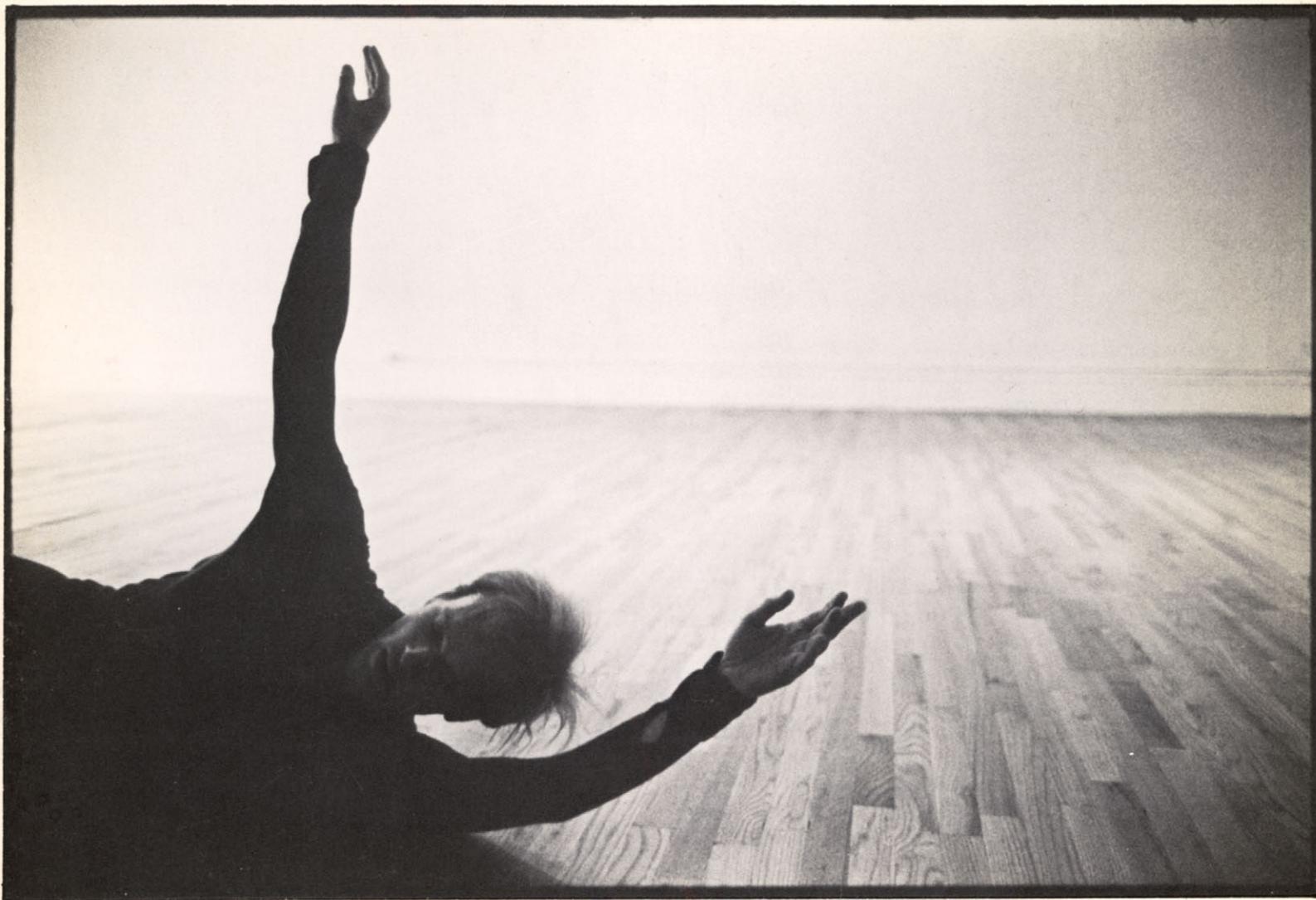


# LIVE

performance art **4**



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# 4

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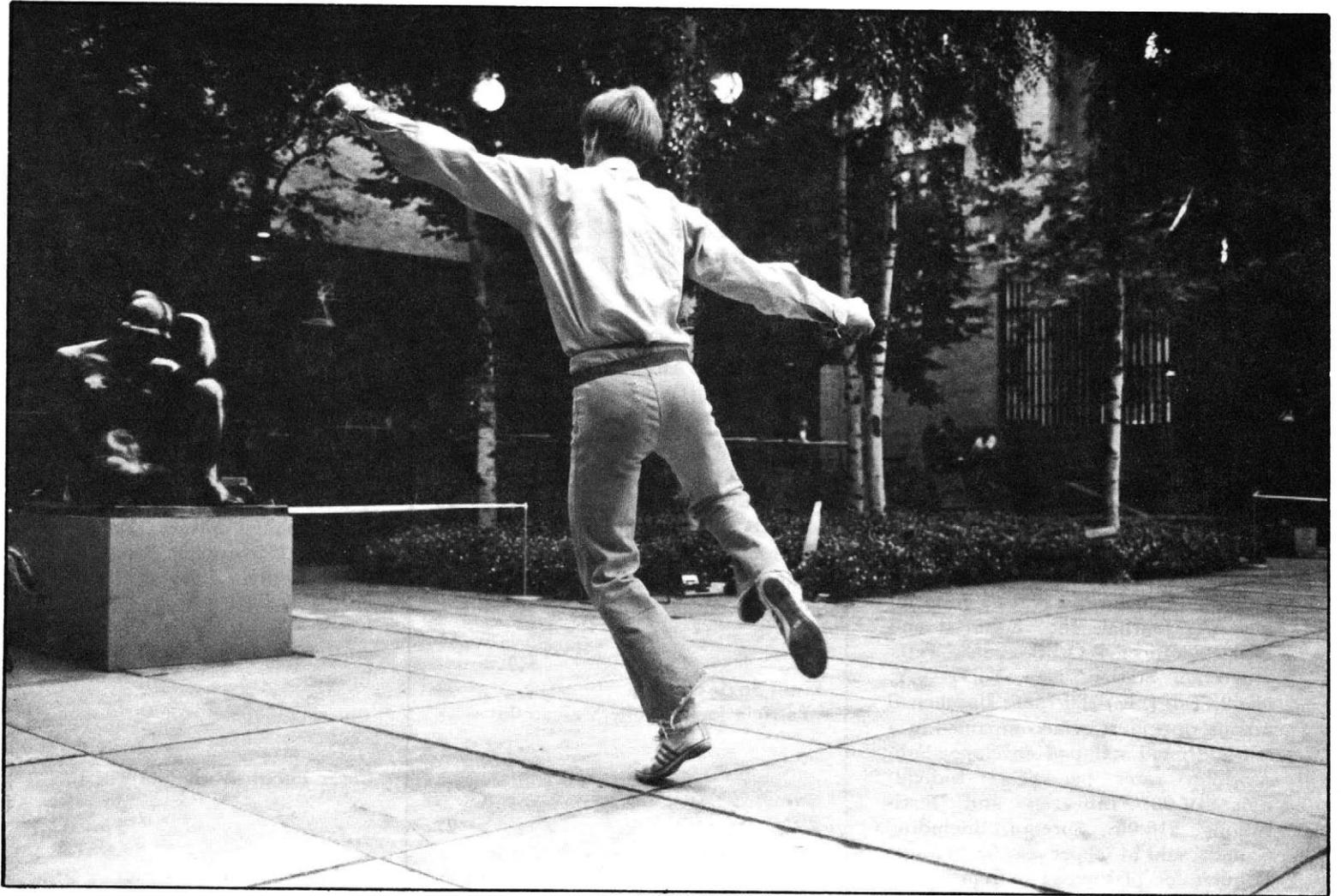
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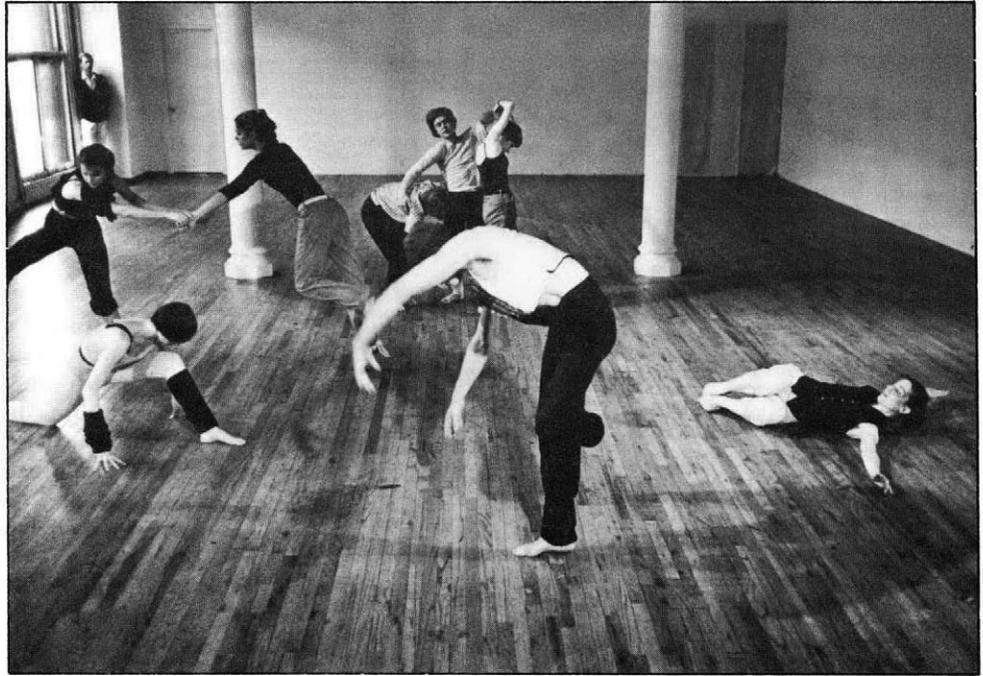
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**A Periodical of Performing Arts Journal Publications**



# DUNN ON DANCING

John Howell talks with  
Douglas Dunn



*Echo* (1980)

**Was there anything different for you in *Echo*?**

Coming off *Suite to Suite*, the piece I had just made in France, I retained an interest in getting a view of the piece from the outside. Which is probably why I was so separate within the piece. I wanted to see all the sections as much as I could so I didn't put myself into it. This time I was certainly (and consciously) as interested in the shape of all the people moving around as I was in what each person was doing within it. Sometimes I get more interested in individual movement—it fluctuates. Obviously, they both have to be there, but I put more conscious effort into one or the other at different times. In France I definitely looked at the time-consuming element there was showing the movement and getting the French dancers to understand it, to do it. By simplifying the movement, I had more time to look at the shape.

**I also saw that emphasis on shape as a response to the peculiar space of the Kitchen. Most dance concerts there are forced to build in a particular staging.**

It does ask you to pay attention because there's no interior space

there big enough to just do what you want. But you can make something pretty wild too.

**Don't you think the music had a lot to do with the calmness that characterized *Echo*?**

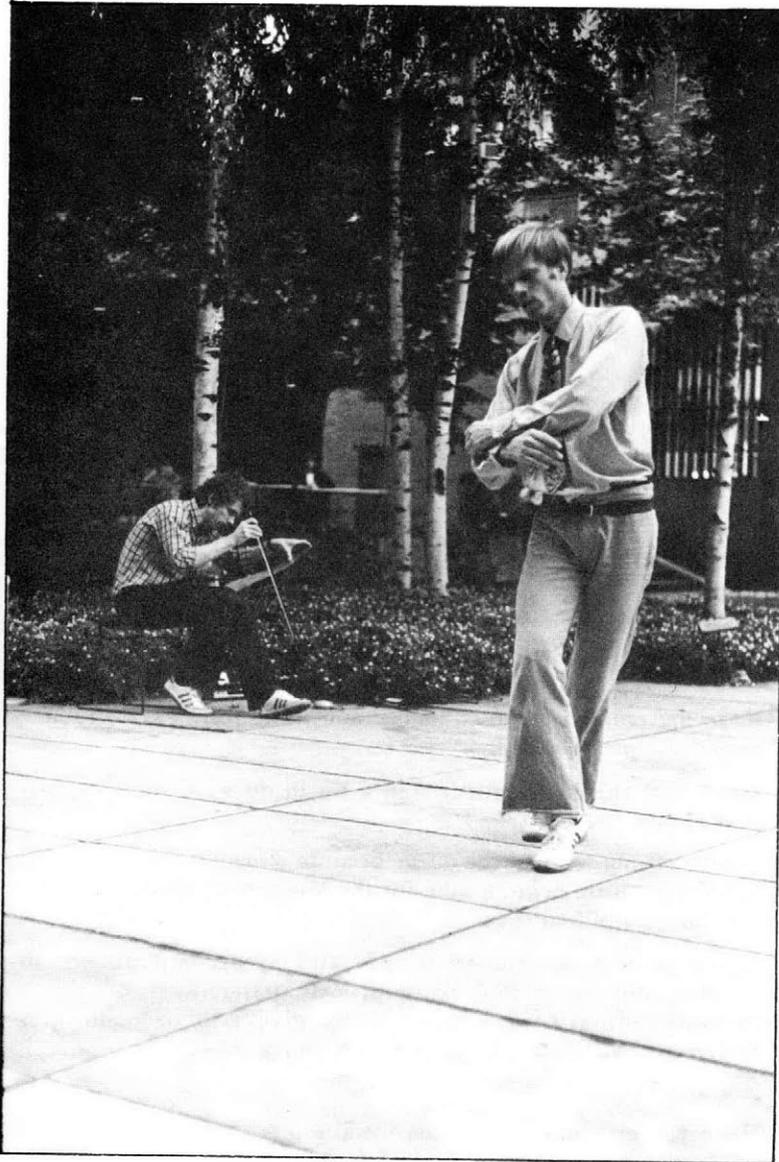
I had a strong sense of the music because we (John Driscoll and I) had done a little *Echo*, a solo, for the Museum of Modern Art using those amplified saws.

**It was a very meditative sound, and as accompaniment to simpler movement and more orderly patterns, it set up a pastoral feeling. I think music always gives a lot of mood cues. Did you work with the music when you worked on the piece?**

Not at all.

**Have you ever developed a dance along with music?**

I'm just starting to for the first time. I didn't think I would ever want to, but if you're making something to a historical piece of music, like I'm supposed to be doing, you have to take some account of it.



**Echo, MOMA (1979)**

### **A classical piece?**

Yeah, "Pulcinella" by Stravinsky. I've started listening to it very carefully about how much I listen to it, not too much and not too little. I'm making up my mind slowly as I go along about how much I want to let the music influence me. This morning I listened to a little of the music, then I focused in on one section which interested me and listened to it twice. Then I put it away. I don't know what I retained from it, mainly the rhythm and tempo I guess, something of the melody. I could hum a little bit of it afterwards.

Then I started to make something which I thought of as possibly going with that music, and also as possibly going with that music along with other things that might be going on at the same time that wouldn't be as related to the music. So I made a phrase - I didn't time the music because my stopwatch is broken and I didn't count the measures because I didn't have time before the dancers got here. So I made a fairly long phrase, maybe two minutes, and put it on videotape and we all learned it. Then I had the dancers give me numbers to randomize the sequence of the various events in this phrase to break it up. There were other numbers involved which I used in making up the score just to keep it loose. So we ended up with seventy-seven measures of triple rhythm with very unpredictable repetitions.

### **So you're wary of music as a mood-setter?**

To me, that's a difficulty, a problem. It's not a gift, it's not - oh great - here's this music I get to choreograph to.

### **What did "Pulcinella" sound like to you when you first heard it?**

Very claustrophobic, very tight and specific. I didn't want to see a dance that was parallel to it, that ended when its sections did, that changed rhythm along with it.

### **No illustration.**

Right. I want something that I already know about in the dance, something that goes on and doesn't stop. I called the piece I made in France *Suite to Suite* which they tell me means continuous, and also suggests sections. That's exactly what the piece was like. Things never completely started or stopped, they were always merging.

### **So you're circling around this Stravinsky music in the dance.**

The music is inevitable, the orchestra is going to play it, and I don't have any choice about that. I feel like messing it up. I want



*Lazy Madge (1977)*  
Diane Frank, Dunn, Daniel Press

the music to have its own integrity, but I have to find a way to make a dance in a shape which is agreeable to me at the same time. The shape of the dance is not the shape of the music.

**It sounds like you're reacting not only to an insistent music but to a metrical regularity in that kind of work, although Stravinsky isn't exactly a smooth tempo type.**

The counts are very specific, very strong, and familiar in a sense. By familiar, I mean that even in short sections—some are only two minutes long—there's three-four time. If I start out with three-four and stay with it, I'll be going about one minute fifty seconds longer than I've ever sustained a three-four in a dance. That's where the friction comes in. I'm not used to maintaining a beat in a whole dance, it's always interrupted or broken or just changes. Because of that issue, I think the look of the dance will be very complicated. Probably more so since I'll be using French dancers who are used to ballet movement.

**Do you ever start working with a definite mood in mind for a dance?**

When I first started working, there were two things I began with. I was aware of a desire to be still, to let a single position to stay the

way it was long enough so that I as a performer—I don't know if I thought much at the time about how the audience related to something still—could let my mental events proceed while the situation stayed the same. That feeling was in and out of my work for the first few years including finally the piece where I was completely still, *101*. So one thing was stillness, the other was anxiety. When I danced with Merce, the physical work of the dancing was extremely arduous and complicated and was enough to absorb all of my attention. I enjoyed having all my attention taken up that way and letting whatever happened happen. I performed without ever considering performance. I performed the way I would have done any physical task. Later, when I started working with being still, I began to feel things about being in front of people and that was mostly anxiety. And it seemed relevant, it didn't seem to be something I had to overcome and I took it as material out of which I made work.

**What's happened to that anxiety and stillness?**

It's been absorbed somehow. And the stillness has been transmuted into movement. At this point there doesn't seem to be very much difference between movement and stillness. It's more like the movement is stillness. They seem equivalent to me now and that gives me permission to move as much as I want without feeling that I'm making more of a mess. Generally, things seem like a mess, and I don't want to make more of a mess. I think that's part of what I felt about stillness. Now the movement doesn't seem to add to the mess. If I stop and think about it, it still seems ridiculous and outrageous to do anything, but it doesn't seem harmful, there seems to be room for it, and now there's a daily interest in doing it.

*I remember thinking that living in New York meant that I had to dance. I didn't know if that meant that if I didn't live in New York, I wouldn't have to dance, but I knew that I couldn't live here if I weren't dancing.*

**Did you ever think of performing and performance-making as harmful?**

That's a little strong. Some things just add to the mess. Anger on the street between motorists and pedestrians and bicyclists seems a waste of energy, very uneconomical, messy. But it also gives oneself an opportunity to be patient, to be generous in stressful circumstances. For me, living in New York is always a test about my own anger and frustration, my feeling that things are a mess. To use up those feelings because someone tried to run me down on the street, that's something I'm still learning about.

