole that is cleverly turned in eccentric ways by motors moving at three different speeds. As the ball spins around, it hits one of several chimes at random, resulting in an aleatory music considerably less noisy than is usual in his work. In many public places, most prominently outside the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, is a motorless "windamajig," a pure mobile of wind-driven cones that rotate on several axes, tripping hammers to sound chimes. A "rotomabob" recently on a Manhattan penthouse porch, has a circular pattern of cones suspended from an axis pole holding a plate at the top. As the wind hits the plate, the whole thing tilts on a single universal joint. Like other Rhoads mobiles, this rotomabob is exquisite and simple; unlike the others, it offers kineticism minus any audio.

Rhoads has also designed children's games, one of which was manufactured two decades ago (to negligible sales, alas). He has a scheme for a two-person pinball machine and "a war game with pins." He has written anagrams and palindromes (three favorite originals being "tons forever of snot," "Dot's tits is tits, Tod," & "G.I. boots is too big"), in addition to experimental poetry (one poem consists exclusively of letters with straight lines, another only with letters including curved lines). He has also written science fiction. In paper folding, he invented the "blintz-bird maneuver" of folding corners into the middle so he could thereby make four-legged animals. In his painting studio was yet another invention—a pallette with a roof, surrounded by a narrow moat, that he designed for keeping his acrylic paints continually moist and thus easily mixed.

"What I want to do now is introduce mechanical elements other than rolling balls. I want to do things with gears, levers and cams. I just invented a couple of days ago a mechanical arm that moves a ball in a quarter circle

and then places it on a higher track. The arm is operated by cams attached to a motor. It's fun to see because you can watch how the arm is directed by a cam. I got this idea from an old doughnut machine, where the arm takes a doughnut out of the oil and then flips it over before it moves it back in. Now all of this kind of motion is done by electronics, so you never see how it works.

"What I'd also like to see in airports is a series of waiting rooms with different atmospheres. You could have a Turkish waiting room with pillows and another waiting room with real silence, and another one with reclining couches where you could lie down; and a room like the Alhambra palace in Grenada—cool and austere, in white, with a fountain in the middle, so you could hear the water splashing. I'd like to see the bus terminal littered with sleeping bodies. Let the homeless just be there." He has a scheme for a playground for adults, which would ideally go in an airport or anywhere else where people have time to waste. He has schemes for more elaborate kinetic fountains than those he did before. In his house is a tree of lights that he made as a scale model for something forty feet high for parking lots.

He also has eccentric architectural projects, such as a complementary pair of zigzagging stairways and balconies extending like trees up to the sky, until the branches converge at the top. Rhoads imagines people looking at each other and at the landscapes around them. There would be windblown chimes for random music. "You could put it on one of those islands in the East River that aren't much good for anything." Another good New York City location would be the middle of Washington Square, in place of the fountain that has lost its function. He envisions building on the second floor of his own house a maze with corridors, dead ends, and plenty of surprises. "If you go down one dead end, an electric eye would turn off the light and illuminate something horrifying. For example, in one corridor, the floor would begin to vibrate, or it would lead into a claustrophobic room with panels that narrow down. The fun is thinking of things to happen. If you went to the center, you'd end up in a light, happy place; but you'd have to suffer a bit before you found it."

No longer poor, Rhoads is nonetheless not particularly interested in earning money from his success. As he now has more commissions than he can personally fulfill, he has for the past few years employed "fabricators," young men with experience in blacksmithing and hot rods. Thus, Rhoads himself now spends most of his days painting and writing in the morning and then designing and overseeing his projects in the afternoons. One afternoon we journeyed in Rhoads's pickup truck back to Dundee, where Fred Crusade, a trained blacksmith in his early thirties, was making a wall piece from a Rhoads sketch. Among other things, the artist asked about the retail price this new work would bring. Eighteen thousand dollars

was the reply. The reason that Crusade knew the sum was that he was working on commission. As no one was rushed, Crusade demonstrated a charming magnetic toy he had found in a local store. While appreciating its action, Rhoads rejected it for himself, because the magnet with its hidden power violated his esthetic-ethic that everything in his works should be visible. All the men have also made maintenance trips, checking on sculptures that, alas, sometimes break down.

Rhoads and McGuire are working out a corporate structure that is rather unusual in the history of contemporary art. Essentially, McGuire owns Rock Stream Studios, while Rhoads himself is "a designer working on commission." The company is responsible for everything—for making the sculptures, for installing them, for maintaining them. I was reminded of Buckminster Fuller's admonition that whenever he founded a company he always included a device for getting out of it in case it became too successful, in case it would consume too much of his attention and energies. "I wasn't thinking in terms of a company," Rhoads told me, when I mentioned Fuller to him. "We were thinking how best to arrange business matters, so I'd be more free." What Rhoads ultimately wants for himself is a daily working situation that allows him to do painting or writing or drawing, while those machines bearing his unique creative stamp continue to flood the land.

Notes on Art Performances, IV.

PRO MUSICA ANTIQUA

The Beauvais Daniel Play (Chapel of the Intercession of Trinity Parish). This is the most perfect "musical" I have ever seen. All the parts—music, pageantry, staging, scenery, acting, plot—fit together in this reproduction of a miracle play. Truly, the listener feels transported back to the time of propaganda after the communion. The plot comes from the Bible; thus, at the end God rescues Daniel from the lions and an angel (Russell Oberlin) comes out to sing *Te Deum*, but the religious point seems to be an afterthought, made for the sake of conformity. Balshazzer's Prince is also represented by Oberlin's voice, a countertenor I find cleaner and less affected than Alfred Deller's, say. The music itself (by writers unknown) is played on instruments based upon antique sources, in this great production that is also a tribute to creative scholarship. (December 29, 1959)

YVONNE RAINER

Carriage Discreteness (69th Regiment Armory). I found this among the least spectacular of the performances in "Nine Evenings," perhaps because Rainer was seriously ill (and Robert Morris ran it in her absence); but many people, I should report, thought it among the best pieces in the series. About sixteen performers, each with walkie-talkie receivers attached, do rote tasks in moving blocks of wood around, all in response to instructions from the director of the piece, situated back in a control booth. I didn't find the kinetic patterns interesting; the piece struck me as lacking in rhythm. There were also movie fragments that did not seem integrated with the rest. Also, by the time I left the performers' movements had scarcely progressed beyond walking. (October 1966)

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Map Room II (Filmmakers' Cinemateque, Wurlitzer Building). I found this a diffuse piece of work, with some extraordinarily original moments, but little discernible coherence or purpose. It opens with four formally dressed men, all carrying horizontal signs with words on them, from left to right—noun subjects, verbs, adjectives, and object nouns. They shuffle the cards and change places, exchanging cards with one

another. A typical construction is: "De Gaulle means educational points." In the next scene, a light from the right flashes upon a mirror on the left, which reflects the beam onto the screen hanging in the back of the stage. As Rauschenberg cleans off the mirror (his shadow reflecting in the screen), we recognize that the light is actually projecting an image of Mount Rushmore, tilted on its side. Then a woman with a cage of two pigeons attached around her does a disjointed dance. Then a man with his feet embedded in the rims of two tires walks/rolls across the stage. Once Rauschenberg sets down an amplified bedspring, the tireman walks across it, generating loudly resonant crunching noises. A woman pushes off the floor with a tire under her chest and, falling back down, lands on her hands. As one man hops with both feet in one tire, another wraps himself in four tires and rolls himself around the floor. Meanwhile, another woman, seated in a couch whose backside faces the audience, drops her head over the backside, letting it dangle down for a few minutes. Somewhere around this point, a travel film about Austria is projected upon the backs of the front row spectators, all of whom were asked to affix white cardboards behind their heads. The piece closes with Rauschenberg himself, on raised glass shoes, walking across the darkened stage, holding a lengthy self-illuminated spear. Even with such a wealth of visually imaginative elements, the piece moves too ponderously for its materials. The best part is the amplified bed. Otherwise, I found stunning images with little discernible coherence or meaning. (December 16, 1965)

Open Score (69th Regiment Armory). When Rauschenberg first told me about this piece, I thought it sounded terribly self-destructive—to use so many people limited the possibilities for action. However, in the past he has shown a penchant for overcoming obstacles he creates for himself. In the course of volleying the ball, two tennis players, with rackets wired for the transmission of sound, generate signals that turn off the auditorium's lights, one by one. Once the place becomes dark, several hundred people come onto the darkened floor. Bathed in infrared light, they are captured by a television camera with a suitably equipped lens. This image is broadcast onto three screens. The game is too amateurish to be the "formal dance improvisation" that Rauschenberg promised in the program. Also, tennis rackets could have been wired to produce more than one kind of sound.

The second section, which struck me as having little to do with the first, has a mob milling on the floor. On the three screens, one of which is much clearer than the others, is a rich, rather intricate image of fluid forms that Rauschenberg makes even more kinetic by constantly twisting his camera's lens. Meanwhile, the sound system announces a constant series of statements: "My name is. . . ." However, the sound system was so fuzzy

and made so much static that I wondered about intentional distortion, and if so, why. The general sentiment of the people attending "Nine Evenings" is that technological incompetence is insufferable, regardless of whether the artists or the scientists are more responsible, and that the Bell Labs scientist responsible for arranging the collaborations, Dr. J. Wilhelm (aka Billy) Klüver, the founder of Experiments in Art & Technology, is most responsible for the bust. (October 1966)

Open Score (69th Regiment Armory). His original plan was to create a stage-piece out of electrified costumes; however, this turned out to be unfeasible. (He told me "another technician" might have been able to achieve it, which struck me as a snotty thing to say about the Bell Labs scientist assigned to him.) The first time I saw it, this piece suffered from faulty technology—only on the left screen could the outlines of figures be observed; and the tennis match was sloppily played. The second time around, the players are in better form (though the sound system still offered only one note). By accident, the tape with everyone saying his name was erased, replaced by a more agreeable collection of clanking noises that were correlated to Lord knows what. The images on the screens are much clearer; and the cast, now much smaller, makes a greater variety of movements. Also the camera takes more close-up shots. He uses the split-screen effectively, and ends the television sequence at the right time. This is the first of Bob's theater pieces to develop a rhythm. This time as well, the performance has a new coda where Bob himself carries a cloth-covered figure, who sings loudly and slightly off-key, to the front of the audience, sets her down, walks around, and then carries her backstage. At first I thought this figure was a loudspeaker fed by radio waves (as a version of his promised electrified costume). I should have known better, as the technology available for this festival could never have produced a voice so clean. The figure was actually Simone Whitman (née Forti), whose voice was live. I still fail to appreciate the significance of seeing onscreen rather ordinary activities that I am unable to see in the dark. (October 1966)

Urban Round (School of Visual Arts). The greatest influence upon Rauschenberg's recent theater work has apparently been his friend, the poet John Giorno; and as Steve Paxton made Bob's performances spatial and timeless, perhaps Giorno will bring an awareness of rhythm, which this performance has to a greater degree than anything else of his that I've seen. (Indeed, only at a point near its end did its rhythm disintegrate.) People enter shaking money in their fingers; then many of them exit speaking disjointed fragments of words. Coming back into the hall, they distribute themselves throughout the auditorium, sporadically reading lines and sentences that they carry in their hands (and illuminate with flashlights).

Then everyone descends to the bottom of the pit-like theater and pours into a tent that Rauschenberg put there at the beginning of the piece. Though this piece has more dramatic sense than Bob's earlier theater works, it curiously lacks memorable images. (November 10, 1967)

Soundings (Museum of Modern Art). Poor Bob Rauschenberg. His involvement with advanced technology has produced lots of nice publicity but little real achievement. I'm beginning to wonder if he might not want to dismiss the whole "experiment" as an awful bust. However, this new work is so redemptive that I foresee better things. As usual, there is an implicitly pretentious statement about collaboration with technicians. It reads in part: "Formerly I was the artist. Now they make the painting, not me. I only provide the possibilities." There are nine panels, each about four feet across and eight feet high. Each panel appears to have three layers—the first silvered to reflect the spectator, the second and third with images of chairs in various positions. Behind the panels are several lights, each apparently activated by the pitches picked up by four microphones suspended in the foreground space. As there is no variation in responding to pitches, it is easy to discover which of your sounds will illuminate certain parts of the whole. As a result, the surprises of discovery are few. (November 1968)

JIM ROSENBERG

Permanent & Temporary Poetry (The Kitchen). Though scarcely more than a dozen people attended, it was stunning. Having already placed disparate words on the walls and floor of the performance space, Jim placed a pile of unattached words in the middle of the floor and then started spreading them around the room. Meanwhile, he played tapes that repeated these words, both with and without conventional syntax. On most tapes, his own voice was heard on at least three tracks. My own favorite tape, *Intermittence* (1974), had a quartet that included Jackson Mac Low, Barbara Barracks, and Sharon Mattlin. Rosenberg also read aloud passages in conventional prose, some of which were drawn from newspapers. It was a bit incoherent in semantic respects but quite coherent stylistically; it was also unlike anything I'd seen/heard before. He should be included in any sound poetry project, even though he seemed less interested in sound than the denial of conventional syntax. The pieces on the wall had words either connected together by lines, which guided perceptions too much for my taste, or without lines, which I preferred. (May 10, 1975)

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN, et al.

Sound-Dance Duo (Bridge Theatre). Theirs was by far the most realized and original work on the program. As James flailed away at the piano, with

a magnificent use of his forearms and a keen sense of off-rhythms, Carolee darkened the auditorium, lit two candles, and placed them on both sides of him. Then with scissors she snipped off his ratty shirt and started to paint directly on his back a Vietnam village scene. By the time she finished, the candles had gone down. In their place she lit two sparklers. Once they went out, he lit a piece of crepe paper strung between two ends of a metal holder. Both visually and aurally, the piece was effective. Schneemann and Tenney, who used to be married, have enough artistic sense to shape their original materials into an inspired, integral whole; there is no other way to describe what differentiates their piece from the others.

Elaine Summers' *White Wind Dance* had manic choreography and a few clumsy dancers. Philip Krumm's *Great Moments in the Life of G. F. Handel* juxtaposed musical quotations, played by a badly handled flute and a piano, against a constant but rhythmically varied background of a clanging cymbal. The Philip Corner composition announced in the program, "Punishment Piece #2 for U.S. Foreign Policy" was replaced by *Up to Seven, Juxtapose, And* which has discontinuous fragments of little resonance. This sort of technique needs more touch and taste than Corner can give it. After the intermission, Corner announced Ben Patterson's *Exam* and passed out sheets of paper to the audience, asking each of us to write down "the purposes and necessities of this examination," adding, "You have one hour." It took some people a while to realize that the evening was over; it was a sweet, post–Dada stunt. (December 12, 1965)

Water Light, Water Needle (Genesis Theater, St. Marks Church). Regrettably I missed her *Meat Joy* which my friend Lee Baxandall describes as one of the best Happenings ever. This new work has a wholly original and remarkable conception. Crumpled newspaper was spread all over the church's floor. Carolee and a man come forward with trays of crumpled newspaper. Both have electric fans to aim newspaper pellets at each other, until a pile collects in the middle of the floor. In the second phase, perhaps a second piece, clumsy figures kick their way out of the cabinets along the back wall. They sluggishly come to the middle of the floor. Eventually they begin to mount the ropes stretched across the stage and swing through them with a movement that from time to time attains some remarkable kinetic patterns. There is no speech at all; and Philip Corner's music, essentially banging outside the church, has little effect. The theme of the piece appears to be the joy and beauty of swinging bodies. Pleasure for Schneemann comes from the body whose instincts are polymorphous. Since her men and women are dressed alike, I suspect the influence of Norman O. Brown's utopian vision in *Life Against Death*. Carolee darkens the house lights for a second phase in which only two flashlights provide illumination, and she speeds up the floor action. (March 18, 1966)

________, **et al.** *Media-Move* (Bridge Theatre). Carolee's piece, dated 1963, was the worst piece of hers that I have ever encountered—thoroughly dull. Called *Looseleaf*, it dramatized the setting up of a table to which Philip Corner and Mark Brusse sat down to eat. Next came a few activities that wrenched the context of normalcy (Corner and Brusse dabbing each other with brown stuff). A friend of mine commented that in turning off the theater's air-conditioner on a hot June night, Carolee contributed to the brutalizing of the audience.

Steve Paxton's *A. A.* (1966) was a tape recording of the take-off and landing instructions of an airline hostess and pilot. Though the printed program spoke of "A Sound and Movement Dance," I discerned no movement on the darkened stage. Its title could stand for American Airlines or, I suppose, Alcoholics Anonymous. Meredith Monk's *Break* (1964) was a moderately creative dance, with marvelously disjointed syntax; but I didn't discern much coherence. Deborah Lee's interpretation of *Carlos Among the Candles*, written by Wallace Stevens in 1917, here directed by James Waring, was miserably bad. Kenneth King stole the evening with his *Blow-Out* which deserved a note card of its own. (June 9, 1966)

Snows (Martinique Theater). I noticed in conversation that Carolee's ideas rarely rise above platitude, and rarely are those platitudes different from those heard elsewhere, all of which suggests a paucity of originality. What bothers me most about this piece is my sense that I've seen most of it before. Several moves were borrowed from her earlier pieces—the figures paint one another, they close the piece by wrapping one another in tinfoil, their costumes seem designed to obliterate sexual difference, and they crawl all over one another. In spite of James Tenney's soundtrack, the sense of time is more meandering than before, largely because the activities themselves lack a rhythmic base. One nice new bit involves placing a spongy substance at the entrance to the theater, so that our bodies will be stimulated. (January 21, 1967)

Illinois Central Transposed (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Poor Carolee, she is so pretentious, yet her stuff hasn't been distinctive or particularly good. Like other pieces of hers, this suffers from a paucity of invention. It opens with figures wrapped in paper, with eye slits; and as they come out into the audience going up aisles and across rows, spectators are forced to stand up to let them pass. Some spectators, perhaps plants, begin to rip off the paper, revealing that the performers are wearing chest-high overalls. Then, in the most inventive sequence, they go up and down the aisles, knocking one another over and sometimes embracing, falling to the ground together. Then everybody comes up on stage, where a fan is blowing an interesting kinetic sculpture encased in a celluloid bag. People in the audience

are invited up onstage to put paste on the performers who then roll their bodies in piles of shredded paper, until they become abominable snowmen (in German, *schneemanne*). As usual in her work, the figures are costumed and portrayed as sexually interchangeable. An interesting, but annoying, sound collage by James Tenney ran throughout the piece. The rhythm established by the opening section completely disintegrates once the performers get onstage. As often happens in Carolee's work, too many routines, such as the fanned scrap paper or the painting/pasting of things on the body, seem drawn from her own earlier pieces. That's too bad, because she's a brainy and talented woman who, often complaining about exclusion, could have used an invitation to participate in this Brooklyn Academy series to realize a big breakthrough. (March 9, 1968)

KLAUS SCHÖNING, artistic director

2nd Acustica International (Whitney Museum at Equitable). Schöning differs from me in believing that the best acoustic art extends from performance, rather than from tape composition, and so he thought it appropriate to present theatrical pieces by his favorite acoustic artists. It was unfortunate that he chose a venue no one known to me had visited before, a big and broad basement theater in midtown, and that his co-sponsor was the Whitney Museum's media department, which has a weak record, almost a touch of lead, at creating persuasive taste for new art. (Just compare its nonsuccess to the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art, which exploited an earlier, similarly pioneering opportunity to establish institutional curatorial authority that influenced others, for better or worse. That accounts for why reviews of new Whitney media shows are so scarce. When an audiotape of mine was included in a month-long exhibition accompanying this festival at the Whitney's main branch, no one ever mentioned hearing it to me.)

I missed Sorrel Hays's *Sound Shadows* because the auditorium door was closed on me. Philip Corner's *Wowunupo: Grizzly Bear Hiding Place* was short, perhaps the shortest on the program, and I remember only that he was on the right side of the stage, using a phrase "evoking sound, taken from the story of Ishi, the last 'wild' Indian," as the program said. For his *Ishi/Timechangingspaces*, Malcolm Goldstein also processed the voice of Ishi, adding his own voice and violin, while on the left side of the stage he manipulated some rocks that were hardly decipherable from where I was sitting, far back on the right. There was no doubt that this performance was too intimate for a 500-seat formal theater customarily used, I guess, to address Equitable employees. Charlie Morrow did *Voices*, a "non-linear audio biography," as he called it, that was more ambitious than any previous performance I'd seen from him, particularly in the range of its material, but also less coherent, again unlike his previous work, which, if nothing

else, exploits his experience as a jingle-writer in making materials clear. Jackson Mac Low and Anne Tardos did another word-scramble for themselves both live and on tape, this time drawing upon Goethe. This piece descends, as he said in his preface, from a 1963 idea that has already gone through many variations. Typically for Mac Low, this piece too went on much too long. (Can anyone tell whether and, if so, why one of these Mac Low scrambles is better than another?) Gerhard Ruhm played Schöning's English-language production of his scramble from Ophelia's speech in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. "All nouns and verbs have been removed from the original text and single words have been strung together in their most basic form. The newly created chain of words is inverted in succession and inserted into the original text of Ophelia." It went on far too long for my taste and was not saved for this festival by Claudia Bruce's virtuoso performance standing still in a well-illuminated wedding gown. Ruhm followed with a "Little History of Human Civilization" in which he plays on the piano a simple repetitive piece, apparently of his own composition, against a tape recording of unrelated, purportedly external noises that include a car crash. Of those I saw in the entire festival, it was probably the most wholly successful piece.

Dick Higgins' *Three Double Helixes That Aren't for Sale* is a trilogue between a young Erik Satie, a middle-aged Satie and an old Satie, mixing the words of Satie himself with words that Higgins "imagines Satie might have used under the circumstances of the three situations of the conversations." Though it had the practical virtue of requiring only one actor (Keith Teller), it seemed insufficiently rehearsed, as the trilogue concept was not fully articulated. Jerome Rothenberg's *That Dada Strain* has four poems addressed to the Dada fathers: Hugo Ball, Francis Picabia, Kurt Schwitters, Tristan Tzara. The unusual move is adding a tape accompaniment (of what I cannot remember) and a live bassist, in this case Rothenberg's highly virtuostic UCSD colleague, Bertram Turetzky. My own feeling is that the purported "duet" turned into a competition between two voices, with Turetzky dominating until the final poem about Tzara, whom Rothenberg makes into a Jewish hero. (Note that this and the Kagel, following, were the only text pieces to be written wholly by their authors, even though it, like many others, depended upon allusions to historic writings.)

The second day began with Pierre Henry's *Metropolis Paris* (1984) accompanying Walter Ruttmann's film *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927). The picture won hands down, even within the limitations of its conventions to film the event of only one day. By contrast, the Henry soundtrack was awful, suffering initially from a lack of specificity—its vaguely urban sounds could have portrayed one city as well as another. (My opinion is generous; others regarded it a vulgar exploitation of the

great Ruttmann film.) I also sensed a compromise with the historic intentions of *musique concrète*, as this contained lots that sounded synthesized to me. (Remember the historic difference between the French electronic music pioneers and the Germans was that the latter favored wholly synthetic sounds.) Everett Frost directed an American actor named Bill Raymond through Mauricio Kagel's *The Tribune*, which is a montage of politician's clichés accompanied by marshall music emerging from two tape recorders turned on and off by the single performer, in this case Bill Raymond. I heard that Frost objected to Raymond's haminess which seemed to save the piece from excessive Teutonic satire that would have been otherwise incomprehensible to an American audience. (Too bad Kagel himself couldn't perform it as he does in France and Germany.) Franz Mon's *Articulations* has not word-play but syllable-play, or phoneme-play, always on the verge of becoming language. Alvin Curran's *For Julian* has three elements: himself on the shofar, Judith Malina reciting from Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and a tape with various sounds climaxing with "more than two thousand people praying at the Western Wall during the holiday of Tishah-b'Ab." The technical problem here was an amplification system that worked only intermittently for both performers; it reportedly failed Hays in a different way, the Whitney staff again contributing its touch of lead. Ronald Steckel said his interest is creating a polyphonic acoustic landscape: "No story, no emotional expression, only an approaching of the condition of perception of an undirected attentiveness, an advance toward the spiritual condition of silence." Maybe, but I'd like to hear Steckel's *Silent Landscape* again if only to discover coherences that missed me. This was conceptually the most ambitious, most pioneering work; but precisely because it begs to be reheard, it was not appropriate for live performance. I missed Pauline Oliveros's *DreamHorseSpiel: Deep Listening*. After 3½ hours, my butt needed something else.

On the third night I missed Linda Mussman's *Danton's Death*. John Cage's *I-VI*, from his Norton Lectures, reads better than it hears, in part because it is not a sequential piece but a scramble that encourages the cross-referencing more accessible with print. Alison Knowles kindly invited Yasunao Tone to join her in celebrating *Setsubun*, the Day of Change that falls each year in Japan on February 3 or 4, marking the beginning of a new year. "We throw beans in the face of the devil; it helps the crops grow." I remember thinking it better than other Knowles performances I had seen, thanks in part to Tone's personification of himself as a bumbler who must continually go back over the machines accompanying his performance, in a kind of unself-conscious post–Fluxus humor that is so rare in post–Fluxus performance nowadays. In *Im Frühling/In Spring*, Charles Amirkhanian returns to tape composition, using not speech but natural sounds that, as he says, are processed to imitate the instruments of a

symphony orchestra, without significant results, alas. The festival concluded with *James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Eric Satie: An Alphabet* that John Cage initially wrote in the early 1980s, which I heard him read solo in Puerto Rico back in 1982. He spoke negatively about it in an interview I did with him around the time, protesting the shifting from scene to scene; but once he introduced a lot of performers, including himself speaking the Joyce lines, he had a viable, if simpler theater piece. Since I had only six words to say, divided into five words on one occasion and a phoneme on another, I would have preferred sitting with the audience that gave us a healthy round of applause.

Perhaps because Schöning was home in Germany for most of the preparations, what was missing from the festival we saw was the kind of overseeing intelligence, a true *producer* present from the beginning, shaping three one-shot evenings composed of a succession of acts, a vaudeville. Had it been the only event in a familiar venue in a small German city, such a sloppily organized festival would have nonetheless gotten the publicity and reviews, not to mention a respectful audience; but within the competitive abundance that defines New York City, it was inconsequential. (Mine may well be the only comprehensive review.) However, since what Schöning wanted to establish a larger presence here for his work with Americans—for avant-garde audio art of the first rank—in addition to producing programs for his own show back in Cologne, his energies and money would have been more effectively spent in issuing a series of cassettes or discs of our very best work (and entirely avoiding the Whitney). (April 27–29, 1990)

KENNETH SHAPIRO

Channel One (East Fourth Street). The East Village is a village in which no one smart takes advice from people outside the Village, especially regarding cultural life within the village, regardless of whether the purported advisors be critics on *The New York Times* or even the *Village Voice*. Only the recommendation of someone you trust will get you to see something previously unfamiliar to you. For the lack of such advice, I took my time to see this long-running neighborhood attraction; and as I saw only the last half of it, the loss was surely mine. Shapiro, the presiding genius, apparently wants to exploit the artistic possibilities of the small screen and newly available videotape equipment. This performance consists of a succession of sketches, some of them considerably better than others, all presented on a small screen. Most of the sketches are slick in conception, a few devilishly so. Perhaps the fact that Shapiro can be both original and slick indicates something about the artistic possibilities of television. At any rate, in one sequence, the fish-eye lens zooms very close onto the faces of a rock duo; in another, four singers (including one woman) are clearly

naked in a shower. There is a hysterical parody of a television cooking show and a kiddie show in which the clown breaks his role in order to read selected passages from pornographic classics (and then, returning to his clown persona, warns his viewers that they should not tell their parents what is really happening on his program). In this low-budget production, Shapiro himself plays the leading role. I should see the rest. (March 2, 1968)

Channel One (East Fourth Street). Now I saw the whole program. This is just like a moviehouse in that the show costs him practically nothing to operate, in which case he would be wise to run continuous performances on his small tubes, rather than, as is the convention in the East Fourth Street theaters, just scheduled evening shows. This is performance theater with a vaudeville structure, as Shapiro does nearly everything from directing the show to starring in it. Most of the best sketches he wrote as well. Even on second viewing, the parody of the cooking show is a joy, if slightly overdone as slapstick, as the recipe requires everything but the kitchen sink. I liked again the Ko-Ko show, in which the clown figure persuades the parents to leave the room and then reads dirty stories to the kids. The part I missed before is a psychedelic interview show—"Psychedelicacies"—in which Shapiro plays the host. What interests me is that he should have made so much video art out of the conventions of television. (March 17, 1968)

Channel One (East Fourth Street). Kenneth Shapiro, a round little guy probably younger than I am, hit upon the clever and yet inevitable idea of putting a series of sketches on videotape and then presenting them in a small theater over a closed-circuit hook-up onto three large black-and-white screens. Confronting the problem of what to put on small screens, he decided in favor of a series of sketches, most of them parodying familiar television forms—the cooking show, the kiddie show, etc. Now he has produced a second set of sketches that do not advance his art, while many pieces are downright dull. Nonetheless, there is some distinct cleverness here and there: a standard talk on venereal disease by a clown figure that, as the camera approaches him, looks suspiciously like a dressed-up penis; a scene of two lovers in a moviehouse necking to unusual degrees of intimacy; or another with a Karate champion hurting his hand on a cement block. However, there are still a lot of bad bits in this rather brief program, including the recurring motif of performers in everyday dress and various stages of exercise and relaxation. The negligible program notes suggest that most of these people went to Bard College not too long ago. (July 1968)

STUART SHERMAN

Sixth Spectacle (Collective for Living Cinema). Initially working with Richard Foreman, Sherman has evolved rapidly in the past year; and though this is billed as his sixth piece, it is only the second I've seen. (How like a composer of concert music, rather than a theater artist, to enumerate one's pieces.) *The Sixth Spectacle* opens with film and then switches to live performance, which includes several audiotapes. The stage is strewn with props, all of which are eventually incorporated into the performance. I found this piece quick and nervous, and quite various in both mood and material. I probably should have seen it again, or at least come away with a list of the miscellaneous events (which Sherman might consider printing in his program, if only as a mnemonic for his audience). He thinks he is evolving his own theatrical language. I think I could tell by now whether a certain piece was his, rather than somebody else's, even if somebody else performed it. That is, I suppose, an ambition held by everyone involved in this new theater—to develop a unique theatrical style. (February 13, 1976)

Sixth Spectacle (491 Broadway). I saw an earlier version of this at the Collective for Living Cinema earlier in the spring, but I liked it more this time. First of all, I find Stuart's theater very surreal—the images are dreamy, and the connections between them quite tenuous. Secondly, the piece reminded me of my own *Openings & Closings* (a book of fiction, 1976) in its structure of separate events that may or may not be related to one another. I think of his work as a theater of images, rather than rhythms. That thought prompts the question of what would a "theater of rhythms" be like? (May 27, 1976)

Eighth Spectacle (Theater for the New City). Stuart's following has certainly developed in the past eighteen months. He is now able to field three four-day weekends of performances and pack his house. This *Eighth Spectacle* has a different concept, for now his sketches are meant to be representations of specific people (largely SoHo celebrities). Stuart's technique seems closer to Gertrude Stein than Richard Avedon, for the references to his subjects are not obvious. Perhaps this represents a conceptual advance in Stuart's own art. I thought the evening charming and ought to see it again. (December 5, 1976)

Eighth Spectacle (Performance-Portraits) (Open Space in SoHo). I like the way Stuart's art has been developing over the years. Each piece is coherent in its own terms; for though they resemble each other, each has its own theme. Here the idea is portraiture; and because the representation is more abstract than realistic, I'm reminded of Gertrude Stein's portraits

of her Parisian literary colleagues. Stuart's milieu is New York downtown culture. He arrives with a trunk full of props, which he uses both for inspiration and support. He announces in advance the subject of each portrait and then does a wordless pantomime. It is all very charming, though perhaps too unthreatening. As Stuart has gotten thinner in the past few years, his long arms look even odder on his short body. He moves with a swift agility reminiscent of soccer players. (March 12, 1977)

Hamlet (A Portrait) (Performing Garage). I'd like to like this more, but it doesn't stick with me as firmly as other theater does. (I trust my memory in ways that I don't trust personal sympathy.) One problem is that Stuart's images aren't strong enough; sometimes I think they are too intimate for any audience larger than twenty people. One development is that his productions have become more elaborate, now with six performers —five male, and one female—in addition to Stuart himself. This also has rather clever props of human figures with parts of their bodies removed, so that the performers can insert their heads into an empty space. Whatever happened to those manuscripts of visual poetry that Stuart showed me back in 1975? They are special, if similarly slight. (October 26, 1982)

DON SNYDER

Spectro-Mach 1 (Filmmakers' Cinemateque). Said to be among the best productions of the first performance festival at the Cinemateque, this piece was rather pretentiously sub-titled "an experimental program devoted to the aesthetic extension of man's internal perceptions and psychic orientation to environment [utilizing] contemporary psychedelic technology to explore and expand areas of consciousness." I came late and thus may have missed an important introductory statement, but what I saw was a series of variously colored lights flashing upon a stage full of boxes, all to the accompaniment of several tapes of organized noises. I watched the stage in a relaxed mood for over half an hour; but as nothing happened to me, I got bored and left. (December 10, 1965)

ALDO TAMBELLINI

Black Zero: Electromedia (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Tambellini's earlier pieces, which I saw at the Bridge Theater and in a small room above the Gate Theater, were always disappointing, largely because they didn't transcend the immediate effects of his two basic ideas—a black-white vocabulary and the mixing of presentational media. This event was a little more impressive, largely because he introduced a videotape sequence on four televisions and because of an inspired prop—a large black balloon that was blown-up on stage only to float out into the audience, where it was punctured to end the piece. However, undermining these good moves

were certain vulgarities, including a tape of a very blatantly sentimental Calvin C. Hernton poem, whose style was patently derived from Allen Ginsberg (down to a declamatory style that sounded like Ginsberg's). Worse was Tambellini's use of sirens too loud, even for such a large theater. Had I not hoped to be surprised, I wouldn't have come. (March 8, 1968)

HANNE TIERNEY

Drama for Strings, in three movements: light-sound-gesture (Minor Latham Playhouse). It was an intelligent program with three pieces, presented with pauses but no intermissions. The first piece had a beaded curtain similar to that used in her *Salome*, presented last year at the Guggenheim Museum. It was suspended from strings. Also hung from above were three simple spotlights whose projection angles she manipulated by controlling the strings. Thus, light not only reflected off the cloth; it made shadows on the walls behind. While she was manipulating the strings, Hanne spoke a monologue about light that I remember as less radical, and less impressive, than her stagecraft. In the second movement, copper pipes were suspended horizontally, one behind the other, their ends jerked up and down in response to a tape of percussive sounds. I found it the most radical and most successful of the three pieces, because the sound was as abstract as the visual elements. She told me it went on for only five minutes; I would have thought it much longer. For the third movement, subtitled "Gesture," she had large rubber gloves that were clearly meant to be human hands. (Later she told me of a Marinetti performance in which the curtain is raised only a few inches above the floor; so that one sees only the performers' feet.) Here too there is a text whose content I forget, because Hanne's articulations are still weaker than her imagery. Her program note mistakenly reduces her work to an exercise in didacticism: "The third movement means to illustrate that the emotional reaction of the audience to a gesture can be independent of the gesturer's performer." True, but note that this description makes no reference to the text. My own judgment is that the middle movement represents growth, coming closest to the abstract theater I've heard her talking about. Hanne told me how she did the same piece in a Pittsburgh art museum a few weeks before, with less success, because it gains from being produced in a proscenium. (March 26, 1988)

DAVID TUDOR

Bandoneon! (A Combine) (69th Regiment Armory). Knowing David Tudor's work as a pianist and recognizing a rational program note when I see one, I had high hopes for this; however, it was disappointing. The accompanying prose described some methods by which an accordian, which Tudor plays, would activate all sorts of circuits, producing both sounds and images, as well as movement in several mobile sculptures that were

on the floor. The aleatoric dimension rested, I suppose, in the fact that Tudor did not know precisely what results would come from his movements. I found a highly limited syntax. The loudspeakers suffered from constant static, while the television image was only a flame that tended to expand and contract, as well as tilt about thirty degrees. Then, the auditorium's spotlights flashed on and off, in an ineffective way, and the sculptures often stopped dead. The second half took at least an hour to set up (forty-five minutes past what should have been the end of the intermission), and I left after about a half-hour of sound, suspecting that, as in certain Cage pieces, this tedium would be terminated only when a certain number of people (perhaps a dozen) were left in the audience. (October 1966)

USCO (GERD STERN, et al.)