**How much is that feeling a consideration about audience?**

I don't set out with audience reaction in mind so that's not an issue for me, and I don't usually care much about work that does. So most of what goes on in television, radio, Broadway, and the movies doesn't really interest me very far. My real interest is in work that somehow circumvents the issue of laying something on an audience.

**Isn't that a performance issue that has always been used to define "downtown" performance and dance? I don't know that it's so now since so many performers seem to be hungry for the most obvious audience attention. It's like Muhammed Ali's two kinds of boxing styles, one in which his show comes out of his concentration on his boxing tasks and the other in which he asks the viewers to react directly to whatever he's doing while he does it—rope-a-dope, shuffle.**

As a verbal topic, that difference has fascinated me for years, but I have no verbal solution. I don't quite know how I respond to that issue in my work because what I would say about it is not what I've heard other people say. The business of what I



*Celeste* (1977)

would call unconscious performing style, that is, where you focus attention on the task rather than on the fact of performance comes from Merce as far as the tradition I'm involved in. It was the bread and butter of the Judson people. There the task sometimes became not a dancey one but say, pushing materials around like Yvonne's (Rainer) work. She didn't want anything to be non-functional so that even Merce's dance movement, which within the range of dance is very functional in relation to how the body works, was too decorative for her. If you moved your arm she would put an object in your hand so that when the arm moved, you could see the purpose for moving—it was moving this object. I take that attitude for granted. I still talk that way if a dancer asks what is going on when I make some movement.

**And part of that idea is that something else happens by focusing in that way?**

I can only say things that have already been said. In leaving the rest of it alone, you get to see something about a person

doing something which may or may not be interesting to watch but which has the kind of interest you get in life. You watch somebody doing something and because they're not aware of your watching them, they do it with less self-consciousness than the kind of attention an actor brings to making a character up for you. That seems to be a very crucial distinction made by the whole Cunningham tradition, that theatre fact of not making a character. But on the other hand, now everybody's doing a lot of different things. Twyla (Tharp) has been doing it differently for years. Her dances have character which is illusionistic and I guess the dancers are directed to be those characters. They do it fine.

**When you spoke earlier about wanting to watch the dance more in *Echo*, does that relate to more or less direction on your part?**

When I first made work for other people, the *Lazy Madge* group, I didn't like to watch what I'd made by the third time I was seeing it. Not because it couldn't be worked

on more, but because the material itself wasn't interesting enough for me personally not to be bored. At this point, I'm not as bored by what I make. I'm also not worried about being bored. Now I feel like it's okay to watch the dance, not that I want more control over it. But I am taking more control because I can stand to watch it.

#### **That sounds—**

Illogical, but that's the way it feels. When I made *Lazy Madge*, there were limits I didn't know about was acceptable, what was not in the overall idea of the dance. The only way I could get to that area was to not control it. At that time, I could not make and control what I wanted to see. Now, whatever it is I want to see, I have more developed means of achieving it in a way that I can set it. Before, what I made was often not complex enough for me. I didn't know how to make all the movement, transfer it to another dancer, get it all out there in enough time to have something to present, and have it complex enough. So I left things open. I didn't know how to dis-arrange space when I first worked. I didn't know how to make an image that was messy enough.

**So you didn't want to make more mess until you could make a really good one. Isn't this idea about how to make dance contrary to what is thought of as basic theatre? In theatre itself, one is told to perform a specific task in a specific way—**

And in relationship to what that could mean, and that might even be used as a way to tell you how to do it. You do it a certain way to tell the audience about the nature of the character. I wonder if we can ultimately avoid that. Somehow I think that's relevant data even for what I do, but I never think of it that way. I never think through those things, I never talk to a dancer in that way. But I'm not sure it's not going on.



*Lazy Madge* (1977)

Jennifer Mascal, David Woodberry, Diane Frank



*Echo* (1980)

Alice Kaltman, Diane Frank, Debbie Riley,  
Susan Blankensop, John McLaughlin

**As a performer, when did you start thinking about the audience as an issue?**

One of the first things I did in New York was go to the Billy Rose Theatre with Yvonne. I'd been in the city for less than a year. In the process of doing that concert I became aware that she was dealing with the audience. She was excited by the prospect of having a Broadway audience and she said that took her back to a feeling of hostility; she wanted to get at the audience. I was shocked because I had unconsciously absorbed Merce's attitude about not considering the effect of what you did in that way.

**Isn't there an underlying sense in all theatre that you're there to please the audience in the broadest sense of that word?**

Yes. There was a time when to say that wasn't the case was shocking in a good way. You could suggest that there could be some other integrity about the event, some other necessity. It could be romantic—I have to express myself. Then there's another thing about structure which is open to the audience, that doesn't tell it what to get.

**So it's still more interesting to you to think about not considering audience in that way?**

Yes. Twyla said somewhere that when she made that piece for the Joffrey, she went to see the company a lot. The first month she watched the stage, then she started watching the audience. She said that was a revolutionary step for her. Of course that's what people have been doing for years, but in her terms it was revolutionary coming out of that downtown feeling. But that's what sustains it for me, makes it more interesting, to find some other necessity than pleasing an audience.

**Do you think your work does please an audience?**

Definitely, but if I talk about it in those terms, the audience I'm talking about is four people who have seen everything I've seen. And what I want to give them is not what they've seen, including what I did before. If I'm going to please anybody, it's myself and a few other people I know.

**How does that audience affect what you make?**

I don't make something to fit that. I have to fit what I don't know about. I have to surprise myself and if I can do that, I'll probably surprise those four people. Not all in the same way maybe. I still think of the audience as individuals, not numbers.

**Is the leaving of certain things alone as you put it—mostly**

**meanings directed toward the audience—based on some idea that the result is somehow more real?**

I agree with that but I'd like to talk about more real. That's the justification for everything everybody does and it's a crucial one. Yvonne talks about it as more natural. That introduced the convention of walking naturally into theatre which I think was a very valuable thing to do. Merce's realism is not like that. He knew there had to be something substantial there or there was no point in doing it. So he made vigorous, highly technical, semi-classical stuff but then he left a lot of things alone. So you have tremendous vitality in the dance in every sense, and the idea of flux is genuinely represented: it's exactly true that the dancers didn't know what they were doing in some ways. Half of what is going on is not set. The dance can be set down to the last step but the people aren't doing it in a manner that tells you to take it in this way or that way. So that the audience and the performers have a certain open relationship. That's a significant element of realism in theatre to me.

**Is that the kind of realism you were after in *Lazy Madge*?**

In *Lazy Madge* the dancers were given the opportunity for a greater realism in that direction. It wasn't that the dance was not set in space, that's another kind of realism which is more obvious than the one I'm talking about. But, because they had choices, the way they looked in performance was totally altered. They weren't completely occupied in doing their steps, they were partly occupied in deciding if they wanted to dance with the person or persons they encountered. You could see that a higher proportion of the dance was taken up with the dancers' mental life which led to a look about them.

**Do the more formal arrangements in *Echo* mean less of that kind of performance realism?**

Yes, that is lessened. The movement is set and relatively complex, so it occupies the dancers' attention. Within that, however much they can get on top of the material allows you to see whatever else is there. It's not a different idea, but a different proportion of that realism.

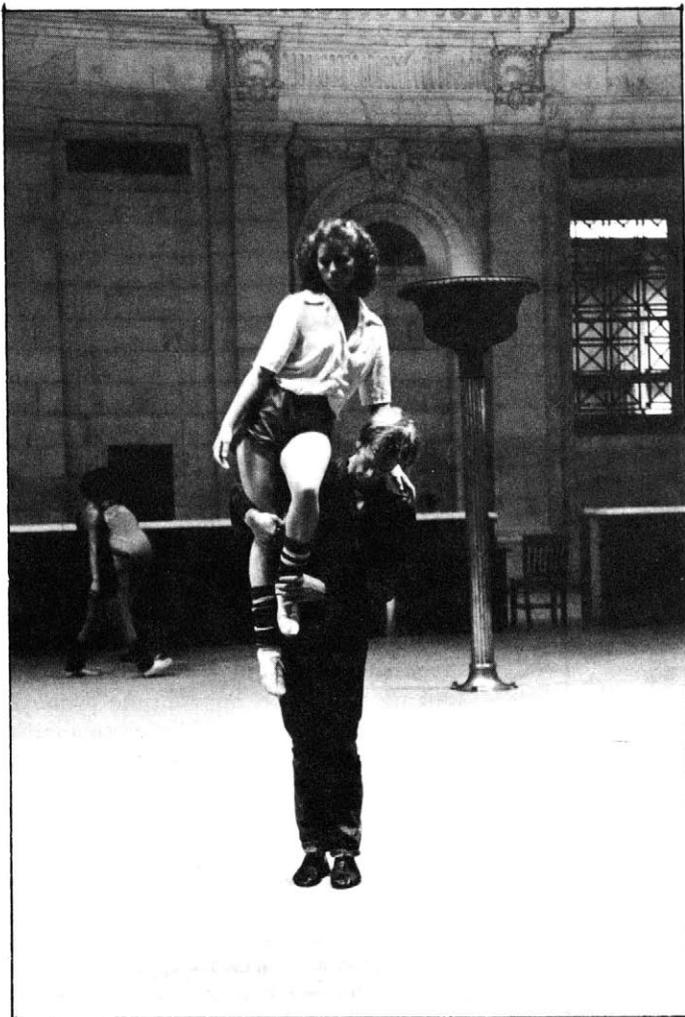
**So in *Lazy Madge* you were less interested in having the dancers just get through the movement?**

That's true. I wanted dancers to have those choices so that I could see them be more like what they were like when they weren't dancing. Now I don't care so much about that. I'm more interested in a heightened sense of the movement which *Lazy Madge* didn't

allow for. I want the dance to have equal weight with the dancers.

### **How do you decide when it's right?**

That's complex. One of the anxiety-allaying things for work is to not get caught feeling that what is going to be made exists somewhere else. It exists right in front of me. That feeling of the present movement being the source of what I'm going to make doesn't have a one-to-one relationship with the feeling of the present moment when you perform what you've already made. The genuine representation of flux which I feel does exist in Merce's



**U.S. Customs House (1977)  
Meg Eginton, Dunn**

work—which is one of the reasons I value that work—can take place if one relates to set material as something that exists separate from doing it. When I first worked I don't think I was up to doing that and now I don't feel uncomfortable to try and to ask other people to try. It seems like a valuable thing to strive for.

### **Where does your movement come from?**

It's already there. I'm not very aware of my moves as a child but when I look at other children and watch other people dance, I think about that. Some people definitely dance like adults and I'm not very interested in that. Usually I can sense the movement children do as having another realization in people's dancing. The more I see that the more I like it. I saw from my window a little girl, maybe four years old, doing something on the sidewalk one day, a beautiful sequence of about a minute. I took it and did it for someone an hour after I saw it, and they said it looks just like you. That seemed to make perfect sense. I was quite accurate about this little girl's dance, I was miming her dance with everything I could sense about the way she did it and not transforming it into something that I would do.

### **What about the still things you did first?**

They were perhaps more cerebrally determined. It seems like the limits one sets are the adult part. I had a very clear thought when I was first dancing, then later when I was making dancing, and that was that I didn't want to get stuck in any one position.

### **Have you ever tried not dancing?**

I remember thinking that living in New York meant that I had to dance. I didn't know if that meant that if I didn't live in New York, I wouldn't have to dance, but I knew that I couldn't live here if I weren't dancing. I don't know if that's true but that's what I felt. And I never tried not dancing.

### **When you talk about dancing, what does that mean about performance?**

I sometimes forget about performing when I say dancing. One of the fascinations to me in the last two years has been watching the making of material become a daily possibility. Before, making material was some kind of challenge that I faced. It still is, but it's not as threatening anymore.

*Photographs by Nathaniel Tileston.*

# THE SOCIAL PERFORMER

Bruce Barber

When Brecht wrote the above in 1936, he was championing a “new” kind of theatre that was realistic, sensual, critical, and above all didactic. Without the apoliticism and detached irony of a Duchamp, he wished to put theatre “once again at the service of the mind.” Like Duchamp, Brecht abhorred the natural—the status quo; unlike Duchamp, who was by calling an iconoclast, Brecht was primarily interested in providing his audience with critical works that dealt with the problems of the past as these had evolved into the present—brought to the people as criticism, for criticism. The abnegation implicit in a Duchamp statement such as “there is no answer because there is no problem” would, for the German playwright, have been tantamount to travesty—perhaps even a curious kind of Pontius Pilate self-absolution. For Brecht, problems once recognized, demand answers, and answers invariably necessitate change.

But what does all of this have to do with performance?

I have written elsewhere that “performance” in its general sense is as “endemic to post-modern art as it is to a post-modern culture.” (*Parachute*, Dec., 1979). However, “performance art” as it appears in

The stage began to be instructive.

Oil, inflation, war, social struggles, the family, religion, wheat, the meat market, all became subjects for theatrical representation. Choruses enlightened the spectator about facts unknown to him. Films showed a montage of events from all over the world. Projections added statistical material. And as the ‘background’ came to the front of the stage, so peoples activity was subjected to criticism. Right and wrong courses of action were shown. People were shown who knew what they were doing, and others who did not. The theatre became an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers as wished not just to explain the world but also to change it. So we had philosophy, and we had instruction. And where was the amusement in all that? Were they sending us back to school, teaching us to read and write. Were we supposed to pass exams, work for diplomas?

Bertolt Brecht

magazines like this one is a “specialized” mode of art production and demands special attention, though its importance or value as a social phenomenon may only be determined by referring to socio-cultural problems.

My aim here is to offer a socially relevant criticism that might promote a socially engaged “performance” either with or without the art. It seems to me that most recent art performances still adhere to an aesthetic, or more precisely an ideology, that has been characterized as *l’art pour l’art* since the late nineteenth century. As such, they reveal certain tendencies in artists’ productions and their social relationships. I want to focus on one of these tendencies, which I have characterized as “imaging,” for it seems that the emphasis given to Image and Format, or if we are looking for more appropriate synonyms, “style” and “package,” has led to a curious kind of disengagement from real social and cultural issues. Furthermore, seventies performance has surfaced to a kind of historical impasse, one that could be loosely categorized as an era without a vector-post-modernism. The time is now ripe for an investigation of strategies which might create performances that are engaged in the broadest sense of the term, that is, both pleasurable and instructive.

In 1967 the literary critic Frank Kermode wrote “the sense of an ending . . . is . . . endemic to what we call modernism.” Now, it seems, that ending has arrived and we have entered the “post-modern” era—an era that does not at this stage really know what it is “post” to, yet which comfortably accepts the provisional title until something better comes along. “Post” denotes the past and apparently “cleansing” or “denial” is enough. Accepting this description, we can become thoroughly modern since for the post-modern individual, fear of the future is *passee*, a legacy of Existentialism and the “modernist” angst that accompanied it. Without fear—with a *laissez-faire* degree of optimism—we are free to live in the present.

The idea that we have no future is implicit in the term post-modern. Now *our future* is contained in the past; since our future is contained in the past it seems acceptable to live onanistically in the present, or, as a recent etiologist of our contemporary narcissism has it,

It makes sense to live only for the moment, to fix our eyes on our own “private performance,” to become connoisseurs of our own decadence, to cultivate a “transcendental self-attention” (James Hougan)

Self-attention, then, may lead to a new form of ultimate self-knowledge but before it can be recognized as such and tested for its legitimacy, qua self-knowledge, it must be externalized in some form for the other—an audience. One of the forms this externalization may take is “Image” and when reproduced it assumes the status of a commodity, thereby becoming subject to the internal pressures and temperature of the marketplace. Image and format are products of the “reductivist” urge. And the urge to reduce, to find the lowest common



Brecht (second from left) at Oktoberfest

denominators, to not multiply entities beyond what is absolutely necessary, to search for fundamentals and essences—all are identifiers of the modernist ideology. In the practice of the separate disciplines of music, visual art, and literature, these “analytical” imperatives lead to a theoretical and practical impasse. In the late sixties the exhaustion or death of art—art degree zero—seemed immanent in these terms. In a sense abstractions were what we had produced, abstractions were what we became. This was modernism. And in this alienated, abstracted state we searched for wholeness. Beyond the looking glass of modernism, we reduced ourselves to roleless beings needing to assume a multiplicity of roles. It was not even acceptable to call oneself a painter or sculptor anymore. Artists were writers and musicians and filmmakers and “did” installations.

Now that the millenium is approaching, the new post-modern version of the “whole” man and the “whole” woman is beginning to emerge—the whole being the sum and not the synthesis of the many parts. In becoming, or more precisely in wishing to become whole, we have become

further divorced from ourselves. Paradoxically, in this quest for integration, we have further become “abstractions.” And what are abstractions but images—mere appearances of reality.

In post-modern performance, Imaging and its concomitant ghosting become dominant modes of behavior. Imaging, the result of excessive self-attention, is a shifting from one role and its projected, reflected image to another, without one of them becoming dominant. One example is Joan Jonas’s “Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy”(1975).

At first I saw the monitor/projector as an ongoing mirror . . . watching myself. I tried to alter the image using objects, costumes and masks, moving through various identities (the sorcerer, the floozie, the howling dog). Narcissism was a habit. Every move was for the monitor.

Ghosting is somewhat akin to “ghost writing”; it’s an ability to realize one’s performance without assistance of props. It can lead to a particular kind of narcissistic self-scrutiny for the sake of authenticating experience and existence. Moreover, it requires the filling of the stopgap of inadequacy; like the employment of the ghost writer for the semi-literate “writer,” ghosting provides the bridge between what is known or experienced and the means of communicating it. It’s a means toward self-awareness and simultaneously a means to legitimize this “awareness of self” to an audience. Ironically, the “self” needs the “other” before any such knowledge can be obtained. The extent or success of self-knowledge can finally depend on individual self-consciousness of the “seeker” after self, as revealed in Andy Warhol’s *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*.

Day after day I look in the mirror and I still see something—a new pimple...I

dunk a Johnson and Johnson cotton ball into Johnson and Johnson rubbing alcohol and rub the cotton ball against the pimple... And while the alcohol is drying I think about nothing. How it's always in style. Always in good taste... When the alcohol is dry, I'm ready to apply the flesh-colored acne-pimple medication... So now the pimple's covered. But am I covered? I have to look in the mirror for some more clues. Nothing is missing. It's all there. The affectless gaze... The bored languor, the wasted pallor... the graying lips. The shaggy silver-white hair, soft and metallic... nothing is missing. I'm everything my scrapbook says I am.

Warhol's mirror image becomes a ghost, his scrap book (history) authenticates his present and without this other "Warhol," Warhol might cease to exist.

Self/other relationships are also particularly evident in the early performance work of Vito Acconci. Using writings of Erving Goffman and particularly his notion of "bureaucratization of spirit" (the homogenization of performance in the theatre of everyday life), Acconci sets out to test the assumptions underlying the basic "I"/"you" opposition. The performer is always in the act of self-aggrandizing or self-effacing: in control, or potentially out of control. For Acconci, turning the "I" into an "it" is as much a characteristic of performance as the presentation of self to other(s).

This can be defined as "performance" in the sense of "something accomplished" (the accomplishing of a self, an image, an object). (Acconci)

For a "self" to be accomplished as a self, it must be reified ("thingified") and self-knowledge once again post-dates imaging. Self-aggrandizement (the self writ large) and self-effacement (the self writ small)

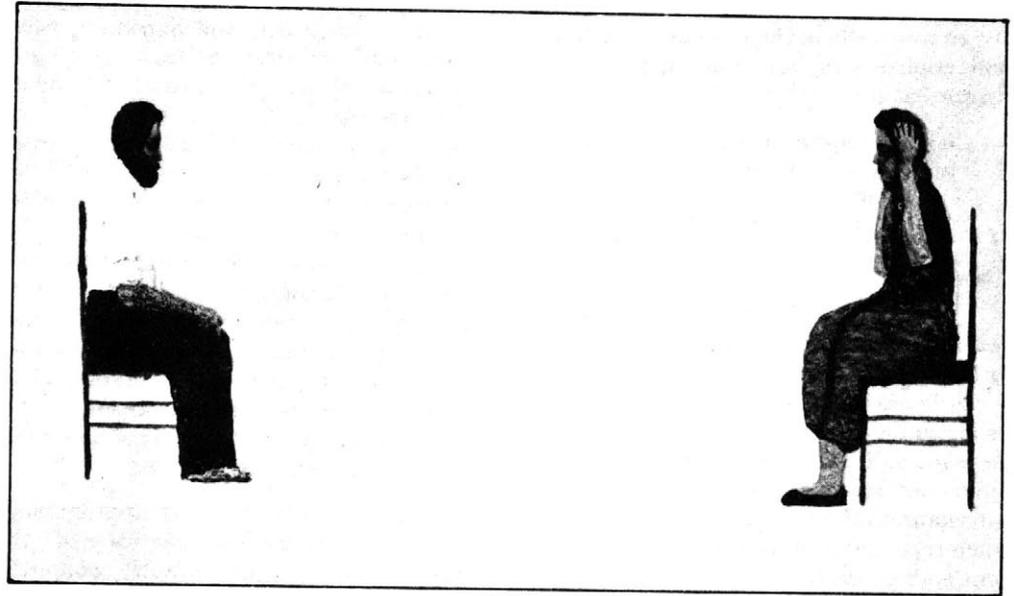
become other indices of reification. Implicit in this form of investigation is a form of critical analysis. However, as a form of analysis it tends, as a result of the emphasis placed on the opposition, to conceal more than it reveals.

On the one hand, the system is "open": if I turn on myself (applying stress to myself), I make myself available to (grabable by) a viewer. On the other hand, the system is "closed": if I both start and end the (same) action, I'm circling myself up in myself, I've turned myself into a self-enclosed object: the viewer is left outside, the viewer is put in the position of a voyeur.

The one attempts to understand and criticize the other (role or image), but its criticism is usually a pale reflection of active criticism and becomes parody. As a toothless form of criticism, a criticism that

is without base, belief system, or ideology, it reproduces rather than reveals. It reinforces opposition or the maintenance of the status quo rather than lends itself to change. Parody in this form is closely associated with a curious form of contemporary cynicism that Christopher Lasch has recently written about.

As more and more people find themselves working at jobs beneath their abilities, as leisure and sociability themselves take on the qualities of work, the posture of cynical detachment becomes the dominant mode of everyday intercourse. Many forms of popular art appeal to this sense of knowingness and thereby reinforce it. They parody familiar roles and themes, inviting the audience to consider itself superior to its surroundings. Popular forms begin to parody themselves: westerns take off on westerns; Soap operas like *Fernwood*, *Soap* and *Mary*



*The Cruel Discussion* (detail) by Nicolas Africano

*Hartman, Mary Hartman* assure the viewer of his own sophistication by mocking the conventions of soap opera.

Some form of "high" art do the same thing, its practitioners showing the same kind of cynical detachment afflicting writers and producers of *Soap* or *Mary Hartman*. High art begins to parody high art.

So-called New Image painting uses some of the conventions of formalist painting from the sixties, throws in an expressionist or neo-primitive image, and mocks not only sixties painting (the unwholesome canonization of essentialism) but also low (folk) art (naive and wholesome primitivism). The New Image work then becomes an oxymoronic form of "cultured naivete." The result is kitsch. Bad painting becomes good post-modern painting because it assures its viewers that they are sophisticated. They see through it and thus come to recognize its true value as a form of criticism — parody.

The popular cultural form of the beauty pageant is mocked by General Idea and in typical Duchampian dedoublement fashion, they too assure their "sophisticated" audience that they are witnessing (or taking part in) a ceremonial mocking of the beauty pageant form and conceptual or performance art as well as the whole status of art in general. Aping the Hollywood star system or Las Vegas night club acts is simply that — aping. Stylish and sophisticated it may be, but criticism it is not.

Parody may not be enough, especially if we ever find out what our post-modern priorities should be. Parody in the seventies was pleasurable but it could have been more instructive. We don't necessarily have to go back to school, pass exams, work for diplomas to transform Mondo Cane into Mondo Arte. Acknowledging Imaging as a product of seventies cultural narcissism

may enable us to defeat it in the eighties.

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*Bruce Barber is a Canadian writer who teaches at Simon Fraser University.*

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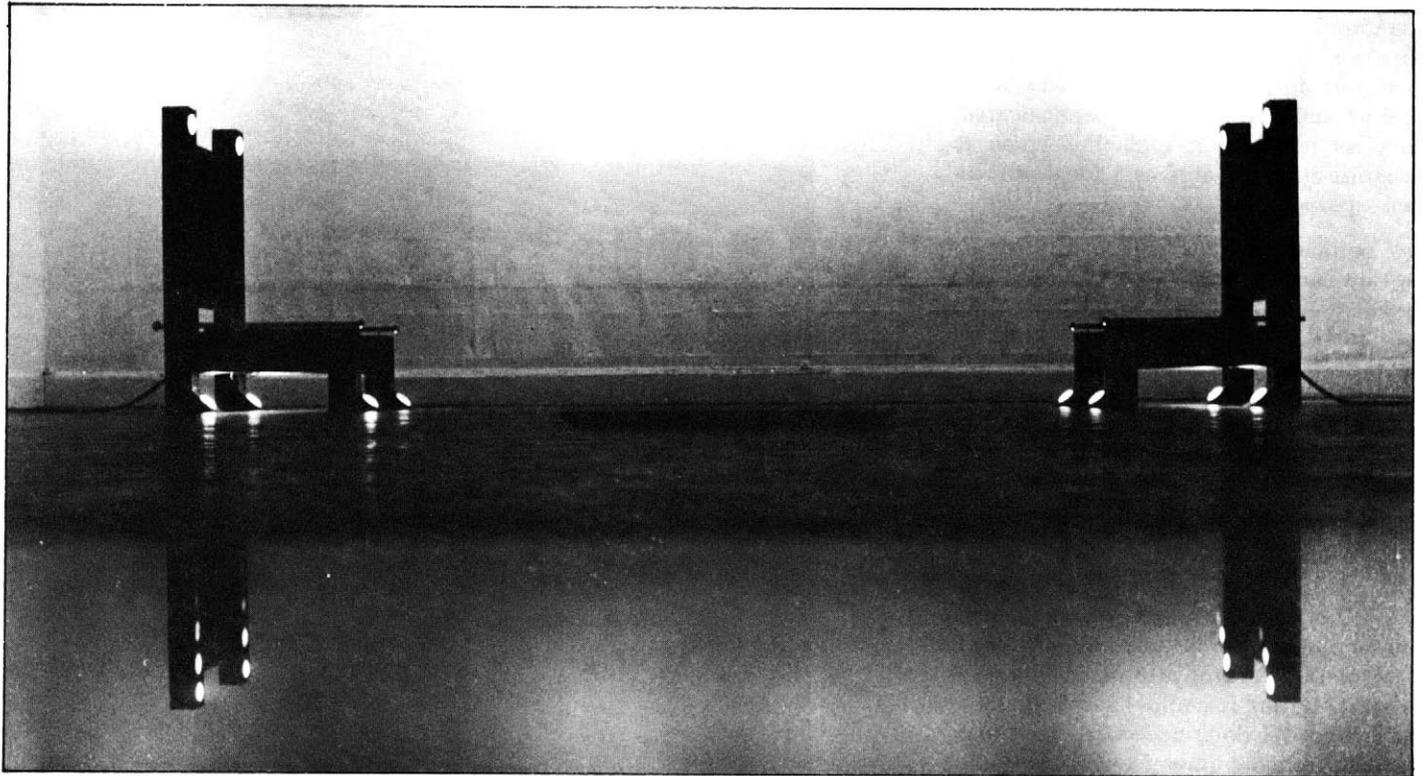
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# LES CHAISES D'ANTAN

Ann Sargent Wooster



Queen Victoria Chairs

Most furniture, and especially chairs, conveys information about the user. Chairs are figures controlling sites—e.g., corsets—that also serve as accessories or costumes. With their carved high backs, Charles II chairs not only supported tall, wigged heads during the evenings of card play popular in the Restoration but served as mini-thrones, aggrandizing their occupants and suggesting the need for graphic symbols of the restored monarchy. The daybeds popular during the reign of Louis XV allowed the spine to droop and encouraged a languid posture suitable for playing the leading intermural sport, seduction. Or imagine the clustered wing chairs of a London gentleman's club: the sheltering ear flaps of the wings isolating their occupants in perdonal caves.

When Brancusi sought to redress the overwhelming verticality of sculpture in favor of horizontal forms, he justified the results by designating the objects produced as furniture, calling them “bench” or “table.” In his quest for a greater degree of abstraction, he did not build chairs because they were too anthropomorphic. While Brancusi disavowed the sensate qualities of furniture, most contemporary artists using furniture in their work (Robert Wilson, Rauschenberg, Scott Burton, and Martin Mull and his *Fabulous Furniture*) come from a theatrical tradition. Their use of furniture capitalizes on the inherent character and drama of furniture, its ability to suggest place and interaction with performers.

Robert Wilson's chairs and other furniture are far more than mere traces of performance. They are sculpture set up individually, or in league or confrontation with each other. They continue the plays in new and independent terms, replacing the performers they once held with their own more defined personalities. The excellent and well-lit (with darkness) installation of



Small Overture Chair

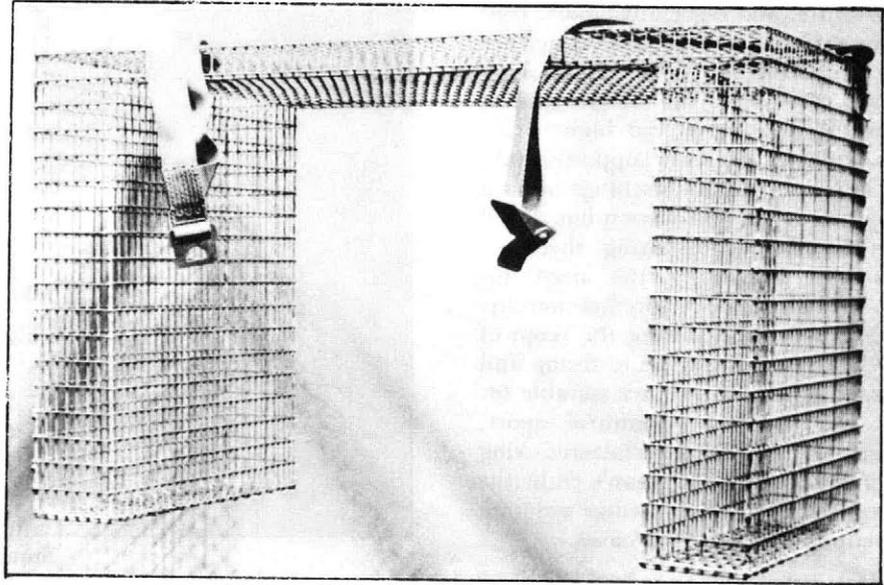
objects, originally curated by Robert Stearns at the Cincinnati Museum of Art, offers a richer and more diversified experience than looking at the sets for Diaghilev's ballets or for Picasso's *The Three Cornered Hat*. The sets and chairs appear as tableaux vivants without performers, enacting some of the situations underlying the plays.

As installed in the Neuberger Museum, Wilson's work is approached through an exhibition of *De Stijl* including Gerit Rietveld's Red and Blue Chair. The similarities and differences between the two approaches to furniture making are striking. Rietveld's brightly-colored uncomfortable chair does have the simple construction and basic carpentry of angles that characterizes much of Wilson's furniture. But Rietveld's chair suggests neutrality, a withdrawal into a more abstract realm. Even the most streamlined of Wilson's furniture such as the neon table and the chaise from *I Was Sitting on My Patio* set or the stainless steel beach chairs

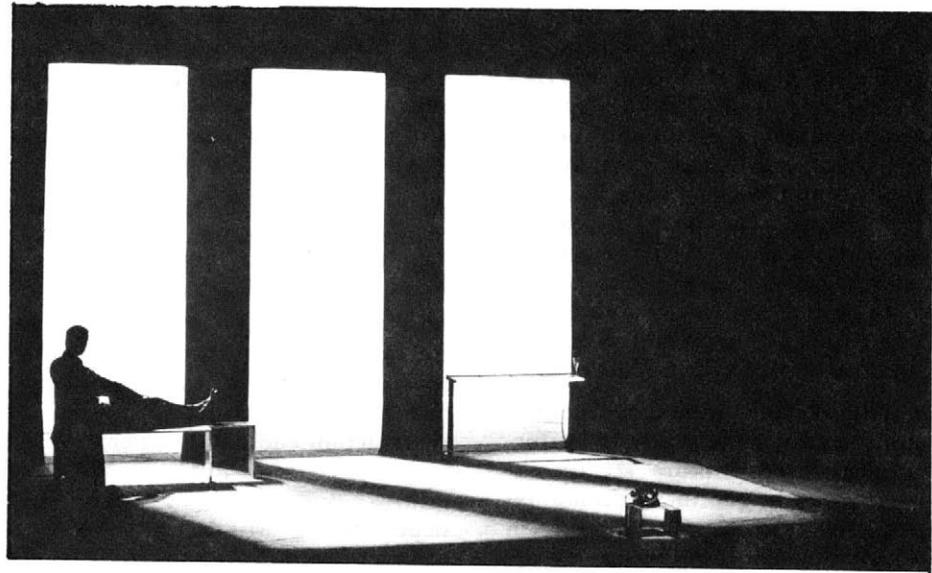
from *Death, Destruction and Detroit* have a deliberate content intended to disturb. Many of Wilson's pieces are done out of sync with human scale. In an Alice in Wonderland way they transform expectations about place. They go beyond their role as containers to instigate a direct response. The small *Overture* chair, placed in the center of a wrinkled sea of lead, posits the loneliness of the individual in a dangerous environment, a solitary voyager. The lead-draped chairs from *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* and the two “electric” chairs from *A Letter to Queen Victoria* evoke different phases of the inviolable prison of domesticity. The footed *Queen Victoria* chairs are equipped with lights in their uprights. The large chairs face each other in the kind of eyeball to eyeball confrontation (with the lights serving as extra eyes) encounter groups and families provoke. The equality and immobility of the chairs suggest a standoff like two computers with equal programming playing chess.

Chairs with and without performers are employed to evoke weightlessness, a meta-physical insubstantiality. The single dangling bentwood chair in *The King of Spain* and *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* was the first of these symbols. The sturdy hanging bench on which Raymond Andrews sat in *Deafman's Glance* has by 1977 metamorphosed into an autonomous erector set bench equipped with a safety belt. Its second incarnation calls forth a state somewhere between flying carpets and electrocution. Chairs are generally proportioned to the figure. The tall thin chair from *Einstein on the Beach* suggests a seat for an extremely tall thin man or a high chair for a child with large parents. Its very shape distorts reality. It is a distortion that continues in performance, suggesting a child on stilts. In contrast to the more massive furniture, the spidery objects tend to dematerialize on stage leaving the performer floating in positions of unnatural rectilinearity.

Like the nineteenth-century theatre designer, Adolphe Appia, Wilson has always shunned conventional notions of theatre, substituting an acting based on dance and placing great importance to lighting. The use of lights as an expressive device is central to his plays since *Einstein*. At the heart of Wilson's recent work are black and white drawings for *Edison*, *Patio*, *Death*, *Destruction* and *Detroit*. They have the same obsession with the power of light and dark found in Seurat's drawings and Edward Hopper's paintings. They pursue a Zarathrustian duality of light and dark in primal conflict. The connection between the two dimensional drawing and the set is most striking in the *Patio* set. The stark banking of the large windows against darkness spills forth light on the floor in a slight chevron which dominates the sharp, linear furniture,



Flying Bench



Patio

Babette Mangolte

relegating it to a lesser role. During performance the striped windows of light equally dominate the spare figures of the performers (Childs and Wilson). The banding of light serves as reminder of the ominous third party mentioned in Wilson's stream-of-consciousness monologue, symbolizing the schizophrenic other. Installed in the museum, the set not only calls forth a more menacing loneliness than it had on stage. Passersby are turned into puppets as their shadows pass across the set, already drawn in tones of shadow, activating it once more.

In several of the short stories (half minute waltzes) that comprise *Video-50*, a half-hour collection of thirty second stories shown as "commercials" on French and German television, light equally supercedes the alleged subject and becomes the main performer. In one, a young girl clad in a shiny satin dress twists on a swing hung on a tree in a wooded glen. The light reflecting off her dress dissolves the dress into the same shimmer and sequins of light produced by the light coming through the spaces between the leaves. Their equality destroys any depth of field, effectively wielding them into one substance. The same dematerialization of objects in space occurs on the *Patio* set. The overwhelming light and dark coupled with apparently weightless furniture (in the case of the table this is enhanced by the inclusion of a neon tube) tends to flatten the space of the set into the graphic symbols of the drawing.

*Ann Sargent Wooster teaches art history at Kean College and writes for various publications on art, performance, and video.*

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## Letters from Yvonne Rainer, Meredith Monk, Kenneth King

# R.E.: CROCE

In her *New Yorker* column of June 30 dance critic Arlene Croce claimed that Robert Wilson “as a writer and director of esoteric visionary plays and as a teacher of movement has been the biggest influence, after Cunningham, on choreographers working today.” Croce disregarded the early work of Yvonne Rainer, Kenneth King, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs and the Judson Dance Theatre.