Hubbub (Filmmakers' Cinemateque, Wurlitzer Building). I gather that earlier productions of this, at a downtown theater, were much better. USCO is a group that works out of a church in Garnerville, New York. Having read their McLuhan, they claim that because they work in concert, much like "artisans in traditional societies," they should remain individually anonymous. What they have to offer is several media working at once. Slides are flashed on the screen; motion picture projectors are also used. There is polyrhythmic noise in the background and two flashing light-producing machines on the side of the stage, as well as a television in the middle, perhaps placed too low for most of the audience to see. The whole is described as "a multichannel mix of films, tape, oscilloscope, stroboscope, kinetic and live images." Beyond that I stop describing but sense there was some attempt to order all these images in advance. Now that I've recorded how impressed I was by the organizational concept and the gathering of media, I'm reluctant to add that the result was really too prosaic. There should have been a shrewder choice of examples and a sharper sense of possibilities of juxtaposition. I felt that more imaginative people could have made better use of the same media; but a friend, whom I met there, suggested that the failure of the evening was intrinsic in the technique itself. (January 22, 1966)

Ten-Foot Fanflashtic (Theatre Workshop for Students, 210 West 65th Street). This was clearly the hit of a group show, a circular box ten feet high and ten feet in diameter, with celluloid sides, a floor of motors which gently shot air up, several balloons bouncing around the space, and four strobe lights in the top corners, their flickering-rates tied to a complicated programming system. The box that had only two entrances, both of them folds of a tough celluloid material. Once inside, people played with the balloons and enjoyed watching one another moving around. I suspected that one could have experienced its pleasure forever. I heard of a plan to

flood the room with thousands of small balls that would surely create a fantastic experience. Gerd Stern insists that the piece's title has a Jewish reference. "What sort of *schtick* is this," his mother would ask. "A ten-foot fanflashtic" is his current reply. Also, this represents the first great piece I've seen them do without Steve Durkee's help; up to now, the best things have generally depended upon his participation. The environmental idea is really rather simple, but certain clever touches, such as balloons, help make the experience richer and more surprising than anything else in this series. (March 4, 1968)

ROBERT WATTS

Fluxyear/Gemini/74/Part 1: An Extended Work for Audience (Onnasch Gallery). I'd never seen any Robert Watts performance pieces before, though I'd long been impressed by some of his sculptures (especially those pieces of neon tubing shaped into the signatures of the classic painters). This piece was slight, except for certain impressive actions. Spectators are invited to sit within specified taped white lines in a darkened room (that was quite chilly). Around the corner from where I was sitting is a small explosion (which I couldn't see), and then Watts's assistants wind smelly wire around us with two sets of tapes. These are then systematically ignited, so that the bunched spectators are surrounded by fire (which was quite hot and scary, especially if the air is blowing in your direction, as it is in mine). Once these die down, Watts comes forward to ignite stylish burners whose special name I can't remember—round balls, resting on the floor, from which turrets from which flames can emerge. It becomes apparent that in the middle are icicles that are steadily dropping water on the floor. From that point onward, nature is allowed to pursue its inclinations, the ice simply dripping into a circular area, as the spectators drift out. This had some nice moments, but not enough to fill an evening. (February 15, 1974)

ROBERT WHITMAN

Prune. Flat. (Filmmakers Cinemateque, Wurlitzer Building). This was the first series of Happenings at the new Forty-Second Street home of the Cinemateque; and I was surprised to discover that nearly everybody visibly important turned out for this occasion: John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Morris, Yvonne Rainer, Andy Warhol (*avec entourage*). Coming after Claes Oldenburg's and Robert Rauschenberg's attempts, Whitman's was the masterpiece of the evening—an exercise in the ambiguous identity of film image and reality. The piece opens with a film of a knife cutting first a grapefruit and then a tomato. Out of the latter pours some unidentifiable, mysterious stuff with a solidity heavier than liquid. The second time the tomato-cutting sequence is shown, two young women dressed in white smocks and white bandanas are in front of the screen; so

that the filmed blade cuts through them. Later, those same two women walk across the stage in a quick step, while the filmed portion shows them walking down a New York street. The same effect comes when a young woman is portrayed as dressed in bra and bikini panties; but in fact, a film of her undressing is projected on the white-smocked woman. The audience gasps as we discover that the woman we thought undressed is actually besmocked. Another film portrays the woman naked, washing herself in a shower, as she goes through the same motions on stage, making herself into a screen, so to speak, for an image of herself. An older colleague told me this represents an advance over Whitman's earlier work in mixed-media. (December 3, 1965)

Prune. Flat. (Filmmakers Cinemateque, Wurlitzer Building). I remember this as by far the best of the three performances; but on the second time round, I found myself less stunned by it. First of all, this time the performance itself was rather sloppily done; for whereas the projected figure of Mimi Stark is supposed to match her physical shape as precisely as possible, now this image is quite often off-center. (Even though Whitman himself told me in conversation that he didn't care how precise the visual match was, the difference in effectiveness is enormous. Sometimes I wonder how well he knows what he is doing.) Secondly, I sensed that the piece lost some of its earlier rhythm. Though I wasn't as impressed as I was the first time, I'm glad I returned to perceive more clearly that his structure and theme are the same—the possible confusion between image and reality. This he realizes by projecting a filmed image of someone or some action against the real person or the real action on stage. *Prune. Flat.* attains a visual interest greater than that in any other happening I've seen. Impressed again, I'd see anything else Whitman does. (December 16, 1965)

Two Holes in the Water I (Two Mile Water Road, Easthampton, NY). Like all of Bob's pieces, this has several striking, beautiful images, such as a TV screen of a nude girl before a shimmering mirror, a spate of flashlights running through the woods, a phosphorescent clothesline, a kayak towing a white sculpture through the water, etc. However, its scale is slightly haywire—certain images are too far away; and I'm not quite sure how they are meant to hang together. In one sense, this is a piece about technology, as every sequence depends upon a piece of machinery developed since 1900. His wife Simone Whitman insists its theme was space. I couldn't make it jell for myself. It simply didn't have the consistency of *Prune. Flat.*. (August 28, 1966)

Prune Flat (1965) & *Salad P. N.* (Dia Art Foundation, 469 Washington Street). *Prune Flat* remains extraordinary, even though its orthography

no longer includes superfluous periods. I was amazed to discover that, a decade later, nearly all the images were securely in my head, so strong was its earlier impact on me—the cutting of the tomato, the projections on the performers, the breaking of the light bulb at the end, etc. And I'd like to see it yet again, so classic has it become. The evenings's second piece was more recent and more diffuse. It opens with Robert's new wife Sylvia Whitman carefully knocking off the top of a raw egg and then igniting its insides. Then on the screen appear several kinetic burning images, apparently from a film projector and, I think, an opaque projector. The program booklet has a lot more explanation than I remember Whitman ever before providing, perhaps in a reflection of current fashion. (April 10, 1976)

American Moon (1960) (Dia Foundation, 469 Washington Street). A dozen years ago, this was commonly thought to be Whitman's best piece prior to *Prune Flat* (as it is now spelled). Its subject, as Claes Oldenburg told me a decade ago, is materials, and perhaps its theme is the complexity of articulation of these materials. The audience is segregated into groups of ten, each occupying a cubicle whose open side looks into a center scene. The curtains in front of each group are raised, and in the middle are costumed people who prance about. Later two kids do epileptic moves, no joke, on the floor. The climax of the piece is a cellophane structure that is blown up from a silent source, the plastic filling the middle space, so that two performers can walk into and through it. Then a man is suspended in a swing above the space. (Photographs of earlier performances of this have been widely reprinted, so strong is the image.) At one point, one of the two screens falls over the space, and a film is projected. I gather that each section of the audience gets its own film (which nonetheless seems drawn from the same source of footage). I found this piece inventive as theater but slower than *Prune Flat*, which now seems almost too fast to comprehend on first viewing; but I also found *American Moon* less coherent. I wonder how Whitman recruited all this equipment fifteen years ago. The new program announcement has such pretentious verbalizing as, "At the end you have the fusion of the will and the rational mind," which is quite contrary to his wish of a decade ago, expressed in his interview with me, to avoid such artificial rhetoric. (April 23, 1976)

Nighttime Sky (1965) (Dia Foundation, 469 Washington Street). This is the fourth in Whitman's reproductions of his earlier theatrical pieces. I found it the least consequential. The initial setting is marvelous. The audience is placed in a large round tent, and events occur on high stages in the four corners of the space. Images are projected from a turret in the middle. I heard the sounds of tugboats (which, now that I think of

it, may not have been intentional, but accidents from the Hudson River nearby). What enhanced the performance I saw was an unintentional heavy rainstorm that resounded on the skylights. Other than the basic setting, the piece was devoid of powerful images. (May 1, 1976)

Film Images (1960–76) (Dia Foundation, 469 Washington Street). The program opened with *Prune Flat,* done so that the bottom of the filmed image was projected on the bottom rim of the stage. For the first time in my memory I watched the projection carefully, and noticed that there were *two* projectors and that the image of the nude woman comes from a film different from that with the urban background. The piece remains a classic that is not dulled by familiarity. The remainder of this program was devoted to new work—filmed footage projected onto four screens distributed across the space. (Four screens remains one of the great modern ideas. I'd like to use that medium myself, should I get further into film.) The images are sometimes complementary and sometimes disjunctive, and once again Whitman's rhythm is swift, though not hasty. As usual with Bob, there are evidences of sadomasochism, especially in the repeated cutting into things and burning of them. I'd like to see this program again. (May 8, 1976)

Light Touch (Dia Foundation, 469 Washington Street). This is the new work in the Whitman retrospective. The program note tells us, in language less pretentious than is customary for him recently, "Most of my pieces are reactions to specific times and spaces. They get off the ground when I see the space and work in the space. They are a response to the physical activity involved in making that piece." *Light Touch* is meant to exploit the space in which the other works of his are represented. The concept is strong, but the execution weak. I'm reminded that Whitman's work has always been uneven—that *Prune Flat* is the exception that makes you forget the bad tries. The audience is assigned to the upper level of the loading platform (which had previously functioned as a stage), while the action takes place below. Images are projected sporadically, and the garage doors open, revealing the street behind flimsy curtains. Traffic passes outside (where the star performer last evening was a city Sanitation truck), and the Hertz Rent-a-Truck backs in, its red back-up lights illuminating the darkened space. There are images of things burning, as seems usual with Whitman. Fellow critics left before me. (May 14, 1976)

Eclipse (Dia Foundation). Whitman did a masterpiece once, nearly two decades ago—*Prune. Flat.*, which I first saw at the end of 1965 at the Cinemateque when it was on 42nd Street (in the basement of the Wurlitzer Building), and have seen several times since. In spite of its superficial messiness, it is a perfect piece, both visually and temporally. I have seen

several Whitman pieces since, sometimes with *Prune. Flat.*, other times not, always predisposed to discover another masterwork; but none came close. This doesn't either, notwithstanding stunning moments that depend, as always in Whitman's work, upon certain visual qualities made by projecting light on objects. Here the objects are mostly silver—large light things (perhaps with silver foil wrapped around *papier mâché* topped with sprinkles; and the light is mostly gray. Another problem is that this stage is broad, rather than narrowly focused (like that of *Prune. Flat.*). In spite of the Dia Foundation's recent beneficience, Whitman's theatrical art has not matured. (Now that I think of it, has any of the Dia artists gotten better under its patronage?) Also on the program was Whitman's wife Sylvia Palacios's *Irregulars* which had performers on ledges around the garage-like space. Some of them sent signs with words hanging on string from the left wall to the right. The words, apparently both spoken and drawn, come from Ron Padgett; they are inconsequential, though surprisingly Steinian in style. I would have thought this the beginning piece of a young artist, had I not known that Palacios must be my age. (January 6, 1984)

SIMONE WHITMAN (b. Forti)

Cloths (School of Visual Arts). In conversation Simone Whitman seems nice but small-minded, and I fear that both those qualities characterize these pieces. Here she joins John and Anina Weber (whom the program credits as patrons) in singing fragments of songs, in various languages, from behind three curtained shields, whose front cloths are constantly being changed. From time to time the performers would also be accompanied by sounds from two tape recorders placed at opposite sides of the auditorium. The piece has a trivial importance within a parochial history by being the first recent mixed-means work to use songs in a theater that has so far eschewed syntactical structures as long as sentences. Yet these songs, along with the general impression of cuteness, persuaded me to think the piece hardly belongs to mixed-means theater.

Simone's second work, *Two at Once* (1967), consisted of two separate actions. In the middle of the stage (which is an artschool classroom platform at the bottom of a pit), lots of people pile on top of one another. While everyone braces arms across one another's shoulders, one person emerges to crawl over the pile. Meanwhile, on a side landing, Steve Paxton, Alex Hay, and Simone herself walk and squat across a precariously tilted board, holding only onto knotted ropes attached to that board. That was all the activity there was. (November 10, 1967)

Face Tunes (1967). This was even simpler and sweeter than the two pieces Simone did yesterday, for here she blew into a flute that had a trombone-like barrel with a string attached to its end. At the end of the string

is a pencil that makes marks on a sheet of graph paper that passes between two rollers, while Simone is moving the barrel back and forth to change the pitch of the flute. I could not see much connection between one activity and another, and for the few minutes of its duration the piece seemed interminable. (November 11, 1967)

ROBERT WILSON and CHRISTOPHER KNOWLES

Dialog/Curious George (Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater). Like Stefan Brecht (in his *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson*, 1978) I tend to divide Robert Wilson's pieces into major ones and minor ones. The major ones are the spectacles that draw upon his unsurpassed capacity for elaborate stagecraft. *Einstein on the Beach* was the last I saw in this mode; the greatest was *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*. The earlier "dialogues" depended first upon Bob prompting the peculiar speech patterns of Knowles, who had been diagnosed "autistic," and then upon a lot of background noise, not only from the amplification systems attached to the portable microphones that both of them must wear to be heard in this theater, but also from Christopher's love of AM music radio as background. When I first saw their "dialogues," Knowles was in his early teens; now that he is twenty-one he has become a more reliable performer and a self-conscious one who evidently enjoys the audience is enjoying him. My suspicion is that Wilson, recognizing that his ideas for language are not as creative as his sense for staging, turned to Christopher, who is indeed original, though limited. Otherwise, *Dialog/Curious George* has those familiar Wilsonian devices—props on strings, blocks of wood that fall inexplicably from the ceiling, stuffed animals, language spoken by figures lying down, and a general noisy inscrutability. I found this production neither interesting nor avant-garde—just eccentric. My fear is that, if this sort of work gets both an audience and a favorable critical press, we'll get more of lesser theater from Wilson, rather than his more substantial theatrical pieces. (June 29, 1980)

LA MONTE YOUNG

The Theatre of Eternal Music (Filmmakers' Cinemateque, Wurlitzer Building). This is the latest development in La Monte Young's meteoric career, but it may also be the end, if he keeps his promise to devote his entire life to it. The music itself has the utterly appropriate title of "The Ballad of the Tortoise." Its content Young defines as "Drone Ratios Transmitting the Manifestation of the Tortoise Center Drifting Obsidian Time Mists Through the Synaptic Stepdown Barrier." There are four musicians (Young himself, his wife Marian Zazeela as the voice drone, Tony Conrad on violin and John Cale on "three-string drone") who produce a steady piercing sound that owes more to amplification than to the voices and

instrumentalists themselves. Indeed, I found it more interesting to watch Young open his mouth to sing into the microphone and then listen to results quite different from what one expects from a single human voice. From somewhere in the back of the theater oriental patterns are projected onto the stage, touching all the musicians as well as the gong behind them. As the light slightly changes, so does the music, with similar indefiniteness. This gushing sound lasts for about forty minutes at a stretch. Between two separate performances was a thirty-minute intermission that included "Gong Contests," where microphones are attached to the edges of a round Chinese gong that is banged lightly. The first piece conveys an overwhelming sense of timelessness and placidity. You hardly get restless, because the noise is too intrusive to allow you to think of anything else. My ears cracked both times, signifying, I suppose, some change in my internal physical balance. The notes Young provides insist that his sound is based upon harmony, but one colleague behind me rightly pointed out that he heard more static than harmonic noise. The accompanying notes portray Young as a utopian, espousing the creation of so-called Dream Houses in which his Dream Music will be played endlessly ("This music may play without stopping for thousands of years"). Of course, with its aspirations to timelessness, this all relates to Zen. Young rationalizes his art with the desire to create a revolutionary personal experience that will in turn revolutionize social life. It would be difficult to do anything violent while listening to this. (December 5, 1965)

Theatre of Eternal Music (Loft of Larry Poons, 295 Church Street). The first time I attended a La Monte Young concert, I was stunned out of my mind. The second time, though I was more prepared for the unfamiliar experience, I still found it extraordinary—quite unlike anything I had heard or seen before. His loud sound is not unpleasant; it is not painful. It does not render one mindless, as I had previously feared; but it does make sustained thought difficult. Somehow I found myself thinking mostly about women, pleasantly to be sure, but did not develop any full fantasies from these snatches of imagination. I entered the place quite tired and frayed from my visit to Marshall McLuhan. I left exhilarated and awake; I found myself relaxed throughout the concert. It is such efficient therapy that I wouldn't mind having a chamber filled with this at home that I could pop into now and then for short doses. This time I discovered that the best place to sit is right near the speakers.

The experience is not just music but the culmination of Antonin Artaud's theater, particularly in its ability to move you with "the force of the plague"—its ability to inspire catharsis without violence. It is, to be precise, an evolving low-definition experience that is enveloping, because it doesn't allow you to do anything other than sit and listen. This time a third

drone voice, Terry Riley's, replaced John Cale's three-string drone, but I think I preferred the earlier blend. As I heard it, Tony Conrad as the violinist plays various notes, while Riley and Zazeela just drone. Young, however, changes the sound by how he projects into the microphone, singing with his mouth open or his mouth narrowed or by blowing and twirling the amplifier's dials. When he changes pitch, he redefines the harmony. The oriental patterns projected on the performers are beautiful. Though Young's earlier music was quite Cagean in allowing for sound in a variety of nonmusical sources (including that produced by butterflies!), this really represents the antithesis of Cage, not only in restricting itself to musical sources but in confining its sound to, blush to think the thought, *harmonies.* (February 25, 1966)

Theatre of Eternal Music (Larry Poons's loft). This was not as effective as it was the night before, largely because something went haywire with the speaker system, which emitted a low, burping noise that became more and more painful as the evening wore on. Indeed, once Young stopped playing, in order to fix it, everyone left. The evening before, I spoke to Young who is clearly not the fool that Milton Babbitt portrays in a notorious anecdote. Young explained that his music is based upon open harmonies, such as C to G and C to E, which he and his colleagues create from four sound-sources, defining a chord based upon the notes 1, 2, 3 and 7 (as 5 for some reason is ineffective). They move from one note to the other with careful attention to what the other performers are doing. From time to time notes fall out of the chord, and that is what changes their sound. Young said he got the nucleus of his scale from East Indian music. Even after last night's bad experience, I admire *Eternal Music* enormously, but think it valuable not as musical innovation but as the realization of Artaudian theater. (February 26, 1966)

The Ballad of the Tortoise (Private tent, Easthampton, NY). This time his theater was a tent, rather than a closed room; so La Monte had to rent two mammoth speakers, raising his total to six. He also introduced two sound-generating machines that gave the first half of his performance an excess of machine noise, such as static, which in turn made his mix dissonant and excessively painful. In the second half, he cut out the two sound-generators; and although the piece became much softer, it was also more congenial. I found that outside the tent, at a distance of some fifty yards, the first half was more tolerable; its presence in the far background so enhanced our conversation that we perceived its disappearance as a disappointment. Merely going to see his work is an adventure full of discoveries. I've journeyed several hours to see once again what has become my favorite example of new theater. (July 30, 1966)

Map of 49's Dream the Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery (1966 to present) (Barbizon Plaza). Once La Monte was no longer able to get concert producers to pay his exorbitant fees, the group of performers that had been rehearsing every evening necessarily disbanded. Given his conception, as well as his use of machines, it became inevitable that he replace the drone voices with mechanical sound-generators—seven oscilators, to be exact. These give a more evenly pulsing sound. At first I feared that the introduction of machinery would produce impure noise; now I'm beginning to think the result more pleasurable than that produced with amplified human performers. Either way, remember, La Monte controls the amplifier, varying the mix in both timbre and value to his taste. Even when accompanied by machines, he is still the lead soloist, able to change the quality of his tone or the distance and angle between his voice and the microphone. The odd thing is that you do not hear his voice as such, but observe how shifts in his singing posture can produce changes in the sound of the mix. Needless to say perhaps, all the machinery worked quite well. The piece went on for three hours, gradually droning away as the light went on. As an esthetic experience, as well as an emotional effect, the piece is one continuous high. There is no applause, perhaps because it is impossible to celebrate an experience lacking in climax. (February 16, 1968)

________ **and Marian Zazeela**. *Sound & Light* (Museum of Modern Art). It is contrary to La Monte's character to be generous; and rather than perform live for an audience, he plays tapes of his pieces, in an environment resembling that of his live performances. Sure enough, the result is pretty much the same, confirming what I said in *The Theatre of Mixed Means* that his pieces are essentially environmental, if and only if the sensory stimuli other than music are recreated. The incense seems the same as before, though I must admit that my olfactory taste is not too sophisticated; but Marian's "Ornamental Lightyears Tracery" (as the program calls it) has become more detailed, I think. At one point the red slide of her patterns was so clearly in focus while the green was blurred against a black background that I swore she had conned me into the illusion of three-dimensionality (which is to say that one color looked considerably ahead of the other).

I had heard Young's *Well-Tuned Piano* (1964) before, and again it sounded terribly Cagean and oriental. His program note contains this boast: "At least one of the intervals (63:64) has never before been used in music composition to my knowledge." The second piece, which had for this night a complicated title, was essentially a tape of *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*. After the intermission, La Monte presented a "Drift Study" attributed to a Moog Synthesizer, though someone more knowledgeable

about machines insisted he heard/saw only two sine-wave generators. This piece drove most people out of the auditorium, perhaps because the resulting sound is even less articulate than the drone of *The Tortoise.* However, La Monte claims, "Not only does the sound become a bit louder and softer but at very loud levels one actually begins to have a sensation that parts of the body are somehow locked in sync with the sine waves and slowly drifting with them in space and time." Maybe. Just before he explains the characteristic action: "In spite of the great stability of the oscillators, the phase relationships of the sine waves gradually drift, causing their amplitudes to add and subtract algebraically." The critical question is whether this piece is closer to music than theater. I think not. (December 30, 1968)

Sound and Light (Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium at the Metropolitan Museum). La Monte presented his annual New York concert without advance publicity to an even smaller audience than last time, perhaps less than one hundred people. Actually he didn't perform at all but instead played three tapes. The first was *Drift Study 4:37-40—509:50 PM 5 VIII 68,* whose hieroglyphics I suppose document how long and when he recorded those two droning sine waves. The second was an excerpt from *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys,* in which La Monte displayed spectacular command of sustained South-Indian singing. The final piece was a section of *Studies in the Bowed Disc,* the gong work he credits to 1963, which I first heard in 1965. As this last tape was played at one-half the speed of the original recording, it sounded like waves on a beach. His program note, characteristically full of copyright signs, exhibits a descriptive precision that even Milton Babbitt, the empiricist, would admire, for all that there is in this music, all the allowable interpretations, are only what La Monte specifies. (January 8, 1970)

Dream House (Kitchen). This was the best performance of the Theatre of Eternal Music that I have ever seen/heard. His group has been enlarged to include a third voice (Alex Dea), a horn (Jon Hassell) and the three-string drone built by Tony Conrad (now played by David Rosenboom). La Monte has also been working on building his bass voice which he enhances by putting a directional microphone deep down into his throat. The group has also learned to play continuously for three hours, eliminating the unnecessary intermission. As before, one can listen attentively to the continuous recomposition of the basic chord, or simply let the sound bathe over you. (May 3, 1974)

ZAJ

(Merce Cunningham Studio, 463 West Street). John Cage identifies Zaj as doing "the most controversial work ... now in theater." Alison

Knowles, who advised me to see their show, told me that there were three men until one dropped out, and a woman took his place. The evening consists of a series of sketches that are terribly reduced visually and elongated in time. It is hard to concentrate on someone who doesn't do any perceptible work, but that is precisely the challenge posed by a Zaj performance. Their tableaus are symmetrically composed and are usually based upon some task, such as preparing the piano to be played or pouring water into a glass or the telling of a secret. This is too slight for my taste in performance, but others told me how captivated they were by the penultimate sketch in which the taller man (Walter Marchetti) tells the woman an inaudible secret that she (Esther Ferrer) in turn whispers, likewise inaudibly, into the ear of the smaller man (Juan Hidalgo) for many, many minutes. I remembered that two of the three performers grew up in Franco Spain, where the passing of secrets was more significant than in, say, the U.S. The Zaj evening closed with "Mandala," which is only a terribly loud generator sound. The three performers were formally dressed, in a manner that probably has more significance in Europe than here. Though I probably should have met them, I doubt if I'd want to see their work again. Though it is hard for someone of my biases toward esthetic extremes to say this, I found this performance excessively minimal. (March 10, 1973)

Robert Hivnor, Kenneth Koch, John Ford Noonan, Jack Gelber, Lee Baxandall, John Antrobus (1973–92)

Robert Hivnor (1973)

The economics of theater are all too cruel to art. Since a play costs so much more to produce than, say, a novel, more important texts are rarely, if ever, presented. Those particularly victimized by such economic discrimination include older playwrights who have neither the confidence nor energy necessary to launch noncommercial productions on their own. There is no doubt, in my judgment, that Robert Hivnor has written two of the best and most original American post–WWII dramas. However, it is lamentable that our knowledge of them, as well as his reputation, must be based more upon print than performance, and that a lack of performance possibilities keeps other plays of his unfinished. His first, *Too Many Thumbs* (1947), is probably the most feasible, requiring only some inventive costumes and masks to overcome certain challenges in artifice. It tells of an exceptionally bright chimpanzee, possessed of a large body and a small head, who in the course of the play moves up the evolutionary ladder to become, first, an intermediate stage between man and beast, and then a normal man, and ultimately a god-like creature with an immense head and a shriveled body. The university professors who keep this creature also attempt to cast him as the avatar of a new religion until unending evolution defeats their designs. Just as Hivnor's writing is often very funny, so is the play's ironically linear structure also extremely original, preceding Eugène Ionesco's use of it in *The New Tenant* (1957). By pursuing the bias implicit in evolutionary development to its inevitable reversal, the play pointedly questions humankind's claim to a higher state of existence. Hivnor's second play, *The Ticklish Acrobat* (1951), strikes me as a lesser work than *Too Many Thumbs*, nonetheless exhibiting some true originality and typically Hivnorian intellectual comedy. Here, however, the practical difficulty is constructing a set whose period recedes several hundred years in time with each act.

Hivnor is fundamentally a black satirist who debunks myths and permits no heroes; but unlike other contemporary playwrights who eschew protagonists, he is less interested in absurdity than in comprehensive ridicule. *The Assault on Charles Sumner* (1965), his third published work, is an immensely sophisticated history play, regrettably requiring more actors and scenes than an unsubsidized theater can afford, and an audience more literate than Broadway can offer. Its subject is the supreme example of liberal intellectualism in American politics—the mid-nineteenth-century senator from Massachusetts, Charles Sumner, who had been a prominent advocate of both the abolition of slavery and the Civil War. Like the eminent historian David Donald, the author of a recent two-volume biography of Sumner, Hivnor finds that Sumner, for all his saintliness, was politically ineffective and personally insufferable. The opening prologue, which contains some of Hivnor's more savage writing, establishes the play's tone and thrust, dealing as it does with the funeral and possible afterlife of the last living Negro slave. "Sir, no American has ever been let into heaven." "Not old Abe Lincoln?" the slave asks. "Mr. Lincoln," Sumner replies, "sits over there revising his speech at the Gettysburg. . . ." Extending such negative satire, Hivnor feasts upon episodes and symbols of personal and national failure, attempting to define a large historical experience in a single evening. While much of the imagery is particularly theatrical, such as repeating the scene where Preston Brooks assaults Sumner with a cane, perhaps the play's subject and score are finally closer, both intrinsically and extrinsically, to extended prose fiction.

Kenneth Koch (1973, 1992)

Kenneth Koch is a genuine person of letters, though that epithet seems inappropriate for a writer whose natural instincts are comic and parodic. In addition to writing much first-rate poetry and some striking fiction, he has been one of America's most effective teachers of writing—not only inspiring several younger poets of note, but also popularizing the idea of poetry writing in both elementary education and senior recreation. His book, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* (1970), details his own experience in the New York City public schools, and thus establishes a pedagogical example that is currently imitated all over the United States. Koch has also written short plays over the past three decades, most of which originated as responses to his personal experience as a graduate student of literature, a college professor, a serious poet, and a participant in the New York art scene. Perhaps because many of these shorter works were inspired by specific occasions, they remain too dependent upon their original circumstances to be presented again. His second collection, *A Change of Heart* (1973), includes several new pieces, all of which are typically Kochian, none particularly better than his earlier work.

On one hand, Koch is a bemused absurdist, incapable of taking anything too seriously; his plays exploit situations and/or subjects for their available humor. On the other hand, he is a "New York School" poet capable of extraordinary acoherent (as distinct from incoherent) writing, such as this marvelous nonsense from these concluding lines of his early play *Pericles* (1953, first produced in 1960):

> And we stood there with pure roots
> In silence in violence one two one two
> Will you please go through that again
> The organ's orgasm and the aspirin tablet's speechless spasm.

In structure, his plays tend to be collections of related sketches, strung together in sequences of varying duration, allowing for imaginative leaps between the scenes. The best plays also reveal his debt, both as playwright and poet, to the French Surrealists and Dadaists.

Bertha and Other Plays (1966) collects most of Koch's early works in chronological order. The very best, *George Washington Crossing the Delaware*, originated as a response to a Larry Rivers's painting of the same title (and the play is appropriately dedicated to that artist). Koch's compressed historical play ridicules several kinds of clichés: the myths of American history, the language of politicians, war films, military strategies, patriotism, and much else. The theme of Koch's multiple burlesques, here and elsewhere, is that the accepted familiar versions are no more credible than his comic rewritings. The play also reveals Koch's love of Apollinaire's great poem "Zone" (1918) by scrambling space and time. The British general refers at one point to "the stately bison," which did not enter popular mythology until the nineteenth century and certainly could not be seen on the East Coast. Also, the play takes place in "Alpine, New Jersey," which is nowhere near the Delaware River.

In the ten short-short scenes of Koch's earlier mini-epic, *Bertha* (1959), whose text runs less than ten pages, Queen Bertha of Norway uses power to assuage her evident madness, has her armies attack Scotland only to halt at the frontier, shoots lovers for their sins and much else. Nonetheless, she wins the respect of both her soldiers and their captives. (The initial source of this burlesque is less obvious, though several possibilities come to mind.) Koch's book also includes *Guinevere* (1954), an early work with some marvelous nonsense writing, and "Six Improvisational Plays," four of which are prose texts that suggest a performance (much like a script for a "happening"). The book *Bertha* closes with scenes from *Angelica* (1958), an opera about nineteenth-century French poetry that was written for the American composer Virgil Thomson but never performed.

Koch's more recent plays are likewise filled with marvelous moments. In *The New Diana* (1984), essentially a satire of the myth of poets and

their muses, he has live turkeys appear, speaking an indigenous (poetic?) language:

> *Caged Turkey:* Mishiki wai nowuga gan! Ish tang.
> *Turkey on Table:* Nai shi mai ghee itan, korega.

Popeye Among the Polar Bears (1986), likewise a series of vignettes, has the wit and representational freedom we've come to associate with Koch's verse plays. *The Red Robins* is, by contrast, an adaptation of Koch's sole novel, published a few years before; it differs from other Kochian theater in having considerably longer speeches.

In the mid–1980s, he developed a working relationship with Barbara Vann and her colleagues at the Medicine Show, a distinguished Off-Off Broadway theater, which produced an operatic version of *A Change of Hearts* (1985, from his second collection), and parts of *A Thousand Avant-Garde Plays* (1988), a title so delicious it includes some of his best writing and wittiest conceptions, even if the book includes only 112 texts, or one-ninth of the number announced in the title. My own favorites are Koch's variations on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in one play asking the performers to say individually in sequence only one syllable of Hamlet's "To be or not to be," changing their postures "after every six syllables or after every poetic line"; in another play having the classic speech recited by an offstage voice while "the story of Little Red Riding Hood is acted out in dumb show."

Only fundamentally radical dramatic texts could prompt Professor Ruby Cohn, in *The New American Dramatists, 1960–1980* (1982), to write, "I find the plays of poet Kenneth Koch, which I have never seen performed, too childish to examine in a book intended for adults." Such a severe dismissal would not occur unless Koch's texts made genuine departures in his theatrical writing.

In sum, these plays suggest a huge dramatic capacity that none of them fully realizes, for neither as a novelist nor as a playwright has Koch written the epic masterpiece his imagination suggests—the equal in their genres of his two great book-length poems, *When the Sun Tried to Go On* (written in 1953 but not published until 1960), and *Ko, or a Season on Earth* (1959). Yet to my senses, his plays do not take enough risks within their premises and do not sustain their innovations to sufficient degrees. It should also be noted that Koch, like his poetic colleagues John Ashbery and the late Frank O'Hara, belongs to the counter-tradition of American playwriting—a theater of poets and novelists that emphasizes not naturalism but fantasy, not character but circumstance, not events but essences.

Jack Gelber (1973)

American drama changed radically once Jack Gelber's *The Connection* opened at the Living Theatre in July 1959 and Edward Albee introduced

The Zoo Story the following winter. Though Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller remained much-produced, they were no longer at the forefront of theatrical consciousness. Whereas Albee was clearly a master dramatist whose verbal facility sometimes transcended the necessities of sense and significance, the evaluation of Gelber's possible talent became more problematic. Since so much of the success of *The Connection* depended upon Judith Malina's stunning direction, as well as the Living Theatre's growing reputation, Gelber's contribution was critically slighted at the time. As he was then only twenty-seven, his youth, along with the evident limitations of his theatrical language, made critics only suspect that *The Connection* might be, as they say, "the only play he had in him." The subsequent publication of the work's text established, however, that Gelber was not only responsible for the play's theme and structure but that he preceded Malina in skillfully turning a naturalistic surface to non-naturalistic ends. For all of its anti-intellectual ambience, *The Connection* gains from echoing earlier plays by Maxim Gorky, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O'Neill, and Samuel Beckett. Just as The Living Theatre has since survived devastating misfortunes and artistically changed, so has Gelber continued to present new scripts, though none of them has been as successful, either critically or commercially, as his first. His theatrical activity is uneven, both in whole and in part, and his single novel, *On Ice* (1964), is likewise intriguing, though flawed and finally unclear.

A group of junkies are visible on stage before *The Connection* begins, suggesting, since there is no curtain, that the scene existed before the audience entered the theater and will probably continue to exist after it leaves. A better-dressed man, announcing that he is "Jim Dunn," the evening's producer, steps off the stage and introduces "Jaybird, the author." Dunn explains that onstage are real addicts whom he has recruited to "improvise on Jaybird's themes" for a documentary motion picture. As two cameramen step forward, Jaybird starts to explain his play until Dunn interrupts him to address the addicts who in turn call him "Jim." By this time, much of the audience is successfully enticed into the authenticity of the scene before it.

All the pseudo-naturalistic devices are intrinsically necessary, for only by breaking down the art-life barriers that customarily stand between spectator and performer can the audience confront the concerns of the play. The characters spend the first act waiting for another character named "Cowboy" to return from the "connection," where he has hopefully picked up some "horse." Beneath the boredom and general purposelessness, similar to Beckett's waiting, run several lines of tension. (The play's title has at least a double meaning, referring both to the man who sells heroin to the addict and to the act of plunging a heroin-filled needle into a human arm.) During the sole intermission, some of the performers follow the

audience into the lobby and, like authentic junkies, try to panhandle. Once the second act begins, Cowboy enters, wearing the all-white of an emissary of mercy, to give each of the waiting men what he calls a "baptism." Out of the audience comes one of the two "photographers" announcing that he too wants a dose. Jaybird, the putative author, tries to dissuade the photographer until, in a reversal, he too becomes convinced that he must have an authentic experience. Whereas the drunks in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* converse with suspicious coherence through their stupor, Gelber wisely lets improvised jazz dominate his junkies' narcotic euphoria.

The question is thus implicitly posed to the audience: Do you want a "connection" too? You see a world lacking in purpose, where the highest goal is individual happiness. You are presented with heroin, which represents a quick and easy way to achieve contentment. It may be illegal, but the morality of heroin is scarcely different from that of other pleasurable stimulants. Sam, an oversized African-American, articulates the ethical center of the play: "People who worry so much about the next dollar, the next new coat, the chlorophyll addicts, the aspirin addicts, the vitamin addicts, those people are hooked worse than me. Worse than me." They are "hooked worse," it can be reasoned, because they must go through so many more steps, some of them demeaning, to achieve the happiness that Sam gets in a single shot. A more intellectual character, Jewish Solly, voices the contrary position that dope is ultimately self-annihilating, destroying its user as a dosage's impact diminishes. Nonetheless, of the four characters planted in the audience, two ask Cowboy for their "baptism," thus suggesting that, if given the chance, half the audience might do likewise. The point is that heroin exemplifies a possible choice which, reflecting certain values, can be freely, existentially made. However, the result of one's choice can determine one's way of life, or to what kinds of goods one becomes addicted. This theme of drug-induced escape is no less relevant many years later.

Gelber's next play, *The Apple* (1961), is in several ways his most difficult; it is surely his most misunderstood. All but totally panned in its opening production, even by critics previously enthusiastic about *The Connection*, it suffers from a sense of chaos that I take to be more intentional than accidental. Once again, Gelber assumes worldly absurdity. The absence of a protagonist means that key lines are distributed among several characters, one of them muttering at the beginning, "Up here or down here, in here or out there, we are not all here." As before, the particular situation determines the play's subject and themes, as disparate stereotypes come together to make a performance. These people are also identified as actors, who sometimes use their real names and thus make a play-outside-a-play (echoing Luigi Pirandello again). Many themes are broached in the course of their conflicts, only to be dropped; and the dialogue is filled with hipsters'

platitudes. What happens is very confusing, while the play's title is no help, as several symbolic associations for apples are announced. One character says, in passing, "I'm whatever you want me to be . . . I'm your apple, baby," such arbitrariness suggesting not only multiple possibility and relativity, but also a comic updating of Ecclesiastes. The most reasonable interpretation of this confusion comes from the mixed-means creator, Ken Dewey, who directed a production of *The Apple* in Los Angeles in 1962. As Dewey described his experience in my book on *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (1968), the play is "talking about democracy as opposed to dictatorship." A group comes together and tries to improvise a result without acknowledging a leader or a plan. In this respect, *The Apple* deals with certain radical theatrical procedures (based upon process, rather than product), as well as becoming a prophetic commentary upon the subsequent development of "The Living Theatre" to which it is explicitly dedicated.

Gelber's third play, *Square in the Eye* (1965), received a more conventional Off-Broadway production. Marked by great shifts in tone and style, as well as by a garbled chronology, it portrays Ed Stone, a failed painter turned schoolteacher, whose wife suddenly dies of peritonitis. Typically, the end of act one, in which Ed Stone remarries, takes place several weeks after the play's concluding scene. Not much of importance is revealed. Gelber's next production, *The Cuban Thing* (1968), which closed after a single Broadway performance, deals with the various effects that Castro's revolution had upon a single Cuban family. Although the playwright reportedly did his homework, the result seemed terribly artificial. Since Gelber also directed this production, the critic Richard Gilman quipped that it "should never have been allowed by its author to publicly embarrass him the way it did." (Gelber's other directorial credits include a New York production of Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen* and a Royal Shakespeare premiere of Arthur L. Kopit's *Indians*.) It seems symbolic, in retrospect, that soon after *The Cuban Thing* opened on Broadway and quickly disappeared, The Living Theatre returned from exile, performing its kind of radical theater far Off-Broadway to the best kind of controversy and enthusiastic audiences.

Gelber's most recent play, *Sleep*, presented in New York in 1972, forbodes a comeback. For one measure, Gelber's writing has become better, as lines are beginning to stand out above their declamation, and certain technical feats are impressive. For the first time, his work is based not upon a situation but a character, who seems something of a protagonist. "Sleep scientists" subject a *moyen* Jewish *homme* to psychological testing until he rebels against such gross invasions of his privacy. What is technically clever is Gelber's management of the audience's shifting perspective—from observing the protagonist's revolt to participating in his fantasies. His dreams become the occasion for reviving that favorite Gelberian device of

a play-within-a-play and thus the pet theme of illusion-reality contradictions —the realities of illusion vs. the illusoriness of "reality." (Another repeated theme is the contradictions inherent in antibourgeois life-styles.) This work, unlike its predecessors, does not suffer from excessive incoherence, while its execution is superior to the theme, which is, for Gelber, untypically familiar. At minimum, Gelber has survived not only professional misfortune but also the stigma of precocity. In certain respects, including authentic adventurousness, he now seems a more interesting playwright than Albee.

John Ford Noonan (1973)

John Ford Noonan is a very large young man (b. 1943), a doctor's son who attended a Catholic preparatory school in Connecticut's Fairfield country and then went to Brown University on a basketball scholarship, until a severe knee injury forced him to give up contact sports. He majored in philosophy, doing an honors thesis on ideas about death, and subsequently took an M.F.A. in theater at Carnegie Tech. While living in New York, he has worked primarily as a stage hand and stage manager at rock concerts, and he once starred in a short movie about a rock singer. It can be seen that all of these interests appear in his work. His first full-length play, *The Year Boston Won the Pennant*, opened at the Forum Theater of New York's Lincoln Center in 1969. Subsequent dramas have since established him as one of America's most promising younger playwrights.

Noonan's plays have been stylistically conservative, its author avowedly subscribing to Aristotelian esthetics; and those critics attentive to the fulfilling of conventions, such as Walter Kerr, Harold Clurman, and John Lahr, have especially praised his talent. Preferring to introduce his characters swiftly, he even lets stereotype carry much of the burden of clarification. The figures in his early plays tended to be theatrically familiar—a baseball star, an ambitiously disingenuous wife, ethnic types—because Noonan was then less interested in characters than in conflicts that had mythic overtones. *The Year Boston Won* tells of a star pitcher, Marcus Sykowski, who mysteriously loses his fielding arm and thus finds his athletic career, and much else in his life, jeopardized. Determined to regain his heroic public image, he visits family and old friends who, instead of helping, try to exploit his misfortune (as they had previously exploited his fame). The plot follows the disintegration of a strong and courageous man. Noonan's theme of human vulnerability is nailed down in the final scene, where Sykowski is mysteriously assassinated. Another theme, which recurs in later Noonan plays, is the hysteria of rather mundane people (those around Sykowski) in an extreme situation. Noonan's second preserved play, *Lazarus Was a Lady* (1970), deals with a dying young woman who uses her sickness as a lever to manipulate people. In 1972 he released

a text, *Goodbye and Keep Cold*, dealing with familial conflict among the rich; this seems stylistically closer to his earlier work. *Rainbows for Sale* (1971) represents a transition, embodying a prominent myth (in this case, Oedipal) and yet introducing two subjects Noonan would later explore more fully—the madnesses of the age and the human penchant for fantasy. In addition to portraying characters that are unfamiliar to most of us—firemen (rather than, say, policemen)—*Rainbows for Sale* contains glimmers of the truly distinguished writing that has marked Noonan's more recent work.

His single best drama so far has been *Older People*, a cycle of fifteen plays about aging, a subject which is rarely treated in theater. They were presented in a slightly abridged form at the Public Theater in New York City in 1972, with six very professional actors, three male and three female, assuming many roles on a sparsely propped stage. In scene after scene, the play vividly, if not cruelly, illustrates how aging determines so much in human life. Resisting the pitfalls of sentiment, Noonan portrays old age as an extreme situation that not only influences behavior directly but also shapes mental attitudes that in turn affect behavior. "It's no sin," one character says early in the play, "but somehow I still can't forgive myself for getting old." In one sketch, one couple acknowledges that they are too old to make love anymore, repeatedly nagging each other about the fact. (This echoes a Samuel Beckett fiction that compares the love-making of the aged to putting a pillow in a pillow slip.) In another, two aging homosexual lovers agree to separate after many years together, one of them planning, not without anxiety, to join a commune of young people on the Oregon coast. In a third, two aging, boastful heterosexual swingers, who were once lovers, compare notes on their current infidelities—"as good as me?"

The tour-de-force of *Older People* is the conclusion, originally performed in 1991 as a one-act play *Concerning the Effects of Trimethylchloride*, in which a chemistry professor's widow comes to give the final lecture in his course. Although she boasts of her own contribution to his work, it becomes clear that she has been his willing guinea pig for all kinds of atrocious experiments. What sustains her extended monologue is not only the horror of her revelations but the increasing excellence of Noonan's writing. Especially for the quality of his characterizations and his prose, he ranks among the best American dramatists of that generation now about thirty.

Lee Baxandall (1979)

Lee Baxandall's *Potsy* (1962) seemed ill-fortuned from its inception. After sitting on the manuscript for many months, The Living Theatre accepted it, Christmas 1962, and even put it into rehearsal just before the

Revenuers invaded and closed the theater in October 1963. Another producer expressed an enthusiastic interest, only to back out. *Potsy* would have appeared at Café La Mama last February, had not the original lead actor, still loyal from Living Theatre times, first postponed his commitment to do instead a commercial production and then cancelled because he suddenly discovered that the play's (and the author's) politics offended him. It was finally produced at La Mama, early in July 1966; but somehow the *Village Voice*, the sole guide by default to Off-Off-Broadway, neglected to run La Mama's advertisement. The play was also absent from the column itemizing activities at the café theaters, its regular critics had departed to more congenial climes, and the hot holiday weekend depleted the regular trade. (Nor was the review that you are now reading previously published, though offered to several outlets.) Such a fate is nothing but lamentable, because *Potsy* is among the few wholly original and truly brilliant scripts of recent years. Indeed, if American theater is to be revived by its playwrights, rather than directors or performers, Baxandall is among the few who can beneficially contribute.

The play's scene—and its subject as well—is the poet on an outdoor privy (Potsy on the potty)—"constipated on the crapper"; and its plot is the government's intentions to install electricity, a telephone, and a television in every edifice, regardless of the individual (Potsy's) objections. To make matters worse, although Potsy protests that the government's "National Secretary of Mobilization" was recently president of the utility, the installers send Potsy a bill for their state-backed make-work. The intrusions of government into dimensions of life previously private is, of course, a theme of increasing relevance. Quite simply, only if man's last refuge is electrified can it be bugged. Moreover, every month we witness another reminder of government and business collusions in "social programs" avowedly for the public welfare but actually for private profit. *Potsy* succeeds in making a small situation express a larger issue—in making a microcosm pertinent to the macrocosm.

What makes *Potsy* an especially successful play, however, is the sustained level of the writing; only in one or two spots does the language fail to function imaginatively. First, through humor, Baxandall neutralizes scatology. Nibbling prunes he dislikes, Potsy muses, "yet who would go alone and forswear classic remedies?" Later, "Plumbing deprives a man of his awareness of the human condition." Secondly, Baxandall uses language shrewdly to shape a characterization. In the opening sequences, Potsy's excessively grandiose talk creates the image of a haughty poet; but once the state-directed electricians enter, his protests assume an increasingly immediate, earthy relevance. Appearing at first a pathetic fool, he becomes the last uncorruptable man in a corrupt world—the last anarchist in an overly totalitarian society. The plot closes with one of the most

eloquently passionate and hysterically funny protests in the contemporary theater—Potsy screaming the words for excrement in several score of the world's languages. "Piszok Baika Loka!" it starts. "Myjka myjkal Skitz. Cacones, cacones, Alhoore zulla szenny!" Like the novelist John Barth, Baxandall effectively transforms pedantic passions into high comedy.

In the original script, Baxandall suggests that, "Signs that bear the import of Potsy's diatribe in various esoteric languages (Phoenician, cuneiform, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Egyptian hieroglyph, among others) descend into view, rendering the communication universal." This Brechtian device was lamentably omitted from the production I saw. So was Baxandall's Artaudian prescription: "The unmistakable stench of ordure is wafted into the audience." At La Mama, the play seemed to carry the rather disappointing production, rather than the reverse. Perhaps *Potsy* will be done again, for a larger audience; for what may save *Potsy* is Baxandall's sole token of good fortune—the script's appearance in the first issue of the magazine *Chalk Circle* (1966).

John Antrobus (1965)

John Antrobus's *You'll Come To Love Your Sperm Test* (1965) attempts, in diverse ways, to encourage audience participation. When the actors exit through the audience, getting to the lobby bar before anyone else, we spectators are supposed to accept them as some of us. The most significant line of the evening has Antrobus himself, acting as his own protagonist, saying near the end: "If you want a third act, you'll have to improvise it yourself." The night I was there, no one came forward to take this part, so Antrobus escalated the invitation by asking if anyone in the audience had any questions about the play. No one did. In this respect, at least , the evening was certainly a bust.

As an American spending the academic year in England, I fear that *Sperm Test* may simply be inappropriate for a London audience, precisely because English people are generally too reticent about public display. Just as one would never see on a London street the rather typical American occurrence of a person addressing a friend some thirty yards away, so I as an American have yet to see, and can barely imagine, an Englishman rising out of the audience, as Americans frequently did, during, say, the New York production of Jack Gelber's *The Apple* (1961). The Living Theatre's production of Gelber successfully inspired its spectators to participate, partly because, let me conjecture, the New York performers avoided establishing distance between themselves and the audience, mostly because the American audience was more predisposed to join the performers.

Such a strong response would measure the kind of essentially theatrical communication that *Sperm Test* endeavors to investigate; but certain deficiencies in the performers (especially excessively formal diction),

coupled with the innate reserve of London spectators and the uncongenial shininess of a brand new playing hall (in contrast to the Living Theatre's shabby upstairs loft), all prevented any of these connections from happening here.

A production like *Sperm Test* is commendable because it contributes to abolishing the sanctity of traditional dramatic procedure, as a prerequisite to dealing with the fundamental question of what is possible in the theatrical medium (which necessarily differs from cinema and TV). Witnessing any production of *Sperm Test* becomes an implicit invitation to consider these issues, in addition to the more traditional one of representing on stage the theme of human anarchy. In a review of the earlier Edinburgh production, the great Scottish poet Edwin Morgan asked what the play might be about, and the answer, of course, is precisely these theatrical problems and possibilities. By this measure, *Sperm Test* should be considered a noble experiment that may become, like *Look Back in Anger*, more of a revolutionary influence than an intrinsically significant achievement.

Elephant Steps (1974)

As the first of several collaborations between the playwright Richard Foreman and the composer Stanley Silverman, *Elephant Steps* (1968) represents something new and important in the history of American theater—a truly *contemporary* opera. Unlike traditional musical theater, it lacks a sympathetic protagonist, or characters who relate to one another, or a comprehensible plot line. The score is not a unified sequence of connected songs but a conglomerate of various musical styles, while the setting is unspecific. The parts within the piece are less connected than disconnected. Rather than trying to entice the audience, *Elephant Steps* keeps even its more attentive spectators distant and confused. Eschewing any attempt at verisimilitude, the production is riddled with actions that seem arbitrary. Nothing happens in *Elephant Steps* for obvious reasons or in familiar ways.

Nonetheless, the production reflects its authors' conscious decisions about the appropriate handling of every theatrical element. Its major theme is the process of alternative operatic creation. Since this, like other Richard Foreman plays, deals with his favorite subject of states of mind, let me suggest that its ultimate theme is spiritual development (and the elephantine steps necessary to reach it). In its narrative discontinuity, its perceptual difficulties, its general inventiveness, its emphasis on the processes of creation over the product, *Elephant Steps* reflects modernist developments not in literary theater but in visual arts, musical composition, and experimental filmmaking. This is the kind of theater implied by the artistic revolutions of cubism and collage, of Dada and Surrealism.

What plot there is in *Elephant Steps* seems to be an ironic convenience —a way of holding together materials that might otherwise fly apart. Foreman, who wrote the libretto, speaks of "a quest. Hartman is looking for enlightenment. He has a mysterious guru by the name of Reinheart. The reactionary factions keep warning him to stop seeing Reinheart, but Hartman persists. After visiting Nighttown and then being abducted and grilled in a radio station, where he dreams of returning to his childhood, Hartman finally climbs a ladder, looks into the window of Reinheart's house, and what he sees brings him illumination."

What seems clear to the authors might, however, be less obvious to the audience. Four years after the New York premiere, I particularly remember a dark stage abundantly filled with performers, props, and musicians. *Elephant Steps* is a sterling example of mixed-means theater, where sound and light, language and music, images and movement, graphics and films, incense and machinery, props and performers are incorporated into a spectacular mix. The materials are mostly those of traditional opera or musical theater, but what makes *Elephant Steps* different is how they are used. Each element is as important as any other; none serves as the foundation that the others complement. Rather than enhancing one another in traditional ways, the elements function separately and often nonsynchronously. What Foreman and Silverman achieved, to repeat, was a different, more contemporary way of putting operatic materials together. As a theatrical experience, *Elephant Steps* is stupendous, multisensory, original, diffuse, overwhelming, faintly frightening, and always surprising.

For the New York production, Foreman prepared a "synopsis" that, in its own way, conveys a clear sense of the stage action—its arbitrariness, its disconnectedness, the drastic shifts in tempo and tone: "SCENE ONE: Hartman is ill, with the Doctor in mysterious attendance. Max comes into the room and seems to be threatening Hartman. He comes and goes and comes and goes. Hartman's wife, Hannah, comes and goes. Then she falls asleep with her head on the table. Everyone pays a great deal of attention to their hands. Are they afraid of being touched? Do they want to touch something? Hannah wakes up and Hartman falls out of bed for the third time. The self-righteous Max sings out—full voice—to warn (threaten?) everyone in the city—'Stop seeing Reinheart!'" As this suggests, what unifies the production is not the plot but the repeated images (such as hands), the theatrical style (partly dependent upon stage rhythms and unusual lighting), and the musical score.

First produced in Tanglewood in 1968, *Elephant Steps* did not reach New York for two years, and the recording of its production took even longer to be commercially released. Like all genuinely innovative art, this work weathered its seasons in the wilderness; it tends to be either hated or loved.

Twenty Years of Merce Cunningham's Dance (1984)

Perhaps because I was still a teenager more devoted to sports, both watching them and playing them, than to art, I didn't much like the dance concerts to which my mother took me in the fifties. She had studied and performed with Irma Duncan, one of Isadora's adopted daughters, and was at the time particularly devoted to Martha Graham and her assumptions about the significance of expressionistic movements. I did not think much about modern dance again until 1963 or so, when I became interested in the esthetic avant-garde, initially in music and literature, and from that foundation looked toward figures similarly situated in other arts, including dance. I saw my first Merce Cunningham concert in 1963, and have treasured his work ever since, first by seeing it whenever I could, and then by taking notes that are now presented in chronological order. Though Cunningham's dance seemed puzzling to others, it was so lucid to me that I learned about choreography and perhaps dance criticism through my responses to it.

What is documented here are, first, moments that have passed from common memory and, then, the development of my own thinking and writing about dance (beginning with some foolishness that would be embarrassing in any context other than this). As continuous reflections of a sensibility that did not mature in dance or dance criticism (and has to this day seen and played more football games than dance), this text tends to favor theatrical perceptions over choreographic. That accounts in turn for why I tend to remember individual Cunningham works in terms of decor and structure rather than any particular choreographic vocabulary. One continuing concern is the relation of dance to mixed-means theater.

As the years went on, I sometimes skipped my commitment to making notes, to my regret; but in 1982, *Dance Magazine* asked for an essay about Cunningham that summarized my thinking at that time. Since it completes my record to a certain point, I decided to incorporate that essay here. The fact that I wrote so many cards about Cunningham, more than I have made about anyone else, is per se a tribute to the richness of his work. As before, unless otherwise noted, the city in which these

performances took place was New York. True to my record, the following text is filled with words no longer used, certain additions are put between brackets, and the orthography for *theater* is however I spelled it at the time.

August 13, 1963 (Philharmonic Hall): Merce Cunningham is the most famous of the American choreographers who rarely perform, and this single evening in a four-part Philharmonic subscription is reportedly his first New York recital in over two years. For two of the pieces he danced to the music of John Cage, whose works for prepared piano I'm beginning to find acceptable; and the cumulative effect is quite striking. While Cunningham does not dance to Cage's rhythms, the dissonance is, of course, consistent with their mutual aims. Like Cage, Cunningham insists upon cutting short all the lines of dance, offering us not so much a sustained fluency (as Paul Taylor did in last week's performance) as an intricate series of jerky movements. The first act, *Aeon* (1961), was simply shocking to me; by their third number I was more attuned to what they were doing and found it quite pleasurable. For the second number, *Septet* (1953), they apparently followed a rule I've noticed before in this Philharmonic series of doing one lighter piece each evening. That accounts for the music of Erik Satie (which I heard for the first time and which did sound like beer-hall jive). The concluding piece was *Antic Meet* (1958), which the program announced with this epigraph from Ivan Karamazov: "Let me tell you that the absurd is only too necessary on earth." I suspect that a critic like Jill Johnston [then on *The Village Voice*] could show how this is an "absurd dance," but I'm not familiar enough with the articulation of meanings in choreography to do so myself. As Cunningham is now about forty, I hope I can learn before he retires. During an intermission, I peeked at the piano that had various household junk strewn across the strings, including thimbles, rubber noise-makers, and something resembling a hand-shake buzzer. During the concert, the pianist came out from behind the keyboard and ran a file, or something, over the strings. I enjoyed what I heard; but after each particularly striking aural effect, four middle-aged women headed for the exits.

April 21, 1966 (92nd Street YMHA): I found this "Lecture" disappointing. Instead of presenting his essential thoughts on dance movement and his radical ideas about choreographic space and time, Cunningham settled on a strategy inbetween, just throwing out ideas in a random order in a counter-expository style similar to Cage's. (Recent interviews in the *Village Voice* and *Tulane Drama Review* suggest that his buddy Cage might be returning to more conventional expository forms, and I think Cunningham would do well to follow his lead.) "Talking about dancing is like trying to pin jelly to the wall," he said, but that is surely an evasion of

possible intelligence, as he certainly knows. His later praise of Edwin Denby as our greatest dance critic only confirms my impression that Cunningham knew such a disclaimer about his own work could be seen as an evasion. "All dance techniques are extended from everyday movement," he said. Had he emphasized "extended," rather than, as he did, "everyday movement," that statement would be even more true for his own work than for dance in general. "It is remarkable that dance survives and that choreographers have such long careers given such huge handicaps." "I don't work with preconceptions, because movement, as a primal activity, creates its own necessity." He spoke admiringly of Fred Astaire, who did not use dance to "express" himself and who, therefore, developed a clear style without mannerism. "Until technology, man was a ground animal." He said he practices every day, because he considers his "class" a form of meditation. His most suggestive idea was that classical ballet has a steady focus of attention, while modern dance doesn't. Einstein once said, "There are no fixed points in space." That, Cunningham explained, was why his group can dance in all kinds of auditoria—they accept any performance space as it is. With such new intermedia work as *Variations V*, he hoped to create "a galaxy of events where everything interacts; new technologies will remake the theater." Some of the lecture, mostly memoirs, was prerecorded on audiotape, which Cunningham played while he performed some motions on the floor. His ability to control independent movements is remarkable; he achieves a discontinuous syntax without losing the classical virtues of grace and fluidity. That last observation, I suppose, could be the starting point for a critical essay on Merce Cunningham. The demonstration was more persuasive than the talk, which contained only a few good points; but that didactic emphasis upon the possibilities of movement alone might have been the implicit point of his "lecture."

April 23, 1966 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): It is nothing but scandalous that Merce Cunningham should suffer the indignity of such infrequent New York recitals, I once wrote; and I say again, now noticing that the new dance critic of the *New York Times*, Clive Barnes, agrees with me. Everything Cunningham does is so striking, so original, so brilliant, so well-realized. I found *Suite for Five* (1953–58) a bit too modest, because I could not figure out its relation to Cunningham's program note: "The events and sounds of this dance revolve around a quiet center, which, though silent and unmoving, is the source from which they happen." *Winterbranch* (1964) was thoroughly brilliant. Set in darkness, with flickering lights, to the accompaniment of La Monte Young's tape loop of two loud sounds, with dancers dressed in dark sweatsuits, it created an image of overwhelming terror and mystery. *Antic Meet* I had seen before at Philharmonic Hall, but I much prefer it in this smaller theater. I recognized

that so much parodied dance styles. From a distance, Carolyn Brown ranks among the most beautiful women in America; she is certainly the most beautiful dancer.

May 1966 (New York City Ballet): I suppose it was generous of George Balanchine to include Merce Cunningham's *Summerspace* in his repertoire, because Merce always needs support. However, Balanchine adapted the work to the New York City Ballet dancers, allowing women to ride on their toes, etc. None of the City Ballet dancers involved struck me as being as strong as Carolyn Brown or Cunningham himself. Nonetheless, I did notice that *Summerspace* was the most interesting dance on a program that also included Balanchine's *Serenade* (to music by Tchaikovsky) and his *Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet* (to music by Brahms, orchestrated by Schoenberg). Those other dances were so offensively representational, if not sentimental, that I was reminded of Merce's professed admiration of Fred Astaire, because he aimed not to represent or express but simply to make interesting sequences of steps. Am I alone in wondering why all female ballet dancers should sport the same hair style?

December 11, 1966 (Hunter College): *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (1965) is a very light and free piece in which dancers, dressed in informal childlike costumes (the women even letting their hair down), move in constantly shifting patterns all over the stage. The result includes more mundane movement than is customary even for Merce. The "score" comes from John Cage sitting in the left corner of the stage and reading from his collection of funny stories; and, by nature inclined to upstage everyone else, here Cage nearly steals the show. (Just before he began to read, he opened a bottle of champagne—a move that could distract attention even from a stripper.) With its scrambled (characteristically out of sequence) allusion to events found in American football, the piece's title is a representational equivalent of random movements, which is indeed the structure of the dance itself.

Place is Merce's latest dance, now in its first New York performance. Along the back wall are hung white sheets that resemble newspapers. Along the back floor Merce pushes an apparatus that emits flickering lights. The movements are staccato, the activity reaching a sustained intensity that is closer in quality to *Winterbranch* than to *Antic Meet*. The climax comes when Merce rustles himself into a plastic bag and rolls toward the back of the stage. My friend [the playwright and critic] Lee Baxandall found too much reference to clichés of dehumanization (mechanical man, etc.), and I suppose this was true. I'd like to see this dance again; and now that Merce is performing in New York more frequently, I suppose I will.

Nocturnes is probably the oldest Cunningham piece I've ever seen, and

it seemed thoroughly dancey, not only in the costumes but in its organization of movement. Still, the piece had those Cunningham virtues of continually rearticulated space and the absence of unison movement. In the back of the stage, along the right half, is a transparent screen, a scrim, behind which the dancers move. (This Robert Rauschenberg design becomes a structural precursor of his theatrical *Open Space* at the 1966 Theatre and Engineering festival.) I notice with some sadness that both Merce and Carolyn Brown have lost some of their bounce and energy, and that Merce's once-formidable powers of elevation are nowhere in evidence. Indeed, in this dance, Sandra Neels becomes the female lead. To his good fortune, Merce seems to have found in Peter Saul a competent second male dancer.

April 1, 1967 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): The program for this concert had, by my current categories, two dance pieces, *Collage III* and *Field Dances*, and two theater pieces, *Variations V* and *Place* (1966). I liked the last better this second time (the first being at Hunter College last December), perhaps because Beverly Emmons's lighting is more effective in this particular theater. As kinetic structures, several group scenes were marvelous, especially one where all the dancers moved from stage left to stage right; and the constant recomposition of theatrical spaces was among the most continuous marvelous achievements I have ever seen. Gordon Mumma's score for *Place* didn't cohere in my mind; and more than once I wondered if something terrifyingly repetitive, such as La Monte Young's loops, might have been more effective. Now that I've seen more modern dance, I noticed several allusions to the kind of cityscape used by Jerome Robbins and, more recently, by Eleo Pomare; but, by overcoming their kinds of cliché, Cunningham does something more extraordinary. The programme says that this production is indebted to the National Endowment for the Arts, which becomes a new player on the American patronage scene.

Probably because I had returned from London the day before, and was depressed about more things than I care to remember, I missed the 1965 premiere of *Variations V* at Philharmonic Hall. I heard it was a great piece, one of the best examples of mixed-means theater; and now that I've finally seen it, nearly two years later, that rumor is confirmed. On the basic level, *Variations V* is a sequence of activities which never lose their rhythm and remain individually interesting. I missed the opening; but, when I came in, there were four screens high above the stage floor. One was serviced by a looped film, and another had still slides of a color whose texture was constantly changing. There were several long poles rectangularly arrayed on the stage; and, as Theremin, they responded to movements around them by initiating new sounds. To climax the piece, Merce, a smile across

his face, rides a handsome English-style bicycle around an electrified field, his proximity to upright metal poles apparently generating random electronic sounds.

"Collage" appears to be the name of a genre that Merce uses now and then. Where the second part of *Collage* (1952) is the significant Brandeis piece in which dancers execute everyday motions (to infer how much choreography exists in everyday life), the first part is a solo. Each uses for music an early Pierre Schaeffer tape collage that Merce reportedly doesn't much like. This version, *Collage III*, is likewise a solo, in which Merce displays a vocabulary of discontinuous motions. The most spectacular effect comes when he moves from right back to left front while kicking his arms and legs out in the direction toward which he is moving. He was in beautiful form this evening. However, as *Collage III* came on this program just after *Variations V*, in which Merce executes a variety of tasks, the second piece seemed comparatively limited. In writing these notes I find I am able to say more about Merce's mixed-means theatre than his dance pieces, perhaps because I still do not know enough about dance to address individual works with a fully equipped vocabulary.

April 1967 (Brooklyn Academy): Everything I'd heard about *Field Dances* gave me a preconception that was not confirmed. Curiously enough, the kind of dance I had imagined would have been considerably better than this. Historically, *Field Dances* seems an attempt to create a performance field even more nonstructured (or dis-structured) than that of *Summerspace* (1959), because the dancers distribute themselves in the oddest patterns all over the stage. As usual, Carolyn Brown is the shining figure here. Her grace and carriage are certainly amazing, while her beauty on stage continues to haunt me (even though off the stage, before me in the flesh, she is a slight woman barely recognizable). Sandra Neels wasn't quite as striking as before. Of the men, Albert Reid has become very fine—his control of himself and the material is sure. His general muscularity reminds me of Steve Paxton (who has left the group). Gus Solomons, Jr., is considerably more sure of himself than he was last year, but he indulges in athleticisms and expressionist gestures that are inappropriate to Merce's esthetic. I wouldn't be surprised to discover that he soon goes elsewhere. The piece disappointed me, perhaps because it was merely dance, whereas even from Cunningham I now prefer mixed-means theater. Another reason is its failure to create in my mind an identity all its own.

May 24, 1968 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): *Variations V* I regard among the greatest pieces of mixed-means theatre, as well as a masterwork for Cunningham; and even on second viewing, it was continually striking. First of all, it is scrupulously diffuse, as the eye never quite knows exactly

where it should look or what it should hear. At one point a back screen displays a videotape sequence of Henry Cabot Lodge; it is flanked by two films (one of them apparently a loop of a man bowling). Meanwhile, dancers are moving across the stage in stylized, through unfamiliar, movements, dressed in the familiar apparatus of dancers—tights that go down to their wrists and ankles. The result is an active scene that becomes, through its constancy, quite serene and placid. This is controlled discontinuity, which is quite different from uncontrolled discontinuousness. I'd love to see it several times more and have regretted for years now that I missed the premiere the day after I returned from Europe in 1965.

Winterbranch (1964) is also among Cunningham's greatest pieces, a rather terrifying monstrosity that is very intimidating, as piercing light beams and loud sounds come out at the audience. The activity on stage consists of jerky, disconnected movements that would probably seem lopsided, if La Monte Young's score, *Two Sounds (April 1960),* did not provide a firm ground rhythm. The piece has a silent opening and a lighted stage; during that time the movement syntax and costumes of the piece are introduced. However, once the lights go out and the tape suddenly comes on, we are propelled into the dark, cold, increasingly unfamiliar environment.

Nocturnes (1956) is an old dance piece that was revived for what is called Merce's "First New York Season" (albeit in Brooklyn!), and I'm somewhat amazed to think that a decade ago this would have been regarded as avant-garde. It is a rather serene and beautiful work with fancy costumes and decor (credited to Robert Rauschenberg); and the movements of the dancers are nearly as classical as the format. The most stunning dancer of the evening was not Carolyn Brown, as has traditionally been the case, or Sandra Neels, like last year, but Barbara Lloyd, who has slimmed down a bit and become a commanding performer. The score from which the dance draws its title, Erik Satie's *Nocturnes,* now sounds as prosaic as Cage's prepared piano music from two decades ago. What Cunningham did, in the decade since its premiere, is extend his discontinuous, "free" syntax into mixed-means theatrical creations. The result is pieces that relate less to the history of dance (a preoccupation often implicit in his earlier work) than to the full opportunities of theater.

May 25, 1968 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): This latest Merce Cunningham piece, *Walkaround Time,* struck me as sloppy and uneven. David Behrman's score has lots of obvious mechanical sound-generation that occasionally disintegrates into large patches of silence. While the setting by Jasper Johns often earns the audience's applause, it also interferes with our viewing of the dance. There are large boxes, the size of picture windows, with clear plastic sides and abstract designs on their fronts, all reportedly

modeled upon Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* in the Philadelphia Museum. Halfway through the piece is an interlude where a patent recording of some unfamiliar march music precedes the company's lounging around the stage in informal clothes. The point I suppose is that the activity here is just as disorganized as that during the piece (or that movements within the interlude have status equal to those within the noninterlude). However, one crucial difference in the interlude is that the dancers drop their haughty, formal way of walking, which is one quality that gives them presence on a stage. Therefore, one implicit, perhaps unintentional theme of the piece becomes the discrepancy between a Cunningham performance and a Cunningham rehearsal. Otherwise, this is a rather drawn-out work that lost my attention more than once during its hour. Precisely because the activity is too languid, while the movements are syntactically too familiar, *Walkaround Time* did not fill in interesting ways all the time and space allotted to it. This may be the longest of Cunningham's pieces so far (though not nearly as long as the latest edition of Yvonne Rainer's *The Mind Is a Muscle*). For this evening, in contrast to last, Carolyn Brown regained her role as the most striking female dancer.

This is my third time with *Place* (1966)—once at Hunter College, another time before at the Brooklyn Academy. First of all, the score still strikes me as atrocious. Gordon Mumma's *Mesa* is not interesting as electronic music—a rather repetitious series of whooshing noises that become particularly offensive whenever they get loud. Moreover, despite an imaginative setting and some effects with lighting and props, this is essentially a dance piece that emphasizes the movements of performers. Indeed, compared, say, to *Variations V*, this contains a good deal of traditional dance movement, even if the activities of the performers are juxtaposed in idiosyncratic ways, at times reminding me of the children's game of "giant steps." This piece ends with the eminently theatrical stunt of Merce Cunningham wrapping himself in a plastic bag that twitches and crackles as he rolls off the stage. This becomes an optimal climax to a peculiarly dramatic, if not occasionally melodramatic, piece. Why is it called *Place*? Well, the scene could, I suppose, be anywhere.

January 17, 1969 (Billy Rose Theater): Though he has temporarily retired *Antic Meet*, which was probably the most famous and perhaps the most radical of his early dance pieces, Merce has preserved *Suite for Five* (1953–58) in his active repertoire, I guess as a surviving sign of where he stood a decade ago. The theme is explorations of kinds of movements unfamiliar to dance (particularly classic ballet). The program tells us, "The events and sounds of this dance revolve around a quiet center, which, though silent and unmoving, is the source from which they happen." The trouble with this piece today is that the emphasis upon movement-as-

movement reveals the comparative incompetences of each performer. Now that the group has been ravaged by the losses of Albert Reid, Gus Solomons, Barbara Lloyd, and Peter Saul, the difference between Merce and Carolyn, on their invisible pedestals, and the rest becomes more pronounced. That accounts for why the most spectacular sequence is the duet entitled "Extended Moment" for just Merce and Carolyn. Though the movement is choppy and discontinuous, its peculiarly slow pace provides a coherent rhythm that becomes the implicit music of the piece, as well as the firmer underpinning than the John Cage score of *Music for Piano 4-84.*

Winterbranch made *Suite for Five* seem not only old-fashioned but modest. As Cunningham's first great piece securely within the mixed-means medium, it is not an essay primarily in movement, like all his works prior to 1962, but an exploration of light and sound, in addition to movement. The music is La Monte Young's two screeching sounds. The lighting is, according to the program, "after original design concepts by Robert Rauschenberg."

The last strives for two radical effects: first, activity in darkness (an idea Rauschenberg subsequently developed in his *Open Score* for the 1966 Theatre and Engineering festival) and, second, beams that are always in the wrong places. That is to say that the beams appear to function much as the movement does—as an autonomous activity independent both of the beat and of the movements of the dancers. As the music's entrance is delayed, the dancers perform slowly in silence for several minutes. At first I thought their pace unusually slow (and suspected that Young's hysterical music had created an illusion of frenetic activity). Once the music came on, I noticed that the dancers' activity picked up speed.