The absence of accurate histories of con-

temporary American dance, performance art and theatre — and critics who have a historical grasp of the overlapping performance and art worlds — has contributed to the confusion in the performance world. Critics and audiences alike have trouble deciding who’s influencing who these days. Some of those artists angry enough to respond to Croce in print have forwarded their letters to LIVE for publication.

The Editors

Dear Arlene:

May I add my two-cents plain to the brouhaha accruing from your article of June 30? Insofar as Kenneth King has done so admirable a job (and one with which I largely concur) on the Monk-King--Dean-Wilson-Glass connections, let me confine my remarks to my own peers. For this purpose I am enclosing a crudely drawn — and vastly oversimplified — genealogy chart which adds several wrinkles to your revisionist sense of history. Mainly, I have enlarged your oddly reduced number of fountainheads, thus opening up the patterns of lineage. I have also given the poor bastard — our esteemed mutual friend, David Gordon — a proper parentage worthy of his name and have ejected Trisha Brown from the ranks of the “Mercerians.” I so much prefer this term to your “Mercists.” After all, while we’re at it why not call forth the whole imperial baggage — what Kenneth King calls the “bankrupt monarch model” — and use a term lying closer to “caesarian” and Caesar?

Even my name gets absorbed into this model in your hands. You say “The whole post-modern movement from Yvonne Rainer onwards” as though at a given point in time my work formed an apex from which everyone else developed. I fervently wish you Sunday historians might acquire a sense of history based on something

other than a sequence of one-man/woman epiphanies. Things are always more complicated than that. True, Cunningham/Cage were doing their thing 30 years ago. But why was their influence in the dance world not felt in any visible degree until 1960? Clearly it required a convergence of a number of people from different areas of art-making to manifest the ideas that in the intervening 10 years had lain fallow. And to further muddy the waters: the harvest that ultimately developed bears in many instances no relation to the original association. Hence, to call Steve Paxton’s Contact Improvisation Mercerian is like calling Morris & Judd Smithsonians because David Smith’s work preceded theirs. Much of the work that developed in the Judson Dance Workshop was in *opposition* to Cunningham’s then perceived elegance and classicism. Things like walking, running, and quotidian activity performed in varying repetitive modes have never been of much interest to Cunningham, and the term “austerity” frequently used to connect the two generations is a cliché obfuscating of differences than revealing of similarities.

This suggests that a good deal of the work of Paxton, Childs, Hay (whom you overlook altogether) and Rainer might be shunted off to another corner of the yard (I don’t think I’m too far off in describing your enterprise in these “railroading” terms). As for

Trisha Brown— Brown hardly studied with Cunningham at all. Although she participated in the Robert Dunn workshop, her real roots come straight out of the Halprin/Forti axis, e.g., her dance constructions early on in her career and her highly personal—and untheatricalized— approach to movement exploration more recently.

You're right in making a distinction between Childs and Dean. However, I prefer to articulate it as the difference between task and trance. Despite her recent predilection for dancing on the beat, her emphasis on floor patterns and the stiff, slightly awkward, almost parodistic relation to balletic steps thrusts the work more in the direction of children's games than toward the ritualistic atmosphere of Wilson and Dean. In this respect Childs is true to her Judson origins.

Perhaps a whole new set of categories is called for: Cagists, Warevers, Judsonians, West Coastians, Halprinians, Literarians, Passlovians, Fortitudians, and post any of the above. And what about Artworldlians? Thus I would qualify as a former Passlovian-Fortitudian-Judsonian Cagist and lapsed Artworldlian Mercist and new Literarian Cinemist. If my chart provides Rainer with a more complex input than any of the others that is merely the result of knowing my own history best.

One last exhortation: Let's stop blaming everything on Cunningham, for heaven's sake, and—if I were you—I wouldn't blame *anything* on Wilson!

Yours in felicity and art,

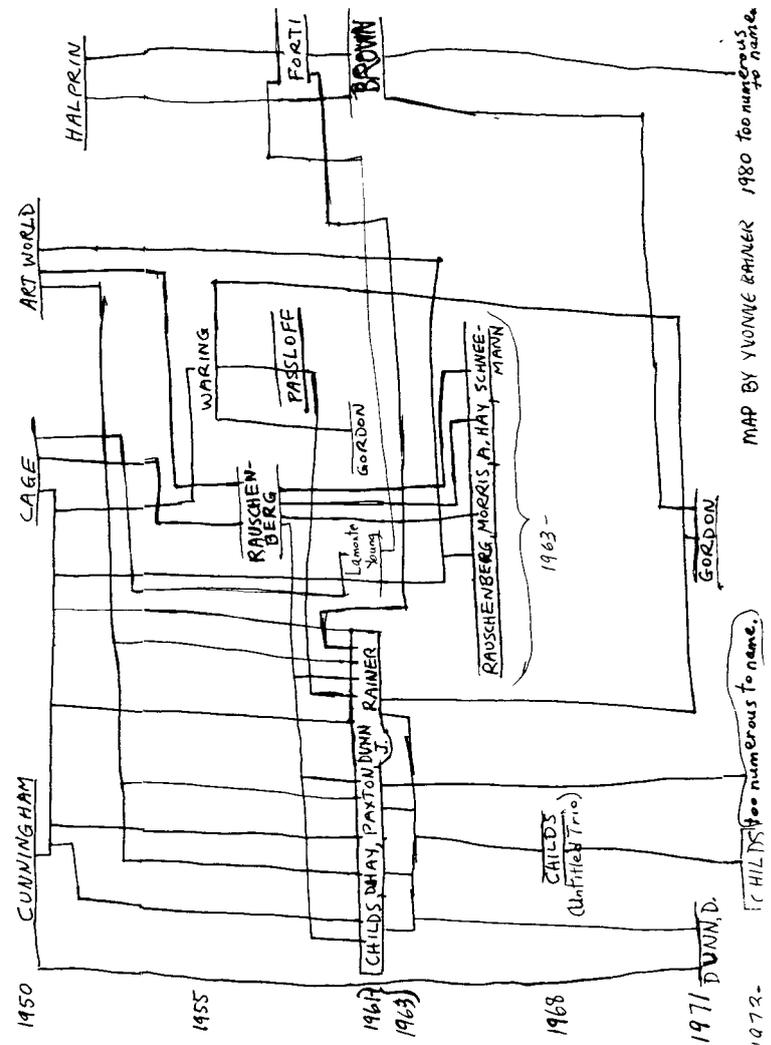
Yvonne Rainer

P.S. Preferences from the standpoint of taste are no justification for the re-writing of history.

Dear Ms. Croce:

It is obvious after reading your article, "Dancing: Slowly the History Comes out," that you think that artists and readers of *The New Yorker* are uninformed and inarticulate enough to accept without argument one person's taste presented as historical fact.

Another danger of an article like this is its effect on funding. It is no secret that you are on the Dance Panel of the National Endowment for the Arts, a consultant to PBS and generally considered an authority in the field of dance. Your article, which mixes fact with fiction, showing little research done and in some cases blatant examples of *voluntary* amnesia, can actually inhibit the



possibilities of some artists getting funding to continue their work. The trend is for funding organizations to give money for the large enterprises and eliminate the smaller projects. This article only affirms the deadening trend—I say “deadenning” because most of the exciting energy of young and creative work is nipped in the bud, leaving only the old and tired elephants to lumber on doing the same old things, taking no risks and offering no contribution to American vitality. When I say “old,” I am not referring to age nor do I mean to imply that all large institutions lack courage. What I do mean to imply is that your writing of this article (about a sub-

ject that hardly interests you) is simply a way that you put your money down on your favorites so that you can be in on what you think will be the most profitable “action.” The only contribution that Robert Wilson has made to American art is that he makes the most expensive and well publicized shows in town. Your article, extolling the old “bigger is better” American dream of which Wilson is a prime example, perpetuates the decadent, ruthless image of an American gigantism that has sadly contributed to the sorry state of world affairs.

Your statement that Robert Wilson and Philip Glass are “mentors” to such “younger” choreographers as Lucinda Childs, Kenneth King, Phoebe Neville and myself is impossible. Depending on the artist, we pre-dated both of them by five to ten years. By the time Robert Wilson arrived on the scene in the Fall of 1967, all the younger choreographers had presented many major works of their own and had generally built their reputations on styles which they continue to use today. I presented my first work in New York in 1963. By 1967 I had created: “Break” 1964; “The Beach” 1965; “Duet with Cat’s Scream and Locomotive” 1966; “16 Millimeter Earrings” 1966 (which you wrote a favorable review about in *Ballet Review* when I revived the piece at the Billy Rose Theatre in 1969); and “Blueprint” 1967 (a two evening work) among many other “multi media” (for want of a better word) performance pieces. Kenneth King had created: “cup/saucer/two dancers/radio” 1964; “Spectacular” 1965 among others of his extraordinary works. Phoebe Neville had presented many of her exquisite pieces and the Judson Dance Theatre including the exceptional and groundbreaking work of Yvonne Rainer, Judith Dunn, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Sally Gross, Deborah Hay, Elaine Summers, Robert Morris and others had already, in the early '60s, presented formidable concerts which challenged all that went before them. It’s strange that you don’t remember you edited an issue of *Ballet Review* in the Spring of 1967 about Judson Church. In it were articles about the Judson Dance Theatre and an article about Kenneth King and myself by Constance Poster. There was also a mention of us and Phoebe Neville in the articles by Jill Johnston and Al Carmines. Naturally, there was no mention of Robert Wilson at all, since he had not even arrived on the scene.

His history has simply been that of seeing things and exploiting them in as profitable a way as possible by making them more visible through his access to more money and a better press agent than most of his contemporaries. The fact that he is an elegant set designer and a shrewd business-man should be acknowledged. But

he does not enjoy the kind of respect from fellow artists that innovators like Yvonne Rainer or Merce Cunningham do because (1) he is not an innovator and (2) he has conducted himself in such a way that respect is an impossibility.

As for your statement that I have composed several “remarkably Glass-like scores,” it is entirely absurd. You can hear all the attributes of what you call the “School of Glass” i.e., electronic keyboards, eerie harmonies, pulsing rhythms and especially vocalise in my record album “Key” (1970), which contains music composed from 1967 to 1970. Phil Glass had not even *begun* working with harmonies, or even chords at all much less vocalise. His music from that period was repeated additive figures played by one instrument or by instruments in unison. He is basically an instrumental composer who uses voices incidentally in an instrumental composition. The voices could easily be replaced by other instruments or even by machines (which he has said himself). I am a vocal composer and a singer. If I use instruments at all, I use them incidentally in a vocal composition. My music is built on special vocal techniques and a vocabulary *intrinsic* to the voice which I’ve developed over a thirteen year period. My music is tailor-made to my own voice and to the voices of the singers in my Vocal Ensemble (who are extraordinary virtuosi) while Glass’s music uses conventional, standardized vocal techniques. The idea of a “School of Glass” is ridiculous—La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Charlemagne Palestine, Pauline Oliveros, Philip Corner, Malcolm Goldstein, David Behrman, Julius Eastman not to mention the Ramones, the Beatles, Patti Smith, Mick Jagger and traditional African, Japanese, Indian, Laotian, Balinese, Chinese, Cambodian, Peruvian and American Indian musicians have all used repetition as a structural element but have certainly not been influenced by Phil Glass. An article like this can only be embarrassing to Glass. He is certainly aware of *who* has contributed *what* to the field of music and would probably be the first to say that you are barking up the wrong tree. The point is, it is clear that you have no information about music and certainly not about music history in the last twenty years. Therefore, you have no business writing about it. No one is the originator nor the owner of 8th notes, polyrhythms, electric instruments or vocalise. If your ear is so insensitive that you can’t distinguish one person’s music from another, leave the writing about musicians to music critics.

Sincerely,

Meredith Monk

Dear Ms. Croce:

Because the basic, pivotal facts and perspectives in your column in the June 30th issue of *The New Yorker* (“Slowly Then the History of Them Comes Out”) are so flagrantly incorrect and so blatantly and authoritatively issued forth, they must be responded to, challenged, and corrected. True, as a journalist you’re free, even entitled, to parade the most extravagant or biased claims across your pages; it’s just that when it purports to be historical, naming names, delineating lines of contact or influence, that your injustice has to be amended, or (better) retracted.

John Cage and Merce Cunningham have worked in their extraordinary, undoubtedly baffling but always innovative ways for at least four decades, and no matter how much fashion changes, or how you assay the trends, they *are* our mentors. Merce Cunningham explained years ago that his breakthrough had to do with the realization that dancing didn’t have to happen on *the* or *a* beat. After two and a half decades, by 1975 or ’76 his dance *Torse* broke through to a new way of measuring, seeing, allotting and experiencing bodyspacetime (new word).

However, your article raises the most spurious view of all that should, and must be challenged across the board, with regard to Mr. Wilson’s exploits, anyway. He’s hardly any mentor for the aforementioned, cited in your initial paragraph. Meredith Monk, myself (and I believe Lucinda Childs) were most certainly presenting *and* exploring the kind of work we are now known for— years before Robert Wilson. Really, it’s the other way around. At this point we are all working on very different things in quite different styles.

The enormous oversight and glaring error— while you’re citing, or shooting mentors—is Yvonne Rainer and the wonderfully complicated choreographic collaborations generated by the decentralization process of The Judson Dance Theater and The Grand Union. Really, the monarch model is over; the alternative barely recognized, investigated, inquired into. I agree—it might be better to call it *all* “post-Cunningham” (and *not* Mercists, please), though obviously no one approaches Merce Cunningham’s expansive, genuinely illuminated expertise. You’re skipping decades in favor of trend and fashion by making a glib, tenuous, myopic jump from Mr. Cage and Mr. Cunningham in four decades to Mr. Wilson and Mr. Glass in one.

Since 1964 I have been presenting a wide variety of dance and theater works and performances. From the beginning they were involved with other things and studies but included movement,

dance, recorded, spoken and published texts, word and voice experiments, and theatrical elements. For example, in 1966 on a well-documented program at Judson Church shared with Meredith Monk, Phoebe Neville, and in a dance of mine entitled “Blow-Out”—a duet with Laura Dean, I performed a super-slow motion study of a motorcycle couple. I never saw the need to inflate it into a five-hour, or all-night extravaganza. In 1966 I also presented my first evening-length theater work *m-o-o-n-b-r-a-i-n* with *SuperLecture* at The Gate Theatre (across from St. Mark’s Church) and again early in ’67 at The Filmmaker’s Cinematheque then located on 42nd Street. In 1967 and ’68 I presented PRINT-OUT, a fragmented, pun-permuted language performance piece (actually a “meta-semantic”) with film and recorded voice in The Judson Gallery, and also as part of an Annual Benefit for Judson Church (’67).

In 1967 I began whirling and spinning. All of movement can be derived from the circle; that’s ancient and universal. From then until ’73 I whirled, often with a rope tied around torso and over shoulders, for long, long periods, not only in numerous public performances, but in workshops (one in particular for a month in the fall of 1970 at American Theater Lab) and at informal gatherings, parties, open houses, etc., and in the lofts of Mr. Wilson, Mr. deGroat, and Miss Dean. Everyone took to it of course, to say the very least. This all for nearly five years, before it started becoming the rage. It was never my intention to save it up, crank it out as a style (or worse, exploit it for my career). Now, alas, it’s been institutionalized.

It’s true that Mr. Wilson mounted several very early theatre attempts in the late ’60s, one at the Bleecker Street Cinema, and one at American Theater Lab, another in an alley. I should know; I was in the first two. We did have a creative exchange—he was in two of my dances as well—at Judson Church and at Eisner/Lubin New York University performance in 1969. But it wasn’t really until the very *end* of the ’60s that he began presenting what is now his characteristic oeuvre—*The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* at Brooklyn Academy of Music. *So*: secondly, I object to your saying we (Monk, Childs, myself, etc.) “reflect different aspects of Wilson’s work, just as Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton and Douglas Dunn reflect different aspects of Cunningham’s work.” With regard to my work—what aspects? Fragmented voice? Whirling? Theatrics? Ms. Croce, these are all as old as the hills. Since 1975 at least everyone mentioned has gone in quite different, really independent directions.

The real breakthrough for those working in dance today is the

constant challenge, exchange and nourishment that obviates our historically plagued, culturally obsessive and repressive need ... for the tyrant-despot ... for daddy. Why don't you maybe try

writing about that, or at least reading and researching them that found it out.

Sincerely,  
Kenneth King

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John Zorn

# SISTER SUZIE CINEMA

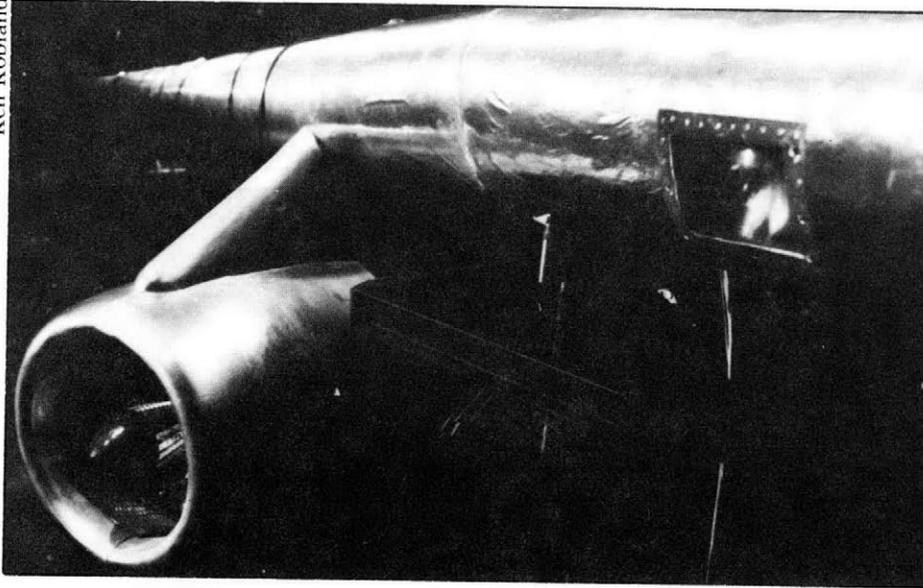


Nona Hotay

Fourteen Karat Soul

Patricia Jones

Tony Mascatello



*Sister Suzie Cinema* is a poem done to doo-wop music. Not poetic theatre. Or theatrical poetry. It is an eerie expression of the tender terms of adolescent sexuality remembered and a marvelous showcase for what some thought was a dying musical tradition. On a set that combines the alien atmosphere of a small movie theatre and the wing of a 727, five young Black men wearing white jumpsuits and red shoes perform part of this richly evocative poem (with music by Bob Telson) about first love, first romance, first sex, movies, air planes, endearments, lies, vulnerability, goddess worship, and California dreaming of a fifties kind.