I disliked *Walkaround Time* the first time I saw it, because it was too diffuse (and David Behrman's score too dumbly Cagean); but now I see that diffusion was precisely the point—diffusion both in time (which is to say rhythm) and space. First of all, just as the performers regularly move in and out of unison activity, so they shift in and out of natural movement. That last theme is developed in a middle sequence where the performers don their rehearsal outfits and move nonchalantly around the stage (and where the music takes something familiar from common media—here I think it was a John Philip Sousa tune). The second half of the framed formal activity opens with Merce's great solo where, way in the left back of the stage, he changes out of one set of orange tights into another, all while jogging in place. Struck by a formal resemblance to the current version of Yvonne Rainer's *The Mind Is a Muscle,* I wonder if *Walkaround Time* reflects her influence? Though Jasper Johns's set, based upon Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass,* is beautiful, it is also inert, and that fact partly accounts for why this piece is finally closer to dance than mixed-means theater.

April 16, 1969 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): Merce dredged *Night Wandering* (1958) and *Antic Meet* (which I regrettably missed this time) out of the old repertoire, and the former shows its age. Designed as a duet for Merce and Carolyn, to a score by Bo Nilsson, with costumes by Robert Rauschenberg, it is nonrepresentational, mostly beautiful, and slow enough to emphasize individual movements. The costuming is particularly incongruous, as Carolyn wears a rather long skirt with showy colors, and Merce sports a rather bulky vest of similar material. I was reminded most of *Nocturnes* from about the same period.

I missed *RainForest* the first and second times round, both last May and last January. This is unfortunate, because it really ranks among the very best, probably even better than *Walkaround Time*, which also premiered last spring. First of all, the stage is especially beautiful, with Andy Warhol's helium-inflated silver pillows lying either with their weighted bases on the floor or suspended from floor-based strings in the sky. Distributed diffusely around the stage, they get in the way of the dancers whose costumes are artfully ripped; many of the dancers' movements are similarly messy. The form is very uninflected. I couldn't take much of the lighting, which I'm told differs from the original scheme; it is credited to Richard Nelson. I'd like to see *RainForest* again.

This third (or so) time through, *Walkaround Time* impressed me less. Although it has several marvelous touches (including Merce's undressing/dressing solo and the interlude that goes on far too long), the piece really does richly fill the time and space allotted for it. Although flat in form, it doesn't have enough sustained visual surprise, except perhaps the large boxes that Jasper Johns designed in imitation of Marcel Duchamp. Though the spatial diffusion is scrupulously sustained, even this quality is too unrelieved. Then, everybody gets a moment of glory, taking a solo as in jazz; but some of the performers simply aren't up to it. Meg Harper has gotten noticeably better and will perhaps fulfill the Barbara Lloyd pixie role. Mel Wong, though marvelously muscular, is also terribly stiff. David Behrman's score hasn't gotten better.

January 10, 1970 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): I had tended to regard *Antic Meet* as the last of Cunningham's pure dance pieces, thinking that after a hiatus with no new dance productions he emerged as a mixed-means practitioner. However, this is wrong. In *Crises* (1960), the movements are very fine and quite various (indeed, perhaps more various than those in his recent work). The dance has a constant pace that differs considerably from the choppiness of various player-piano pieces by Conlon Nancarrow. Robert Rauschenberg's costumes emphasize the spectrum of colors. For this performance the addition was Viola Farber, returning to dance her original role (and make no doubt about the impression that her

presence is now missed). Tall and curvaceous, she is particularly adept at one aspect of Cunningham's choreography—contorting the body into unusual postures. Carolyn Brown, by contrast, represents speed and grace. The piece represents the climax of the style that Jill Johnston described in our book *The New American Arts* (1965)—the cool clean avant-garde classicism that younger dancers and eventually Merce himself rejected. I'd like to see *Antic Meet* again.

I missed *Canfield* last April, and perhaps would have been more severe about Merce's recent work had I seen it then. The pace is slow, with an emphasis upon movements of great finesse. The innovation is a vertical column, suspended from the top of the stage, with lights inside it, their illumination projecting back onto the stage. This touch is credited to Robert Morris, yet another Castelli artist. This column moves mechanically across the front of the stage, providing a kind of ground bass but occasionally obstructing performers. The score, attributed to Pauline Oliveros and entitled *In Memoriam: Nikola Tesla, Cosmic Engineer*, essentially instructed the musicians to test the acoustics of the auditorium while the piece is in progress. The choreography struck me as less interesting than that in *Winterbranch* that followed it on the program, because the emphasis in *Canfield* is clearly upon dance, while Merce's dance is no longer as interesting as his theater.

I'd seen *RainForest* before and was more impressed then. The decor, attributed to Andy Warhol, remains striking, even eliciting gasps from the audience as the curtain opened. Because there is a sequence of virtuoso solos, individual dancers are often alone on the stage. Meg Harper is getting considerably better; she could well replace Sandra Neels as the second-lead female dancer. The new men are efficient but less outstanding—Jeff Slayton and Chase Robinson. I found David Tudor's score atrocious.

The stylistic precursor to *Tread* is *How To Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (1965). The movements in the former are loose and wild, the performers' faces beam beatific smiles, and a gross distraction is placed between the performers and their audience. In the earlier piece the obstacle was John Cage reading from his stories; here it is a bank of tall, turning electric fans (credited to Bruce Nauman, another Castelli artist). The ladies' costumes are hideous —beige tights, with gray gym suits short enough to expose their butts and green leggings that go up only to the middle of their thighs. I'm beginning to marvel at Merce's ability to create flat pieces that still have enough of a concluding climax to elicit the audience's applause; here the performers close the show by marching off together. The movements weren't as hard as those in *Canfield*, say; so that the new performers in the company look okay, though somewhat embarrassing in other pieces. I suppose I like *Tread* best of Merce's very recent dance works.

It seems that Cunningham has for years wanted to do a dance to Erik Satie's *Socrate.* Finally deciding to make it, he commissioned Cage to do a small orchestration. However, the Satie estate ruled against granting them permission to use the piece (that will enter the public domain in a few years anyway); so Cage quickly put together a "Cheap Imitation" that is composed by some Satiean formulas that are continually varied. The music is slow and spare, one-finger piano for most of its duration (Cage allowing for his chronic arthritis). The dance itself is likewise slow and spare, with many dance movements and some unison activity. Indeed, there are enough allusions to ballet to suggest that Merce has either reversed himself or intends irony. The general emphasis upon finesse reminds me of both *Nocturnes I & II* (1956), revived last year, and *Crises* (1960), revived this year; but the pace of *Second Hand* (1969) seems closest to *Walkaround Time.* Everyone involved in this eccentric departure proclaims it is great, but I find it almost inconsequential.

January 14, 1970 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): I'd not seen *Scramble* before, though I knew much about it from Calvin Tomkins's narrative in the revised edition of his book *The Bride and the Bachelors*; and it was something of a disappointment. In performance, Frank Stella's streams of colors, raised high above the dancers, turn out to be too small for the space. Moving them about the stage echoes a similarly mobile procedure in *Walkaround Time.* With movements that are slow and scrupulously inflected, this may be the first Cunningham piece in my memory to eschew the imposed climaxes that tended to end his pieces from 1964 to 1966 (especially *Place* and *Variations V*). Instead, it ends with a typically Cunningham distribution of the dancers in various positions across the space of the stage. The score, Toshi Ichiyanagi's *Activities for Orchestra*, is an atrocity, as blasts of feedback prompt the worst sort of distraction. This reminds me that none of Cunningham's electronic scores is as beautiful as Bulent Arel's for Mimi Garrard's *Flux* (1968).

January 15, 1970 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): I'm beginning to like *Place* more than before, even though I'm put off by its representational moves and occasional melodrama. For the first time I noticed that a setting so specific forces me to remember the piece in terms of image, rather than kinds of movement or the distributions of dancers. In this last respect, as well as in its use of large bags, it resembles, surprise, Murray Louis's *Junk Dances*!

It seems that *Canfield* consists of a series of "games," or sequences, only some of which are performed in the course of an evening; but tonight they decided to do all of them. I liked the piece now more than before, and the fact that it ran over an hour contributed to its weight. The movements

are free and playful, and Merce has some marvelous solos for himself. The whole company appears, and for the first time there is only one weak dancer. All the men are good, even Douglas Dunn, who joined the company after only a year of intensive study.

January 16, 1970 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): I liked *Tread* more the second time through, mostly for the sustained inventiveness of Merce's individual moves and the way his people play off one another. There are a lot of incipient gymnastics here, but the possible melodrama of such movement is always chopped down and out. Uninflected, *Tread* ends with the same level of movement used throughout the piece. I suppose this is the best of his very recent works, but I'm finding a slight falling off since 1964–65, after *Winterbranch* and *Variations V.*

Second Hand is no better on second viewing, despite all the puffery from Satie enthusiasts; and I suspect it will quickly disappear from Cunningham's active repertoire. One explanation for its atavism appeared in a program note—that the choreography represents the expansion of something composed in 1945!

Also on the program was *Crises* (1960), which represents the culmination of Cunningham's pure dance style and is perhaps the greatest of those archaic pieces. I've never seen any dancer move the parts of her body as disjointedly as Viola Farber, whose performance is truly dazzling.

November 10, 1970 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): As the active repertoire has been updated to include no piece earlier than 1965, I missed seeing at least one of those early pieces, with their narrower focus and emphasis upon smaller groupings. This time the assembling of *Canfield* has Merce's spectacular [and, remembering his later choreography for himself, prophetic] solo with his fluttering hands (which reportedly turns up only once in every four performances), and I've begun to make more sense of Pauline Oliveros's auditorium-exploratory score. Otherwise, this is relaxed dancing.

In this context, *How To Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* now seems the first of those languid Cunningham pieces, although the score of Cage reading his zippy stories functions to hide this quality. The focus upon his declamation also obscures the fact that none of the dancers predominates—not even Carolyn or Merce. *Objects*, which premiered this evening, seems to signal a departure from the late '60s pieces. Alvin Lucier's score consists of sonar generators diffused around the hall; but in this context, which depends upon theatrical amplification, they sound like crickets and are no less boring than real crickets. Here too the pace is slow, the piece is long, the structure very uninflected, the movements nonrepresentational. Perhaps because nearly everyone in the company appears, I found more unison

activity than usual. The most striking section has eight dancers sitting in a circle pretending to play jacks (and shifting around the circle in unison, while Carolyn Brown dances in the middle). Susana Hayman-Chaffey has become more beautiful and competent in ways appropriate to Merce's pieces. Meg Harper has become spectacularly more lithe. A new woman, Louise Burns, has legs too short for her body and blonde hair too short for her head; yet she also moves far more rapidly than anyone else. I sensed at one point that her own rhythms might have influenced the pace of this work, so inclined to thrusting moves.

November 13, 1970 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): During *Walkaround Time* (1968) I became more clearly aware of how different these late sixties pieces are, not only from what went before in Merce's development but from what seems to be following afterwards. These recent works are for larger companies and larger spaces, and their theme is *diffusion*—not just of people in space but also of commanding roles in time. Each of many performers gets a solo, typically drawing upon his or her individual talents. One result is a diffusion of individual emphases. No other choreographer, in my experience, uses so many people so well.

Signals is the better of the two new pieces, opening with Merce sitting on a chair way in the back of the stage, with Hayman-Chaffey in his lap; much of the action continues to the back of the stage. There are sequences in which the dancers spontaneously determine, according to prearranged signals, who will do which one of several predefined solos. (As in *Field Dances*, I find evidence of Merce's watching televised American football.)

In *Objects* black canvas tripods are brought onstage. The piece closes with Merce and Carolyn spinning one of the tents around. A boyfriend of one dancer tells me that it draws upon bits of earlier Merce pieces and that Merce doesn't think too much of the work.

Walkaround Time, seen for the third or fourth time, now seems more inventive; for even within the flaccid sense of time, Merce's artistry remains tight. The most stunning solo, as I've surely noted before, has him running in place and changing out of one outfit and into another that, surprise, is absolutely identical. Another paradox is that the roles that initially seemed interchangeable are, to the contrary, based upon moves that are clearly indigenous to each dancer. This time I found the ending came too quickly for the pace of the piece.

One recurring theme in these notes is my changing opinions about, and perceptions of, this major Cunningham work.

November 14, 1970. Now that *RainForest* has been dropped from the active repertoire, *Scramble* seems the weakest of Cunningham's recent pieces. The most stunning element is Frank Stella's decor, consisting as it

does of colored stripes mounted on poles based on wheels. At the beginning two stripes are in front, while the rest remain at the back of the stage, leaving an open space between. By the end of the piece the stripes initially in the back are moved forward. Sandra Neels has an extraordinary solo, as well as a remarkable duet that brings out the best of Chase Robinson.

The score for *Signals* (1970) consists of whatever whoever is there wants to do. Thus, the program promises a piece specially entitled *(2nd Week of November)* and credited to "Behrman-Cage-Mumma-Tudor" (in alphabetical order, please note). Cage's contribution, according to Behrman, is a series of cadences from the history of music, played on the piano in an aleatory way. This time the work begins with Wong and Hayman-Chaffey on the chair in the back, with light shining down from behind. Like Louise Burns's dancing, this piece sets rather quick individual moves against a dull background. In one sequence, Merce does something I've never seen from him before—make noises with his visibly static mouth, in order to keep the beat for rather unison movements. The last part of *Signals*, subtitled "Sextet for 5 or 6," relates more to his late sixties pieces, because of its concern with large ensembles in large spaces. Also in the opening part, "Solos for 1, 2 or 3," the male dancer uses an extended cane, somewhat in the manner of a magic wand. It's the first time in a long time, to my recall, that dancers have used props in Merce's pieces!

Second Hand (1969) is dancey and boring. I now understand that the opening draws upon a solo that Merce made for himself not in 1945, as I heard before, but in 1944, while the last part, which employs the entire company, seems closer to his late sixties pieces. (Merce seems more adapt at using a large company than, say, José Limon, whom I saw for the first time recently. As a result perhaps, Merce's company has better dancers.) This time the piece had a corny conclusion, with Merce in the back of the stage, his arms out and his head up (greeting the sun?).

December 11, 1971 (Walt Whitman Auditorium, Brooklyn College): I'd never before seen an "Event," which is Merce's generic term for compilations of bits from previous pieces. As this was entitled *Event #25*, there must have been two dozen discrete mixes before it. The fact that Merce can mix bits from his past so fluently is gratifying, for not even an excerpt from the very dancey *Suite for Five* (1953–58) seems out of place. As a kind of lecture-demonstration without words, an Event becomes a good introduction to Merce's characteristic styles for articulating space, movement and ensemble. In my opinion, his most important truth has been noncentered space. This esthetic principle (whose analogue is nonclimactic time) becomes more clear to me in dance than in music. Neither Merce nor Carolyn Brown dances much here, perhaps because these works are more about ensembles than the duets that were necessary in the 1950s.

Indeed, he seemed willing to let younger performers dominate. Louise Burns moved to Hawaii, which is unfortunate, because her extraordinary quickness is missed. The dancer replacing her, Nanette Hassall, is competent but undistinguished. This Event began with sections from *Winterbranch*, now seen in light (rather than darkness). The most stunning individual bit was Merce's solo of discontinuous movements with his hands. Done this time with the houselights up, it became a sort of intermission. The "music" seems to be whatever under the sun Cage, Mumma, Behrman and Tudor wanted to do that day. The whole program lasted for over an hour, and only toward the end did I begin to lose interest.

February 9, 1972 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): *Canfield* has several parts whose order for the evening is determined by chance processes. When scheduled within a three-act program, only an abbreviated version is done. However, its full-length version can take an entire evening, or at least an hour and one-half of continuous dancing (which I saw two years ago, when I remember being less impressed). Now I think it the very best of the recent pieces. Essentially dancey, the principal characteristic of its choreography is the awesome range and variety of moves for the entire company. The costumes are several shades of gray, and there are no props. The use of a ten-person ensemble is breathtaking, as their patterns of diffuse spatial placement seem endlessly various. This evening's arrangement concludes with Merce's spectacular solo for his hands. The score by Pauline Oliveros is meant to be a testing of the acoustics of the hall, and for the last two-thirds it is. This performance opens, however, with an extremely funny dialogue between Cage and David Tudor about Cage's hypothesis of cosmic communication between Nicola Tesla, the subject of the Oliveros score, and the twelfth-century Tibetan mystic Milarepa.

February 12, 1972 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): *Landrover* is the most beautiful of Merce's recent pieces. (I understand that only two of its four parts were done on the second performance that I attended, and only three on the first night.) I suspect that it may finally be as fine and major as *Canfield*, which I saw in its entirety a few nights before. Like *Canfield*, *Landrover* exploits Merce's extraordinary choreographic range—richly inventive in both individual and ensemble moves. A good number of these passages are rather slow, such as a marvelous duet between Susana Hayman-Chaffey and Douglas Dunn in Part II. For sound, it seems that the three composers are each bequeathed a section for his own bit—John Cage read a few passages of scrambled Thoreau and then allowed for silence, Mumma preferred low rumbling generators, and Tudor a higher cricketish sound that was perhaps closer to white noise. The dancers'

costumes consisted of a variety of bright single colors. I should very much like to see this again.

Borst Park (1972) is the second of Merce's brand-new pieces (the third being *TV Rerun*, which I didn't see and which most people didn't like). Though good, it scarcely stands up to *Landrover.* For one thing, it suffers terribly from gimmickry, such as making the three musicians visible on stage or a passage in which Merce, in duet with Sandra Neels, changes costumes again (echoing *Walkaround Time*). Christian Wolff's score *Burdocks* consists of elongated sounds in an open airy context. The sounds are atonal, and their aggregations seem intentionally devoid of structure. While the three musicians are left rear, the dancers are seated with their backs to the audience along the right rear; and the latter come forward, usually in pairs, to dance. Way up on the left, behind the scrim, is a light that regularly changes colors to no apparent scheme. *Borst Park* might pass as cute out in the provinces, but I suspect it will quickly disappear, at least from the Cunningham repertory presented here.

Signals isn't memorable, even the second time around. Its principal significance is the score, titled for and by the week of the performance, that allows each of the participating musicians to do his own thing for the duration of the piece.

March 24, 1973 (Brooklyn Academy of Music): *Canfield* is always a joy to see. Now that it has become more familiar, I've come to enjoy some of its peculiarities. I once found the score offensive. It consists of a systematic testing of the acoustics of the hall in which the piece is performed, but now the jokes are more integral, the personalities of the performers more evident. I heard a female voice in the mix, and then heard her called "Pauline"; so that the suggestion was that Oliveros herself had flown up from San Diego to oversee this display. However, I noticed that for this performance Cage-Behrman-Mumma-Tudor seem to retire and instead played a tape made at a previous performance in Belgrade. David Tudor announced that he was playing the tape for Oliveros's benefit. What is most impressive here is the autonomy of the parts—the dancers, the lights, the testing of the acoustics. This autonomy perhaps accounts for why the dancing as such is continually inventive, down to Merce's great solo with his hands.

April 14, 1974 (Merce Cunningham Dance Studio): Instead of waiting for an extended New York season, Merce decided to give a long series of performances in the intimate setting of his studio. Musicians fill the high stage at the end of the space, while the dancers work on the regular practice floor. We spectators are distributed in a few rows around the edges. I like the idea of Events for performances that differ from evening to evening,

but find them frustrating in other ways. Since no information is given to identify the sections within an Event, the evening becomes not a selection from individually recognizable previous works but, simply, an extended demonstration of Cunningham esthetics. Gone is any sense of one Cunningham choreography as different from the others, as having an integrity of its own. As someone who remembers particular pieces, and appreciates the historical, piece-by-piece evolution of Merce's art, I regret the loss of specificity. (He could at least announce sources, if not sequence, in the evening's program notes.) *Event #107* opens with backward movement in noncentered space. The evening's music comes from MEV, which is Frederic Rzewski and associates; and it is (typically?) atrociously loud. One new dancer, Catherine Kerr, is spectacularly good.

March 15, 1977 (Barnard College Gymnasium): Since I'd not seen Merce perform live for a few years, it was a pleasure to do so again. It is the first time I've seen the company perform in a gymnasium, which is the sort of informal, four-sided space frequently offered to them during tours of universities. Unless one or another sponsor has commissioned a "New Work," Cunningham continues to favor Events and similarly continues to invite young composers to provide background music. This evening's *Event #186* included, I was told, *Signals* (1970) and *Squaregame* (1976) in their entirety, and parts from *Torse* (1977), *Changing Steps* (1975) and *Loops* (1971). The best are two witty sequences—one in which six dancers fall into straight lines, holding up fingers, while Merce makes grunting noises; the other in which boxing bags are thrown about. Another section involves a stick, which is used less as an extension (as Alwin Nikolais would) than as a resistance—a prop to dance *against*. Now that Carolyn Brown is gone, the most commanding female performer is Karole Armitage; I hope she sticks around. It is good to see Louise Burns back in the company, though she did not seem as spectacularly quick as before. Since Merce is now so much older than the rest of the group, he commands the stage, focusing the audience's attention, solely by that fact. It can no longer be said that he dances among equals.

March 4, 1982 (University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras): From the last time I saw Cunningham perform, at an Event at Barnard five years ago, only three members remain—Chris Komar, Louise Burns and Ellen Cornfield. Karole Armitage has gone (her parts apparently assumed by Megan Walker). Catherine Kerr has returned, after an absence in California. The women are now all long and skinny, except for Burns and Judy Lazaroff; most have visible chest bones and show signs of ballet training, in sum suggesting that Cunningham's taste in female performers is coming to resemble George Balanchine's.

Fielding Sixes (1980) is a patently acceptable piece, with its obvious beauty and unison movements. The unusual touch is the score, which Cage calls *Improvisation IV.* It consists of short cassettes of Irish instrumental music. The musicians each have a stack of cassettes which can be put into tape players at random. The speeds at which these tapes are played can be varied, thanks to devices developed by John David Fullemann. (Simply, in front of them is a dial where 12 o'clock is normal tape speed, 7 o'clock is the slowest speed, and 5 o'clock is the fastest speed.)

The final piece, *Roadrunners*, has a witty text by Yasunao Tone in which Cage and Takehisa Kosugi, placing themselves between two microphones, read an English translation of a Chinese text about "various peoples, some of whom we are told have identical male and female organs in identical places." The climax has something to do with Merce's attempt to put on clothes while Megan Walker dances around him.

March 5, 1982 (University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras): The masterpiece of the evening was *Inlets*, which Merce, knowing what's best, redid the following evening. Performed behind a white scrim that fills the stage from top to bottom, it echoes *Winterbranch* in the darkness of the stage; but it contains a greater complexity of individual movements and ensemble activities than either *Winterbranch* or his other recent pieces. The second effective stage device is a large silver medallion that moves slowly across the back of the stage. When it hits the middle, the stage is suddenly filled with light (that makes the scrim visibly disappear), but then the stage returns to darkness. The music that sounds like electronic burps is made in conch shells that are shaken under microphones. Kosugi toward the end introduces a plastic plumbing pipe that he found in Berlin to make a trumpet-like noise that exceeds that of the amplified conch shells. To my mind, this is Merce's mellow masterpiece of the past few years, just as *Winterbranch* was his aggressive masterpiece of fifteen years ago. Both works exploit the full resources of his associates. I saw it twice in Puerto Rico and would like to see it again.

March 18, 1982 (New York City Center): Self-anthologizing is really an audacious conception for performance, especially when there is a refusal to identify individual parts. Perhaps the surest sign of its continuing audacity is that no other choreographer uses anything resembling a Merce Cunningham Event to fill an evening. Alwin Nikolais sometimes devotes one of his three sets to what he calls a "Divertissement" that features choice scenes from earlier pieces, each identified by name; but a whole evening devoted to self-anthology—never. One problem is, of course, that few choreographers have a sufficient backlog upon which to draw, for only George Balanchine, among contemporaries, is as fecund as Merce. Now

that I see a Cunningham Event in a theater (indeed, a rather formal playhouse) it is important to remember, first, that the Event format was initially conceived to fill informal spaces, such as gymnasiums, because the piece has no backdrop, and then that the "music" consists of the inventions of the composers who happen to be on hand. Of all the sequences, I was most impressed by the one performed in black sweatshirts and black sweatpants—something from *Winterbranch* (1964), now performed in full light and without La Monte Young's aggressive score. Neil Greenberg has a strong solo so full of leaps I thought it once belonged to Merce. What impresses me most about the company's dancing now is its flawlessness. The dancers are all strong; there are no conspicuous weaknesses and few false moves. The only clinker in the evening involves opening the big door in the back of the stage, revealing storerooms behind. Robert Joffrey did that over a decade ago in this same theater, in a piece called, I think, *Astarte*.

March 19, 1982 (New York City Center): I remember thinking in Puerto Rico that *Fielding Sixes* has an awful lot of unison movement for its "experimental" subject. (It is always a surprise to discover that Cunningham is customarily so unforthcoming, if not secretive, that even his performers can only conjecture about his ultimate purposes.) Another touch, similarly odd for Cunningham, is dancing that often seems congruent with the music. *10's with Shoes* (1981) has a Martin Kalve score that includes the sounds of barking dogs and crying babies, all with a certain lifelike quality. *Tango* (1978) is billed as a solo but is actually a duet between Merce and a television set that appears to be showing an intimate bedroom scene (that, alas, never becomes pornographic).

March 20, 1982 (New York City Center): The American premiere here is *Gallopade*, to the score *Cycles* by Takehisa Kosugi, a witty piece with Merce himself as the key performer, reflecting his current movement limitations. It strikes me as further evidence of the range not only of his inventions but his moods. The innovation is a considerable amount of dancing on all fours and crawling over the floor. (All the dancers wear slippers, I guess in deference to Merce's current preference for wearing them.) I sensed the score sounded congruent to the dance (and wondered if the dancers might not be taking their cues from it, in contrast to the traditional Cunningham practice of independent counting).

Fractions was scheduled for the Puerto Rico visit, but not performed there. The most unusual move involves the decor, which consists of differently colored rectangles that are lowered from the back of the stage. I thought it went on too long, complementing the leisurely quality of Jon Gibson's music.

Channels/Inserts (1981) has a David Tudor score that is full of atrociously aggressive sounds that overwhelm the audience. I also noticed more exploitation of male-female difference than is customary in Cunningham.

March 25, 1982 (New York City Center): This Event was quite different from the one presented the week before. I detected only one repeated sequence—the spectacular duet between Susan Emery and Lise Friedman (and wonder from where in Merce's repertory it came?). Emery also has a solo that permits her to display her upper body contortions, including subtle movements of her shoulders and chest. She reminds me of Viola Farber, much as Megan Walker reminds me of Carolyn Brown, so long have I seen this company. This Event has across the back of the stage a scrim that was perhaps the same one used in *Inlets*, because this evening's selection includes some music from *Inlets* and perhaps some dance from it as well. (I swear that at times I find the music corresponding to the dance, or that the music I remember from a certain dance is played when that dance is danced, even though a friend of mine in the pit insists, to the contrary, that the music is indeed whatever the participating musicians want to do that evening.)

March 27, 1982 (New York City Center): *Gallopade* (1981) is really very witty, in the tradition of *How to Pass, Kick, Fall & Run*. One source of the wit is the abundance of unusual individual moves.

The new piece is *Trails* (1982) to a John Cage score that includes the sounds recorded earlier this month outside his window in Puerto Rico, in addition to the sounds made by the shimmering venetian blinds in his hotel room. (Rooms without air-conditioning in San Juan are customarily facing the continuous sea breeze. All night you can also hear El Coqui, the noisy toad, indigenous to Puerto Rico, that Cage likewise recorded for future use.) *Trails* consists essentially of duets between five well-matched couples—Alan Good and Megan Walker as the biggest, Louise Burns and Chris Komar as the quickest (and oldest). In spite of the convention of coupling, someone is always out of symmetry. The Mark Lancaster backdrop was a very rich red.

May 1982: Twenty years ago it was not so easy to see Merce Cunningham dance, and the experience often involved incidental hazards. I remember a concert at Philharmonic Hall, August 13, 1963, in a subscription series with Donald McKayle, Paul Taylor and José Limon. The audience was spectacularly aggressive. After every cacophonous crunch from the orchestra pit, several people in militant unison hit the aisles, creating a comic, continuous, distracting stream of exiting herds for the duration of

the performance. Some *New York Times* reviewer advised that Cunningham would fare better without John Cage's music. Jill Johnston, then the dance critic of the *Village Voice*, took to her columns to reply that Cunningham without Cage would be like the Bible without God.

In those days, it is hard to believe now, Cunningham rarely performed in New York, the city in which he has lived since the mid–1940s. One reason was that a set of performances at the end of 1953 went completely unreviewed. In another year he was included in a putatively comprehensive series of contemporary choreographers, only to be excluded the next year. My recollection is that the 1963 concert was his first New York recital in three years. In previous seasons, aficionados had to go somewhere else—Hempstead, Philadelphia, or New London—for their annual dose. During the mid-sixties, Cunningham concerts would happen almost by surprise, here and there around New York, perhaps once a year.

The faithful audience for his work had a certain quality back then. Consisting of many familiar faces—artists, writers, and other performers—it was the sort of peer audience that Cunningham, as well as Cage, had from the beginning of their mature careers. John Gruen, in *The Party's Over Now* (1972), tells the story of the critic Harold Rosenberg screaming during the 1953 season that Cunningham's show could not start because a certain painter had not yet arrived. "Everyone doubled up laughing," Gruen explained. "We all attended every event and everyone in the audience knew everyone else. 'There's a stranger in the third row,' Harold continued. 'Throw him out!'" Even a decade later, in the early 1960s, I was struck by the loyalty and quality of Cunningham's backers. By the middle sixties, painters such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were selling works of theirs explicitly to finance Cunningham's performances in New York.

Back then, Cunningham himself was the central *issue* dividing the world of modern dance. What a person thought of his work would usually indicate what else he or she liked or disliked on the current dance scene, if not in contemporary art in general. (Remember that expressionism vs. antiexpressionism was more of an issue then.) Like all artistic edges, Cunningham's work inspired many private arguments comparable to the one between Jill Johnston and the *New York Times* reviewer. I liked what I saw and attended Cunningham's performances as often as I could. His dances were for me a revelation about the possibilities of nonexpressionistic movement and, by extension, of nonexpressionistic mixed-means performance; about noncentered space and, analogously, uninflected time; about experiments that nonetheless respected grace; about surprises that were, yes, beautiful. Another theme was nonsynchronicity, for what one dancer did had no definite connection to what the others were doing, while the music had no ostensible connection to the dance. There were abstract

truths to be learned from his refusals both to suggest erotic themes or to give his women dancers movements that were generically different from those given to the men.

Even twenty years ago, when Cunningham was in his early forties (and had outgrown his early reputation as a spectacular jumper), he was the strongest male dancer I had ever seen. His principal partner at the time, Carolyn Brown, also stood out from the rest of the company (that, alas, invariably included at least one person who was visibly outclassed). The dance I liked best in those days was *Winterbranch* (1964), which I regarded as a masterpiece of terrifying theater, with its dark stage, its dancers in black sweatsuits and blackened faces, and its howling La Monte Young score. The other work I especially remember is *Variations V* (1965), which was likewise a piece of mixed-means theater that incorporated, without combining, Cunningham's choreography with Stan VanDerBeek's films and a forest of sensitive vertical wands (Theremin) designed to stimulate sound generators. The conclusion had Cunningham on a bicycle, which I took to be a vivid epitome of his polemical assertion that *all* movements should be available to modern dance. Rich in kinetic activity and sensory stimulations, not to speak of esthetic implications, these pieces also drove viewers to exit the hall and prompted reviewers to splenetic outbursts.

Two decades later, so much is different. What was initially a tenuous career is now a fortunate one. Cunningham has annual two-week seasons in New York. His name fronts a foundation that regularly receives both federal and state grants. The stagecraft and administrative duties are no longer done by moonlighting dancers but by a whole crew of technicians and executives. His new works are respectfully reviewed in the same journals that once panned or ignored him. Presidential prizes are no doubt waiting around the corner.

The audiences for his work are different as well. The same David Tudor abrasiveness that once sent spectators to the exits moved few negatively in New York. The bright lamp directed into the City Center audience's faces was not taken as offensive by most. On the other hand, the audience had fewer artists (or at least fewer known to me), and then most of those few were professionally involved with Cunningham and Cage, mostly as collaborators. Are the rest of these spectators, I wonder, the same people who patronize the other attractions in the City Center season: Martha Graham, Paul Taylor, Dance Theater of Harlem, Alvin Ailey, The Joffrey Ballet, and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens? Might they be the children of those who, two decades before, would have idolized "Martha" and ignored Merce? Or the kids of those who walked out of his performance at Philharmonic Hall?

Cunningham's choreography has not changed as much as the times and the context. Before, as I said, I was most impressed by the scrupulous

abstractness and disconnectedness. The parts of the dancers' bodies did not complement one another; the ties binding the dancers to one another were irregular; his choreography cultivated the idiosyncracies of his performers. There was little resemblance to the traditional modern dance of Isadora Duncan, Graham, José Limon, or whomever. The music proceeded utterly independently of the choreography. Given what I remember (and what Cunningham taught me), I now find that his dancers often move in unison, that their arms and legs often echo balletic conventions, that male/female distinctions are frequently emphasized, that the female dancers resemble one another in both appearance and competence, and that gauche movements are rare. At times I could swear the music was providing a patent platform for the dance. What changed? The company perhaps; my sense of innovation in dance (and art) for sure.

What I now find missing is the earlier audacity—the audacity of *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (1965), whose "music" is John Cage reading funny stories (and at times upstaging the group); the audacity of the conclusion of *Place* (1966), where Cunningham wraps himself in a plastic bag and rolls off stage with twitches and crackles; or the audacity of the interlude in *Walkaround Time* (1968) where the dancers don warm-up clothes and amble leisurely about the stage. By my count, Cunningham's last audacious move for the stage was the presentation of an Event, which is a terribly ingenious conception initially designed for nonstandard performance spaces. Cunningham has always thought of his dances as having four fronts, or as being open on all sides. The proscenium theater, with only one front, was a convention to which he capitulated with particular backdrops for each piece. On tour, he often was offered gymnasiums or other comparable spaces in lieu of theaters; and since the backdrops could not be used, he was free to fill the performance space and time in another way.

Events are composed of earlier dances, either in whole or part, performed in continuous sequence for over an hour. They are unique self-anthologies drawn from an ample storehouse. Though different in detail, every Event has the same theme, which is the range and characteristics of Cunningham choreography. (It seems odd that no one else has appropriated this propitious structure. Perhaps their scrapbooks are not thick enough.) The first of the two Events at City Center included a sequence danced in black sweatsuits. Sure enough, it was *Winterbranch*, now in bright light (but, alas, without La Monte Young's intimidating score). Both Events included a spectacular duet between Lise Friedman and Susan Emery; its source was *Aeon* (1958).

However, those two Events at City Center were fundamentally different from another one I saw five years before at the Barnard College gymnasium. Whereas the first was done with a huge bare wall-backdrop and

theatrical appliances, the second had a large white cloth (that looked to me like the scrim of *Inlets*). That cloth gave this second City Center Event a definite backside and thus a single front that was made even more definite by the proscenium structure of the space. What we saw this year was not a true Event, if you please, but a compromised one. Next time, Merce, please consider using Madison Square Garden, the 69th Regiment Armory, or the Sheep Meadow.

One friend of mine found eighty minutes too long to sit for a single dance, but that comment ignored a certain quality that this work has in common with Cage's music (and much else in avant-garde art)—it need not be seen from beginning to end, because it is a series of sequences that are essentially independent of, yet complimentary to one another. Therefore, one can tune out and come back without feeling lost. (This is an interesting contemporary form—also present in *Finnegans Wake*, among other places—that scarcely anyone has written about.) My vision is that these Events really should be longer—indeed, as long as is physically tolerable—not only because some might feel a bit shortchanged after only eighty minutes of dance, but also because the temporal dimensions of the piece should be such that spectators inclined to take a walk should not feel discouraged from doing so. That, indeed, is another reason for doing Events in spaces more open than a proscenium theater.

What impresses me most about Cunningham now are his apparently limitless resources for unobvious invention—inventions not only in dancers' movements but in stage compositions. Once he had decided that all movements were available to dance, he proceeded down an apparently endless road. In every work is something that even his most loyal fans had not seen before (and probably will not see in another work). Even when he honors choreographic conventions, he disrupts them with surprising quirks. On top of that penchant for originality is an incomparable range, from the comic in his new *Gallopade* (1981) to the somber in *Inlets* (1977), from the elegant in *Trails* (1982) to the messy in *Roadrunners* (1979), from the spacious in *Fielding Sixes* (1980) to the constrained in *Tango* (1978), which is, incidentally, Cunningham's most recent solo for himself.