The first riff features the bass and tenor trading fours slowly, pleading as the group moves from the back of the movie theatre ("I was in the back row/playing with my yo yo") to the presence of the beloved ("Sister Suzie, you're my first love/my last chance"). The desperation of adolescent sexuality mingled with the relentless

earnest vision of love. The move becomes incandescent—a song of all young men who tried to "cop a feel" or get a real kiss instead of the brush across the lips. Women never have seemed so mysterious, so distant, so necessary. The tenor's solo soars above the rich harmonies of the chorus (Telson's melodies are perfect for the words) as the silliest of feelings give way to the recognition of the absolute absurdity of first romance.

After a brief interlude made up of commentary by a tuxedoed black man sitting just outside the action, at the side of the audience, the singers hardclap a mean clave to the beginnings of "Carry me back to the prime time," with a most delicious hook ("You natalie wood/would you, you natalie wood"). This riff is Lee Breuer at his funniest. Puns, twisted language, movie-biz talk all wrapped around the part where the young man obviously "gets over." There seems to be no writer who uses puns as refreshingly as Breuer does.

His love of American language extends to making magic out of the most banal. Where the punk ethos and its practitioners would take this language and drive nails (rusty ones at that) through the utterly absurd heart of it, Breuer elaborates, provokes until a reality becomes so transcendent that you wonder why you're laughing, but you laugh just the same.

The final part of the performance concerns the air plane ride (metaphor for first sex and memories thereof). The falsetto comes into play—puns intended at this point. He rides the melody high like the air plane wing which rises to fine crescendo, then falls as the stylized movements of the singers give way to the relaxed climax of "I'll Be There When the Popcorn is Gone" (with popcorn in hand, of course). The fevered falsetto to the rich baritone. Breuer has done it again. Made another statement on the vulnerability, the fragility, the ephemera of masculinity and time. In *The B-Beaver*, he dealt with impotence, with evolution as a process of falling apart. In *The Shaggy Dog* and *Prelude to Death in Venice* he sees the transformation as terrifying, probably necessary, bewildering. No answers. But a will. The shaggy dog regains her dignity. John keeps hanging on the telephone.

*Sister Suzie Cinema* is slight in comparison to the "Animations," but no less serious. The lush poem inspires this lush music. Breuer speaks to and for the young man feeling for the first time, the awe of, the desire for, a woman, the Other. (That little girl grown up just a little. She whose mouth pouts like Tuesday Weld or who kisses languid like Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun*.) Male adolescent sexuality is often looked upon as a time of incredible violence, anguish, and terror. Breuer uses those elements just as doo-wop music, despite its sweet sophistication, uses primal

harmonies, rhythmic complexity, and a supremely simplistic melodic structure. An elegant concoction has been created that evokes just enough of the rough stuff to let the audience in on the rather bumpy ride of this "night flight."

It is at that point in the narrative, where puns flow, where the paradox is seen, where the laughter begins and the heart breaks. The point where the poem stays a poem, only more so. The point where Breuer clinically examines with humor and an ear for the most outrageous statement of American male fantasy, the rise and fall of masculinity in our times. It is the point where the music, Black music, becomes a healing force. That "sweet love, what about that" that moves us and keeps us grinning. It is here where the appeal of young men is seen as great as the appeal of "Veronica of the Lake" or "Sally of the Fields."

*Sister Suzie Cinema* is too brief, but beautiful, a dessert of a theatre. A dessert just as serious and as earnest as the music it uses. Breuer, who rarely works with Black performers, has an uncanny gift for utilizing the best of a tradition notably absent from "white" theatre. This is no minstrel show. The group, 14 Karat Soul, acts as well as sings (the singing is better, but the bass of the group has incredible potential for drama). Group singing adds dimensions to the poem that a simple reading or choreographed piece would never do. It brings back the use of lyricism. Lyricism in modern language. From celebrations of "Suzie's" adornments to show-biz slang to air plane talk, the words jump up and dance through singing that shows that black music is not sheltered in the pseudo-gospel based popular style heard on those gigantic radios by young brothers who would understand for the most part what is happening in the performance. Doo-wop

singing is real people's music. The lyric tradition has always been the most popular of poetic styles. That Breuer can bring these supposedly unharmonious elements together to make this delicious theatre is to his credit as a writer and director. A perfect way to mythologize all the "Suzies" of this world. A perfect way to hear a poem that pleads the desperate desires of never-to-be-forgotten youth.

P.J.

When the lights come up on *Sister Suzie Cinema*, we are in the dark. But there is light; it is the pregnant twilight of the darkened cinema, and we sense the coming projection. We are the audience, but we have been contemplating a sea of theatre seats which is the stage. We are expecting a picture, but we will hear a voice.

Fourteen Karat Soul begin, the lead explaining that: "It came together. yeah. me and my movie. how could I falter. with you as my lead. I went to a late show. and sat in the back row. and played with my yo-yo.

and let my heart bleed." But although he is silhouetted against the projection booth window, the way an audience member would look to a film star from his place upon the screen, the projection beam is shining on his face from behind us, giving us the impression of being simultaneously within and outside of the performance. In fact, the notion of bilocation seems further to be thematic in this work inasmuch as it is simultaneously effective as popular music and as theatre.

In *Sister Suzie Cinema* Lee Breuer doesn't just put high art on top of pop or vice-versa. By going directly to the real world for his performers, by simply hiring Fourteen Karat Soul, he has avoided the first obvious pitfall, that the actor will fail to measure up to the pop idol he is referencing (Beatlemania syndrome). David Thurmond, Glenn Wright, Russell Fox, Bobby Wilson, and Reginald Brisbon deliver with divine breath. They are simply the real thing. How he avoids the second obvious pitfall, that of the star with nothing to do



L.B. Dallas

(Elvis in Hollywood), is more complicated, and has to do with his qualities as a writer and as a collaborator.

The central character through whom the poetic "I" speaks is a vocal group. They do much better with Breuer's poem than any actor could do with their singing. And they are not pulled out of shape. Bob Telson's music is terrific and authentic; hovering behind it is Breuer's poem, very condensed images of an erotic encounter with his muse. Cliche after cliche is redeemed by the clarity of the script, turned into metaphor by the sudden convergence of several meanings on a single phrase. It is a lyric clearly beyond the limits of popular music, but it works nonetheless perfectly as such.

L.B. Dallas' work on the sets is beautiful collaboration—strong, simple images upon which the performers move, and through which the events acquire additional meaning. In the opening song, for example, the movie theatre set has already sounded a basic theme before the first words are spoken or sung. And as the group finishes this song, a kind of invocation to *Sister Suzie Cinema*, the rows of chairs fall away, delivering the group onto what appears to be a conventional stage. The lead singer does what he always does at this point in a real concert, he talks to the audience. "...are we ever. a two shot. ever so close up..."

But here he somehow seems to be describing the union of the poet with his muse. The group jumps into the second song, a rocker, and a more urgent invocation to Sister Suzie. "...Carry me back to the Prime Time/Star studded/You Natalie Wood you/Would you..." And this segues into the third song, yet another invocation, this time tender and lyrical. As they sing "Through this night flight/be my bright

light..." the stage amazingly transforms itself into a lifesized jet plane wing under their feet. The wing, and the song, take off. A slide of the starry night puts us up there. "... Holy love of god look at me. transparent./isn't this the height of it..."

The lead (the group changes leads) declares his faith in Sister Suzie and his need for her. He'll be there, he asserts, when the popcorn's gone. And the wing descends with the song toward an ending. "It came together. me and my movie. we opened up uptown on 5th avenue. We played it light as a feather. then we played heavy in leather. then we came together and my movie came true."

Lee Breuer has been involved in collaboration for a long time. He has developed a special talent for combining talents. In this spare, joyful work, he has succeeded in cutting back almost all literary device, and let the images declare themselves. Everyone involved has contributed outstanding material, and remarkably it all functions together perfectly well. The entire piece is a luminous image filling the dark of the theatre.

T.M.

*Patricia Jones is a New York poet and critic. Tony Mascatello is a New York painter and performer.*



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# F.Y.I.: MOMA

## Daryl Chin talks with Cee Brown

In the past two years, Cee Brown has created one of the major resource archives on performance art. Presently employed in the Department of Education at The Museum of Modern Art, Mr. Brown established this archive in the library of the Museum in 1978. The following interview was conducted by Daryl Chin on June 19, 1980, in the Sculpture Garden of The Museum of Modern Art.

**What type of material did you concentrate on for the archives? Is it what Barbara Moore (Backworks) would call "the memorabilia" of a performance; that is, flyers, posters and press release? Or do you try to get full documentation?**

Both, actually. I definitely try to enlist artists and institutions to send me as much material as possible, such as resumes, bios, bibliographies, notices, and flyers. The archive definitely has a collection of what you've called "the memorabilia" of performance art.

If it's possible, I do try to get as much documentation as I can. At times we get actual objects and props. For example, the Swiss Mime Company Mummenschanz donated several of the large rolls of paper which they use as part of their costumes. Federica Marangoni (as part of PERFORMANCE III) donated the painting of wax which she used in her performance. By and

large, though, I try to discourage that sort of donation, only because there really isn't enough space in the archive. Of course, many artists have utilized a variety of media in their work. Many artists have made films, videotapes, audiotapes, records. Laurie Anderson is a good example. Perhaps at some point it would be possible to have a file on Laurie Anderson which would include her records as well as some of the objects, such as the tape-bow violin, and the documentation on her performances.

**How many artists are documented in the archive?**

Now it's close to 2,000 artists. These artists cover a wide number of fields: music, mime, theatre, dance. I've recently gotten a lot of mailings from Carnegie Hall on their concerts and recitals, and it's hard to know where to draw the line, or if there should be a line. How do you define "performance art," and should you exclude certain types of performance, such as symphony concerts? I guess when I began the archive, I had a certain definition of performance art in mind, but as the archive has grown, and more and more material began to accumulate, I found it harder to hold on to my initial definition. There are certain music concerts that can be classified as "performance art" just as there are certain choreographers who do "per-

formance art," so I've tried to be as inclusive as possible.

**How did you start the archive?**

It started in June, 1978, with about 20 artists. By Christmas I had over 600 artists on file. I started by contacting a few people that I knew, like Jane Crawford at Performing Artservices. I asked her to send me information on the various artists that she handled. Most of the organizations that I contacted were places which sponsored performances, such as LAICA (Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art) and the Walker Art Center, and the ones in New York City like The Kitchen, P.S. 1, and Artists' Space. I also try to be in on as many artists' mailing lists as possible: in this way, there's actually very little cross-filing in the archive. I can keep separate files on each. This has made organizing the archives easier.

**You mentioned that you did have documentation on some artists. Could you give me some examples of artists whose files are virtually complete in that sense?**

Well you see, that's very difficult, because I'm dependent upon the artists. It depends on what they send me. Julia Heyward is an example of an artist whose work I'd like to have more material on, but the material that I have is rather minimal: just a few flyers and announcements. I've tried to contact her, but we haven't been able to get together to discuss this matter. But there are some artists whose files are virtually complete. Francesc Torres is one. Helmut Schober, a performance artist who works in Italy, is another. When Federica Marangoni donated some material from her performance, she also brought over a lot of documentation on her work. I have a large file on Cindy Lubar and Christopher Knowles.

**How did you get interested in performance?**

Well, when I was living in Seattle, I did performance. I kept extensive files on my performances, as well as other performance work being done. Once you've done a piece, it's gone. It's a very ephemeral art form, and I liked the idea of having something that I could refer to in the future. For that reason, I was always very conscientious about documenting performances. As an artist, I had an archive of my work. I assumed that most performance artists would have similar archives. The summer before I came to New York City, I took a course in archival management at the University of Washington Library Science School. When I came to New York, my first job was working on "Projects" here at the Museum. I had a lot of time to organize material for those shows, and I began to think of the fact that many of the artists also worked in performance.

**Aside from direct contact with artists, what other sources of information are there?**

Other important sources of information are institutions which sponsor or present performances. In New York City, there are the well-known ones like Franklin Furnace, The Kitchen, Artists' Space, P.S. 1. Another important source is the Center for Art and Communication in Buenos Aires: I find their publications very helpful. I think that conferences and symposia are vital in this area, because the field is becoming so widespread. Last year, I attended a conference on performance in Venice, Italy, that was cosponsored by the Center for Art and Communication and NYU. I thought it was an illuminating conference as I was able to meet with performance artists from many different countries. Many Italian performance artists have since been in

touch with me, and that's how a lot of the documentation has grown.

**How extensive are the archives? For example, many artists have been doing performance works since the late 1950s. Do your files go back that far?**

As more and more artists began to submit material, I found that it was getting overwhelming. So, rather arbitrarily, I've tried to eliminate the archive work from 1970. You see, the important point about the archive is that I'd like it to be a *living* archive. I'd like it to be a clearinghouse for information, as well as a resource, not just for scholars, but for artists as well. For example, when an artist come to see me, I always try to make sure that there's some information that I can help him with. Frequently, I get artists from other countries who are donating some material about their work. Often, I can help them by giving them names to contact, places to go to.

**In conjunction with the Junior Council (at the Museum), you've been involved in presenting performances. I was wondering if there were possibilities to extend the function of the archive, so that, for example, you would hire a photographer to document a performance.**

Of course, that would be the ideal situation. Not only that, but also having artists create works for videotape. I don't mean just videotaping a performance, but works created for video, which would be archived. Ideally, I'd like to have space so that we could get media equipment, such as videotape decks and monitors, or stereo record players, so that someone doing research could just come in and be able to see or hear the artist's work. Of course, all this equipment is dependent on funding. Right now, the archive has to be run on a small scale. This summer I've been lucky

enough to get a volunteer who's working full time on the archive. The archives can only be open during the hours that I can spare to be there, so the artists coming in have to work around my schedule.

Also, I think that performance art is very vital: there's so much going on in the field. I try to see as much as I can. When I first came to New York, there were times when not much was happening, but now there's always something going on. I think that the archive is one of the ways that the Museum can recognize this activity, and I hope that funding can be provided to expand it.

And finally, I'm sure that there are many artists I haven't been able to reach, or who haven't heard of the archives. If people want to contact me, they can do so by calling me at the Museum or by writing to me. I'd really be interested in having artists send me material on their performance work.

Cee Brown can be contacted by writing to:

Cee Brown  
Performance  
The Museum of Modern Art  
11 West 53 Street  
New York, New York 10019

# CZECH MAIL

Prague, February 28, 1980.

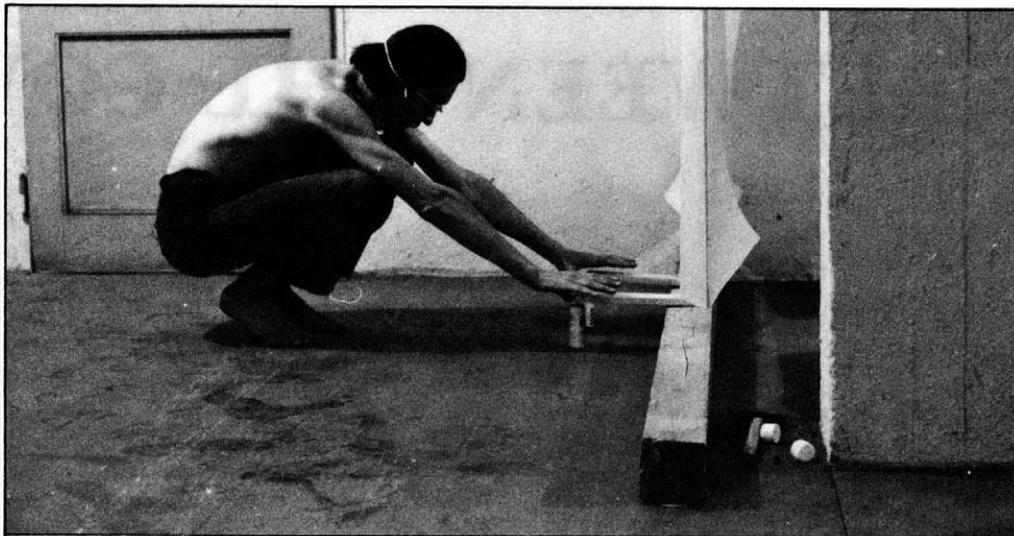
Dear Live,

Thank you very much for three issues of LIVE and, first of all for your very kind letter offering a place in it for the things made or being made here. But I have to admit my holding of an illusion: I knew that most artists making actions/performances here have stopped—for different reasons—their activities during the last 1-2 years: but I've reckoned upon their creative abilities, forcing them to come back ... But as much as I can see I was wrong. And moreover, for the present time I feel myself unsatisfied with this kind of working: with its directions to theatre and show in the West as well as with very limited possibilities to do these things here, and from it a resulting limited audience, etc. And the last but not least reason of my unsatisfaction is lying in myself, because of feelings of exhaustion of directness of my own body's involvement in these works, and because of my inability to arrange works using one or more mass media and their effects, which are attracting me more and more (I never studied art, but—over 10 years ago—information and communication theory).

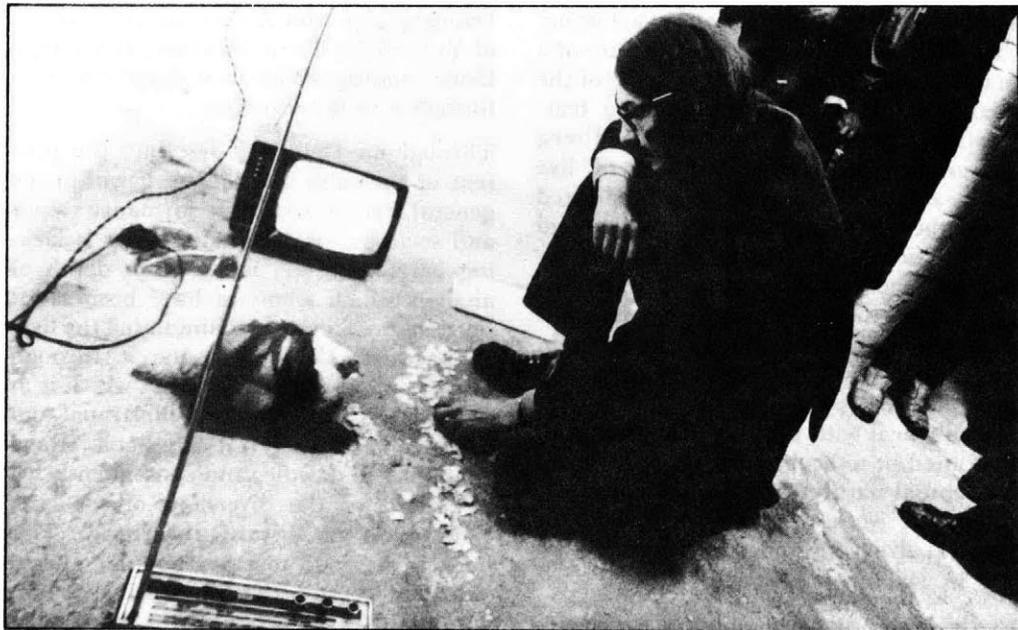
Many best regards and thanks. Love.

Petr Stembera

P.S. I didn't end my working—now I am waiting for some ideas and am preparing to create some "sociological" works (not performances). More like studies.



In an unstable position over two bottles of spray—when I fall over, the sprays start spraying. (Untitled, Prague, 1979)



Placing a chicken between a TV set and a radio, I prevent it from escaping. (Untitled, Wroclaw, Poland, 1979)

# BETWEEN THE COVERS

with Tony Whitfield

In the concluding paragraph of the foreword to *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* RoseLee Goldberg states, “. . . this first history inevitably works itself free of its material, because that material continues to raise questions about the very nature of art . . . it pursues the development of a sensibility. The goal of this book is to raise questions and to gain new insights.” *Performance* succeeds in achieving that goal. Given, however, the absence of a major historical work on the growth of the medium, this is not an astounding feat. Performance art, which Goldberg cautiously gives the loose definition of “live art by artists,” has always been predicated upon the necessity for challenges to and reevaluation of the “academy,” and by extension, the world in general. The experimental nature of performance itself demands questions, dialogue and commentary through its active engaging and manipulation of an audience. To successfully deal with this material, one must first attempt to accurately reconstitute the conceptual nature of the inquiry intrinsic to specific works with regard to both its physical structure and the historical context in which it is posited.

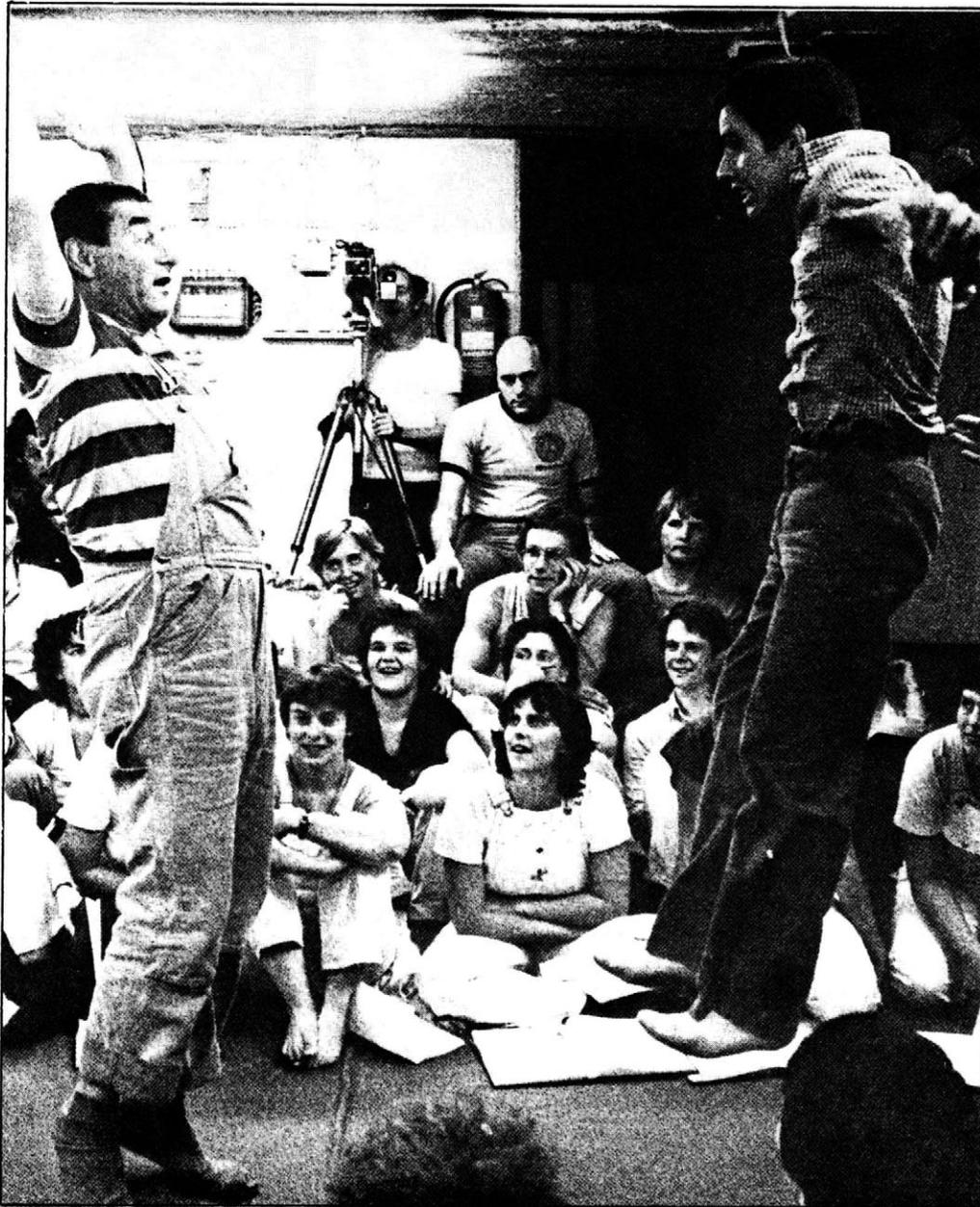
In chapters organized roughly in chronological order Goldberg attempts to do this. Beginning with Futurist “manifesto-like

events” *Performance* discusses its Russian counterpart and then moves on, giving equal time to Constructivist “production art,” Dadaist cabaret in Zurich, the Bauhaus theatre/performance workshop and the post WWII years in Europe and America, focusing on Cage, Cunningham and the Black Mountain College, Happenings, Fluxus, Ann Halprin, The Judson Dance group, and Europe-based activities of Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, and Joseph Beuys, ending with a final chapter on performance in the seventies.

Throughout Goldberg describes the content of the work and locates it within the general frameworks of performance trends and socio-political climate. What is lacking here, however, is a certain depth of analysis which seems to have been sacrificed in the interest of maintaining the lively pace of Goldberg’s march through history. In a work of this type, which is at pains to be concise and well-illustrated, not unlike a “Time/Life Library Book,” there is no time to dawdle, and consequently little room for the diversions of scholarly elaboration or critical theorizing. This book is designed to carry popular appeal (whether or not that is possible is debatable). Yet its approach to that end is rather academic. For this reviewer, in a book that discusses the most eclectic of art

media, a text which allowed itself the freedom to seriously examine inter-media relationships on historical and conceptual grounds would have been more than welcome. When the necessity to do so was inescapable, as in the case of Dada and surrealist performance, Goldberg delves into those areas of intellectual exploration. For the most part, particularly in discussing the post-WWII years, her approach is formally descriptive and historically linear. She begins to codify the performance medium to a point of misleading separation from the influences of concurrent developments in other art forms, forms in which most performance artists are also deeply involved, such as painting, sculpture, film, video, literature, etc. While *Performance* successfully underlines the significant length of the live art phenomenon, it does not by any means encompass its breadth. But could that have been expected from a “first history”? Obviously not. It does, however, lay the groundwork for future studies.

Luckily for Goldberg and the writers who will take up the challenge of future histories, the seventies have produced ample documentation of performance in forms ranging from videotapes and records to magazine coverage and anthologies. Of the latter, two recent publications illustrate



Flug Versuch, SD Performance, Otto Muehl, SD Zentrum Friedrichsuf, 1979.

the difficulties facing the writer who attempts to present a broad assessment of this period. Putting aside the most obvious problem in working from documentation of ephemeral material—that it is only a surrogate for the live work—one must keep in mind that these works were brought together in catalogue or anthological form (and often documented with that end in mind) with specific goals other than simply recording performance activity.

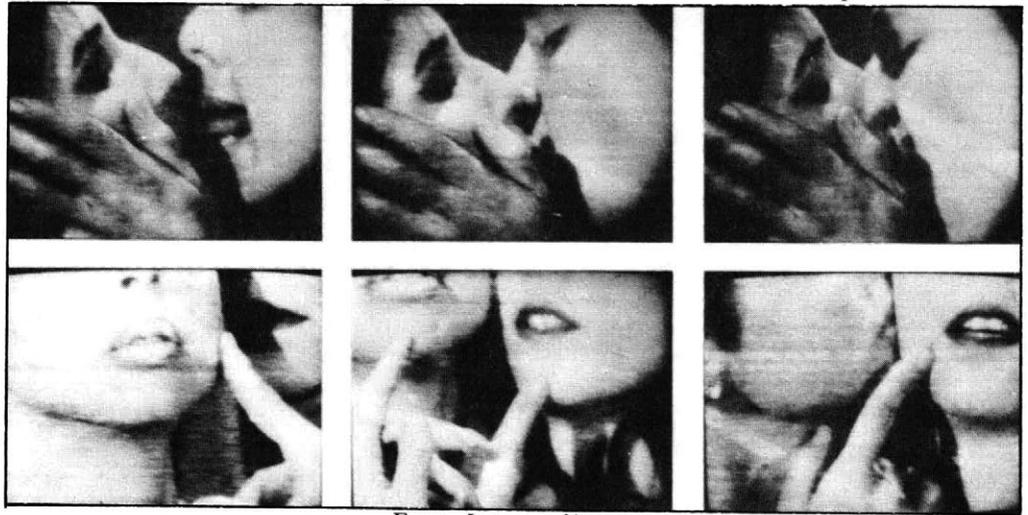
In issue 10/11 (Spring 1980) of *The Dumb Ox*, artists/editors Allan Kaprow and Paul McCarthy solicited six-page contributions from fourteen performers and/or art writers whose work, by Kaprow and McCarthy's standards, seemed to indicate important future directions in the field, while at the same time acknowledging the historical tradition of performance. Of the artist-contributed pages, the German Otto Muehl is the most informative about his work in general and his performance concepts. In an essay accompanied by photographs he discusses how he has arrived at what he terms "reality art" and how it relates historically, politically and structurally to the social environments of Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop or "Narcissism Art." Kaprow, Pauline Oliveros, Carolee Schneemann, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Wolf Vostell and Michael Kirby use their six pages to document specific works with texts, photographs and, sometimes, diagrams. While imparting skeletal descriptions of the original works these contributions are equally concerned with a re-presentation of their content under the conditions set by the printed page. Most successful of these media transferrals is Schneemann's dichotomous pairing of photographs of erotic fantasies and art business letters to funding agencies, art schools, galleries, etc. The relationships she sets up on the page are one to one, as is

finally the relationship between the reader/viewer and the components of the work. It is a work about disjunctive experience, and the inherent schisms are effectively conveyed.

Also included in this issue of *The Dumb Ox* are essays by Barbara Cavaliere, Frantisek Deak, and Richard Hertz which, in assessing the current state of the medium, provide a provisional outline of the tradition of performance art and imply future directions for performance as a pure art form (if such a description can be thought of as anything other than a contradiction in terms). Richard Hertz's essay, "Performance Grids," defines historically correct performance as loosely scripted; free of the situational "frames" of the stage, gallery, etc.; unconcerned with technical expertise or cast hierarchies; of social and personal relevance; international and cross-disciplinary. Hertz goes on to discuss artists included in this issue as examples of proper performer, i.e., both the inheritors and progenitor of valid performance tradition. In doing so he exposes the bias of this publication.

If this issue is to be considered as a whole, Hertz's definition abides and serves as an introduction to Barbara Cavaliere's "Notes on Performance Art in New York" and as a context for the reading of Frantisek Deak's fine article on "The Use of Character in Artistic Performance." While such a definition as Hertz's is quite useful in that it provides a basis of approach for general discussion of performance, it is also problematic in that implies a false qualitative standard based on the recognition of what has become the performance academy.

From a different perspective, The School of Art and Art History at the University of Iowa's publication, *Intermedia*, has assembled documentation of a wide range of



From *Intermedia*.

performance activity which came into being, ironically, under the auspices of an academic institution. Since the late sixties and the establishment of the University of Iowa's Center for New Performing Arts, the University of Iowa has been committed to development of performance art, or, more precisely, artists working in intermedia, thereby expanding the boundaries of performance concepts beyond the live situation. *Intermedia* documents works its editors, Hans Breder and Stephen C. Foster, deemed the "best and/or most representative" produced either for the CNPA or the Corroboree: Gallery of New Concepts, which succeeded the CNPA in 1976. Because the works represented in this anthology were drawn from a pool which spans a ten year period of pedagogically diversified activities *Intermedia* is, surprisingly, one of the least (covertly or overtly) didactic primary source volumes on the subject. Twenty-seven artists are involved. Their particular aesthetics are as varied as Hans Haacke's and Martha Wilson's, as Marjorie Strider's and Jon Gibson's, as Richard Kostelanetz's and Mac Adams',

yet they share a sensibility that demands cross-disciplinary uses of media. Unlike *The Dumb Ox*, this book is unified by a consistent design scheme which shifts the reader's focus from the art content of each artist's entry as it appeared on the page—the artists, here as in *The Dumb Ox*, supplied, in most cases, their own photographs and texts—to the work it described.

In addition to quite straightforward documentation *Intermedia* includes an insightful 1976 article by Peter Frank entitled "The Arts in Fusion" in which he makes his way comfortably through the web of intermedia history, particularly in the late twentieth century, paying careful attention to the cross-overs of poetry and music into the conceptual territories of the visual arts. Frank's point in this article seems to be that an inter-disciplinary approach to the art making process is not an exception to the rule, but is in fact a basic tenet of modernism.

*Tony Whitfield is a New York contributing editor for FUSE magazine.*

# REVIEWS

***La Frontera.* Ed Friedman.  
*Disclosure on All and Everything (Part 1).*  
Larry Miller.**

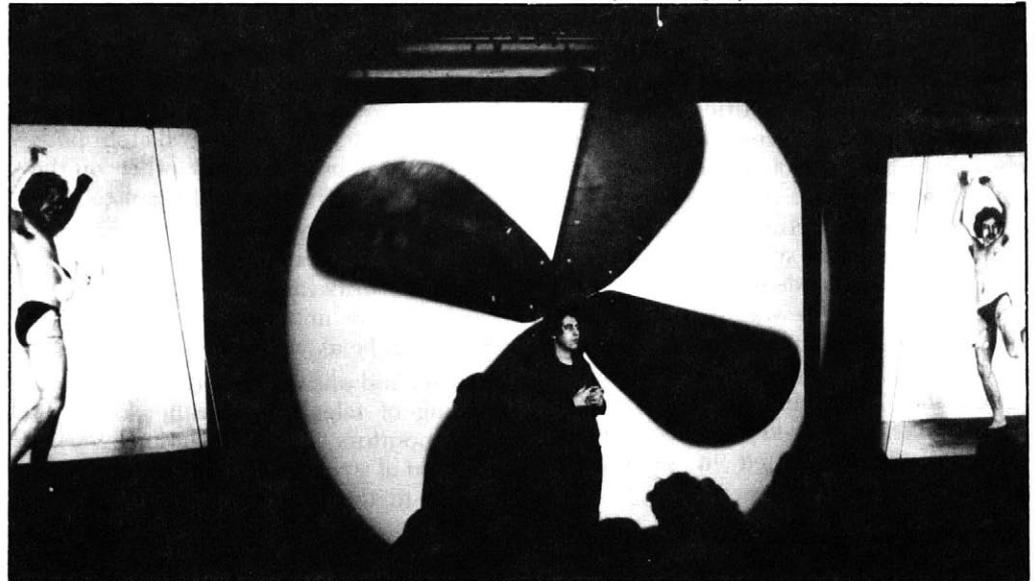
***Aleatoire Je Ne Sais Quoi.* Ralston Farina.  
*The Kitchen* (April-May).**

Within three weeks, Friedman, Miller, and Farina presented solo lecture-dem/comedy performances at the Kitchen like the separated parts of a Soho vaudeville program. Each monologist was accompanied by the usual media aids: film, slides, recorded music, props. Each set up his show along the Kitchen's long wall to place himself close to all of audience for maximum comic feedback. Apart from these general similarities, each act proved yet again that while this basic performance format can accommodate any kind of subject matter, even these simple terms call for material appropriate to the framework's length and structure.

Writer Ed Friedman's *La Frontera* was a performance poem unnecessarily stretched to novella length on the rack of convention, i.e., that an evening's entertainment must be of certain minimum length to justify the audience's time and money. This Procrustean job had the intent of all such unnatural re-shapings, that of torturing a

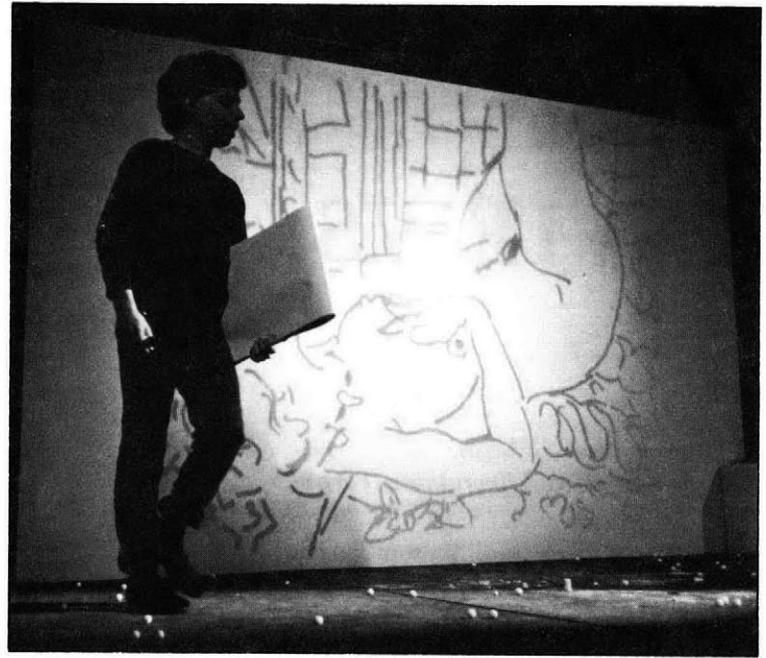
slight, fragile idea (here, an English class for illegal aliens) into a Big Statement (Bad Language Equals Bad Social Position). Friedman presented himself as a teacher who called on his "class" (accomplices seated in the front rows of the audience) to recite aloud the Spanish-inflected, phonetically spelled-out sentences projected on slides, thereby "learning" a kind of Desi Arnaz English. Built on a running joke of sassy immigrant sayings coupled with Kim MacConnel's faux-naïf, cartoon-like drawings, this gimmick initially came across as a clever performance idea with a dash of modest social comment. However, *La Frontera* was so amused with itself that it never changed, never developed, but simply went on and on. After some twenty minutes it was only mildly funny, and after that, not very interesting. A regular class period's length—fifty minutes—was too long by half for this lesson.