Indeed, it is perhaps in his choreography for himself that Cunningham is now doing his most exploratory work, for he is discovering a new vocabulary of movements for an older dancer who must nearly always keep both feet on the floor. Since *Canfield* (1969), he has given himself (and, to my recollections, only himself) solos for his hands, often fluttering with the speed of a juggler's (and yet moving nothing). He frequently uses props, less as extensions in the Alwin Nikolais sense than as foils and supports. In *Gallopade*, both he and the company play a lot on the floor.

Five years ago, Cunningham's own performance reminded me of Gordie Howe, the legendary hockey player who had come out of retirement

to be on the same team as his sons. Visibly a generation older than his teammates, yet able to do things they could not, Howe was both sympathetic and embarrassing in his desire to skate along with the kids. Nowadays, Cunningham puts more distance between himself and the group, if only in his choreography for himself. What might be more interesting now would be a Cunningham piece for a company entirely of older dancers.

The other pioneering dimension of his current art is his work with film and videotape. While he is more fortunate than earlier choreographers in having survived into an age of media that can transcribe economically both sight and sound, Cunningham also realizes that they offer him the opportunity to create works that exist only on screens. Working in collaboration with Charles Atlas, he has produced at least two films and one videotape that can be rented or purchased. Each is different in style from the others; each explores territory that is scarcely occupied. Of the three I saw, the most impressive is *Locale*, in which the camera moves as the human eye cannot—in speed, to heights, from angles—in sum, making us profoundly aware of the limitations of the traditional theatrical view of dance. (Televised spectator sports have made us similarly aware of the limitations of even the "best" stadium seat.) Indeed, the final suggestion of *Locale* is that choreographers might eventually need to be responsible not just for the movements of their dancers but for the "movements" of their audiences as well.

Of the eleven works I saw this past season, the strongest to my senses is *Inlets*, whose initial distinguishing mark is the white scrim that covers the proscenium from end to end and from top to bottom. For nearly the entire piece the scene is bathed in hazy light whose overall murkiness is reminiscent of *Winterbranch*. (But whereas the earlier work is dark and strident, *Inlets* is fair and mellow.) The music is a John Cage composition that sounds electronic but is actually the amplified sound of water jostled in large conch shells. (Why do amplified natural noises sould more like other amplified sound than anything heard in nature?) The crowning touch of the Morris Graves decor is a silver medallion, several feet in diameter, that inches across the back of the stage, higher than the dancers. When it reaches the center, the stage is suddenly bathed in strong white light that visually obliterates the scrim until there is an equally sudden return to the initial murkiness. One quality that separates *Inlets* from other recent works and yet connects it to my earlier favorites is a fuller exploitation of theatrical resources.

Whenever Cunningham appears on stage nowadays, he gets an extra round of applause (as did Gordie Howe in his reborn years). However, (as with Howe) one wonders whether these fans are honoring him in the present or appreciating his career which, as everyone knows by now, has had

the classic avant-garde shape: early innovation that his elders dismissed, professional exclusion, sustained productivity in spite of public incomprehension and financial hardships, the development of a loyal nucleus of colleagues and then an expanding, loyal, proselytizing audience, and finally a breakthrough into popular acclaim.

The difference is that Cunningham two decades ago made us think about the possibilities of dance and of theater. There was a spikey edge to his work and to his work's relationship to the audience. I find that challenging quality—that risk of unacceptability—still in much of John Cage's recent work, which is at times outrageous and can drive out audiences; I find a bit of that sort of edge in Cunningham's work for film and video. There might be even more of such an edge in choreography for *objects*, the dance equivalent of electronic music, were he to think about doing it.

That last possibility suggests that the current root of his creative predicament is, paradoxically, his company—or, rather, the pragmatic and ultimately esthetic burdens of supporting and touring his talented entourage, which is the professional convention that Cunningham shares with his more conservative colleagues. Now that the company is so strong, and so much larger than before, while invitations to travel remain plentiful, he is even more beholden to it. Nonetheless, isn't it reasonable to speculate about what might happen to his art if he freed himself of that baggage?

Text-Sound Reconsidered (1981)

> Intermedia differ from mixed media in that they represent a fusion conceptually of the elements; for instance, opera is a mixed medium since the spectator can readily perceive the separation of the musical from the visual aspect.... With familiarity, each intermedium becomes a new medium, and . . . new intermedia can therefore be said to exist between the old ones.—Dick Higgins, *Some Poetry Intermedia (1976)*.

In 1976 I received from the National Endowment for the Arts—from the Visual Arts Program, not Literature—a grant to do a project I had been thinking about for a long time: a comprehensive critical survey of text-sound art in North America. A fifty-page report was completed by the end of that year and submitted to the NEA. In abridged form this first essay appeared in two parts in successive issues of *Performing Arts Journal*, II/2 and II/3 (Fall 1977 & Winter 1978). The entire essay was reprinted, in a fuller form, in the first collection of my essays on poetry, *The Old Poetries and the New* (1981), and in that book the complete survey is most conveniently available. (The first part of the PAJ version was also offset directly to become the introduction to my anthology, *Text-Sound Texts* [1980].) By now this survey is four years old. Not only have the names of new practitioners come to my attention, but the people discussed in that essay have since produced new pieces—four years being, after all, a long time in the history of an emerging art. I have also spent many hours thinking and conversing about text-sound. These notes represent a series of glosses on those earlier essays.

* * *

It was my thesis that text-sound was neither poetry as such nor music as such but something between—a true intermedium, by the Dick Higgins criteria quoted above. It incorporated elements of poetry with elements of song and yet was finally neither just poetry nor only song (in part because it eschewed specific pitches) but something else, which is text-sound. The frequent use of repetition in text-sound, for instance, is a characteristic less typical of poetry than music, where repeated phrases often become the

piece's principal motif; yet in part because words in such pieces are customarily spoken rather than pitched, they are not song. Text-sound is an intermedium, not a mixed-medium, because in genuine text-sound the language and music cannot be perceived apart from each other. No one can hum a text-sound piece, because there is no definitive melody that exists apart from the spoken word, while merely speaking the words in a prosaic way—say, one after another at a steady beat—or printing them on a page will only suggest the sound poem, rather than replicate it). A "talking blues," to make another discrimination, is not text-sound but, rather, to be precise, rhymed prose customarily spoken to the accompaniment of a rhythmic instrument; it is a precursor of what is now called "rap music." Mouth-made sounds that are not language and do not suggest anything resembling linguistic sounds are ultimately not text-sound either but, rather, song, and are perceived as song, especially if they have intentional pitches. Talking blues/rap music is, like all words spoken to the accompaniment of music, really a mixed medium, to remember Dick Higgins's incisive distinction; nonlinguistic, human-made sound is a monomedium, which is to say a kind of music.

* * *

While there were obvious precursors to our contemporary text-sound work, what was recognizably new was our acknowledgment of text-sound as a distinct art form with characteristics and traditions of its own. One quality that makes this recognition especially interesting, at least to me, is the discovery of new artistic territory—an area that has been explored, to be sure, but only scarcely occupied.

Given these initial perceptions, I could hardly sympathize with those who dismissed this new work as just "late imitations of early modernism" (and thus failed to recognize crucial differences). I had less sympathy for those who would obliterate the intermediumistic definition by including all kinds of poetic singing or hyper-rhythmic poetry. There is perhaps a paradox, I know, in my preference for a pure intermedium; but unless we agree to isolate an art that is different from other arts, there is, in a practical sense, nothing more than enthusiasms to write about. I personally like good poetry and good song, but the best text-sound is something else.

I have often noted that avant-garde works in every art today tend either to purify the materials of an art or to mix them with the materials of other arts; and while I remain appreciative of innovations in the former direction, the latter path strikes me as ultimately more fertile. Indeed, I believe that intermedia *per se* is the greatest esthetic idea of the late twentieth century, much as collage was the principal idea, likewise relevant to all the arts, of the early twentieth century.

I still prefer the epithet *text-sound* to "sound poetry," just as I have preferred *word-image* to "visual poetry." First of all, since some pieces are, in their language, closer to prose than poetry (e.g., Gertrude Stein, Jack Kerouac, my own *Recyclings*), *text* is an appropriate generic name for language that can be either poetry or prose. Secondly, what separates text-sound from traditional texts is that it is enhanced primarily in terms of sound, rather than syntax or semantics. Thus, it must be heard to be fully appreciated. "Sound-text" might be more accurate, especially to distinguish it from "read-text," but that first epithet should be discarded as sounding worse than *text-sound*. In my own conversation and even discussion, I sometimes use "sound poetry," as well as "visual poetry," in part because colleagues do.

* * *

In the earlier piece I tried to mention at least everyone doing important text-sound work, but there is no question that the principal omission from that survey is Tom Johnson. The fault is mine; I knew about his work but simply forgot to mention it. (Perhaps the same regular byline in the *Village Voice* that impresses some people disaffects others. We all have problems with the company we keep.) As a trained musician who has worked extensively with dancers, Johnson has a keen rhythmic sense that he applies to such meaningless syllables as these:

gba gda bga bda dga dba

He then strings them together in quickly spoken monologues that have a high transformative energy:

gdbagdbagdbagdbadga bdgabdgabdgabdgabdga

Notwithstanding my general prejudice against "sound poetry" that lacks recognizable words, I think that these succeed in part because they sound like language rather than resembling, say, François Dufrêne's vocables that clearly are not words and would never be mistaken for them. One quality that makes Johnson's nonword vocables interesting is their complete abstractness—they suggest nothing more specific than a general resemblance to language (no objects, no atmosphere, no states of being—nothing); yet in each of the several pieces that Johnson has done in this vein, he manages to evoke a particular linguistic terrain that is different not only from English but from all the other pieces in this series. This last effect he realizes by not only rooting but confining each verbal piece to a characteristic range of spoken sounds. The best recording I know of Johnson's extraordinary performances exists in the first *Breathing Space* anthology (1978). Even though I published his texts for these in *Text-Sound Texts*

(1980), I can scarcely imagine anyone performing them better (but would, nonetheless, relish being refuted). At the opening event of the Twelfth International Sound Poetry Festival (New York, Spring 1980), Johnson also did a marvelous performance piece that depended upon the audience's responses to get from one point to the next; but to my mind, this last performance was not "text-sound" but something else.

* * *

Four years ago there was no doubt in my mind that Charles Amirkhanian was a major American text-sound artist who had produced some of the very best pieces any of us had done, and his work then suggested, to me at least, that he would continue to develop in exceptional ways. However, around that time, Amirkhanian apparently decided no longer to do the kind of piece at which he excelled—the tape composition that is intricately edited and electronically mixed, as well as technically impeccable. In my opinion, the results of his pursuit of alternatives have not been salutary. His recent pieces are only performed live. They are customarily based upon a single evocative phrase, such as "dutiful ducks," which is repeated in whole or in part. These new pieces customarily have a classical linear (musical) structure, running from simple repetitions at the beginning through a more complex counterpoint and then down to simple repetitions again. They are charming and good and idiosyncratic, but to my taste not as special as *Seatbelt, Seatbelt* (1973), which I have heard over two dozen times and still consider among the very best, most awesome text-sound pieces ever done anywhere.

In 1976 I lamented that Amirkhanian's masterpiece was not commonly available. Fortunately, it has since appeared in his solo record of past pieces, *Lexical Music* (1979). Having noticed before that Amirkhanian often does not present his work in an optimal way, I am scarcely pleased to report that one of his other first-rank tape pieces was not included in this retrospective record and thus is *still* unavailable—*Rouffier (not Roussier)* (1973), which is an ingenious, conceptually impressive tape-composition retrospective of his early audio art. Here Amirkhanian weaves fragments from prior pieces around the repeated refrain, "Charles Amirkhanian, composer of Armenian descent," neatly recapitulating his early creative career within four minutes.

* * *

Since the principal purpose of my earlier essay was establishing the presence of an *American* text-sound art, my neglect of E. E. Cummings is also inexplicable. It is true that I acknowledged the pioneering sound prose

of Gertrude Stein and Jack Kerouac—two figures not customarily included in the potted histories of sound poetry (e.g., McCaffery, Ruppenthal-Wendt)—but in truth I had not yet read enough Cummings to find the single poem that most clearly forecasts current concerns. It is in *Viva* (1935) and is prefaced by the phrase, "from the cognoscenti." It opens:

> bingbongwhom chewchoo
> laugh dingle nails personally
> bung loamhome picpac
> obviously scratches tomorrowlobs

and continues in a similar vein to a single line that is set below and to the left of the six four-line rectangles: "Of radarw leschin," which connects radical linguistic change to social *revolution*. Now that I have offered my own interpretation of this poem, it should be noted that one Cummings commentator, Prof. Rushworth Kidder, argues that the "cognoscenti" are "those who foment Communist activity" and who are, given Cummings's text, thus "incomprehensible in their arguments." (This poem, Kidder concludes, "carries the fallacy of imitative form to its extreme.") I think, in reply, that Kidder is all wrong. Cummings is really making a discovery about language—a discovery that, like so many of his other more extreme innovations, he broached in one and only one poem and then, oddly, did not pursue. (That is one reason why it took me so long to discover it.) In my own interpretation of Cummings (published in *The Old Poetries and the New*), I suggest that although Cummings never met Vladimir Mayakovsky, nearly his exact contemporary (born in 1893, to the former's 1894), and though each had no immediate influence upon the other, Cummings aptly illustrates two Mayakovsky dicta: "Neologisms are obligatory in writing poetry." "There is no revolutionary poetry without a revolutionary form."

II

> There is a wealth of timbre in the spoken word which no orchestra possesses. Nature has endowed the magnificent instrument, the human voice, with subtle tone qualities for which music has no equivalent. Even poets have not been able to draw from the inexhaustible noise-sound well-springs of spoken language the expressive and emotional elements capable of imparting human resonance to their poetic message.—Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noise* (1913)

The Twelfth International Sound Poetry Festival, in New York in Spring, 1980, was disappointing for a spate of reasons. First, it was too

thick—too many people on ten successive days; and while some of those announced in the program did not show, substitutes were suddenly included, at times stretching an evening's concert well beyond three hours. Not unlike others, I missed several reportedly good people, because unfortunately I had something else urgently to do.

One general sense I had was that a good deal of work should not have been included, not because it was weak but because it was something other than sound poetry. Indeed, one esthetic rule evoked by the festival was this: Whenever a "sound poet" introduces music into a performance, he or she reveals an implicit fear that his or her language cannot survive without it. Bill Bissett, for instance, read his more traditional poems to a silent background, or he chanted considerably simpler, repetitious texts to the accompaniment of a hand-held rhythmic instrument or even an occasional dance. Indeed, he seemed utterly unable to declaim the latter texts without such musical accompaniment (which contributed to mixed-media, rather than to an intermedium). Similarly, Jerome Rothenberg is a pure sound poet when he performs his "Horse Songs" either by himself or to a four-track audiotape of himself declaiming a simultaneous chorus. Though these are chanted, rather than spoken, such musical sounds are intrinsic in the language. However, in the festival he also spoke his poetic homages to Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara to the accompaniment of an accordian-like percussive instrument that he played between his hands. Since the language of these latter pieces was considerably prosier and less rhythmic, I wondered if the inclusion of an instrument indicated his apprehension that these poems could not survive in live performance without his additional "music."

The single most satisfying live performance I heard during the entire festival was Norman Henry Pritchard's rendition of his "Gyres' Galax." I already knew his 1967 recording of this text (as part of the Folkways anthology *New Jazz Poets*), but that version now sounds like a rehearsal, so to speak, for his 1980 rendition with its changing, evocative rhythms. Not unlike others, Pritchard deals with repetition, this time of such aurally resonant phrases as "through beneath lit" and "above beneath"; but by speaking slowly and continually changing his pace (and visibly savoring each line), he enhances such minimal verbal materials splendidly.

Unfortunately, his festival set degenerated into an unnecessary, irremediably prosy monologue about his being the only black poet in the festival (as if that thought had not occurred to many in the sophisticated audience) and the then-current state of the Liberian revolution.

* * *

Here are some abrupt notes on several others who performed at the festival:

Kenneth King: He read "Word Rain," reprinted in *Text-Sound Texts,* in an unfocused, undistinguished way, implicitly raising the question of whether sound poets are necessarily the best performers of their own texts. I regret that he (or someone else) did not also read "Print Out," a brilliant example of Joycean sound prose that I would have gladly included in *Text-Sound Texts,* had I not already reprinted it in my earlier anthology, *Future's Fictions* (1971), and also quoted from it in *The End of Intelligent Writing* (1974). Enough is enough.

Re: Sounding: This duo, composed of Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie, is substantial and various. As full-time literature professors, they like to begin with someone else's texts, rather than write their own. These "found" texts are as diverse as T. S. Eliot's "Love Song for J. Alfred Prufrock," or Peggy Guggenheim's testimony that Jean (Hans) Arp knew only one English word ("candlesticks"), or the bilingual instructions on boxes of Canadian breakfast food (in "Pop Tarts," their best single piece). Not everything they did was text-sound.

Courtenay P. Graham-Gazaway: In her first book, *ime* (1969), were three short "sound poems" (her epithet) that I remember as pioneering examples of American nonsemantic text-sound, and I have since admired the variety and courage of her art. However, her performance here disappointed me. Whereas some of the festival performers used music to support weakness in their language, she accompanied her words with slides of her arty photographs whose lushness and variety functioned to diminish, if not defeat, the rather limited and pointless range of her live declamation.

Bliem Kern: Some of his works I rank among the finest that any of us have ever done—"Jealousy," "It's Finally Happening," "Sound Poetry"—but he chose not to do any of these for the festival. Instead, he performed "Nuclear Prayer," which is, in my opinion, not as good as his best three. He played with toys that were neither text-sound nor interesting. His set opened with a hilarious videotape in which he was the subject of an arts-feature interlude on a New York City *early*-evening (i.e., lower-class) news broadcast. Since the audience at the festival was more sophisticated than the mass audience for the television program, we could snicker at the slick announcer's snickering at the insert of Kern actually reading his poem.

The ironies were rich, but they distracted from Kern's performance and, of course, had little to do with text-sound.

Charles Amirkhanian blew it. He opened with *Mugic* (1973), a tape piece that ranks among his weaker works (and is already available on *Lexical Music* anyway). Scarcely sound poetry, it depends upon recorded noises —mostly the slamming of a door—that are then taped on a succession of recorders. (Tape-delay is another name for this procedure.) He performed another undistinguished live piece with Charlie Morrow and then "Another Norther" (1976, also in *Text-Sound Texts*) with Beth Anderson and Michael Sahl. The concluding piece was his single best in this live genre, "Dutiful Ducks," the score of which is reprinted in another anthology of mine, *Scenarios* (1980). Whereas Amirkhanian's best tapes are much better than nearly everything else, these live pieces were so slight, if not servile, that I initially suspected that Amirkhanian was perhaps trying to be "acceptable" and thus popular, rather than excellent. (This peer-pandering is a characteristic stance I associate with artists employed in hierarchical bureaucracies, such as universities.) One recurring problem in this festival was that not even the best guests were always good.

Beth Anderson opened with her best, "If I Were a Poet," which I have heard her do at least a dozen times; it remains a masterpiece for me. With rapid articulations reminiscent of tobacco auctioneers, she repeats simple phrases, each new line adding or subtracting from its predecessor. (This text too is reprinted in *Text-Sound Texts*, even though I doubt if anyone can declaim it better.) Her other pieces were different from this, and from one another—all to her credit; but none was better. The fourth work had her shouting against a loud tape of herself speaking. That format, curiously, was used as well that evening by two performers who immediately followed her.

John Giorno also read aloud to an audiotape previously composed. The hysteria of his performance was so unrelenting that the few moments of relapse were almost comic. I sensed that he was trying to imitate the sustained high "energy level" of New Wave rock singers without using their instruments. His texts customarily have short prosaic sentences that evoke macabre images that become yet more macabre as the sentences are repeated both live and on tape. His taste in subject matter and technique (image repetition) reflects the influence of William Burroughs. This is scarcely text-sound; it is hardly poetry, but rather dumbly repetitious sub-Steinian prose. In both performance and on record, Giorno's work is stunning for a few seconds but less successful over a longer duration.

Bernard Heidsieck opened with a piece about heartbeats, "Poeme-Partition A," initially done in 1958 (well before nearly everything else on the program). Next was "Sisyphe (passe partout) 25" (1977) in which he too shouts against a tape of himself; and "Democratie II," where he tosses away little papers with the names of the Prime Ministers of France while their monikers are heard successively on the sound track. Had one not known of Heidsieck's reputation or heard his better work, it would have been hard to believe that he has long been considered a major international text-sound figure.

Robert Josephs & Pier Van Dijk: These two Dutchmen were late arrivals, whose names were added to the program after the festival began. They did a series of silly sketches which included whispering the letters of the alphabet into a bottle and then corking it, or sitting at a dinner table under two signs reading "Beet" and "Hoven" while they meticulously ate, you guessed it, fat red beets. I would not have minded the fact that their performance went on far too long for their slight materials, were I not ready to perform next and thus pained to see much of the audience, potentially *my* audience, walking out for reasons beyond my control.

Bob Cobbing; What I heard at the festival were random readings of a nonsyntactic text and then a second piece that became song and even a dash of dance. I have heard him do better on record (e.g., "Variations on a Theme of Tan" [1964/68], among others). As I said before, one recurring problem at the festival was that not even those guests reputed to be the best were very good.

Ake Hodell's festival contribution was a languid multimedia theater piece that appeared to have an autobiographical base (and refer to the literary myth of Hodell as the war-victim-as-anti-war-hero, which is more familiar to Swedes than Americans). His tape I could not remember when I tried to make notes about it the following day; the slides he showed were undistinguished; and his "live" contribution consisted of putting a succession of masks over his face.

Sten Hanson deserves credit for founding these festivals and for keeping the tradition going, and he was generous with his presence, attending, as no one else did, every single event. His opening piece depended upon audience responses to the English phrase "How Are You"; and even though this audience was responsive, a piece of this kind would have worked better in a performance space more intimate than a cavernous Manhattan church. The tapes he played disappointed me, in part because I have heard better works of his elsewhere (and have read descriptions of works that, at

least in print, sound yet more spectacular). A bigger problem was letting his language be smothered by song and electronic sounds. Conceptually, the most challenging tape contains the characteristic sounds of human beings making love, but to my senses, this is essentially not sound poetry but a kind of cute programmatic music and perceived as such.

Armand Schwerner was joined by *Charles Stein* for two pieces with b-flat clarinets and voices. They alternated between undistinguished riffs on their instruments and a sort of scat-speaking, some of which was quite virtuostic; but once the two modes of articulation were established, this piece of, so to speak, either/or media (song or music) went nowhere.

Mary Ellen Solt opened by showing a slide of her *E Pluribus Unim*, which is a good visual poem, while Jalulu Kalvert Nelson played a strong jazz trumpet solo. (However, this was not sound poetry either.) The second piece was an audiotape based on her "Forsythia" poem, which also flashed on the screen. Even though that visual poem ranks among the very best ever done in this country, the declamation did not add to the visible poem or the visible poem to the declamation. This is to say, this presentation was heard and seen, rather than heard-seen. Solt's best piece—a wholly satisfactory sound-visual poem—was Nelson's taped reading of Solt's "Zigzag," which was also projected on the screen (and reprinted in *Text-Sound Texts*). Here, unlike before, sight made sound more comprehensible (and vice versa); but I was scarcely alone in wondering why this text should not have been read live.

Bob Holman provided comic relief with a series of silly, offhand pieces. Charming though they may be, they are less sound poetry than stand-up comedy.

Hannah Weiner opened with her "front consciousness" prose read by herself surrounded by Charles Bernstein on one side and James Sherry on the other. Read uninflected, unmodulated, at a fairly high amplification, this work sounds like three noisy radios, and it does not get better. Rochelle Ratner, in her review in the *SoHo Weekly News* (April 30, 1980), remembers, "The three people reading it seemed to be having fun; there were in-jokes and comments about friends à la New York School poetry, but the rest of the audience seemed as bored as I was." While this three-voice piece might be interesting on the page, it is not sound poetry and did not belong here. The same could be said for, say, John Ashbery's two-voice dramatic poem, "As We Live Now," which thankfully was not included, Ashbery's fashionableness notwithstanding, in the festival.

Ron Silliman: His nonsyntactic prose (poetry?) is not sound poetry; and it lost, rather than gained, from inclusion in the festival. (To quote

Ratner again: "His reading lacks both the musicality and the staged quality of the other performers.")

Bern Porter: His ideas, along with the assumptions informing his work, have always struck me as better than the work itself. Regarding his contribution to the festival, I return to Rochelle Ratner again: "Porter simply asked everyone to go to one of four microphones and 'either define poetry or define sound.' In an attempt to oblige, a few stragglers began improvising sound poems, but there was no sense of leadership or purpose, and it turned into fifteen minutes of chaos."

Penny Kemp, a Canadian, closed one evening with several song-poems to the simple melodies of nursery rhymes (her bio note identifying her as a "traveling mom"). She (or the Canada Council) imported from Montreal a dancer who was no better and added little to nothing.

The Four Horsemen opened with "Allegro 118," which after a decade remains their single most stunning work—it's on their first record, *Canadada*; and it was a pleasure to *see* the four performers build up their word-fugue by entering the chorus one after another. However, their later pieces were so disappointing that I wonder about their future. One is a cute sketch about their inability to do a performance in New York on April 21, 1980 (and close behind the light banter lie all sorts of heavy modernist theories about self-reflexive art). Other works depend upon animal noises that some of the Horsemen love to make. The concluding piece sounded at times like an Anton Webern string quartet and at other times like parodic imitations of several modernist composers. My general impression of the Four Horsemen this time was that there was either too much prose or too much sound (and sound effects) and not enough poetry.

Jackson Mac Low remains a singular literary artist whose work poses so many critical problems that it is inevitably pushed to the end of every survey (or omitted entirely); and even though my earlier, longer text-sound essay devoted more words to him than to anyone else, I still feel that my treatment of him there was needlessly incomplete. One reason for this fault is the sheer amount of Mac Low's work—no one in the American avant-garde has written more experimental poetry, no matter how one counts; the fact that so little of it is commonly available hinders adequate understanding. A second reason is its variety, as Mac Low operates off several esthetic assumptions, some of which contradict one another, in an assertive, eclectic way. Another hazard to critical understanding is Mac Low's reluctance to make discriminations within his work, as if they did not matter.

His programming choices suggest, nonetheless, that he knows which of his pieces are best and why. In the festival, he opened with his standard audience-warmer for the past few years, "The 1st Milarepa Gatha" (1976) in which Tibetan words and words made from the letters of the Tibetan words fall over one another at a rapid clip. It is a good piece made better by Mac Low's strong, practiced declamation. It belongs to a vein of Mac Low pieces that are about anagrams, so to speak—the words and pseudo-words that can be found in the letters that compose other words. Mac Low characteristically gives these letters and their combinations equal status within each of his performances.

At the festival he then read an early work, written about Thanksgiving, 1938, when Mac Low was still a teenager. Its proto-experimentalism really did no more than substantiate Mac Low's image of himself as the American pioneer who did everything long before everyone else. His last piece, "Is That Wool Hat My Wool Hat?" was based upon a phrase uttered in passing a few nights before by none other than myself. (I had, you guessed it, misplaced my favorite wool hat.) For his reworking of the elements of this phrase, Mac Low recruited a chorus of speakers. While it was charming for a few moments (especially to me), this piece went on far too long for its materials, like so much of Mac Low's work, and then lost both energy and audience through his curious, incorrigible indulgence.

Charlie Morrow: He spoke at times about withdrawing from the festival, because his current art scarcely resembles sound poetry. While my 1976 essay commended his work with Jerome Rothenberg, particularly in a tape of the electronically recomposed "The Beadle's Testimony" (which has never been published), I sensed that his heart and art were presently someplace else. In the festival, he performed initially with Glen Velez, a percussionist familiar from Steve Reich's Ensemble, and closed with an effort to get everyone in the audience to dance (which is not sound poetry). Though Morrow's interests are various, he seems more, if not most, committed to a kind of folk-pop music that is simple, easily played and yet different from the more familiar strains of either folk or pop. He played on the Jew's harp a rather stunning piece of folk-pop music based upon calendar poems by Eleazar ha-Killir, a seventh-century Hebrew poet whom Jerome Rothenberg and Harris Lenowitz translated for the anthology *A Big Jewish Book* (1978). But this is not sound poetry either.

There were evenings I missed, as I said before, and so apologize for not being able to report first hand on the performances of people whom others especially admired: Jonathan Albert, Katalin Ladik, Carles Santos, P. Clive Fencott. About the last participant Rochelle Ratner wrote: "Another fine example of sound poetry in its purest form was the performance of the

English poet, P. Clive Fencott. 'Forest' sounds were played on the background tape while the poet stuttered until the stutter itself became music. Then he began to read quickly, as if once recovered he had to keep going—a process he returned to successfully several times. It was difficult to understand his heavy British accent—you could pick up on the intonations, but not the words. And the fact that this is a process we go through with everyday speech made a vital impact on the audience. As he completed pages, he threw them on the floor. Picking them up, he went through them in a sort of verbal shorthand, perfectly timed with the tape recorder to provide a medley of some of the most unusual sounds heard at the festival." Sorry am I, yes, that I missed that.

There is not much I can say about some Europeans who participated in the festival, in part because I understand no languages other than English, but also because I am less familiar with the purposes and traditions of their work, both individually and collectively. (I had not attended any of the eleven earlier International Festivals.) Nonetheless, more than once I had the disturbing impression that certain European sound poets survive solely on and for these festivals. As long as they went to one in the past, they can usually take an invitation to a new one to their native government culture agencies to obtain travel funds, thereby exploiting the dark side of the European principle of better support for avant-garde writing. For some (though not all), their work has always been mediocre; it has not improved. However, since their appearance at another festival abroad, in this case New York, comes prepaid, organizers of new sound-poetry festivals are enticed to invite them again. A secondary motive behind such invitations is that their presence supports the organizers' claim for the new festival's "international" scope.

On the other hand, one fear confronting anyone who organizes a festival (or edits an anthology, whether as a book or on disc) is that too much bad work creates the general impression, however erroneous, that *nothing in this new art is good.*

★ ★ ★

One recurring feeling I had during the festival is that it must be harder than I suspected to make text-sound per se, because so few do it. Too many participants found it easier to resort to the crutches of music, choreography, or slides to compensate for their fear that language alone might not sufficiently sustain their work. I began to think that pure unadulterated text-sound represents, *ipso facto*, a genuine achievement.

On the other hand, perhaps an index of the new prestige of "sound poetry" is the fact that so many should want to be identified with the term, even though they are actually doing something else. There are blessings to be counted in the garbage can.

Some of my general strictures apply, needless to say, to myself. My creative adventure is based upon extending language into media other than 6" by 9" or 8½" by 11" printed pages, and with that principle in mind I have made silkscreened prints, photolinens, audiotapes, videotapes, films, a hologram and even books in various radically unconventional shapes and sizes. Most of my work with audiotape has, in truth, not been text-sound but something else—alternative realizations (and thus "publication") of mostly fictional structures: "Milestones in a Life," "Excelsior," "Openings & Closings," "Plateaux." These tapes usually exploit the unique possibilities of an audio studio in distorting one voice, such as stereoizing, filtering, or changing ambience, all to produce audiotapes that are generically closer to audio art, albeit unconventional, than anything else. "Recyclings," another major audio piece of mine, is really not sound poetry but something else—a prose experiment in nonsyntactic linguistic perception that is surely quite singular. Because the tape of this text is so different from the printed pages, in spite of my efforts to make them comparable, the audio version poses different perceptual problems from the book. (Several years after writing *Recyclings*, I still do not fully understand it or its implications.) In truth, most of us keep one foot in the old territory as we advance into the new.

"This Is My Poem" is genuine text-sound that uses audiotape techniques to enhance the sound of that four-word phrase into something other than how it began. The fact that this text exists in four different audio realizations (that complement one another) further establishes their status as text-sound. In "Praying to the Lord," which I consider my most wholly successful text-sound piece yet, familiar language is enhanced by audio techniques to realize aural experiences that are possible only with audiotape. This is the piece of mine that most people like best, and the only one so far that I can rehear with continued awe and pleasure. I have since worked with other religious texts, perhaps less successfully in *Asdescent/Anacatabasis*, because I find that audio techniques can enhance the sacredness precisely by realizing effects that are ethereal—beyond the capabilities of normal speaking.

II

> The effect . . . is as if the words, as the basis of their auditory friendship, had taken charge of the situation, as if, instead of an event requiring words to describe it, words had the power to create an event.—W. H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand* (1951)

Two major figures unable to perform in the festival were John Cage and Charles Dodge, who together epitomize two divergent directions in American text-sound art. In the earlier essay mentioned before, I separated native practitioners into two distinct groups. One works primarily, if not exclusively, on audiotape and is thus especially concerned with the technological possibilities of electronic voice-enhancement; the other customarily performs live. While Steve Reich and Charles Amirkhanian (at his early best) exemplify the first direction, John Cage epitomizes the second. Although Cage pioneered the use of electronic machinery for making music, all of his text-sound pieces are performed live. I noted before that the four parts of *Empty Words* are progressively more spare, the first part using whole phrases from Thoreau's remarks about music; the second, a mix of words, syllables and letters; the third, only syllables and letters; and the fourth, only letters. The performance of Part IV that I heard in the spring of 1975 consisted simply of the sounds of letters, separated by multi-second silences. It was the most profoundly austere performance I had ever experienced (and walked out on, notwithstanding my commitment to Cage).

It appears that I was scarcely the only spectator to find Part IV too sparse to tolerate. After a disagreeable experience with an antagonistic Boulder audience, Cage introduced some modest singing into his performance (implicitly illustrating my point about sound poets resorting to song when they find their words insufficient). "I decided," Cage told me, "to make the text more musical than I had." However, this new version of Part IV really compromises Cage's original innovation of *verbal* asceticism, instead bringing *Empty Words* closer to the two historic exemplars of musical minimalism, Anton Webern and Morton Feldman. Such a retreat into a traditional medium (song) is not, to my mind, an appropriate solution to the evident difficulty of Part IV. It would be interesting to hear Cage read in sequence the entire *Empty Words*, which reportedly runs nearly twelve hours; and until the promised fourteen-record set appears, it is hard for a critic to tell precisely where the work loses its initial energy. My hunch is that the turning point must come in Part III; and as much as I admire Cage for pursuing his creative premises to extreme conclusions, perhaps his *Empty Words* should end there.

Cage's latest literary piece is his several-part *Writings through Finnegans Wake*. Here he subjects Joyce's final text to a series of aleatory extractions, each of which Cage characteristically carries from the beginning of the *Wake* to its end. Each extractive procedure is then given a different subtitle: "For the Second Time," "For the Third Time," etc. Cage has published some of these *Wake* texts in his recent books, and he has performed them as well. My own opinion is that they are more interesting to read as visible extractions from a rich text, whereas it is harder to *hear* the

extractive process. Instead, Cage (or anyone else) reading his *Writings through Finnegans Wake* aloud sounds scarcely different from his (or anyone else's) reading aloud from the original *Wake* (which is likewise unclear about beginnings and ends). Moreover, neither Cage nor anyone else I have heard declaiming words from the *Wake* can equal the historic tape of James Joyce himself reading from "Anna Livia Plurabelle." That is to say, whereas Cage's technique visibly transforms the original Joycean text into something Cagean, the technique has less effect aurally. The words that are read aloud, one after the other, are still wholly Joycean. Furthermore, only if you know the original text thoroughly, word by word, would you hear Cage's declamation as a radical abridgment.

One quality that these new Cage works have in common with his earlier music is that they provide a fertile subject for interesting esthetic conversation, about not only radical purposes but also unusual methods—conversation by Cage himself as well as by others; and I as much as anyone have been seduced by this sort of appeal. Indeed, more than once I have found that these new text-sound pieces were, much like Cage's musical compositions of the 1950s, more interesting to talk about than to experience directly. If that is true, where is the art? In the work itself, or in its capability to stimulate extrinsic conversation? It takes a very liberal definition of Art, though not an impossible one, to make the latter, especially if it is more prominent than the former, an intrinsic part of esthetic experience.