Larry Miller's *Discourse* was equally over-long, an hour and a half anthology of unrelated skits stuck together in no particular order. Miller appeared as "himself," talking to the audience in a casual "oh, you're here too" manner, and served up thoughts on a number of topics. Fortunately, Miller showed an easy ability to pull off semi-improvised chatter with a lot of off-hand humor so that the commentary was less a lecture than a free-associating comic monologue. This "discourse" was illustrated with some well-made, striking props: flashing neon signs ("DREAM/DON'T DREAM"), a gigantic fan blade, angel wings for humans, "death caps" to make audible the sound of dying (cloth caps with audio speakers attached). But these engaging assets were offset by the rambling nature of the piece as a whole, and by the run-on structuring of some of the individual sequences, notably a lengthy film which exhausted



*Discourse on All and Everything* (Miller)

Leslee Broersma



*Aleatoire Je Ne Sais Quoi (Farina)*

the slight joke of treating a gorilla as a human being. The in-joke references to the art world and its politics were a further deficit, and so were the constant referrals to the lack of rehearsal and the inevitable technical foul-ups (they did happen). Another section, a slide sequence showing closeups of scars and wounds of Bowery derelicts made me uncomfortable not only because it was extremely distasteful to watch, but because it was just there in a sort of innocence, as if sincerity (“I saw this”) were enough. The strength of *Discourse*, its low-key fantasy atmosphere, slowly dissipated in such sour clouds.

By contrast, Ralston Farina’s *Aleatoire Je Ne Sais Quoi* was a briefer, more related collection of bits, the whole kept in energetic motion by Farina’s fast pacing and nimble comic timing. Many of the skits

were organized around magic tricks, such as an ESP segment in which he reproduced the images drawn by selected audience members on unseen sketch pads. Others were built around other on-the-spot drawing efforts: his attempt to trace separate and moving projected transparencies which was followed by a lottery (“random drawings for random drawings”). These acts were all performed with panache as were the slighter ones, a question and answer period and the rapid twisting of television channel knobs on some monitors. The little actions worked as a kind of structural and thematic punctuation to the larger bits and lasted no longer than necessary to get across that idea. Perhaps the only element of Farina’s past occasional aggression toward the audience was the penetrating smell of the moth balls which spewed out of his Hugo

Ballish costume when he gyrated wildly to open the show; the image was hilarious and worth the forty-five minutes of bitter odor. Aside from that, *Aleatoire* didn’t deliver much of the mysterious opacity or crazed wackiness of Farina’s previous “Portraits of a Half-Hour,” but it was a good-natured entertainment by a performer who skews the considerable skills of a nightclub magician toward his own inimitable purposes.

**John Howell**

**William Hellermann *Nests and En-Trances.*  
Art on the Beach (July).**

On a perfect summer’s evening, with a spectacular view of the downtown skyline before me, and the lapping of the Hudson River against the shore behind me, I wat-

ched William Hellermann launch the performance series of "Art On The Beach."

His first work, *Nests*, was an audience participation piece. Members of the audience were invited to cover themselves with large white sheets, making nests in a circle on the sand. Each nest of participants was equipped with a bird call. Hellermann stood at the center of the circle of nests swinging a long tube. As he swung the tube overhead, it created a hollow, low pitched whistle. Participants were instructed to respond to the sounds they heard around them. After the piece began, it was difficult to locate the source of the sounds. *Nests* created an interesting juxtaposition of man-made sounds mimicking nature in an unusually "natural" setting at the edge of the urban environment. Through this juxtaposition, heightened by the backdrop of the city skyline, the open air beach came to feel much like a theatre. The creation of

mechanical sounds in a "natural" setting gives way to a notion of distance, metaphorically mirrored and dialectically reinforced by the contrast of city and beach, skyline and shore. The distance from nature created by the artificial bird calls and contrived nests draws attention to nature and natural worlds. The active ingredient of this piece was the performers' response to their feelings about being in a nest. Some felt secure, some felt threatened, some felt complacent.

Hellermann's second piece, *En-Trances*, also involved group participation, although its elements were very different. The audience was invited to form a chain circle, each person sitting behind the nest. The sound was created by the participants/performers singing into one another's backs. As the sounds of the music passed through the group, the search for a tonal center began to develop into a chord.

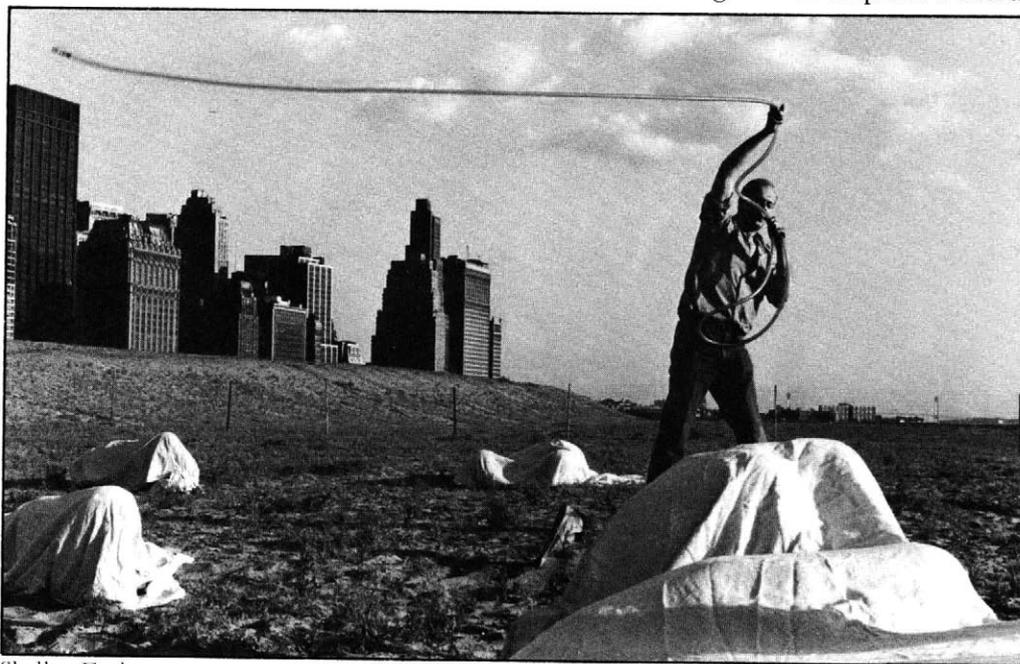
*En-Trances* created a dynamic that was different for participant and spectator. For the participant, the piece was a physical, immediate experience. For the spectator, it was a richly aural experience of glorious tones and sustained tempo. As participants' comprehension of their roles grew, the musical tones and overtones became denser and texturally interesting. The ending was beautiful to see and hear. As if on cue, the sounds faded, the circle straightened up and the piece ended in one graceful motion.

Both works have an unusual place in Hellermann's output. They stress the making of music rather than the thinking about music. These pieces were cleverly conceived, addressing critical issues and the experimental perception of structure. The process of creation and the concern for the performance site were key elements in the structure of these works. Hellermann once again demonstrates that for him hearing music is making music. In Hellermann's music, the composer/performer fills a pivotal role in the development of a shared experience, an experience created jointly with the audience which shares the responsibility for its making.

Debbe Goldstein

**Film and Video Festival.  
Women's Interart Center (June).**

The various evenings of the festival were neatly organized by program director Elizabeth Garfield according to a particular interest: narrative, documentary, experimental. Ellen Hovde and Mirra Bank did some nice work with a Grace Paley story in *Jokes, or Love Departed* about a single mother's process of maturing. *The Cruz Brothers and Miss Molloy* by Kathleen Collins moved pretty much in the same vein, except that it was fo-



Shelley Farkas

*Nests* (Hellerman)

cused on three brothers helping a senile woman recapture part of her past. One evening Susan Milano got the audience to mill around and discover the human aspect of video, and that was kind of fun. Her documentation of the festival, though, appeared somewhat superfluous. Why didn't this festival offer one of her video installations?

The evenings dedicated to the experimental mode turned out to be the least interesting. They appeared mostly to be about the technological pliability of film and video, explicitly so in the work of Barbara Buckner, Mary Lucier, and Abigail Child.

During the two weeks of events I was *seeing* a great deal: splits, inserts, out-takes, animations, real proplr, negatives, hearts, colors, stills, black and white, myself, post-images, dots and bubbles. My eyes opened, closed, strained, teared. . . finding myself unmoved, a nagging irritation set in. Seeing is a pretty basic function for any film/video artist: there shouldn't be anything out of his/her focus. So what are they seeing and what am I seeing and, later on, reviewing? Anyone out there SEEING anything?

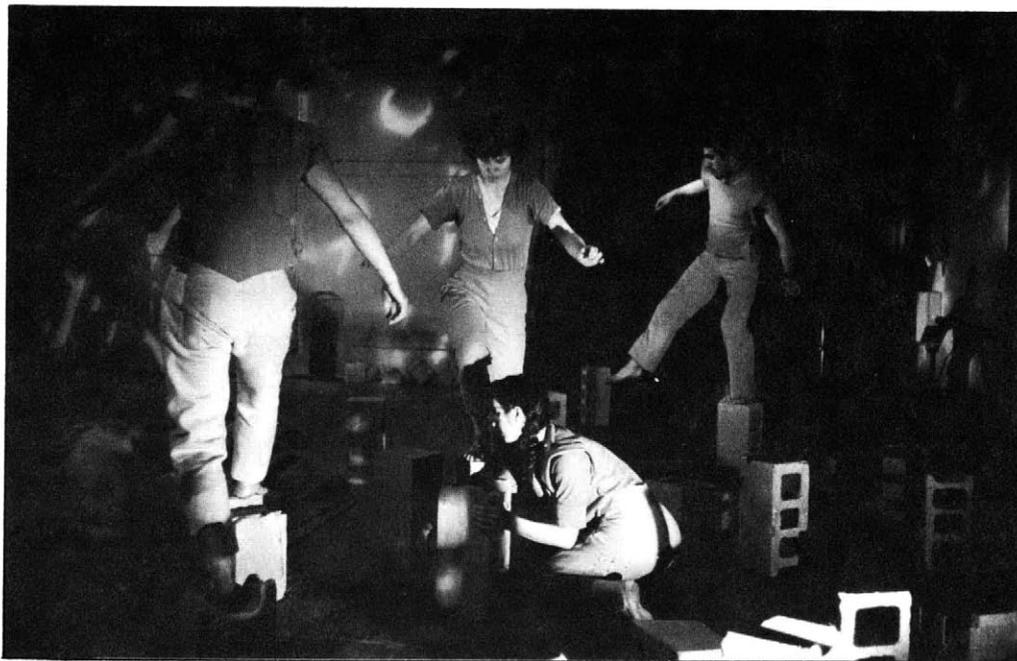
My concern is human activity as it appears in various guises be it film, theatre, performance, music, video, dance, photos, writing, etc. Sometimes all of this is called "culture": that is, heightened, condensed experiences of existentiality. Through our being-in-and-of-this-world and through our use of various symbols we arrange/rearrange the reality to which we are existentially connected. Film and video are examples of symbolic reality "manipulation." The inter-relationship between human beings and social, cultural reality adds to (at least it used to) each individual an ethical dimension. The individual gesture is NOT towards an empty

space but is a participatory gesture in the social composition. Each image comes from and extends into its surrounding reality thereby suggesting established, specific norms for each viewer.

Our perceptions of the world (our reality) always contains something new, there is an element of production; so, two identical perceptions, i.e., reproduction, is an illusion. In other words, each perception, despite whatever small fragment is being perceived, becomes a subjectively conditioned interpretation.

One of the reasons that made the festival so disappointing is that none of the evenings' events showed me the subjects: the affinity wasn't there. I found myself sitting in the dark looking at cultural artifacts (objects).

Ingrid Nyeboe



*Camptown* (Kaye, Rethorst, Bernard, Rose)

Nathaniel Tileston

Cindy Lubar, Garry Reigenborn, *Union Specific*.

Larry Richardson's *Dance Gallery* (May).

Pooh Kaye, Susan Rethorst, Peter Rose, Claire Bernard, *Camptown*.

*The Performing Garage* (May).

Yoshiko Chuma, *Ragged Valley*.

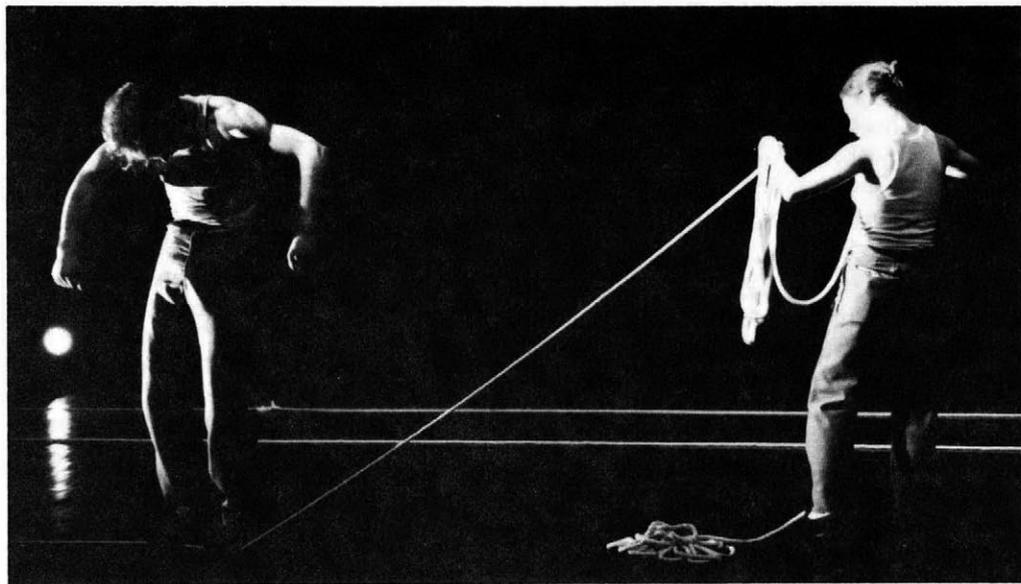
*The Performing Garage* (May).

It appears that choreographers are increasingly incorporating theatrical elements or fragments of texts into dance performances. Meredith Monk and Kenneth King have worked this way for years. Lesser known choreographers who have used texts include Jessica Fogel, whose wedding gown-clad dancers spoke lines from *Waiting for Godot* in one dance, and Mona Sulzman, who recited poetry as part of one of her own dance pieces.

*Union Specific* featured a text by Cindy Lubar and choreography by Garry Reigenborn. The strongest sections of this work about hobos were the ones that included a text, which was mostly about motion and change and women in a man's world. However, the sometimes witty play with words (for example, the Woman A/Woman B section, where the rapid repetition and juxtaposition of words sounded like the traveling of a train on tracks) was not sufficient to carry the piece over its many uneven spots. The choreography ranged from rapid, repetitive movement to simple, sentimental mime, and the different tones and moments of the piece were not well-integrated.

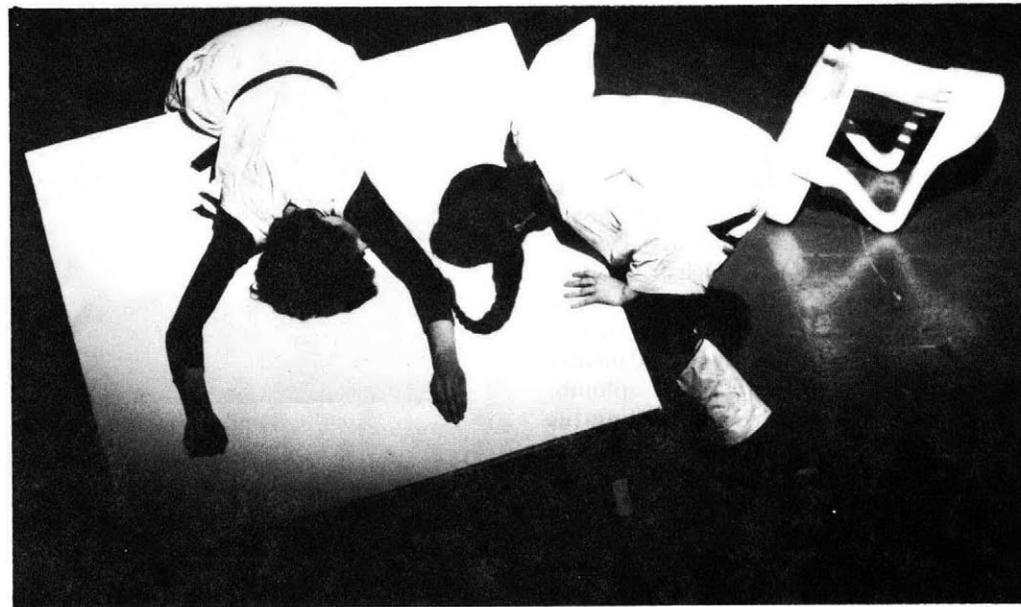
Pooh Kaye et al's *Camptown* was about "a group of people coming together in a temporary settlement," only they never settled down. The theme, along with the raggedy costumes, immediately reminded one of Lubar's hobos. (Why this sudden interest in transience? We all suspect the world is changing, but perhaps dancers *feel* it.) When the four dancers came onstage, they hurled cement blocks at one another. Following this friendly beginning, they proceeded to relentlessly move the blocks around into every imaginable construction, with much scraping and thudding and occasional grunts. This movement was punctuated by simian behavior, nestling heads in laps, and curling up on top of a mound of cement blocks for a rest. Occasionally moments from Meredith Monk's *Recent Ruins* and Simone Forti's animal dances came to mind. However, the performance was mostly depressing, boring, and extremely dusty (from the cement blocks), and moving those blocks around looked pretty exhausting.

In Yoshiko Chuma's *Ragged Valley* a movement vocabulary similar to *Camp-*



*Union Specific*

Nathaniel Tileston



*Ragged Valley* (Chuma)

Akira Hagihara

town's was used (leaping up and falling on knees and thighs, falling sideways so that one foot is extended into the air, dancers comforting one another) but to much wittier and livelier effect. The generally quick-paced theatricality, inventiveness, and sense of exuberance made the performance a pleasure to watch.

The production, while essentially a dance piece, utilized an array of theatrical elements: a film by Jacob Burkhardt of manic activity in office cubicles viewed from the exterior of plate glass windows opened the show. This scene of hyper-frenetic activity was in sharp contrast to the serene setting of white table-tops set at angles amidst bales of hay, some of them on scaffolding. Following the film, trench-coat and goggle-clad performers emerged from behind the angled tables and hay bales. Soon the trench coats were shed and thrust aside to reveal ragged attire.