IV

> Sound poetry is much more than simply returning language to its own matter; it is an agency for desire production, for releasing energy flow, for securing the passage of libido in a multiplicity of flows out of the Logos. To experience such flows (as a break-through in a break-down) is to experience the sonic moment in its full intensity of transience.—Steve McCaffery, "Sound Poetry" (1978)

In the earlier essays mentioned before I lamented that most of the pieces I described were not commonly available. Since it would be hard for a reader of my criticism ever to *hear* many of the works I was then talking about, I acknowledged it would be impossible for him or her to verify, let alone test, many of my opinions. I might as well be writing about miraculous performances in the jungles of New Guinea. This blockage in literary communication has been opened in some respects, but not in others. 1750 Arch Street, the record company that produced Amirkhanian's disappointing anthology, *10+2 American Text-Sound Pieces* (1974), has since issued a record exclusively of Amirkhanian works, *Lexical Music*;

and while this contains one of his very best pieces, "Seatbelt, Seatbelt," it misses at least one other first-rank Amirkhanian work, as noted before, and includes a few others that might have better been forgotten.

Back in 1976 I lamented that the sole persistent audiocassette periodical, *Black Box*, rarely included text-sound, mostly because of its publisher's interests in political poems, poetic attitudinizing, and the presentation of fasionable poetic personalities. Late in 1977 it published the first *Breathing Space*, edited by John Wellman, which has the initial virtue of including the first publicly available recordings of two live performance pieces, Tom Johnson's series of works in pseudo-languages, and Beth Anderson's "If I Were a Poet." It also contains Charlie Morrow's finest piece, "Sunchant," in which Morrow chants the word "sun" to emphasize the letter *N* and then overdubs several performances of this reading to build up the vibration based on *N*, so that the piece progresses from words to highly vibrant linguistic sound. In 1979, *Black Box*'s parent, the Watershed Foundation, issued a second *Breathing Space*, subtitled */79*, this time edited by Paul Vangelisti; and there is nothing here to recommend. Now that more experimental work has been shunted off to this *Breathing Space* series, *Black Box* itself has returned to its customary mix. It should not be forgotten that a weak anthology, like a weak exhibition, can sabotage an emerging art, not only because it is bad per se, but also because it may persuade innocent people to believe that since this "selection" is so bad, then the entire art must be no better. (On second thought, a weak anthology/exhibition benefits two groups—those who think minority art bad and those veteran practitioners whose careers have survived previous inept presentations.)

Charlie Morrow is also the principal figure behind the New Wilderness Foundation which in 1978 published an "Audiographics" series that was a peculiar mix of anthropology and modernism. Based essentially on the poetics implicit in Jerome Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968), these audiocassettes include Richard Schechner and Joan MacIntosh's first-hand audiotaped account of their witnessing primitive rites in the Pacific South Seas, Indian chants by Leonard, Mary & Christine Crow Dog, music by Philip Corner and Annea Lockwood, translations by Armand Schwerner, stories by Spencer Holst (which are so unlike the remainder of the series that their inclusion seems based on nonesthetic sentiment), and three Jackson Mac Low tapes. Aside from whatever virtues these Audiographics tapes might have as anthropology, music or poetry, it should be noted that the number of first-rate text-sound pieces is startlingly few: Morrow's "Sunchant," Rothenberg's "Horse Songs," and Annea Lockwood's "Malaman."

* * *

As I look back over this essay (and by extension at the corpus of American text-sound), I am struck by how little I like or recommend, but that is ultimately the wrong way to consider an emerging art. It is true that I mention weak works in part to give credence to my recommendations, for no one believes a discriminating essay in which everything is equally praised.

Some readers are privately critical of the earlier essay (and some practitioners particularly critical of the parts concerned with them, perhaps because their work had never experienced serious criticism before). Nonetheless, no one has since written either a comprehensive rebuttal or another comparable critical survey (that might, say, have different emphases or different themes). This is unfortunate, for discriminatory surveys are written not to be definitive, even by default, but to open critical discussion by presenting values and issues. It should be assumed that, even now, the considered examination of text-sound has not come to an end.

I write about this art because there are some works that discover virgin literary-artistic territory and in the course of their discoveries convey a cumulative excitement that in turn suggests where adventurous artists and new art might go. Whereas I once believed that the presence of many practitioners was per se healthy for a new art and thus included over a hundred North Americans in *Text-Sound Texts*—numbers hopefully justifying the acceptability of an innovation—I am now more inclined to the qualitative, perhaps elitist position: *Only the good ones count*, for only they establish critical values and reveal the potential of an art.

V

> "True music," says Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister*, "is for the ear alone. I want to see anyone I am talking to. On the other hand, who sings to me must sing unseen; his form must neither attract nor distract me." The sight of the musician, the performing instrument, contributes nothing to the music, and even disturbs its character; in the first place, because if you watch the process of playing at the same time, you get the impression that not the music but the human figure is the chief and central feature. The music has the effect of merely isolating this human figure and its instrument. In the second place, the movements of the musician frequently do not correspond to the line of the melody: the sliding in and out of a trombone-tube has no tonal parallel; cellists and basses lower their hands when the melody is ascending. But, thirdly, and what is more important, the orchestra sitting on the platform is inactive and static, whereas music is characterized by its movement in time.—Rudolf Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound* (1936)

What is most necessary now for the art to survive in America is an anthology of only the very best work, and with that principle in mind I offer the following proposal for a two-record long-playing set [and reprint it a dozen years later, because it still has not happened]:

Side One:
- Beth Anderson, "If I Were a Poet," 1:15
- Glenn Gould, Prologue from *The Idea of North*, 4:00
- Steve Reich, "It's Gonna Rain," 20:00
- Norman Henry Pritchard, II, "Gyre's Galax," 3:00

Side Two:
- Bliem Kern, "Jealousy," 1:16
- Tom Johnson, "gbda," 4:00
- Charles Amirkhanian, "Seatbelt, Seatbelt," 14:58
- Richard Kostelanetz, "Praying to the Lord," 5:45

Side Three:
- Bliem Kern, "Sound Poetry," 9:00
- Jackson Mac Low, "The 1st Milarepa Gatha," 10:00
- Jerome Rothenberg, "10th Horse Song," 4:10

Side Four:
- Charles Amirkhanian, "Roussier (not Rouffier)," 4:00
- Emmett Williams, "Duet," 1:58
- Four Horsemen, "Allegro 108," 3:00
- Toby Lurie, "Innocence," 2:00
- Charlie Morrow, "Sunchant," 3:50
- Mary Ellen Solt, "Zig-Zag," 5:00
- John Cage, excerpts from *Empty Words*

With these pieces we have, in my judgment, not only the best North American text-sound art so far—a corpus of work that is as good as the best European text-sound—but also a coherent sense of where this fertile intermedium might go.

* * *

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Modern Dance Concerts

The younger dancers felt that their predecessors had not held onto the original version that had driven them to create dance companies and to tour as concert artists and not as incidental accompaniment to musical plays. The younger generation wished to establish further the freedom and the independence of modern dance, it was willing to dispense with popular audience favor altogether if need be.—*Don McDonagh's Complete Guide to Modern Dance* (1977).

ALVIN AILEY

(November 2, 1964, Shaftesbury Theatre, London). One of the curious ironies of our time is that a black American artist can have greater opportunities for touring abroad than a white artist of comparable quality and stature. If the black choreographer can carry one white dancer and a Japanese woman too, as Ailey's group did, he is probably yet more attractive to our State Department. Two years ago, Ailey, who is, as far as I remember, rather unknown in New York, toured the Far East for the U.S., and I assume that our State Department is footing some of the bill for this European jaunt. At any rate, despite all the listed debts to Lester Horton (whose work and ideas are unfamiliar to me), the movements here seem directly out of Martha Graham, suffering from the same expressionistic limitations and clichés that plague her work. Arms go out, up and down before they are clenched against the chest in a cringing movement. Since these dancers have black faces, that last move attains a resonance unavailable to whites. Once you have seen Merce Cunningham, you become rather impatient with anything less than the most inventive Graham (or post–Graham). Nonetheless, this is a strong group, James Truitte and Joyce Trisler are proficient dancers, and Brother John Sellers was thoroughly charming as the resident musician.

(January 28, 1969, Billy Rose Theater). A few years ago the Alvin Ailey company seemed a ward of our State Department, touring the world as an African-American dance group that performed lively expressionistic numbers, carried its own blues singer in the pit (Brother John Sellers), and included two accomplished dancers in starring roles (James Truitte and

Joyce Trisler). Four years later, the dancing seems even more prosaic—very close to Broadway schmaltz. If José Limon reacted to more modernistic styles by developing those oddly abbreviated moves of his, Ailey's response is choreography that is very slick in execution, very obvious in its meanings, and very expressionistic, which is to say out of the Broadway shows in (and on) which he worked. The dancing is incorrigibly athletic (though there really aren't any good athletes here). Dudley Williams is meant to be the lead male dancer; and though he is lithe, his conspicuously false eyelashes are disaffecting. Judith Jameson, a tall, leggy woman, could use a less embarrassing haircut (as well as broader shoulders). *Congo Tango Palace* (1960), to music by Miles Davis and Duke Ellington, with choreography by Talley Beatty, is familiar African-American expressionism, while *Icarus* (originally 1973), to music by Shin-ichi Matsushita, with choreography by Lucas Hoving, seems designed to display the curious sexuality of Ernest Pagnano. It is generous of Ailey, I suppose, to stage works by choreographers other than himself.

Ailey's own *Quintet*, listed as a New York premiere, opened with five women in an overdone bit that seemed cribbed from the parody of the Supremes in *Hair* before disintegrating into elegant clichés about theatrical life. Talley Beatty's *The Black Belt* (1968) was another collection of stereotypes of black life (whose verbal forms are repeated in the program note, apparently written by the choreographer). The lack of either surprises or new revelations made me wonder whether he actually lived in a "Black Belt" or learned more about this subject from the pop sociology whose images he echoes. More than once, but particularly in the concluding sequence—a riot in which a blinding spotlight is aimed directly at the audience—I thought that much of this piece was cribbed from a vulgar Eleo Pomare work I saw at Hunter College two years ago [and discussed ahead under his name]. In comparison, the audience for this performance was considerably different—a lot of Beautiful Middle Aged People, perhaps inebriated, who apparently thought that everything Ailey did was great. I did not stay for the third act.

GEORGE BALANCHINE

(May 28, 1969, New York State Theater). This was the first Balanchine concert I'd seen since his rather mistaken staging of Merce Cunningham's *Summerspace*. Although most of the works had the kind of obviousness and familiarity I find so forgettable, one could not help but be awed by the company's proficiency. *Afternoon of a Faun*, to the familiar music of Claude Debussy, is a swoony, rather representational telling of a missed seduction, but all those *pas de deux* all too often reminded me of what I don't like in ballet. *La Source* is cotton candy, a rather trivial piece to a dreadful score; however, John Prinz was considerably more impressive than the

much-touted Violette Verdi. *Four Temperaments*, to a dreadful score by Paul Hindemith, is full of two things that Balanchine's people do extremely well—movei n and out of unison; pit an individual performer against a unison chorus. Marnee Morris struck me as the most attractive lady I've seen onstage since Carolyn Brown—very large and bony, she displayed spectacularly grand moves that I found very compelling. *Symphony in C* was originally done in 1947 to a recently discovered score by Georges Bizet (and thus, curiously, still in copyright). I liked the music in spite of its nineteenth-century style. The last movement is particularly spectacular, as more than sixty dancers, two-thirds of them women, fill the stage. Who else can handle so many people so well?

(June 3, 1969, New York State Theater). My third experience of the Balanchine company was no less spotty than the second. *Episodes* is a homage to Anton von Webern, performed to all of his orchestral scores. Though the choreography is largely discontinuous, particularly among the performers on stage, the work was linear enough for the audience to know when to applaud. Everything seems rather uncomfortable until the last section, which is Webern's arrangement of Bach's *The Musical Offering*. Here Balanchine brings out a large company that performs mostly in unison. At the resounding climax, the audience applauded gratifyingly. However, in the first three parts of *Episodes*, Balanchine successfully avoided the obviousness that characterizes most of his work; it is among the few pieces of his that I would enjoy seeing again. A fellow critic sitting next to me said that in the original production, perhaps a decade ago, the first section was a parody of Paul Taylor and the second section a parody of Martha Graham; however, since the styles of each of those figures has since changed, those parts had to be revised.

Dim Lustre is an extravagantly costumed piece with several scenes in which two performers dance as if they were reflections of each other (but thanks to the unmodern technology of the mirror, didn't Groucho and Harpo do this better in *Duck Soup*?). *Trois Valses Romantiques*, to music by Emmanuel Chabrier, is chock full of very obvious moves—nothing distinguished enough to remember here. For that reason, it represents ballet at its worst. *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*, to music by Richard Rodgers, newly orchestrated by Hershy Kay, looks like an imitation of Jerome Robbins, who, come to think of it, is a generation younger and thus a successor to Balanchine (and thus do Europeans teach Americans who teach Europeans how to do our native dance). This is a patent showpiece for Arthur Mitchell and Linda Merrill, but the deficiencies of her stiffness reminded me of what Edwin Denby had to say, by contrast, in praise of Tanaquil LeClercq in a similar role many years ago. Arthur Mitchell, on the other hand, is just beautiful—truly loose and graceful. However, in his tap dancing sequence,

he shifts rather oddly from the white men's style, with the arms working expressively, to a manner closer to Bojangles Robinson, on his toes with his arms hanging loose. The principal strength of Merrill's performance is fantastically expressive long hair. Thanks to its obvious appeal as an evening closer, *Slaughter* got a rousing response.

(June 11, 1971, New York State Theater). This was an all-Balanchine evening; so I got to see his various styles. The striking work is *Four Temperaments,* which Edwin Denby dates as 1946. It was hated at the time, he said, but always favored by the dancers. The stage is bare, the music is good Paul Hindemith (so rare), and the thematic idea, I gather, is an unconventional use of school steps. That last decision accounts for the unusual rhythms I detected.

The star performer was Gloria Govrin, a huge woman with the first pair of full breasts I'd ever seen on Balanchine's stage. *Donizetti Variations,* undated, struck me as a conventional vehicle for show-boating the star dancers, Kay Mazzo and Edward Villella (who is a true master). Not only are they extremely adept, but they are also capable of winning applause for their obviously extraordinary feats. *Pas de deux* is a similar vehicle, this time for Melissa Hayden and Jacques d'Amboise (who is surprisingly large for a male dancer). *Stars and Stripes,* by contrast, is a vehicle for the entire company, which at its best can steal one's attention from any individual soloists; for never before have I seen so many competent male dancers on a single stage.

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO

(March 29, 1975, Vandam Theater). They are spectacular, as well as various enough to ensure that their joke doesn't wear thin. This is summarized as transvestite ballet, though I guess that adjective seems gross in this context. The gag of men dressing and performing as ballerinas is made more complex by their doing it in different ways. The performer listed as "Tamara Karpova" is a bulky man whose technique is fairly fine and his facial expression grimly unchanging. The joy is that this ungainly man can perform the female role without much affectation or articulation. The performer listed as "D. Zayre" is, by contrast, excessively female, down to coquettish glances at both her male partners and the men in the audience; and she/he is a visibly accomplished female dancer, down to her/his expressive wrists. Olga Tchikaboumskaya, by contrast, is clearly a man trying to dance like a woman. The result is at once very amusing and occasionally beautiful.

MAURICE BEJART

(November 24, 1971, City Center). Working under the title of "Ballet of the 20th Century," this show opened with a program of dances to the music of Igor Stravinsky, who was as a rhythmicist perhaps the premier composer of theatrical dance. Maybe this homage to neoclassicism accounts for much of the pretentiousness that even creeps into Bejart's program notes. (It should be acknowledged, nonetheless, that such pomposity probably sounds better in his native French.) *Renard,* which received its New York premiere, depends upon a Rube Goldberg–like truck from which the sparklingly costumed performers emerge—Jaleh Kerendi, who is Persian-French, is outrageously skinny and overly cosmeticized, and yet compelling. *Firebird* is more successful, largely because of a brilliant performance by Paolo Bortoluzzi, who received innumerable curtain calls. Here I noticed that Bejart choreographs to the score, though often at some delay; so that dancers will repeat a rhythm articulated only a few moments before. *Le Sacre du Printemps* features Suzanne Farrell, that renegade from Balanchine. Although she has the body of a star ballerina, with long legs running up to a small head, the choreography assigned to her is not compelling. Upon leaving the theater, I heard one fey voice tell another that Bejart does not know how to choreograph for women, and that seemed true. The most impressive section in this work exploits a large company of male dancers (twenty-five, I counted), who move in and out of chaos with some skill. Here, as elsewhere, I found an excess of freneticism, perhaps to compensate for the absence of choreographic invention. In short, to a declining tradition, Bejart has added some modernistic touches, such as angularity in the individual moves (though there is still too much symmetry).

TINA CROLL

(August 14, 1968, Dance Theater Workshop). I remember her Bennington classmate telling me that Tina Croll would really be a better scholar than a dancer, but Tina stuck to choreography long enough to become good (as perhaps all of us more persistent younguns are by now). Her moves are a bit clumsy, perhaps because she is too heavy; yet her piece is imaginatively choreographed, full of stark and developed images, abetted by appropriate dissonant sound (with large batches of silence). Indeed, some of her movements, particularly one where she holds up her wrists and shakes her hands free, are indubitably stunning. Tina wears so much eye makeup that I did not recognize her at first.

(November 8, 1968, Dance Theater Workshop at Riverside Church). My, how good Tina's work has become, and how far her own esthetic has come. I remember only seven years ago, just after I first met her, when she told

me how impressed she was by Martha Graham. I remember later seeing a photograph of a piece of hers that seemed, if only from the costuming and the arrangement of the performers, irremediably cute. This evening's piece, *Solo for One Rhinoceros, Three Birds and a Pineapple*, consists of disparate actions that are held together by a fairly articulate rhythm, in a dance I would call abstract. Quite nonlinear, it displayed an imaginative use of material, including a film first of three birds and then a rhinoceros, all abetted by minimal movement mostly foreign to traditional dance. It concludes, for instance, with a tape full of crackling noises, while Tina comes out with a rooster figure mounted on her shoulders, over her head, while she scratches her body. She comes to the front of the stage, takes off the head, reaches into her bag for a pineapple, and then carries it offstage. I think this represents not just a step but a leap ahead in the development of her own work, and I look forward to seeing what she does next.

(April 25, 1969, Judson Dance Theater). I thought Tina's 1968 *Solo* (done again this evening) represents something of a breakthrough in her possible development, but this new work is less distinguished. There is some unison movement, particularly in runs around the space (perhaps too reminiscent of similar moves by Yvonne Rainer); but none of this is too athletic, exhibitionistic, or memorable. The only interesting movements were some body contortions in Tina's own solo. The most stunning image has the choreographer with a long pole balanced on her head, while the dancers move around her; and she exits by going through a screen of paper. Tina is still too stocky for comfort; and not only was her own dancing a bit clumsy, but at one point she fell embarrassingly. There was a film of Lauren Persichetti painting a chair, but I couldn't see how this was either a complement or a counterpoint to the action.

(December 15, 1971, Washington Square Methodist Church). Tina Croll's work is maturing by amazing leaps, and these two pieces push her yet further along. *The Limestone Room* opens with her on a single roller skate, making a circle. On her shoulder is a bag that is filled with styrofoam plates and cups that are rolled onto the floor. She then plays with them in various ways. The new work, *Excursion*, depends upon two nondancers, her husband Albert Bellas and his identical twin, who execute various physical exercises (opening with them tossing a football back and forth, which surely loosened them up both physically and mentally). Of the three parts to this piece, the most stunning concerns twins who are so thorougly identical that it took me a while to identify which is my friend Albert; but once they changed shirts, I got confused. Perhaps the sections without them go on too long. (Michael Kirby, who is quite singular-looking and likewise an identical twin, told me of a performance he did, I think at Expo '67 in

Montreal. Its climax depended upon the appearance of a protagonist resembling the first. I wish I had seen it.)

(June 26, 1971, Video Exchange in Westbeth). Tina's work so far has been marked by inventive use of materials, rather languid time, and uninventive movement. Her new pieces, none of which had I seen before, are no exception to these generalizations. It was also my first visit to this auditorium, actually the Merce Cunningham studio, which is a large performance floor surrounded on three sides by strips of seats only a few rows wide along the edges. A stage so huge lends itself to spreading performers across it. The tape for *Ground-Work* is miscellaneous sounds, its movements limited mostly to runs followed by little leaps; but the climax comes when Tina strides through a paper screen suspended across a wooden frame, smashing the paper. A similarly extreme gesture punctuates *One Space, One Figure and Occasional Sounds* (1968), where Tina strikes a piece of lead with a hammer. The most ambitious piece is *Farm* (1970), which has a further advantage of lots of props and a larger company, as well as a more elaborate soundtrack. Unlike her last concert, but like the one before it, this had no surprises.

(June 10, 1973, American Theater Laboratory). I've liked Tina Croll's work more and more over the years, in part because I find it increasingly intelligent. There are fewer lapses in either time or taste, and I'm impressed by its variousness, particularly in the use of unusual materials. She has yet to evolve any personal ideas about movement, concentrating instead upon rather simplistic choreography. Her rather long new piece, *Collage 1973 (Farm and Other Stories)*, has some marvelous audiotape, including a loop of amplified crunching, that is interspersed among selections of music. There is a humorous duet in which two performers swap clothes (echoing a similar move with twins in an earlier piece), and Tina herself has a marvelous solo that depends upon changes of clothing. Anne Sahl struck me as an especially energized and beautiful dancer who, in street clothes afterwards, looked bespectacled and mousy. What Tina needs now is a breakthrough piece comparable to Meredith Monk's *16 Millimetre Earrings* (1966), and perhaps the new development in her personal life (single again) will provide the impetus.

DARPANA COMPANY

(December 10, 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). The most striking dance concert last year (or was it two years ago?) was a Kathkali performance at Hunter that reportedly went on forever, but left everyone impressed. And so I expected this much-touted group to do at least as well. No luck. The lead dancer was not distinguished, and she also had the

chubbiest physique I'd seen dancing in a long time. The male was a compelling performer, but limited. The dancers purportedly portrayed narratives; but since the house was so dark, I could not read the program for advice on what was happening. The musicians were not especially distinguished, depending as they did more upon unison movements than repetition, and their performance also suffered from inept amplification.

CHARLES DAVIS DANCE GROUP

(November 28, 1968, Fillmore East). Charles Davis is a big handsome man whom I've seen perform in many dance groups, most recently in Ron Pratt's ensemble in a Ronald Tavel play. His size and physical beauty make him appropriate for the highly dramatic "African" dancing that some critics condone as an expression of ethnic pride, though I for one find it corny. His group is a mixed crew, some too fat for comfort, others too clumsy. The night before I saw two black women outside the Fillmore stopping to look at the poster, the taller exclaiming to the shorter, "Is that Chuckie Davis performing here?"

LAURA DEAN AND DANCE COMPANY

(December 14, 1973, Loeb Student Center). Out of her collaboration with Steve Reich has come extraordinary constructivist dance. My favorite piece remains *Circle Dance*, in which ten performers shuffle their feet around four concentric circles in unison speed, to no sounds other than their own footsteps. However, since they move around four different circumferences, the performers go in and out of phase (and in this respect does Dean's choreography most closely resemble Reich's music). It's all clean and compelling; out of a simple idea comes a powerful piece. As in two of the other three pieces on this program, the music comes from sounds made by the performers themselves. The company performed *Jumping Dance* (1973), which I'd seen earlier this year, this time in closer coordination with one another, as if they wanted to generate predetermined geometric patterns and end their bobbing within twenty minutes. The last dance I'd not seen before—*Changing Pattern Steady Pulse* (1973), in which six of twelve performers, aligned facing one another in parallel rows, go into a circular formation in the center and then do whirling dervishes, first clockwise and then counterclockwise, before falling back into their original formation. Writing about them now, I find that Dean's pieces are best described by those simple geometrical drawings that accompany their program.

LAURA DEAN AND DANCE COMPANY/ STEVE REICH AND MUSICIANS

(April 14, 1973, Loeb Student Center). I remember Laura Dean as a terribly affected little young woman I frequently encountered at Meredith

Monk or Kenneth King performances around 1966. It seems that she went away for a while, perhaps to the West Coast, and has since hooked up with the composer Steve Reich (who had also been away to Ghana for a while, where he learned about drumming), returning levels more mature (and maybe taller). Together they have evolved a rather stunning kind of performance that depends upon regular rhythms and a patent resemblance between music and movement (in contrast to almost everyone else in contemporary choreography). The opening piece, *Circle Dance* (1972), performed in silence, has ten dancers moving steadily in four concentric circles. They occasionally reverse themselves, in unison, suggesting that they must be keeping a count. *Walking Dance* (1972) is matched with Reich's *Clapping Music* (also 1972), an extraordinary work really, where he and Russ Hartenberger simply clap their hands before microphones. Her piece consists of a series of geometric moves that Dean does with another female dancer.

Her *Square Dance* (1971) is combined with his *Phase Patterns* (1970), which are performed on four electric organs. The first part of her title refers not to American folkdancing but to the principal formation of the dancers. It closes with constant spinning in place, done quite differently from the Turkish dervishes (who move counter-clockwise, spinning steadily off their left foot, as I remember it). In *Jumping Dance* (1973), twelve performers, lined up in three rows of four, simply jump up and down in place, making their own noises by their exertions, until everyone is exhausted. I neglected to note the duration but think it lasted for a half hour. I was reminded of a La Monte Young piece done in the early sixties, where he beat a pan with a thousand strokes. The whole Dean/Reich show was performed on a floor lacking both props and backdrop. Everything here seems based upon John Cage's gag about doing something again and again until it is no longer boring but interesting. That is not always true, in my experience.

VIOLA FARBER

(September 13, 1968, Judson Dance Theater). Viola Farber is a tall, rangy woman who used to be a principal female dancer in the Merce Cunningham troupe (her departure creating an opportunity for Barbara Lloyd to excel). I was under the impression that she suffered a serious injury that is not evident now. *Legacy* (1968) is a short piece, to music by Chopin, that I found undefined in movement, though basically graceful and unathletic. The dance's most distinctive mark is the baseball glove that Farber wears on her left hand. *Notebook* (1968) is a longer, more puzzling work that she choreographed for four others to perform—June Finch, Margaret Jenkins, Cathleen Powers, and Dan Wagoner (who is unusually stocky for a male dancer, as well as extraordinarily good). What is strange about this

last piece, to my mind, is the absence of any distinct choreographic identity, coupled with an evident consistency in syntax and tone. I'd like to see it again.

ELIOT FELD

(October 24, 1970, Brooklyn Academy of Music). Marcia B. Siegal, whose honesty I respect, writes in the program introduction that Feld's dances are primarily about dancing; to my mind too, that is their real virtue. There is no dependency upon corny stories, or pseudo-sexual gestures. However, too many of the movements are far too familiar; his dancers in the American Ballet Company don't seem used for their full potential (especially Christine Sarry, who can be spectacular). Even worse, Feld frequently resorts to both folk dancing and acrobatics to win his audience's applause. The most satisfactory piece among those I saw is *At Midnight* (1967), which is the oldest and had the most conventional score. There is nothing excessive here.

Intermezzo (1969) opens with a piano onstage and begins nicely as the dancers slowly come into view; but except for some applause-winning leaps by Sarry, the moves are not particularly interesting. *The Consort*, which received its world premiere, begins with formal costumes reminiscent of José Limon's *The Moor's Pavanne*, moves through costume changes and into folk dancing before a Dionysian conclusion that I found rather distasteful. The evening opener was Bruce Marks's *Clockwise* (1970), which was originally done for the Lucia Chase group (to which, I gather, Feld himself belonged until two years ago). It was too full of obvious moves and unison activities (which by now disturb post–Cunningham me more than dancers on pointe). Perhaps the most impressive thing about the piece is the absence of any discernible plot, thus confirming Marcia's original claim. Otherwise, I won't be hurrying to see them again.

MOLISSA FENLEY

(October 26, 1984, Joyce Theater). She has been touted as the most promising, most futuristic new choreographer; and though she has obvious virtues, I was not impressed. Her principal conceit is having her dancers move continuously for extended durations. While they do leap, it is true that these leaps are modest, because anything more virtuosic would break the marathoners' rhythm; it is also true that they do not stop (perhaps out of a similar fear). Their moves could be characterized as continuous flow (supposedly conveying superior energy), within a limited movement repertoire dominated by extended hands and a sort of cradling (for which there is a technical term). The limitations of this movement repertoire account for why the individual dances are so similar to one another. This struck me as Yvonne Rainer's *Mind Is a Muscle* turned into virtuosity, at the

expense, or loss, of interest in esthetic issues or possibilities. I gather that Fenley used to dance by herself; only in the past eighteen months did she take on other dancers who are nearly as good as she, and within the ensemble have equal status in the nonfocused, nonhierarchic space. In the equation of continuous movement with Life, I was reminded of Isadora Duncan.

MARJORIE GAMSO

(June 7, 1973, Dance Gallery). Marjorie Gamso is a large, voluptuous, chain-smoking woman who seems full of eccentric ideas, as well as a willingness to experiment; but the results are too unfinished and underrealized. Here the resonant idea is taking a series of instant photographs of a dance that she and a colleague are doing, and then basing a new dance upon those photographs. I gather that this compositional process informs all the pieces this evening, although the program note is not clear about that question. The opening work, *Beginning Dance*, performed with Nancy Topf, is done inside a circle of candles; it consists of slow movements executed in silence. For the second, *Two Weeks*, Marjorie and two other performers sit on the side of a stage and utter sporadic sentences; this work I remember least. The last, subtitled "Rotogravure/refinishing job," is more elaborate. Here the star is Dana Reitz, an exceptionally strong dancer I had not seen before. I thought this piece too long for itself, even before I heard that for the show I saw it had, at the request of the performers, been souped-up to double speed.

MARGIE GILLIS

(December 1984, Theater 46). She's the most commanding solo performer I've seen in a long time, mostly because of her mastery of the trick of keeping parts of her body moving all the time. Even though some of her dances seem weaker than others, she never loses her ability to focus the audience's attention. At times she reminds me of the reputed power of Isadora Duncan. She uses her undefined face for a limited repertoire of mimed expressions; she moves quickly and agilely with both her hands and feet; she has a spectacular head of long auburn hair that is expressive as well (though more than once I feared, especially in her tumbling, she might trip over her hair). Her looks would never fit into a dance company (not even Merce Cunningham's nowadays)—a broad torso, thick legs, muscular arms. I don't remember seeing any other female dancer doing forward rolls and somersaults; she also takes moves from disco stars and break dancers. With moves that depend upon her strength, stamina, and acrobatic agility, she makes Molissa Fenley appear positively wimpy. My first thought in her opening short pieces was that she dances like a man—the first female dancer to strike me as a protégé not of her mother but her father. Even

when she emerges from a feathered hoop-skirt to appear nude above the waist, she looks like a well-scrubbed boy. After the intermission, she did a long piece in a simple frock, *How the Rosehips Quiver*, that struck me as more substantial than the others. (No wonder it is the title of her performance.) As the representational survey of the moods of a woman, it has a fuller emotional range than her other pieces. Here, unlike elsewhere in her program, the choice of rock music appears to work in her favor (Dalglish and Larsen, from the album *Thunderhead* on Flying Fish records). The next best was *Give Me Your Heart Tonight* in which, even though she is essentially prone on the floor, she moves with astonishing rapidity. I gather that Gillis has emerged from nowhere, which is to say Montreal, where she still lives, after desultory studies around the world. A review of a prior performance identifies her as a child of avid skiers; one brother (Christopher) dances with Paul Taylor, while the other is a hockey player. I'd see her again.

MARTHA GRAHAM

(March 5, 1962, Broadway Theater). In celebration of my winning a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, the family went to see Martha Graham. Not for many years have I been subjected to a whole evening of modern dance. Her choreography seeks to emphasize sharp organic movements, color contrasts, sensuousness, and ambiguous symbols. Her dancers are muscular and lithe, lacking the fastidious primness that kills ballet for me. The critic for the *Herald Tribune* found *A Look at Lightning* (1962) "one of the best things Miss Graham has ever done." Robert Powell as the lead male is especially exciting here. *Seraphic Dialogue* (1955) captures Joan of Arc amidst a stunning set. Miss Graham dances the title role of Alcestes herself. Though her age, well over sixty, handicaps her considerably, everyone sympathizes with her effort.

CHUCK GREEN, et al.

(May 26, 1969, Burt Wheeler Theater). This *Tap Happening*, as it bills itself, is the underground hit in New York now. A few weeks back, Don McDonagh recommended it to me; then Merce Cunningham, in Urbana, Illinois, some ten days ago, told me it was the best show in NYC. (What he probably likes about it is the predominance of scrupulously nonexpressionistic movement.) McDonagh tells me that most of these performers are hotel employees during the day. I subsequently learned that tap dancing was flat-footed until Bill "Bojangles" Robinson put it on toes (an image from films still vivid in my head) and then that white tap dancers, in contrast to black, care about using the top half of their bodies. Watching this anthology, I first noticed how each dancer has his own style. Chuck Green, who produced the show, is graceful and sublime; Bert Gibson is

outwardly fancy; Sandman Sims prefers eccentric effects including an opening piece on a sand-filled board; Rhythm Red sets up an irony between his big body and light-footed grace; Jimmy Slyde has expressive legs; Raymond Kaalund does cute bits, like dance with a jump rope, with a poker face; and Jerry Ames moves his arms a lot. The entr'acte has a stand-up comic, supposedly once a tap dance protégé of Bill Robinson, who tells a number of familiar, if funny, stories. There is a teenage boy whose style and presence seem embarrassing in this setting (as did his face, with excessive makeup). Sandra Gibson's attempt at sexy dancing is made embarrassing by her age, at least fifty, and her heavy body. There were some signifying taunts from the audience and, at one point, effective back talk from the stage. The music is embarrassingly bad, but the dancers, most of them well over forty, display a devotion to a chosen craft, as well as authentic Americana, that is truly moving.

GARY GROSS

(June 1964, Judson Church Theater). While his capacities for interesting movement are limited, due to his inexperience, his physical capabilities are enormous. The only other person I've ever seen move with such expansive grace and leaping agility was Adehmar da Silva, the Olympic hop step and jump champion who appeared in the movie *Black Orpheus*. Gross can leap across an enormous stage in three steps and during each step take his back leg, kick it forward and snap it back again before landing. Merce Cunningham could reportedly do that in his prime. As a physical stunt, it was very impressive.

ERICK HAWKINS

Dance Company (February 11, 1992, Joyce Theater). I'd not seen his work before, perhaps because I classified him as a Martha Graham clone, which was a mistake; for he is really quite different. His concern is lyrical movement that is without edge and almost without character, so that my first thought was that this choreographer must be very young and underdeveloped, even though the program note told me he was over eighty. I saw three pieces: *Lords of Persia, Black Lake, Cantilever Two,* all of which I found languid and boring. Lucia Dlugoszewski's music attempted to generate more excitement, but since The Hawkins Theatre Orchestra, as it is billed, performed in the lower right-hand corner of the theater, you could see that they were having trouble. At one point during the performance some musician, perhaps Dlugoszewski herself, screamed, "Oh shit." In *Black Lake*, I found myself becoming more interested in the movements of the clarinetist Jean Kopperud, dexterously shifting among four mouthpieces. In all three pieces, the lighting designer Robert Engstrom favored a light blue. Herman Cherry's wife Regina told me that I witnessed an

unfortunately weak performance—that, particularly in the last piece, many dancers were new. With a well-advertised classics degree from Harvard, Hawkins favors self-consciously "humanist" program notes that I found embarrassing: "The title *Black Lake* is a metaphor of the night sky. In a smaller way, the dancers are metaphors of the eight different evocations of the sky at night conveyed through movement, music, and costuming." Ugh.

HOOFERS

(April 6, 1979, Entermedia). Ten years ago the dance world fell in love with middle-aged black tap dancers who performed every Monday night at the Hotel Dixie in midtown. The Hoofers, as they were then called, went on a European tour and, if I remember correctly, a season in a Greenwich Village theater. Ten years later, they are charming, if older. The stars now are Isiah "Lon" Chaney, Jr., who has a heavy build and slitty eyes; and Charles "Chuck" Green, whose heel-toe action is spectacularly deft. The other performers are more limited—Buster Brown, who looks seventy, with his soft shoe; and Raymond Kaalund, with his imitation of a sleezy figure. Ralph Brown is a little guy whose limber moves reminded me of Jimmy Slyde. I missed Sandman Sims, whose act was special. This time they performed with The Legends of Jazz, an overage Dixieland group lead by a young white drummer named Barry Martyn. If I remember correctly, the pianist was born in 1911, the bassist in 1915, the trombonist in 1914, the clarinetist in 1914 (and he could do circular breathing, off a sustained note), and the trumpeter Andrew Blakeney in 1898. As they were good, while their drummer was poor, one wondered about exploitation.

AL HUANG DANCE COMPANY

(May 17, 1969, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Urbana, IL). This performance differed from what was originally scheduled, because Huang had sprained his ankle. Whereas he is reputed to be a spectacular performer, most everyone else in his company isn't. The choreography is sweet, somewhat lyrical, with simple flowing movements, though less than expressionistic. When he puts many people on the stage, Huang demonstrates a shrewd sense of space not evident in his smaller ensembles. He favors oriental music, which generally does not synchronize with the performers; and he likes to use props, which, perhaps because his absence reduced the number of performers from three to two, tend to outshine the dancers. The hit of the evening was the finale, *Dragon Play*, because Huang himself danced with crutches, gracefully and speedily projecting himself around the stage. Not only did the audience find this cute, but the constraint of his crutches made for some interesting choreography. Perhaps

he'll keep this unplanned prosthetic element in his piece, because his work is otherwise undistinguished.

JOFFREY BALLET

(October 9, 1968, City Center). This is a decidedly weak local version of European ballet, now somewhat handicapped by the loss, I'm told, of several major dancers; so that the performances are more pathetic than paltry. Perhaps the best piece is the first, *A Light Fantastic*, which is one of assistant director Gerald Arpino's two new ballets for the season—a piece in several movements, the best of which are either marvelously comic (like those featuring the dancer Trinette Singleton) or impressively spectacular (particularly in costuming and stage design). In *Elegy*, on the other hand, I found even more discrepancy between the brilliant lighting/costumes and the weak choreography, as well as a leaden plot. Nothing in this performance could convince me that the tall, heavy-jawed lead dancer, Maximiliano Zomosa, has the makings of a star. *Fanfarita*, the much-postponed second new ballet (which actually premiered the night I saw it), was patently a vehicle for Luis Fuente, a large, commanding dancer who has mastered difficult steps and poses but is finally too much of a prima donna for my taste. *The Clowns* is perhaps the most inventive work, particularly in the use of plastic props (reminiscent of Steve Paxton's architectural creations). Not only are the choral scenes well-structured, but Robert Blankshine, a slight, sexually neuter gamin, is wholly satisfactory as the star. I suppose that Judsonites are right in assessing that anyone who has a company, as well as this kind of official sponsorship, cannot help but do certain kinds of compromised pieces that lie, mostly in limbo, between European ballet and American modern dance. Also, why is it that, after you've appreciated Merce Cunningham, other choreographers seem to have a limited vocabulary of moves?

(October 15, 1968, City Center). The starring piece in the Joffrey repertoire is reportedly *Astarte*, which I looked forward to seeing (having heard its score performed by the Crome Syrcus at the Fillmore East). It is without doubt the most interesting of the Joffrey works I've seen. The conception is spectacular; as a billowy sheet fills most of the stage, a rock group performs out of the orchestra pit; there are some lovely juxtapositions between movements on film and movements onstage. The action starts with a spotlight flashing onto Maximiliano Zomosa, who is seated on the aisle in the audience. Coming on stage, he strips down to an enlarged jockstrap. However, since the piece's movements depend largely upon acrobatics, his heavy-jawed appearance is incongruous; his distorted movements on film are more interesting than those onstage. More than once I got the impression that Joffrey simply did not know what to do with the magnificent

theatrical conception he (or the spirit of the times) cooked up for himself. The result is very much old ballet in an up-to-date environment. The concluding idea of Zomosa walking under the raised sheet, out a large rear door directly into the street, is as good as the opening idea of having him emerge from the audience. However, it would be hard to say for sure there is otherwise much equation or contact with life outside the dance. The best parts of *Astarte* only underline how disappointing most of it is. The other pieces on the evening's program were *Gamelan*, also choreographed by Joffrey himself, this time to music by Lou Harrison; several days later I scarcely remember what this was like. There was also *The Lesson*, choreographed by Flemming Flindt after the well-known play by Eugène Ionesco. The action pretty much hews to the plot of the original play. Most of the movements, such as the mechanical actions of the housekeeper, take off from standard productions of the play. The difference is that movements, rather than words, are the stuff of the teacher's lessons (and thus are exaggerated in ways that would be impossible if complemented by words), but Flindt's choreographic language seems all too familiar, even, at times, out of Jerome Robbins.

(October 29, 1970, City Center). The best piece was *Sea Shadow*, choreographed by Gerald Arpino. It is a delicate, coherent, magical duet, sporadically erotic, in an amorphous setting. The moves are subtle, completely avoiding the occasional bursts of audience-pleasing gimmicks that plague other Joffrey pieces. The lead dancers, Dana Sapiro and Dermont Burke, are both impeccable. It was not for nothing that the audience drew them back for many curtain calls. The role was created, I gather, for Lisa Bradley, who is alarmingly skinny, and subsequently danced by Trinette Singleton, who can be spectacular; Miss Sapiro, though she seemed very young, was compelling. The score, by Michael Colgrass, reminded me of his *As Quiet Is*. Part of the comparative success of *Sea Shadow* stems from its avoiding ensembles, which Arpino tends to handle in heavily obvious, old-fashioned ways. *Trinity* was announced as this year's hip piece, in the tradition of *Astarte*; and, in the principal role, Christian Holder, a tall toothy man who is a nephew of Geoffrey, makes an auspicious debut. It has a marvelously diffuse opening, before falling apart and ending terribly with just a sea of low candles strewn *evenly* across the stage. The ensemble activity is particularly dreadful, more than once reminding me of Jerome Robbins, but now only slightly updated. The score, attributed to two composers, was performed by a rock group supplementing an orchestra. My, was everyone surprised when this group, calling itself Virgin Wool, took their bows, for they were six long-haired preteens. The opening work was Leonide Massine's *Three-Cornered Hat*, recently revived, but for all practical purposes destroyed by the dismissal of Luis Fuente a few weeks ago.

It seems that Fuente insisted upon changing the choreography that probably needed revision and that Joffrey fired him by a telegram that arrived at his house in the morning—how cool, or cold.

(November 4, 1970, City Center). *Trinity* seemed better the second time around, perhaps because the performers responded with extra *energy* to a full house. Much as I hate that last epithet, energy, it seems appropriate to characterize an amorphous quality that here seems present in the rapidly articulating gestures, as well as in the frequent swapping of male/female partners. The rhythm of the piece stems partially from all the irregular entrances and exits. It became clear this time that Joffrey has many fine male dancers (and perhaps fewer first-rank female dancers) and that Christian Holder is a real star, a very tall man with a high butt who draws the eye from the moment he appears on stage. The piece itself is racy, down to scenes of heterosexual copulation; but it might be racier still if more of the flat-chested ladies discarded their bras. By now the falsetto voices of six prepubescent boys no longer seem so strange. Todd Bolender's *Time Cycle*, introduced earlier this year, is a very dreary, crowded piece, riddled with unison activity and a clumsy Schoenbergian score that is brilliantly sung by Susan Belling. However, the piece ultimately makes no sense, at least to me. *Astarte*, with all of its 1967 psychedelic coloring, already seems dated. It's still a good idea, however, to begin a dance piece in the audience and end it in the street. In the lead role, Christian Holder suppresses not only his natural smile to preserve Zomosa's placid grim expression but also his instinctive athleticism to recall Zomosa's heaviness. However, as Trinette Singleton's replacement, Nancy Robinson is sluggish and grounded, reminding me of a supple bag of potatoes; and the new rock group seems messier than Crome Syrcus. Only the light projections have become more sophisticated, although I suspect that Alwin Nikolais could do that sort of a thing far better. The piece seemed drearier than before, and the audience scarcely applauded through all the curtain calls that the performers wanted to take. Joffrey's work is so uneven in quality that, were I giving grades, I would rate *Trinity* as good, *Astarte* as fair, and *Time Cycle* as poor.

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE AND COMPANY

(November 1984, Brooklyn Academy of Music). *Secret Pastures*, as an evening-length production, was clearly designed to announce the arrival of Important Theater Artists, and to that pragmatic end it was, I suppose, a success. The piece has a libretto, printed in the program, of which little sense could be made; and the piece passes through several scenes, each lusciously costumed, some considerably more striking than the others. The Academy paid for a full orchestra with many familiar names (Ned Sublette, Rhys Chatham, Richard Landry, Peter Zummo), conducted by Peter

Gordon, whose music I find terribly repetitious in uninteresting ways. Toward the end, *Secret Pastures* became excessively noisy. A thin black man, Jones is a stunning, commanding performer who has thankfully outgrown his desire to confront the audience with such monologues as "look at the nigger dance," etc. His partner Zane is so small that, his dexterity notwithstanding, his demeanor is essentially comic. To me, the mark of their style is moves that verge on mime, until they are abruptly cut. Perhaps one virtue of the piece is its suggesting so much plot, or almost plot, without resorting to language. Just as my companion thought that many of Jones's positions echoed Picasso figures, so I thought the piece ended with him in a posture resembling the now-familiar Keith Haring figures that filled the sets. I was impressed, but I did not like it.

DEBORAH JOWETT

(May 3, 1969, Dance Theater Workshop). Deborah Jowett is a tall, rather striking-looking woman who writes dance criticism for the *Village Voice.* Since her stuff is intelligent, I went to a group concert primarily to see her piece. (I wonder if anyone else went for the same reason and, beyond that, whether it is possible to advance in choreography through the writing of reviews—as it can be in music and visual art.) Her *Palimpsest* is disjunctive in structure, as the movement scarcely accompanies the score of passages from Pierre Henry's *Le Voyage* (electronic *musique concréte*) and readings from Leonard Wolley's *Ur of the Chaldees.* However, the problems here were primarily syntactical; I couldn't discern any particular idea of how dancers should, or could, move.

PHYLLIS LAMHUT

(April 11, 1970, Henry Street Playhouse). Long the lead dancer in the Murray Louis and Alwin Nikolais companies, Lamhut quit traveling this year in order to devote more attention to her own choreography; and although a younger colleague remarked that since Phyllis is over thirty-five it might be too late for her to begin dance authorship, the results are very impressive. In her own performances she continues to show a powerful comic sense already evident in her contribution to Murray Louis's masterful *Junk Dances*—a comic talent that, though not quite as quick as Chaplin, say, is very deft, because little, if anything, misses. Her work also reveals the "circus classes" that she has reportedly been taking. These pieces are full of stagy gimmicks and many pleasant bits. The scores are sound collages that seem filled with timing cues. Her partner, Raymond Clay, is a tall, well-built black man who seems to function as her straight man. Lamhut's title for the evening was *Extended Voices,* which meant that the individual sections were comic lyrics. The notion of an evening of discrete dances that are yet interrelated is new to me.

PEARL LANG AND DANCE COMPANY

(May 23, 1969, City Center). Pearl Lang descends from Martha Graham, whose principal soloist she was for several years, as her pieces are filled with the kinds of movements that might be meaningful to my mother but have by now become embarrassing or vulgar to me. I'm thinking particularly of that very obvious expressionism where the body stretches with hands open into happiness or contorts into pain. Then behind the lead dancers a faithful chorus works more or less in unison. Actually, Lang's pieces become more interesting with the introduction of props, because those objects force her performers to move in less obvious ways. In *Shirah* (1960), to a score by Alan Hovhaness, the purest movements belong to strings that are stretched across the stage. In *Piece for Brass* (1969), which was set to a score by Alvin Etler, there are ocean-liner air vents into which a few dancers are placed, as well as some silvery slabs. However, in this piece too the choreography inevitably favors gestures of expressionism that I cannot stand. The second movement of the final piece, *Tongues of Fire* (1969), started late, because of "an accident backstage"; but, even with that excuse in mind, I couldn't make much of it.

JOSÉ LIMON

(January 22, 1969, Billy Rose Theater). Psalm (1967) is José Limon's response to his grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. As yet another piece about WWII's six million, it seems opportunistic, melodramatic, and perhaps vulgar. The company is rather inept around its edges, while Limon's choreography, which now runs to cutting off expressive movements, does not encourage elegance. Louis Falco is very much the star of this piece, and he is indeed spectacular—tall, well-built, good-looking, with his head of lushly curly hair (and as a 1963 graduate of Performing Arts High School, no more than 23). The score, attributed to Eugene Lester, reminded me of Lou Harrison. *Comedy* (officially 1968) is another new piece, now in its first NYC performance. This has a clear plot where a tough guy, played by Falco, turns out to be softened by women. There are a lot of embarrassingly fake seductions in the chorus, and the piece often sinks into a vulgar display of Falco's ballsiness (including one scene where, clad only in crotch-hugging drawers, he splits on the floor with his penis aimed directly at the second row). Finding this last piece unpardonable, I noticed that Clive Barnes, the *Times* dance critic a row behind me on the aisle, trotted out before its end. I thought he might have been in a hurry to make deadline, but he wrote that this was the first time in twenty years that he walked out of a dance because of awful choreography. I was so upset myself by *Comedy* that I can hardly remember the final piece, *Missa Brevis* (1958), to music by Zoltan Kodaly and both set and costumes by Ming Cho Lee. I fear that Limon's company is very

deeply swamped by a post–Graham wake, and not even these new pieces are likely to extract him from a dead end.

(January 23, 1969, Billy Rose Theater). The Winged (1966), to a semi-electronic score by "Hank Johnson" (whoever he is), appears to be a vehicle for the developing talents of Jennifer Muller (who seems to be replacing Sarah Stackhouse as this company's female lead) and, peripherally, Louis Falco in two solos. The choreographic syntax is, as in the other recent piece, a sort of abbreviated Martha Graham, the abbreviations becoming a self-conscious effort to appear modernistic. Nonetheless, *The Winged* is an overly long, rather incoherent piece (perhaps meant to be tied together by the constant references to birds), in which several solos are done by performers who appear to be less than competent. The opening work, *There Is a Time* (1956), to a score by Norman dello Joio, struck me as excessively long and fragmentary. The evening began with Limon's one great dance, *The Moor's Pavanne* (1949, which was twenty years ago), with himself in the title role of Othello. Here the movements for himself and his associates are more expansive, as in classic Graham; the emotions more expressive; the costuming more elegant; the music more congenial; and the drama more shameless. There are also several fantastic duets, particularly between Limon and Falco (who is curiously identified in the program not as Iago but as "His Friend," as though someone might have forgotten what his real name is). My only quarrel with Limon here is his affected use of his hands. The very Venetian costuming is very elegant. It seemed like a masterpiece from another period of dance, as indeed it was.

BARBARA LLOYD

(May 9, 1971, 61 Crosby Street). After being a little too heavy for herself, Barbara Lloyd became the co-star dancer in the Cunningham company before quitting to work independently around the City. Unlike Steve Paxton, who quit Cunningham four years before her, she did not turn against concert dancing; so that whenever she performs, she does not deny her cultivated capacity for commanding attention. In the past year she has become especially distinguished as a whirling dervish whom I saw spin continuously for ten minutes (though I heard she can go for a half-hour). Her evening opened with *The Grand Union in Unison,* where Yvonne Rainer, David Gordon, Nancy Green, Trisha Brown, and others pick up on one another's improvisations. Though basically a demonstration piece, it was charming and coherent in its way, as the single ensemble split into two groups and then fell completely apart. The second new piece, *The Nude Trio* (1970), is more definite and, as such, more ambitious, as three nude women (Lloyd, Nancy Green, and Cynthia Hedstrom) lay supine on the floor and slowly move their arms and legs, twisting their

bodies accordingly. The accompanying music is equally slow in its transitions. The vocabulary of movements is interesting in its limitations, as well as innovative with respect to the traditions of Cunningham and Graham; and the nudity helped sustain interest (as not even women have seen nude female bodies contort like this). Another theme is that, after beginning apart, the dancers touch one another whenever possible; toward the end, they are almost wrapped in one another. This piece seems very special, even though it scarcely exploits Lloyd's competence as a stand-up dancer; and I hope to see it again sometime. The principal problem with *The Nude Trio* as theater is its horizontality, which is to say that, unless you have a chemistry lab or a similarly deep well, it is hard to seat a large audience before a dance that takes place on the floor.

MURRAY LOUIS

(February 1, 1969, Henry Street Playhouse). Murray Louis has long been the principal male dancer in Alwin Nikolais's troupe; but from time to time he has presented his own pieces, drawing upon his colleagues in the Nikolais company. However, this series of concerts announces the formation of the Louis Company as "a separate performing unit," while *Proximities* (1969), which premiered, fulfills a commission to Louis from the National Endowment for the Arts. That last work seems to have several ideas, not at all congruent, slapped together in a lumpy mix that has marvelous moments but little overall coherence. The movements are unusually various, and from time to time elements of parody are introduced (though the work as a whole is scarcely parodic). The music comes from Johannes Brahms, whose work seems effective for both resonance and parody nowadays. Sara Shelton has the most beautiful long body I've seen on a stage since Carolyn Brown's, though her facial makeup makes her look more fierce than I'm told she is. The evening opened with *Chimera* (1966), which has a spectacular opening solo by Louis encased in an elastic costume with vertical lines that are constantly rearticulated. This inconsistent mix of fluency and abstraction, of formality and parody, makes the question of Louis's stylistic identity unclear to me; but I may be missing his point. I look forward to seeing more of his work.

(February 7, 1969, Henry Street Playhouse). This New York premiere of *Go 6* I found far too long for its materials (a fault of nearly all Louis pieces) and not quite dissonant enough for its electronic score by Arnold Heinrich. As I write this note, a few days later, I'm unable to remember details. *Proximities* appeared again, still striking me as incoherent in its shifting between elegance and parody. The program also included *Interims* (1963), to an old score by Lukas Foss; but I can't remember much about it now. Compared to *Junk Dances,* which is a masterpiece, everything else

I've seen by Louis has been to various degrees comparatively disappointing.

(February 15, 1969, Henry Street Playhouse). Junk Dances (1964) is unquestionably Louis's best piece, one of the very best dance works of the past decade, perhaps the only piece of his devoid of egregious faults. (First of all, it is the only one without tardy passages.) The piece strikes me as essentially parody, partially of pop art, then of thirties movies, and finally of Christmas, as Louis himself is draped like a Christmas tree that, as the piece ends, lights up, so to speak. There is even some parody of Nikolais's use of props, as here the stuff on hand includes floor brushes, grocery bags, cereal boxes. Even better, there is real magic in this piece—a quality conspicuously lacking in Louis's other work. Phyllis Lamhut, outfitted in a grey wig, is great in the satire of office work. I liked it enormously and hope to see it again and again. (Incidentally, Clive Barnes, generally no dope, accuses Louis of moving mechanically, despite "splendid muscular control," but I don't see how his movements are any more mechanical than those of standard ballet.)

(January 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). This extended season at the Brooklyn Academy is giving Murray Louis a chance to revive many of his old pieces; but whereas his buddy Nik preserves a general consistency, Murray's are uneven. I found *Intersection* (1969), which I had seen before, largely a bore. It opens spectacularly with a slide of a museum gallery projected upon a back screen, and out of it emerges four ladies with fancy headdresses. Murray wears a shoulder-less undershirt and often appears drunk. There's lots of nonorgasmic activity, though little action; and the dance struck me as simply repeating the Harold Farberman music. In *Facets* (1962), which he revived with Gladys Balin, who seems by comparison a little out of shape, there is a simple sound score (by Nikolais), too much unison movement that goes on too long, and, curiously, no lighting. Even though a duet, it was sexless. *Interims* (1963) opens with a dark stage and four performers in checkered costumes, and there are lots of swaying movements. Phyllis Lamhut, unlike Balin, is still a first-rate dancer, especially as she lies with her hip on the floor and moves her head inexplicably from side to side.

(January 26, 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). It's amazing, given their close personal partnership, that Louis has managed to keep his work so different from Nik's. *Hoopla,* which had its world premiere, ranks as his best new piece since *Junk Dances* which was premiered eight years ago. Like that predecessor, *Hoopla* is comic and filled with props. Its scene is a circus, and its atmosphere is that of a carnival. As the company first

comes out in floppy shoes, there is a large hoop with lights suspended from the ceiling, and in one of the best sections three dancers are tied together in the shape of an octopus. Murray has some good solos which he performs very well, and Frank Garcia's costumes are especially magnificent. However, I found the piece becoming clumsy toward the end, as a penultimate section seemed wayward, less in terms of plot than costume and choreography. *Hoopla* was probably the best premiere of the season, surely better than Murray's *Personae* (1971), which I found comparatively weak and can scarcely remember.

(February 17, 1973, Brooklyn Academy of Music). Now that Nikolais is letting Murray Louis assume a greater part of their combined programs, his work is beginning to blossom. I thought *Hoopla* (1972) his best piece since *Junk Dances* (whose performance this year I missed), but it seemed slow and contrived the second time round—it lacked the absolute perfection and exaltation of the older work. (What *Hoopla* did reveal, however, was the continuing influence of Charles Chaplin on Louis's mime.) This time I was more struck by *Personae,* which I must have seen before, though I don't much remember it. Clive Barnes, seated directly in front of me, had precisely the same impression. It was full of witty moves, witty costuming and good dancers (including three tall athletic men). The weakness was a tendency to repeat moves. Barnes told me that the second half was an inversion of the first. (Why, with my concern with form, didn't I notice that?) I'd like to see it again. The raunchy improvisations came from a group called "Free Life Communications."

LAR LUBOVITCH DANCE COMPANY

(November 21, 1971, Stage City, 66 East Fourth St.). I didn't know before that the large, strangely unused building on the block next to mine had such a large interior space (though, since it lacked seats, someone installed a slanted board and then gave out cushions). I hadn't seen Lubovitch before, even though he had an acclaimed run at the nearby Shakespeare theater. Well, while this space is wonderful, the choreography isn't. Essentially, it is ballet without shoes, as it favors symmetry in space, unison activity, identical-looking performers, and lots of other characteristics that, by contrast, post–Cunningham dance has tried to avoid. In dance and music, unlike painting, individuals customarily acknowledge their teachers in their bio notes, and these performers mostly identify themselves as post–Graham, although quite a few have also worked abroad (perhaps another negative sign, given the avant-garde supremacy of American modern dance). The gestures are quite conventional (as well as symmetrical). To compensate for choreographic insipidity, Lubovitch favors a freneticism that might pass for "energy" with less sophisticated

viewers. The third piece, called *Whirligogs* (1971), seemed more suggestive, partly I suppose in response to the score—Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia;* but I didn't stay. Ernest Pagnano has the most hirsute chest I've ever seen a male dancer display.

(October 31, 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). Disappointing last year, they are no better now. The style is oddly eclectic, as *Whirligogs* opens with the chaos of Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* while the dancers move in unison and the choreography favors easy symmetrical arrays. To put it another way, the dance is at odds with the music; yet there is little conflict within the dance itself. The company has grown and is now remarkable for having few bad dancers. The duet of Lubovitch and Jeanne Solan, *The Time Before the Time After (After the Time Before)* (1972), was marred by lighting that emphasized *his* face, while hers remained darkened. *Joy of Man's Desiring* (1972) contains a series of very familiar Bach pieces; yet Lubovitch himself accomplished the most unusual feat of dancing badly to the J. S. Bach *Air on a G-String,* which I had thought almost as dance-proof as, say, Aaron Copland's *Rodeo.* On the other hand, a duet just before the end included Lubovitch's most inspired choreography. I guess this was meant to be the single piece that one remembers long enough to want to come back next time (much like Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*). The program also included Yuriko's *Moss Garden,* danced by Mari Ono to music by Alan Hovhaness, where the single dancer wore only a diaphanous yellow gown reminiscent of Isadora Duncan.

MERLE MARSICANO

(January 31, 1967, Hunter College). Merle Marsicano has long had a reputation among the cogniscenti as one of the most imaginative choreographers. She is, I'm told, about as old as Merce Cunningham; but as she did not go as far as he did, she did not become as well-known among the avant-garde audience. Mostly on the strength of Jill Johnston's recommendation in our book (*The New American Arts,* 1965), I went to see. In *Images in the Open* (1962), five women create a tension with conventional dance syntax by continually moving in and out of unison patterns. The result has a manic quality equal to the dancers' makeup. Some moments are better, as when two women are on the left, two on the right and the last on all fours, pumping her legs back and forth. I should very much like to see more of her work.

MOMIX

Passion (January 2, 1992, Joyce), directed by Moses (formerly Robb) Pendleton. I liked the idea of Pilobolus, co-founded by Pendleton, without having seen them too often, for work that is at once heterosexual and

sexless, reflecting the influence of acrobatics and sports as much as traditional dance. I also liked their uses of nudity and symmetry, each as free of expressionism as the other, and more than once thought it would be interesting to do a major article about them. However, the work was also reminiscent of Alwin Nikolais in suffering from limited choreographic invention beyond the opening scenes (compared, say, to Merce Cunningham or George Balanchine). Especially since the scenes went on too long for their choreographic materials, there was a tendency for the spectator to say "wow" at the beginning of a sequence only to lose interest before it is finished. Pendleton, who seems to have an inflated ego, broke from Pilobolus to found Momix several years ago (his program booklet biography doesn't say when). The program this year that I didn't see, which is reportedly more typical of what they do, had ten short pieces before the intermission and then four after it. Instead, I saw *Passion,* an "evening-length" piece that actually ran over an hour. Purportedly about the life of Christ, it didn't say much on that level; and the use of Peter Gabriel's music didn't add any weight. (Some religious piece by a romantic composer would have worked better—say Rachmaninoff's *Vespers.*) As usual with Pilobolus-Momix, the opening moments of certain sequences were quite spectacular, especially in combination with the projections onto a front scrim. (At first I thought the images were coming from behind the scrim, until I realized that since most of the images were dark, the beams over our heads did not draw attention to themselves.) Though the program identifies seven dancers, I saw only five—three women and two men. Two of the women have long hair and looked alike, with small high breasts and skinny bodies, while the third woman plays contrary characters. I should see more before answering the question of whether Momix represents a departure from Pilobolus, which still performs.

CLYDE MORGAN AND CARLA MAXWELL

(October 9, 1970, Cubiculo Theater). Morgan and Maxwell belong to José Limon's troupe, where they stand between the featured dancers (Muller, Stackhouse, Falco) and the rather rugged chorus. I had seen him before with Phyllis Lamhut, where he was stunning, especially as his long black body contrasted with Lamhut's blonde, short, rounder figure. However, most of these dances were too plotty for my taste. I didn't find anything impressive about her dancing, while his superior talents remained handicapped by rather prosaic choreographic ideas. It seems that the two traveled to Africa for the State Department, where they supposedly assimilated some African influences, which I found reflected in rather familiar dances. For particular choreographies they drew upon Anna Sokolow, José Limon and, curiously, Daniel Nagrin (whose *Peloponnesian Wars* I regret missing); but perhaps the most impressive piece they did was Clyde

Morgan's own, *Triptych,* especially in the duet he did with John Parks, another black dancer whose build resembles his own.

MULTIGRAVITATIONAL GROUP

(December 16, 1973, Space for Innovative Development). I'd heard a lot of good things about them, and the conceptual idea struck me as a good one. Rather than dance on the ground, Stephanie Evanitzky and her associates dance in the air, with the help of a rig drawn from circus acrobats. Dancing on this rig, rather than on the floor, should inhibit convention and cliché. However, these performances blew that good idea, or at least the group hasn't quite graduated into their radical concept. There is a preference for flowing movements, and for repetitions, and for going on too long, all of which contrasts with the rather abstract electronic music. The costuming and the lighting are romantic, although the constraint implicit in the rig scarcely is (except, of course, for the romance of being in the air). I found the pieces moving in and out of the plot, but never quite realizing the representational ideas of their titles (or the accompanying program notes). Although the men and women wear identical costumes, there is some sexual play and, in the first piece, specifically heterosexual play. My assumption is that with a conceptual idea so good this group can only get better and that what I saw was limited in ways that suggest more possibilities to be discovered, or developed.

NETHERLANDS DANCE THEATER

(March 28, 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). Clive Barnes remarked how strange it is that Glenn Tetley should be regarded in Europe as a major U.S. choreographer, and that both of these opening night pieces should be his compositions. The first piece was also billed as the first nude ballet, which I suppose it was, but the nudity was saved for the end and, as exhibitionism, it was modest compared to what Ann Halprin has recently exposed. How incongruous it must be to dance in the nude while wearing false eyelashes, but Anja Licher does it. *Mutations* is a dullish work, suffering from uninteresting choreography. It uses three filmed sequences, which get progressively less interesting—Tetley suffering over time; and the magnificent ribbed costumes of the opening sequences are undermined by the stupidly revealing flesh-colored tights of the second sequence. One way I found the choreography clumsy was that you couldn't identify the group's stars, I think because the moves given them were no more interesting than those for the mass. *Mutations* also had a ramp extended out into the orchestra, down which the performers sometimes came, not always too effectively. The sound came from Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Telemusik* (1966) and *Mixtur* (1964), for orchestra, sine-wave generators and ring modulators, in this case a summary of the components fairly well describing the aural result.

THE GREAT OLATUNJI AND COMPANY

(January 13, 1967, Cooper Union). This performance leads me to observe that what separates the new theater of mixed means from its more primitive precursors is that components in the new theater are *nonsynchronous* and that its rhythms are extremely *irregular.* Otherwise, they are similar in the miscegenation of means and the desire to create in the audience a more involving experience than could be provided by one means alone. I liked what I saw and heard—the lead male dancer was extraordinarily beautiful and agile, while the music exhibited considerable variety within unity. However, two things disturbed me. Olatunji himself seemed a promoter straight out of capitalism's most decadent phase, as he not only explained everything in the simplest terms but he frequently plugged his brand-new Columbia record and his School of African Culture (from whose faculty and perhaps students he seemed to draw his huge entourage). He struck me as a classic New York sharpie who thought he knew what he had to do to get ahead; and although he looked very black, I could not fully accept him as African. In one sequence, he invited children to come up onstage to dance, and sure enough twenty did, how spontaneously I was not sure, since his pupils could have been admitted free to this Cooper Union concert.

ELEO POMARE

(January 31, 1967, Hunter College). In an anthology of several choreographers' "Dance Protest for Vietnam," Pomare's *Blues for the Jungle* was the most awful and vulgar dance I've seen since I don't know when. I heard Pomare on WBAI-FM describe himself as the James Baldwin of the dance; but as he spouted angry black pieties with a fruity Hispanic accent (as he was born and raised not here but in Latin America), the effect was more comic than terrifying. The dance deals in black stereotypes, ranging from chain gangs toiling in the fields to rape to junkies to boxers and boppers, all of which is a lot more experience than a single dance can handle unless each element carries a clear sign, so to speak. The choreographic syntax seems straight out of Jerome Robbins and Donald McKayle, except that Pomare adds considerably more frenzy and violence. When it came time for the troupe to take its bows, they sneered at the audience, much to the delight of those who applauded vociferously. I ran from the theater in terror.

YVONNE RAINER

(June 1964, Judson Church Theater). She is, according to Jill Johnston, the most substantial of the Judson choreographers, her *Terrain* reputedly the single most exciting and original long work of the revolution that they have accomplished. *Part of Sextette,* danced with Robert Morris (an

emerging sculptor of some note), is probably the most original dance I've ever seen. While a recording of her own voice discusses, in rather Steinian prose, the variety of ways in which, where, how, and with whom she sleeps, Rainer executes a variety of real, rather than stylized, motions of her daily activity. When the voice stops, she and Morris do several stylizations of lovers' motions, each doing the same movements in alternation. (One question is whether the point of this is to obliterate sexual differences or to illustrate that men and women in love observe similar actions.)

(April 14, 1968, Anderson Theater). The Mind Is a Muscle now strikes me as the most important post–Cunningham dance I've seen. Rainer seems to be the only Judson dancer now doing extraordinary work, Jill Johnston's recent touting of Deborah Hay notwithstanding. It is also the first full-evening work of avant-garde dance I've seen. The theme is the possibilities of nondance movement, which is to say movement unlike anything we've seen before in theatrical dance. At one point, a juggler (Harry De Dio), appears on the left side of the stage while the company's members mill about on the right. There is a lot of nonmuscular gymnastic movement, much of it brilliantly executed by Steve Paxton. In part seven, they dance behind a movie screen filled only with someone's legs occasionally dribbling a soccer ball; and when that screen goes black, they continue dancing, while on the side screen we see a hand doing simple exercises. Each section of the piece creates and sustains its own pace, even though most sections lack any sound accompaniment. Although this piece appropriates certain techniques from mixed-means theater, such as the free use of spoken words as a background tape (in this case, a clichéd physical movement that puts it very much in the tradition of dance, which is to say that it is an anti-dance conceived out of an extensive involvement with, and in reference to, the history of modern dance). Note that this is pure dance, devoid of expressionistic undertones, and that each section has a flat form, for the real development of the piece is the embellishment of the theme, which is a possible vocabulary of nondance movements.

(February 6, 1969, Billy Rose Theater). Rainer's *The Mind Is a Muscle*, which I watched develop over the past two years, is probably the masterpiece of the Judson Church constellation—very much concerned with nondance movement that is still interesting as movement and yet fully theatrical in its exploitation of time and space. Of that generation younger than Cunningham and Halprin (who were both her teachers), Rainer seems very much the master. This new piece, *Rose Fractions* (1968), has over two dozen movements, which are listed in the program; but not only do I fail to remember them all, I didn't see any structure amid their variety. The opening sequence consists of simple physical exercises—jogging

around the stage literally becomes the defining movement. In another, Rainer herself delivers Lenny Bruce's notorious monologue on snot as the filthiest English word to a background of descending yellow lights. On the left screen is the film *Beautiful Lecture* in which Steve Paxton and Becky Arnold, both nude, toss around a big beach ball—it ends with him jumping up and down on a couch, his penis flopping, while Arnold's stony face slowly breaks into a broad smile. (For the February 8 performance, Rainer introduced, I heard, a "stag film" of a couple copulating.) Another section has an essentially static movie of squawking chickens projected while the company sprinkles bags of chicken feed all over the stage. Later there was soft pink light that nearly put me to sleep. I couldn't discern much in all this provocative jumble but would nonetheless probably come to see it again.

North East Passing (1969) is the second of Rainer's two new pieces for the evening. It opens with a dozen performers running around the stage. There is a sequence of wintertime rural slides (that Yvonne told someone are essentially about her own rediscovery of, ugh, the countryside); in another, a pile of books is knocked over, against a background of a sound tape of people walking through the woods. It would seem to me that her recent pieces, while extending the rejectionist idea implicit in *The Mind Is a Muscle*, attempt to explore forms of nonstructure in an entire work. The piece speeds up at its end, when someone puts on a record of the Chambers Brothers performing "In the Midnight Hour." That prompts the performers to go into that peculiarly Rainerian movement that has no apparent end, as arms and legs all assume a continuous swinging motion (that Deborah Jowett calls "that longest dance phrase in living memory"). This won much applause from whatever audience remained. Knowing that she was on to a good thing, Rainer did it again. As much as I liked this last move, I couldn't make much of what went before. I fear that she is exploiting the license of her reputation to offer unfinished pieces.

YVONNE RAINER, STEVE PAXTON, DAVID GORDON

(January 12, 1966, Judson Dance Theater). This concert of nine works was very uneven. Steven Paxton is a magnificent dancer; despite a rather stocky build, he moves his body with what is called "effortless ease." No wonder he was for years the co-starring male in the Cunningham company (but he and Robert Rauschenberg recently split from the group). His *Proxy* (1962) has imaginative moments, including three people standing in a small square, oblivious to one another—one just staring straight ahead, another occasionally drinking from a glass of liquid, the third noisily munching an apple. My companion said it looked like a pot party; I found the

tension of cross rhythms exciting. Paxton's second, officially unfinished work has original elements, including plastic bags, but it is clumsy and boring in its execution. David Gordon's work eluded me; I thought it phony without being able to explain why.

The best single dance of the evening was Rainer's *The Mind Is a Muscle*, part I of a work-in-progress, in which three dancers move their heads freely, in continuous, seemingly endless motions, to the accompaniment of falling wood planks.

LARRY RICHARDSON

(January 20, 1973, Eden Theater). Richardson showed courage in renting this large, somewhat unsuitable theater for nine days, including two weekends; but he seems to be made that way. First of all, his is the only biography included in the program; his colleagues apparently do not deserve comparable acknowledgment. Secondly, he seems not to teach classes, which means that he does not have a loyal audience of current students, past students, and their friends. Thirdly, he seems not to receive grants from the National Endowment or the New York State Council (though the Jerome Robbins Foundation remembers him). Ambitious beyond his needs, he also performed a large number of individual pieces. On the Saturday night I went, the downstairs seats were less than half full, while the balcony was closed. The best single piece was *Epoch*, most of which had a Stockhausen score, much of which was nonetheless done in silence (which can be risky before a noisy audience). The second section in particular has some stunning compositions. The best dancer is Richardson himself, who is athletic and forceful in uninteresting ways. His pasty smile is also disturbing, meant as it is to convey nothing more than a joy in movement that, since his dance is strenuous, might be illusory.

ELIZABETH STREB

(September 25, 1993, Brooklyn, NY: Vaults of the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage). It's a shame that I've not seen her group perform before, because I'd heard about her work for at least a decade and even remembered a recommendation, in this case from Merce Cunningham, that is far more persuasive than any puffy review. Her dance has traditionally been classified as *physical,* and indeed it is. The first piece, which I scarcely saw because of where I was standing, had the junior performers fall successively into a trampoline net. *Freeflight* (1987), as it is called, reminded me of a concluding scene in the Living Theatre's *Paradise Now* (1968), not only in the act itself (falling from erect to prone) but in the symbolism of liberation. For *Surface* (1993), which was prepared during a residency in this spectacular (and spectacularly vertical) Brooklyn space, six performers bounce

off two plywood panels, each four feet by eight and ¾" thick (and reportedly weighing one hundred pounds apiece). The patterns in attacking the boards usually involve symmetrical actions, I guess in part to keep them balanced; it all happens so quickly (and perfectly) that I'd love to see this piece again. Next came *Kids Action—Wall* (1993), in which six black children related to a single wall board in various physical ways; it was charming, if juvenile. *Little East* (1985) involves a single box high above the floor in which performers relate to the walls, which were amplified to resound to contact. For *Impact* (1991), Streb had two rectangles of bars, one above the other. In the bottom rectangle was a piece of clear (and reputedly strong) Plexiglas off which the performers could bounce in various ways; a few moves involved climbing upwards to the second rectangle. Moving now to a third space in the anchorage, the program had Mark Robison, the largest male performer, swing an oversized baton in undistinguished ways. The short evening concluded with the most spectacular piece of all, *Lookup* (1993), for which four performers were suspended from a wall thirty feet high, with harnesses attached to ropes, so that four operators atop the wall could lower them slowly to the floor. As they were coming down, they interacted in various ways that included well-timed collisions. It was a mistake to attend this show on its last night, because there were far too many people for the space. I'd see it again anytime. The strongest performers were C (Christopher?) Batenhorst and Paula Gifford, whose bio note claims fifteen years of gymnastics (remarkable for someone so broad and tall) in addition to a B.S. in biology from Yale. I haven't enjoyed a "dance" concert so much in years; it was almost as good as a great sports event.

PAUL TAYLOR

(May 9, 1969, Center Center). Paul Taylor is considerably better than I had remembered. His company has several outstanding dancers who are allowed to distinguish themselves—Bette de Jong (very tall, blonde, and strong) and Carolyn Adams (very small, light brown, and slight). Like so many other dancers who once worked with Merce Cunningham, Taylor necessarily confronts the problem of how a contemporary choreography can move without echoing ballet or Cunningham or Martha Graham. In *Aureole* (1962), the primary movement is an exaggerated swishing, as legs go way out and the arms go way up, both forward and back; yet the overall structure is fairly conventional. (However, Taylor's own solos reveal him to be a dancer both clumsy and weak—scarcely the swim team letterman portrayed in his publicity literature.) *Scudorama* (1963) seems styled with concessions to the avant-garde in mind, as the piece opens and closes with the performer wrapped in blankets (and by that rather conventional move does Taylor get out of things). Perhaps because the music (attributed to

Clarence Jackson, who is?) reminded me of Jerome Robbins, the activities seem almost representational, though devoid of any overarching scheme. In the middle is a sleepy solo for Eileen Cropley, who did not seem entirely up to it. The masterpiece of the evening was *Public Domain* (1967), which is a satirical collage; and just as the tape by John Herbert McDowell collects a variety of sounds, both highbrow and popular, so the choreography draws upon various styles, enabling the company at one point to do soft-shoe to the accompaniment of Gregorian chant. Like Murray Louis's *Junk Dances*, this last work appears to be a choreographer's unique masterpiece (even as it reveals his inability, or unwillingness, to move beyond extant styles); and I would, indeed, enjoy seeing it again. For anyone who has trouble moving beyond a distinct avant-garde, parody is always an easy out.

(November 29, 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). The best pieces were the more recent, such as *Big Bertha* (1970), which has a plot and funky music from the "St. Louis Melody Museum." It opens with an all–American family, played by Taylor and Eileen Cropley (who seems older than the other female dancers), along with little Carolyn Adams as their daughter; but all goes haywire, as their clothes become tattered and the father appears to rape the daughter. Taylor himself looks better than before; and now that Dan Wagoner is gone, he remains the only truly competent male dancer in the company. The piece has a scary quality that seemed closer to Cunningham (as in *Winterbranch*) than earlier Taylor. I also liked *Guests of May* (1972), because it seemed more abstract and Taylor choreographed a good solo for himself. However, *Private Domain* is weaker than its companion *Public Domain* (1969) while *Insects and Heroes* (1961), a revival, has a cuteness that seemed to epitomize Taylor's compromise. (To make his pitch yet more pretentious, the program includes an insistence that the work "is presented as an elaboration on a theme, rather than a narrative.")

GLEN TETLEY DANCE COMPANY

(May 13, 1969, City Center). This was really bad, so square it was embarrassing; yet the audience applauded vociferously. Tetley's professional ancestry includes both ballet and Martha Graham, and a mix of only those two sources completely accounts for his style. His movements are mostly obvious, though he is skillful enough to avoid repetition; the way his performers are distributed around the stage seems more balletic than not. The physical expressions of his dancers tend to be overly exaggerated, almost in corny ways (that I associate with Graham and post–Graham). Tetley himself is a tall, thin, balding dancer who is less than athletic. His female lead is Carmen de Lavallade who, now in her late thirties, is less

spectacular than the creature who once starred with Donald McKayle. Incongruously enough, most of the accompanying music is electronic—Stockhausen's fabulous *Gesang der Junglinge* and his *Kontake,* as well as Morton Subotnick's *Silver Apples of the Moon,* which sounds like several generators that were left on too long. The evening opened with a new piece, *Embrace Tiger and Return to Mountain* (1968), and closed with *Ziggurat* (which seems 1969), but in between was the most trivial and obvious piece of all, *Perrot Lunaire* (1962).

TWYLA THARP

(February 3, 1969, Billy Rose Theater). She is probably the most puzzling dancer among my exact contemporaries, as I'm not entirely sure whether or not her work is interesting (and opinions I've solicited seem either partisan or opposed). Educated at Barnard in art history, married to the minimalist painter Robert Huot and originally associated with Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp developed independently of the Judson clique, which probably worked to her advantage, and has not aligned herself with any other reputation-making machine. The testy personality I encountered the one time we met may be the reason for her independence. She seems involved with the imposition of abstract ideas. In *Disperse* (1967) for twenty-one minutes and a space 40 feet by 60 feet, the dimensions of both time and space progressively decrease by the ratio of 2:3 throughout the dance, until the lights flash very quickly and the dancers congeal in the back right. Tharp has developed a very particular way of moving that consists of imposed imbalances—doing things wrong without ever losing control, such as spinning while the arms dangle. Deborah Jowett writes as follows: "This style . . . involves acquiring a strong classical technique and then learning to fling it around without ever losing control. The dancing is difficult, quirky, beautiful, stylish." The other kind of movement Tharp favors is no movement (and thus a minimalist analogy for choreography), as the dancers stand on the side of a kind of relaxed, if not slumped, posture. Nonetheless, I found *Disperse* rather monotonous, though I should have become more interested in the rhythm of changing time and space. The monotony was broken at one point by bringing out a chair that was then shattered to bits.

Excess, Idle, Surplus—A Reconstruction (1968) is more suggestive. At the beginning of the preceding intermission we hear a two-track tape that seems to have a voice of a bossy lady (probably Tharp herself) on one track and the sound of dancers on the other. This tape continues through the entire intermission and even into the beginning of the piece. Whereas I thought it might be a guide to the action, colleagues beside me say that they could not relate it to the work before us. Even more puzzling is Tharp's initiating onstage the practice of counting out loud; yet the dancers

did not appreciably change their rhythm. Deborah Jowett reports, "Tharp herself claps a beat or occasionally stops perplexed in the middle of a movement. The difficulty of remembering and reconstructing the original dance becomes an integral part of the new version," even though it was first performed less than a year before. This version apparently incorporates the process of reconstruction into the piece itself—that accounts for the title; but I find this less interesting than Tharp's inventive way of moving.

After "Suite" (1969) was a premiere, absolutely flat in form; it even ended in the middle of a movement, reminding a colleague of Anton von Webern's music, where movements are as pointed and concise as patches of no movement. Later I learned it was meant to be a homage to Merce Cunningham, the "Suite" of the title being his *Suite for Five in Space and Time* of 1955. However, I'm more fascinated, as I said, with the peculiar qualities of those movements. Tharp is the most accomplished performer in her group; she may well realize that kind of star quality informing, say, Carolyn Brown's performances.

(February 28, 1969, Brooklyn Academy of Music). A concert collectively titled "Works for an Open Space" included *Generation* (1968), an older work that Don McDonagh described in *The New Republic* a year ago. I found it too slow for comfort, although the dancers' movements are as interesting as ever. The evening's big piece was *Group Activities* (1968), forty minutes in length, in which an enlarged company of ten women do an extraordinary variety of movements to the accompaniment of only a metronome. My colleague George Dorris tells me that the count system ran up to twenty; so that in case a dancer forgot, she could ask aloud where everyone else was. The movements themselves seem to be a repertoire of imposed awkwardnesses that are more skillfully executed by Theresa Dickinson and Tharp than by the rest. During several movements the dancers are continually on the verge of colliding with one another. I could barely deduce what was happening, though I'm told that an article in a forthcoming *Ballet Review* will explain all. Though I'm impressed by her work, I really don't know what to say; my comments so far are inadequate.

(September 16, 1969, The Great Lawn of Central Park). Since Tharp's *Medley* reportedly succeeded spectacularly well at Connecticut College this past summer, I went to Central Park to see its NYC premiere and was disappointed. The best thing about the piece is the exploitation of open space; so that at one point the dancers go so far in one direction that the audience must get up and follow them (and others had to get up to see over those who had stood up before), all of which is good. As the performance

moved around the park, there were interesting foreground/background juxtapositions between it and kids playing baseball, football, and even rugby. (From the point of view of unintentional background choreography, the choice of an afternoon in *mid*-September was fortunate.) As usual with Tharp's choreography, the movements given the dancers are scrupulously nonexpressionistic. I sensed an arbitrariness in the avoidance of structure. The best passages had the performers falling in and out of perceptible patterns —a theme that was more pervasively explored in *Group Activities* last spring in Brooklyn. Before *Medley* ended, my attention was distracted by the first rugby match I'd ever seen in the flesh, Tharp losing out to the folk choreography beside her.

(January 22, 1970, Metropolitan Museum of Art). I was impressed by her *Group Activities* at the Brooklyn Academy last February, even though I'd been mostly puzzled by pieces seen earlier at the Billy Rose Theater; but the piece done in Central Park last summer was so boring that my attention succumbed to a nearby rugby match. *Dancing in the Streets of Paris and London, Continued in Stockholm and Sometimes Madrid* was originally done at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum last fall; and I suppose it extends her concern with nondance (aka "environmental") spaces that I find less interesting than her instructions for movement. Here the dancers perform various sequences in and among the crowd, which dutifully moves out of the way every time a figure comes near them. Indeed, some of the more striking moments come from the audience collectively recomposing itself. Since the dancers are dressed in everyday bohemian clothes, it is more difficult here (than in Hartford) to tell the dancers from the spectators. Afterwards Tharp gave a lecture-demonstration that revealed her to be an outrageously bossy and inconsiderate woman—a real case, as we say. She admitted that the idea for this piece came from Gene Kelly movies—"dancing in the street when you might otherwise be walking." However, my own impression was that these new ideas, which allowed for audience responses and other unexpected activities, were quite contrary to the rigor of *Group Activities*.

(February 1992, City Center). I had not seen her for many years. Remembering the very severe piece presented at BAM nearly a quarter-century ago, my first response was that she had sold out. (To think I'd recently been saying how hard it has been for vanguard artists to retailor their work for commercial success, but add her to the self-selected group that includes Walter Abish and Philip Glass.) For the first night, she presented three pieces. *Sextet* (1992) struck me as a pastiche of classical dance moves, mostly derivative, to which was added a Latin quality. *Men's Pieces* (1991), which she narrates from a hidden microphone (made visible only

by the transmitter on her back), has a similar pastiche/derivative structure, except now the movements are drawn from rock 'n' roll. The third piece I thought more distinguished, if only because its choreography wasn't so patently derivative, "The Golden Section" from *The Catherine Wheel* (1981). I sense that (not unlike myself, in my creative work) Tharp tends to be severe or cute, generally establishing one tone or the other for an entire piece, occasionally veering between them; but instead of identifying with a sensibility similar to my own, I found myself disliking its limitations. For the second night, Tharp presented *Deuce Coupe IV* (1973), for which Sara Rudner, her loyal performer from two decades ago, returned. This draws, if not depends, upon music by the Beach Boys, with pop dance moves juxtaposed against those of an elegant solo ballerina. *Nine Sinatra Songs* (n.d.) is a pastiche of coupling dances, none of them distinguished. In between was *Octet* (1991), which seems the most interesting, because it was the most abstract. I'll not be seeing her again for at least another two decades.

THE WHIRLING DERVISHES OF TURKEY

(November 17, 1972, Brooklyn Academy of Music). The program is a religious ceremony that opens with instrumental improvisations that are not distinguished. I remember three flutes, a zither, drums, and a fiddle played in the performer's lap. Each of the musicians improvises in a meditative fashion that would have been more appropriate as an accompaniment for reading a book. After the intermission came a larger group of musicians, lead by a blind singer whose voice is indeed stunning. Behind them came eight male dancers, apparently ranging in age from late teens to nearly fifty, who were initially spun by a dance master. They let their crossed arms fly outward as they turned about, for several minutes at a stretch, for four full stretches. Most were tall and lanky, but a gray-haired man was heavier. As some spin slightly faster than the others, they fall in and out of sync. Each dancer has his own physical style, as the gray-haired man has absolutely straight arms and an erect carriage, while the others dip their backs, their shoulders, or their arms. Forming a circular pattern, they move counter-clockwise without hitting, which strikes me as amazing, as their eyes seem genuinely shut (because, unlike ballet dancers, they do not repeatedly turn their heads to focus their eyes upon a single spot, though they may emit hissing noises that would be audible to one another but inaudible behind the music). Although the competence of these dancers is limited to a single move (making them the original one-step hoofers, so to speak), the collective result is surely stunning. Isn't it odd that *spinning* should be regarded as an homage to God? I'd like to see them again.

AL WUNDER

(December 21, 1968, Henry Street Settlement). Though not a particularly impressive dancer (especially in comparison to Jeanette Stoner, whose work was also featured on the evening), Wunder is the more imaginative choreographer. My favorite piece was *Say Ah* in which Wunder as the performer obeys a tape of movement-directions spoken in his own voice. Toward the end, the voice on the tape is speeded up into aural chaos, driving him into frantic activity. The second interesting work was *Cranium Circus,* in which dancers perform largely behind a network of screens.

Artistry in Football (1969)

Not unlike a mass of American males, I cannot go through an autumn Sunday afternoon without turning on the professional football games; for even though I usually have more than enough literary work to do, America's favorite pastime is also my own obsessively favorite way of passing Sunday's time. The haunting anomaly is that though my particular trade as a cultural critic-historian is indubitably esoteric, there I sit once a week sharing the same spectacular experience in unison with millions of other American men, if not admiring the same heroes for many (though not all) of the same reasons.

The sources behind the compelling power of this sport (and not another) have always been somewhat mysterious to me, and by exploring that mystery perhaps we can discover some reasons for its attraction. One sentimental explanation has it that football was the game I most enjoyed as a kid, more years ago than I care to count; and as a one-time wingback in the archaic single-wing formation (that phrase itself dates me), I did indeed always get an extra pleasure from watching Princeton, the last of the single-wing teams the last time I looked. I also remember that the earliest profound fight I had with my parents was over their refusal to grant me permission to play ninth-grade ball; and on that issue sprang our particular generation gap—to this day, they have not been entirely forgiven. However, today's football, with all its new formations and complicated signalling, scarcely resembles my own which succumbed to the game's awesome internal progress. Since I have phased out most of my childhood enthusiasms, some of which are embarrassing in retrospect, there must be more persuasive reasons for football's persistence, not only with myself but with others. Let me start with three personal observations which other habitual fans might find strange: I usually do not care who wins; the combat and violence offer me no pleasure (and I find none of the hidden sexuality that both Paul Goodman and Norman Mailer emphasize); yet as a critic I'm inclined to regard one game as better, or intrinsically more satisfying, than another. These observations in turn suggest that what makes the televised football game so attractive are perhaps those performance qualities I must call *esthetic*, in part because they cannot be defined as anything else; and therein lies much of its compelling appeal, not only to the masses, to whom

it is a pop art more popular than rock, but also to people, like myself, attuned to appreciate contemporary art.

Perhaps too these esthetic qualities also explain why no mass-media presentation commands so much unabashed enthusiasm from artists and intellectuals who would not touch comic books, flip through *Reader's Digest,* think of voting for Richard Nixon, identify with "Middle America," or watch a televised soap opera. Among the Sunday afternoon aficionados have been such culturally distinguished acquaintances as the late historian Richard Hofstadter, the novelist Ralph Ellison, and the composer Milton Babbitt, each of whom is as obsessive about seeing Sunday's games as I am; and the only lady I know to share with equal compulsiveness our masculine enthusiasm is by profession a film critic. "Nothing in this country," Hofstadter once told me, "is done as well as professional football. Compare it to our diplomacy." The late Randall Jarrell once wrote a poem for the great quarterback Johnny Unitas the day after they first met; and Jarrell's wife has described how his Sabbath habit mixed partisan enthusiasm with esthetic responses: "On Sunday we had pastries with Löwenbräu and watched the National Football League on television. Besides quarterbacking plays, Randall was continually appreciating scenes of the crowd, half in light and half in shadow, or of half stadium and half turf with the athletes in combat on the bright limed lines of the grid." William Phillips, the senior editor of *Partisan Review,* once wrote, "Not college football, but the real thing, pro ball, is the opium of the intellectuals" and a very Brechtian Yugoslav theater critic once told me, after touring America, that clearly the most successful theatrical communication he saw here occurred at "a Homecoming game in Indiana."

The first time I met the second-string (and American-born) dance critic for *The New York Times* at a very esoteric concert, we decided to sit together; and during one particularly unengaging piece witnessed by no more than one hundred people, he leaned toward my ear and whispered, "Did you see the Jets game this afternoon?" I nodded that I had. "Wasn't the turning point in the second quarter when. . . ." Another dance anecdote tells of an English art critic who saw Merce Cunningham's *Field Dances* (1963), where performers frequently come into the middle, contact in various ways, and then return to the sides; and the critic, noticing a suspicious formal resemblance, correctly guessed that the choreographer likes to watch football on television. This perception upset Cunningham, who would prefer to think of his choreographic forms as totally original abstractions that take nothing from either earlier dance or definable art. Not only the eminence but also the impressionableness of these football enthusiasts support my contention that the pastime must have certain esthetic qualities.

To my senses, football is a more artistic experience on television than

live at the stadium, where one is surrounded by rooting fans who genuinely care which side wins and, therefore, establish the game as primarily a combative event. Also, probably because the games are so few and the preparations for each are so extensive, while mistakes can be so costly, football players perform more perfectly than other athletes (track men excepted). I find that professional games are more attractive than college events, largely because the pro teams are less sloppy and their individual performers are superior artists. My first critical perception then is that the rhythm of activity in televised football, where each play pursues a rapid cycle of premeditated action-to-result, has a form more appropriate to a narrative representational medium (and perhaps the esthetic sensibility too) than basketball and soccer, with their jagged rhythm of emphases, or baseball and cricket, which become boring through both an excess of moments in which literally nothing happens and a limited repertoire of significant events. Other sports are not, by any count, as various in forms of visual order as football. In this sense too football also appeals to what the sociologists David Reisman and Reuel Denney call "a pronounced American taste for action in sport, visible action."

As most every American knows, the pattern takes this form: The players huddle on each side for a brief period of time (while the more sophisticated spectators and the media's announcers calculate each team's strategies), and then emerge into opposing formations, their play beginning in unison with eleven men moving as one. However, this initially synchronized activity eventually takes, thanks to individualized instructions, diffused and idiosyncratic paths which cannot be repeated. Their prescribed instructions are thus by design worked out in innumerable approximate ways, until either the plan is superceded by some breakaway activity and/or the play ends with a tackle or pass incompletion (and the whistle symbolically blows), forcing players to return to the huddle where the cycle begins anew. The structure of this action runs from stasis to purpose to passionate pursuit to chaos and back to stasis again, itself a resonant pattern worthy of emulation in contemporary narrative art; and this mythic quality is itself so universally appreciable that it seems odd that football has not been as successfully exported as other American pastimes.

Another esthetic point is that the rectangular two-dimensional screen is especially appropriate for the rectangular shape of the visible action (again unlike baseball or even basketball, where the action assumes circular forms); moreover, the variable focusing of the televised eye, as well as the use of several, diversely situated cameras, continually changes the home-screen's distance from the action and thus the viewer's perspective upon it. There is also an unwritten artistic law which holds that all nonrectangular images in televised football must be resolved by returning to a rectangular arrangement. After disinterestedly observing the huddles of

both offensive and defensive teams, the camera usually takes a perpendicular view of the nose-against-nose scrimmage and, once the play begins, closes in upon the ball carrier. I hugely admire the ability of football cameramen to keep their lens (and my eye) on the ball, even when my mind is faked into looking elsewhere; and, despite the increasing variousness of not only offensive but defensive plays, they and their directors usually manage to put the home-viewer's eye precisely where on the field it wants most to be.

In the past few years, what has made home-spectatorship so vastly superior to live viewing has not only been the finer color transmission but also those isolated cameras connected to videotaped monitors. Exploiting the intervallic rhythm of the game, these extra eyes enable the directors instantly to recheck in slow-motion the details of a crucial maneuver, or to regard a recent play from totally different angles or even to watch on the "split screen" two distant men (like the passer and his immanent receiver) simultaneously. (Thus does the screen guide the home eye to where it wants ideally to be but physically cannot go—two different places at once; or, with playback, at various times in the past!) These mediumistic techniques radically rearticulate the characteristic space and rhythm of the game; and so truly restructured has my own perception become that "live" games now seem peculiar, inept, incomplete and pedestrian. Secondly, this set of techniques esthetically echoes the fracturing of classic time and space that was achieved by cubist painting, which regarded a single image from multiple perspectives (and, by implication, from separate moments in time); and precisely in this way, as McLuhan suggests, does advanced modern art forecast the radically different structural forms of subsequent technologies. (Furthermore, as Leni Reifenstal discovered definitively in her film *Olympia* [1938], athletic movement that is replayed in slow motion invariably seems strikingly beautiful.)

One conclusion of this analysis is that television's mediumistic affinity for football has helped make it a more popular game than baseball, the pre-1955 favorite, where the ball itself is simply too small and moves too quickly (if not imperceptibly) for the scale and speed of the screen; or basketball, where the camera's eye seems too immobile to be in the most propitious place at the right time. The only other major sports that television handles especially well are track, where it can provide close-ups of the action on the distant side of the oval and yet return focused for a perpendicular overview of the finish line; and swimming events, which also lay out well on the rectangular screen. Need one add that a football game heard on radio is news or journalism, however, and not an esthetic experience.

Artistry in televised football depends upon stunning kinetic images; and in this respect, as well as in its concern with precise execution of

planned strategy, the game expresses qualities close to modern dance. Perhaps my favorite kinetic passage is a long run by the slithery halfback who gracefully eludes several oncoming tacklers (Gale Sayers, Leroy Kelly, and Hugh McElhenny are exemplary at this tour-de-force), while the best replay follows a swivel-hipped runner from another angle—ideally directly in front or behind. Their various graces, in my art-critical judgment, exceed those of a skier, a high-diver or even a matador, in spite of the last's practical advantage of an opponent far less likely to succeed. My esthetic canon also includes the criss-crossing of moving players and fixed lines on a kick-off; the blocking lineman pulling out on an end run; the low devastating block that thwarts an incipient tackler just before the kill; the individual head-on tackle of a full-steam runner (representing the collision of two powerful lines of force); a long pass into the outstretched arms of a distant, moving receiver (indicatively called "threading the needle," itself an esthetically successful ritual); a strong runner breaking loose from a spate of tacklers (Jim Nance, Calvin Hill, Mike Garrett); several players scrambling for a loose fumble; a speedster's touchdown runback of a kick-off (a feat mastered by Travis Williams a few years ago); and the visibly anonymous helmeted players enthusiastically but discretely hugging each other after a touchdown. Most of these choreographic gestures can be appreciated by people scarcely familiar with the game's technicalities.

One esthetic measure of a "good game" would thus be the sheer number of first-rate kinetic images, while a weak one contains but a few; and for that reason too, professional matches are generally preferable to college games, while those on wet fields are usually a disappointment, no matter how exciting the stakes. (Similarly, I find injuries to be an esthetic distraction that, were this a movie instead of a live event, would need to be spliced out; and while people at the game generally rivet their eyes on the reviving player, the television announcers usually manage to run an advertisement or talk about something else.) Sometimes a sloppy team or player (such as a lineman inadvertently carrying the ball) will inject a kind of esthetic freedom into the conventions of the art, an achievement analogous to Robert Rauschenberg's combines in painting—I remember one muddy game riddled by spectacular fumbles; but such forays into esthetic impurity can rarely follow a strategic design. They could also become dull through repetition. "The [football players] do what red Indians do when they are dancing, their movement is angular like red Indians move," noted Gertrude Stein, of all writers, in *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937). "When they lean over and when they are on their hands and feet and when they are squatting, they are like an Indian dance."

Then there are players who offer esthetic pleasure simply because they move with especial grace, like the legendary Jim Brown, once of the Cleveland Browns, Paul Warfield of the Miami Dolphins, Lem Barney of the Detroit

Lions, Jim Plunkett of the Boston Patriots, George Sauer of the New York Jets, and Lance Alworth (appropriately nicknamed "Bambi") of the San Diego Chargers, or even such mammoth linemen as Deacon Jones of the Los Angeles Rams and Buck Buchanan of the Kansas City Chiefs; and the football pros seemingly acknowledge this choreographic distinction when they refer to the "beautiful moves" of a particular player. (Like other increasingly self-conscious new arts, football verges on developing an indigenous critical language to supplement its technical jargon.)

This last quality of exemplary personal grace also links football to contemporary dance, much of which attempts to eschew the affectations of classic ballet by programming practical physical activities that, if done well, will produce beautiful movement—in pieces by Yvonne Rainer and Ann Halprin, in particular; and in both football and this strain of modern dance, the choreography is easily accessible, as noted before, to people who hardly understand the game or the art.

That last point in turn connects this essay to that peculiarly contemporary (and yet quintessentially American) theme of discovering esthetic qualities in what has customarily not been regarded as artistic (as well as, by converse implication, the related theme of artistic work that successfully rejects the "artificial" conventions of intentional art). At any rate, the next time you appreciate the rhythmic structures of football's activity, the complexity and precision of their ensemble activity, the variable patterns of their evolution and solution, the skill of the individual players, etc., you should remember that there is much solid American artistry on that field, or screen.

Prefaces to My Own Performance Texts (1991)

Collected Performance Texts

> Composition by intention: When you work like this, you say what you intend and you leave the specific realization up to the performer. It is a nice way to work because it allows for no mistaking what you are trying to do, and it also allows the performer to do what you want in a way that is most in accordance with what he can do. This sounds like indeterminacy, but really it comes out quite differently, since indeterminacy is a method of structuring materials while intention simply points in a direction and says, "Go!"—Dick Higgins, "Postface" (1970).

My texts are designed for performance. However, any reader perusing them can see that they are less explicit than most performance scripts. Nothing specific is said in these scenarios about setting or lighting or staging, for decisions about these dimensions are, by design, intentionally left to the works' directors and performers. Indeed, there are no instructions about which theatrical medium to use, for these texts might be performed just as well on audiotape or videotape or film or even in private circumstances such as one's own home. Perhaps someone other than myself will discover that one medium is more effective than another for a certain text. These largely verbal constructs are designed to inspire performances that, though they reflect the texts, will ultimately resemble one another less than, say, two performances of *King Lear*. The "plays" of Gertrude Stein, for example, are likewise verbally suggestive and yet theatrically unspecific.

To my mind, "performance" is a category of art, much like books or paintings, and the two principal characteristics of performance are that, first, some people present something to other people (who may or may not have volunteered to be an audience) and, second, that it takes place in time and thus has a beginning and an end. Within this definition fall radio programs, videotapes, live theater, concerts of dance and music, records, poetry readings (all of which should be critically evaluated principally in terms of their respective kinds, and then with one another). These texts of

mine are not just for actors; they could also be used by teachers and even ballplayers who are both, after all, also public performers accustomed to enticing the interest of many others.

I am personally less interested in live theater than in other presentational media, in part because live performance incorporates a slew of extra problems in production and then, to compound the trouble, is comparatively disadvantageous as a communications medium. For one basic measure, a live production of even minimal duration is more expensive, much more expensive, even with volunteer actors in a donated theater, than a production of the same text over audiotape and even videotape. On more commercial levels, theatrical art suffers from boom-or-bust economics, which demand that a work must "make it" within its initial public performances in order to survive. It is my considered opinion that the attitudes intrinsic in such economics are artistically deleterious, fostering in the preparatory (rehearsal) period an atmosphere of hysterical compromise and opportunistic pandering.

In general, I would prefer to do art that costs several hundred dollars to produce and needs only a small audience to survive, rather than art that costs tens of thousands of dollars to produce and then might last anywhere from a few days to several months (only to disappear completely from public view). One reason why I personally favor audiotape and videotape for my own productions of these texts is that these presentational media have a longer art-life; perhaps that is one professional taste that reflects my personal history as initially an author of books. (Should some of these texts strike everyone as being "impossible to produce," that is okay by me, as long as they survive as texts on pages, which is to my mind scarcely an insufficient way for an artifact to live.)

Much as I would love to stage these texts myself, it is hard for me to conceive of a situation that would persuade me to produce live theater. Working with other people over an extended period of time makes one excessively dependent upon both coercion and collaborative generosity. Most theater directors, in my observation, have developed authoritarian mentalities that I would personally rather not find in myself. It was from John Cage that I first learned the value of giving performers more personal responsibility and initiative in realizing an author's designs. As long as they respect the purposes and integrity of my text, I tell myself, the details of their activity do not matter. Although some performances have struck me as better than others, I have not felt betrayed yet. Indeed, what impressed me most was how different they were, if not so different that comparisons among them were irrelevant.

These texts are comparatively skeletal, not because I lack ideas for staging them, but because, as I said before, I would rather leave that dimension to people with more experience in live theater production. Knowing

language better than stagecraft, conception better than execution, I would sooner stick to my trade. What I seem to be saying, essentially, is this: Give the producer just enough text and instructions to ensure that the resulting work will be mine, and then also enough freedom to allow the performance to be his. I hope that some readers of these texts will find them worthy of performance, in whatever circumstances, to whatever scale, suits their tastes and will please keep me informed of what has been done. This theatricist, or theater-writer, is prepared to be surprised and impressed.

Epiphanies: A Polyphonic Performance

Epiphanies is a large number of single-sentence "lines" that are available for theatrical performance. Since these are meant to be the encompassing climactic moments—Epiphanies, in the Joycean sense—of longer, otherwise nonexistent narratives, my principal request of the director and performers is that they do their best to read each sentence in a way that evocatively communicates a sense of what the remaining, implicit story might be. Any number of performers may sit or stand as they wish, in a proscenium or an open space, in neutral dress; and there is no need to costume or mime any activities, since it is assumed that most, if not all, of the *action* is in the lines and how they are spoken. The performers are functioning more like an ensemble of musicians who play their solos on cue.

For the premiere performance, directed by Suzanne Bennett at the University of North Dakota, the lines were read one at a time, with extended pauses between, by four informally dressed, standing performers distributed around the circumference of a circle made by the audience seated in the middle (in an inversion of the traditional "theater-in-the-round"). From the manuscript, the director chose those Epiphanies she preferred, had them copied onto individual 3" by 5" cards, and then distributed these cards over large tables, inviting the four performers to choose those cards each felt he or she could articulate best. The director then assigned some of the remaining Epiphanies to those performers she thought could render them best. (No director is obliged to use all the lines; none of them is necessarily more essential to the whole than any of the others.) Appropriate direction should emphasize the individuality of each story and thus avoid, in assigning the stories, giving recurring personas to one or another reader and likewise avoid, in the ordering of elements, suggesting any relation between the story at hand and any other near it. Though the original production had stories emerging in succession from various points around a circle, other directors might want to have them spoken, if not dramatized, in other ways; other kinds of theatrical spaces are also feasible.

A subsequent production took place within an art exhibition gallery at Vassar College, with spectators scattered about; and since this director, E. St. John Villard, instructed her dozen performers to speak often in canon or unison, she used approximately three times as many stories within a production that took just as long as the initial one—forty-five minutes. Moreover, as the order of the lines need not be fixed, I could envision the director changing the sequence from performance to performance in an extended run, or the performers exchanging Epiphanies with one another, in part to keep their renditions continually fresh. There is no doubt in my mind that different groups will (and should) perform *Epiphanies* in totally different ways, much as Gertrude Stein's similarly open texts are susceptible to radically different theatrical interpretations; and the length of a performance could vary from a few minutes to several hours. Despite possible variations in interpretation, the text has its own intelligence; it will always be about one theme that is unique to it: the exhaustive experience of the experience of story.

So to answer the conventional production questions: *Epiphanies* is a text for any number of performers of any sex, size and shape, for performance at any length, with no scenery, in any sort of performance space. At issue, to be frank, is a desire to realize the unusual concept.

Lovings: A Text for Performance by Three or More Speakers/Instrumentalists

Lovings is a collection of independent single-sentence stories about the variousness of love experience. Individual sentences may be spoken and/or played. If the latter, the performer is asked to evoke the content and style of that sentence by whatever means are available to his or her instrument. The instrumentalist may announce the sentence before playing it, or it may be flashed on a card or even an LCD board. It is also permissible to mix speaking and playing within the performances of a single sentence. Singers, for instance, may choose to sing the words to a melody of their own devising, or vocalize the text (without speaking words), likewise to a melody of their own devising. The purpose of considering *Lovings* as a musical score is to see whether a strictly verbal text can generate musical interpretations, and thus to explore the relationships between literary tone and musical articulation.

As each sentence is completely independent of the others, they may be performed in any order, with one limitation—no one shall perform two sentences in succession, if only to ensure that they are perceived separately. Performers should feel free to pick sentences from the text, selecting whatever

they find most appropriate to their instruments or their speech. Sentences not chosen by the performers may be assigned to them by a conductor or group leader. It is not necessary to perform all the sentences. Should they be considered "beads on a string," a director once asked me. "Beads, no string," I replied, knowing full well that their recurring subject provided sufficient coherence.

Once an order is established, it might be convenient to number the sentences and then station a silent LCD counter at the head of the ensemble. If the performers can develop alternate interpretations of either the stories they have selected or those initially assigned to others, the cycle of stories may be repeated within a single performance.

Proposal for an Audio Realization. Though these individual sentences were meant to be appreciated separately, in sum they create an aura of intense erotic experience. To achieve this last effect on audiotape, consider having the stories read by several voices in a multitrack studio in the following manner: One story is recorded in a tape-delay system that allows for immediate echo (say, by placing two machines adjacent to each other, the tape running from one to the other), so that this first story is repeated continuously through the system until its decay to inaudibility. Once this first story is heard for the second time, make that the cue for a second story to be read into the same tape-delay system, its echo decaying similarly on a separate track of the multitrack. Once this second story is heard for the second time, a third story is read to echo similarly on a third track. This painstaking strategy is continued for however many stories will be read, using as many tracks as are available. As the single-sentence stories tend to run between six and ten seconds, the realization of, say, one hundred of them should take from twenty to thirty-four minutes. I would like to do as many as would produce a tape lasting nearly one hour. In the mix down (to either two-track for record or eight-track for theatrical performance), there would be an attempt to separate successive voices across the stereo spectrum. It is also possible (if, say, this was composed in a foreign country where native-English-speakers were scarce) that all the voices could be one (or mine). I imagine the experience of the piece as new stories heard against a continuously recomposing background bed of previous stories and thus, though the stories be different, the tone would be continuously and profoundly erotic.

For production scripts, in whole or part, as well as performance rights, to any or all of these texts, please write the author at P.O. Box 444, Prince St., New York, New York 10012-0008.

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