There was continual transformation going on in *Ragged Valley*. Dancers moved the table tops, eyeing the corners of the room (a very funny movement), and also seeming to listen for information. In one of the most beautiful moments, a man poured water from high on scaffolding across a table top, so that the water fell from a height of several feet into a clear bowl on the ground below. This "precious" moment was ruptured abruptly by the use to which the bowl of water was subsequently put: a smaller man, with much aplomb, "dove" into it (actually only wetting his hands), which was followed by other circus act numbers. This kind of shifting of the balance and tone of the piece (a movement in the dancing as well as in the overall design of the show) created a rich and imaginative interchange of play and thought. Tall, wiry Kate McLaughlin, Terry O'Reilly, and energetic, smiling Yoshiko Chuma were especially im-

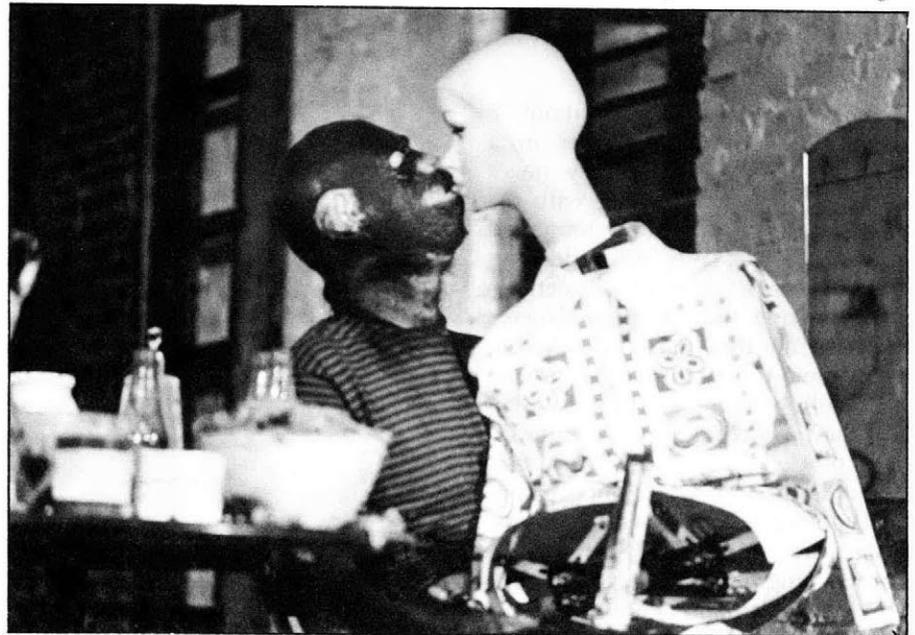
pressive in this well danced piece. The effective lighting for all three dance pieces, was by Carol Mullins.

Lenora Champagne

**Paul McCarthy, *Vented Trilogy Quiz*  
or *Monkey Man*.  
DTLA (May).**

Paul McCarthy provided an unexpected dose of humor in his recent contribution to the Los Angeles "Public Spirit" performance series. In the past, he has been known for obsessive ritual-like

treated to a high loft above the performance area. In addition to the stage, the artist further emphasized a "cabaret" atmosphere, perhaps partially as a comment on the current insistence on performance-as-entertainment, by providing audience seating at a number of small tables, each covered by a pristine white tablecloth with a handful of hot dogs arranged in the center. Hot dogs have reappeared often in McCarthy's work along with other cliché items of American consumer-culture such as mayonnaise, ketchup, cold cream, dog food;



*Vented Trilogy Quiz or Monkey Man (McCarthy)*

works which explored physical and psychological limitation—both of artist and audience; by contrast, this piece was decidedly light and graceful.

McCarthy divided space and activity sequences into three parts: he performed on a raised, stagelike platform, moved down into and through the audience, then re-

when these are activated by McCarthy, they become representatives for body elements—sperm, blood, excrement, flesh tissue.

Along with actions involving his own body, McCarthy employs large numbers of children's dolls. *Vented Trilogy Quiz* referred to the central prop, a life-sized

half-mannekin fashioned from a dress-maker's dummy, with a bald, fashion-model head the artist could turn by inserting his hand into its back. This creature was at once grotesque, funny, and profoundly meaningful. A green, plush-covered toy snake dangled beneath its torso, a bizarre representation of its androgyny, that matched the artist's strapped-on plastic breasts.

Perhaps what enabled McCarthy to create a powerful work that, in less skilled hands, could have been merely chaotic or egocentric, was his sense of intuitive balance. He moved back and forth between comic moments (but these were, again, complex: the violent and pathetic tenderness as the artist kissed his creature, crushing its face in the process) and profound gestures (when he moved into the audience, space was obediently maintained; from time to time, he struck unmistakably classic poses). By using careful timing and framing throughout, McCarthy presented a complicated and poetic work examining cultural violence and confusion about sexuality, while relying neither on scripted dialogue nor gratuitous shock.

Nancy Buchanan

**Lyndal Jones, *On the Road Again*.  
110 Chambers Street (May).**

Within the mode of "performance," a pressing problem for the most committed artists has been the negotiation of narrative. The temporality of performance imposes a condition of sequentiality which must be addressed: to ignore the implications of this represents a lack of awareness which can result in an uncritical aesthetic.

Lyndal Jones is a performance artist from

Australia; since 1977, she has created a series of pieces under the general title of *At Home*. While in New York City this spring, she presented the third piece in this series, *On the Road Again*. Working in a highly self-conscious (in the sense of reflexive and self-critical) manner, Jones sets up a situation of simultaneous information systems, relaying a set of variations on the thematic material of a voyage. A series of slides detailing familiar sights of travel are projected; short narratives are read by the artist at intervals; an audiotape with a message which recurs at intervals is played; the artist enacts tasks relating to travel (packing, carrying suitcases, etc.); these systems appear in a variety of conjunctions and disjunctions, generating a multiplicity of interrelations and interpretation.

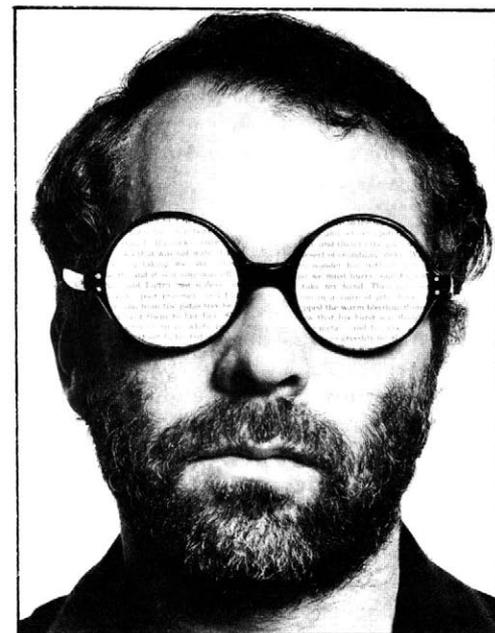
In work of this kind, the question posed involves the integrity of the possibilities offered; as Jones herself notes, one of the aims of this work involves "the search for an audience position somewhere other than voyeur or physical participant (in particular, as decision maker rather than art consumer)." The deployment of "mixed means" remains interesting only in so far as the means prove *expressive*, a *genuine* extension of an artist's sensibility and imagination. With Jones, her natural tact ensured the distinct pleasures of elegance, discretion and exactitude. *On the Road Again* was a becomingly *modest* performance, enabling the viewer to share in the process of constructing/deconstructing one of a number of narratives about the state of being "on the road." That state of being negotiates between arrival and departure, a (literalized) metaphor for a performance proffering an investigation into supposition and signification. Moving between contingency and continuity, Jones distends, extends,

extinguishes, distinguishes and dissembles the temporal perimeters of her performance, thereby creating a trajectory remarkably *open* at every point.

Daryl Chin

**Stuart Sherman's Twelfth Spectacle (Language) plus 3 sound pieces and some short films.  
Artists' Space (June).**

**Richard Gallo/Sheryl Sutton, *A Killer's Loose but Nobody's Talking*.  
The Kitchen (May).**



Stuart Sherman

Stuart Sherman brings an intense concentration to the act of performing. His object constructions are personal. Their accessibility to the observer is frequently through a kind of visual punning or humor—the incongruity in the juxtaposition of images, a perversion of their normal relations.

Nathaniel Thelston

His performance at Artists' Space in June was a treat, despite the overly warm evening and crowded audience quarters, which made viewing the *Twelfth Spectacle* somewhat difficult. The sound pieces, produced by Radio France, displayed the same witty and surprising relationships apparent in Sherman's object manipulations. The "water" film, with Sherman and Scotty Snyder, was the crowd favorite, but two new films, *Elevator/Dance* (which features pin ball machines and escalator stairs as well as elevators) and *Theatre Piece*, were also well-received. *Theatre Piece* was especially interesting in that it, like the "piano" film, features Sherman-as-performer in a performance situation: in the theatre film, he is both performer and spectator. In both films a lot of black was used, and Sherman took on a quality of obsessed intensity.

*The Twelfth Spectacle (Language)* is especially significant because Sherman's work with objects began as a substitute for writing. (In the film with Edwin Denby, the camera follows his writing gestures by moving as though it were a pen.) In this spectacle, he tackles the subject of language (as previously, he dealt with "the erotic") with his object vocabulary.

An interesting development is Sherman's increased use of sound. Although this is not the first spectacle in which he uses the cassette recorder and spoken words, it seems a more essential element now. For example, in one routine the word "growl" was heard repeatedly on a tape, as the spectators saw a toy tiger in a cage. A cloth was placed over the cage and other miniature animals were lined up above it. Suddenly, as a growl was heard on the tape, the animals tumbled over. Though the tiger was caged, his sound (his *name*)

was enough to slay the other animals. At least two of the routines involved blowing (in one of them, Sherman sucked air *from* a microphone), and the recitation of random dates, followed by a "whooshing" sound, which corresponded to various cut-out silhouettes of a house, a lamp, a little person, that were subsequently "blown" over.

In Sherman's vocabulary of images, the eye is the most frequent human orifice through which knowing, consciousness, and experience enter, although occasionally the mouth functions in this regard. Although the "Language" spectacle began with an ear—a giant rubber one—this image of film (images and information) passing through the eye (organ of sight and insight) seemed closer to Sherman's relationship to language than does sound itself.

*A Killer's Loose but Nobody's Talking*, an excerpt from a proposed longer work by Richard Gallo, was polished in the manner of a fashion show. The costumes—especially sequined fish scale outfits—were spectacular, and heavily-padded shoulders were very "in." Gallo's previous work has been very much about costumes and threatening personas (masking his face and body, making random appearances in Robert Wilson's *Stalin* dressed in outlandish garb such as a red dress with long train), and that is where he succeeded best in *A Killer's Loose*. . . . Otherwise, the visual and aural stimuli didn't penetrate the surface of perception to create any texture of meaning, or lucid sense of structure. The elements of the piece suggested a possibility of sudden terror which never occurred—mysterious rabbit ears on video screens seemed to vibrate to the disturbing pitch of the throbbing soundtrack, a tarantula crawled over the face of a man, visible on video screens as wolves were heard

howling. The visual surface and the objects were carefully chosen and arranged, but the elements didn't mesh or connect, suggesting that stringing together images doesn't work if there is neither a well-thought out concept behind the arrangement nor an emotional need for it.

In addition, Gallo totally lacks a sense of pacing—the piece dragged, ominously at first, but eventually it just trailed off. The precise timing and subliminal theatricality of a Bob Wilson spectacle (it was obvious from the handout given to the audience that Wilson is Gallo's mentor) were totally absent. Sheryl Sutton was cool and elegant as always, but the lines she spoke were banal: "All you have to do is think of nothing. Any woman can do it."

The final affront to the audience was when the room filled with suffocating smoke near the end of the long performance. People gagged and coughed as they rushed for air and the exit.

**Lenora Champagne**

***Dialog/Curious George*, Robert Wilson and Christopher Knowles.  
Newhouse Theater, Lincoln Center (June).**

***Exotic Landlordism of the World*, Jack Smith.  
Times Square Show (June).**

*Curious George* is the latest of a series of "dialogue" performances created and performed by Wilson and Knowles over the past few years. These works have inspired a lot of misguided talk about Wilson's "therapeutic" methods and intentions, but like all of his work, the duets in no way attempt to understand, exhibit, justify, or correct any special conditions. *Curious George* is an absorbing theatre piece sufficient within its own terms, one in which two inimitable artists explore

and perform their aesthetic and, of course, personal rapport.

As always, Wilson and Knowles' most prominently shared dramatic interest revolves around architectural structures. The episodes proceed according to a formal arrangement—four sections of four parts each—rather than by any narrative or thematic linkages; in each scene the actors' movements are organized along geometric lines. In "Curious George Goes to a Hospital," Knowles and Wilson mirror each other in a circular dance. In "Advertisements," Wilson reclines upstage and mimics Knowles' downstage delivery of his fractured version of Crazy Eddie's television commercial. In "Curious

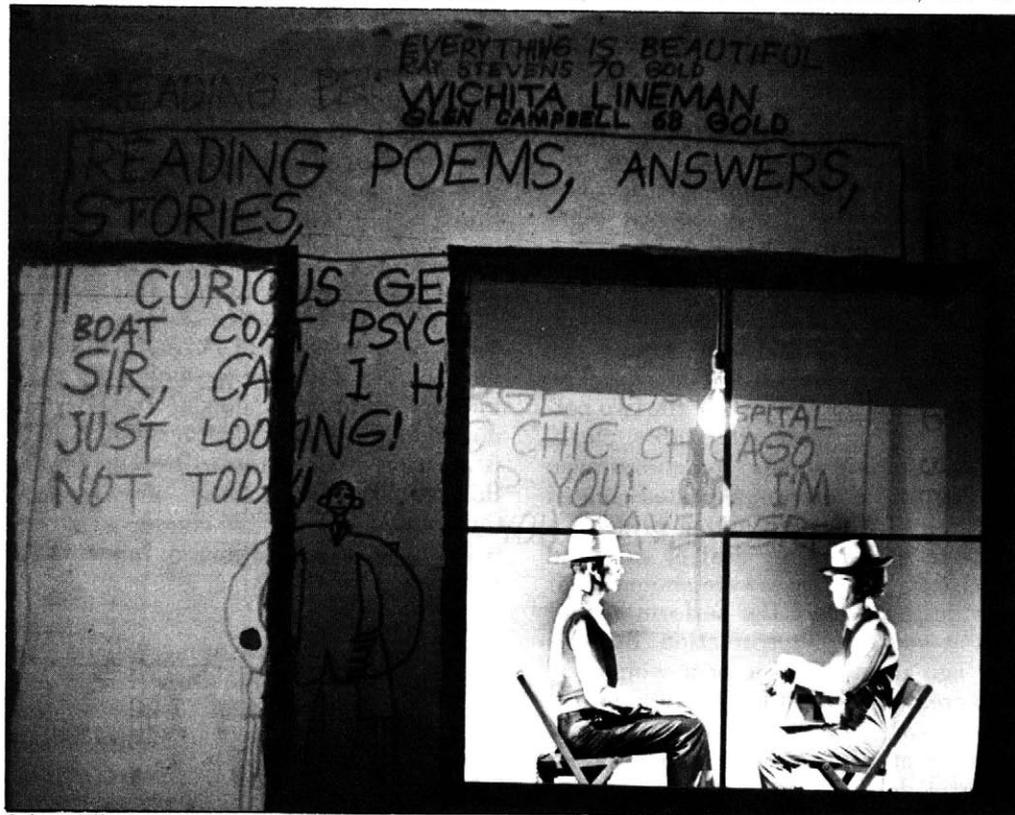
George Takes a Job," the players sit in a line and recite in a sort of canon dialogue.

Likewise, the textural accompaniment, mostly pre-recorded audiotape, follows laws of aural pattern instead of syntactical or thematic linearity. A melange of music, Knowles' distinctive writings, fragments of radio programs, and sound effects pours out of speakers placed around, behind, and above the audience.

The images which unfold within this geometric outlining are as characteristically idiosyncratic as the schematic plans are logical. (Here we might remember that Wilson often mentions at least three mentors; the formalist Balanchine, the ir-

rationalist Jack Smith, and that meticulous arranger of flux, Merce Cunningham.) But unlike previous "dialogs" in which Wilson and Knowles appeared as unspecified consciousnesses in abstracted contexts, *Curious George* presents them as characters drawn from H.A. and Margret Reys' picture books for children. So the set and props are precisely detailed, carefully placed, child-like objects: a drop which looks like a Rousseau drawing of a house, and downstage, a horsehoe-shaped lineup of alarm clocks, cassette recorders, and transistor radios through which ramble life-size dummies, remote-controlled toy trucks, and large stuffed animals as well as the two principals. Knowles capers about in a monkey suit and a yellow-hatted Wilson as the mischievous monkey's keeper is by turns guardian and fellow explorer. Their performances play at these characters without trying to reproduce them just as *Curious George's* events allude to but do not illustrate those of the stories. With less skillful and less personal actors, this approach could only result in an embarrassing display, but the combination of unusual empathy and ability which Wilson and Knowles exhibit makes for a compelling, often comic chamber-piece.

A formula of faux-naif structure, imagery, and action underlies all of Wilson's work but such characterization can be deceptive. A much less noted and crucial quality is the theatrical timing with which he articulates his material. The sense of intuitive rightness that saturates the unfolding of a Wilson play is palpably evident. Timing seems even more critical with innocent material as in *Curious George*, and here Wilson and Knowles have arrived at a mutual rhythm of playful energy which finds new uses for such stock Wilsonian stage devices as the



Johan Elbers

*Curious George* (Wilson, Knowles)

screaming stutter dance, the object dropped from a great height, the silent monologue, and the repetitions of speech and action.

More serious thoughts can exist along with simple structure and child-like subject matter (cf. C. Chaplin and B. Keaton). Although *Curious George* doesn't touch on the symphonic profundity of an *Einstein on the Beach*, its intimate chamber-work rhythms evoke no less moving feelings.

The world could really use a strong Jack Smith show to counter the looming advent of Ronald Reagan, but *Exotic Landlordism of the World* is not it. In fact neither of the three performances even approached being a show of any kind. Among the "acts": the Brassiere Girls of Baghdad fought with Smith and trashed some of the art on display at the venue; an inept dancer read for hours from Yvonne DeCarlo's biography; and a junkie-looking "genie" played a desultory sax solo and later broke Smith's only stage light. All the while Smith ignored his own non-show; he passed the time fiddling with props which were never used and with dope which emphatically was. This was the worst, most terminal of the several suicidal Smith disasters I have seen, and I don't see how the patient can recover. *Exotic Landlordism* belongs to no world and certainly not to that of the genuine original who is Jack Smith.

**John Howell**

**Maria Irene Fornes, *Evelyn Brown*.  
Theatre for the New City (March).**

*Evelyn Brown* is an unusual piece for playwright Maria Irene Fornes because it is the only work of hers she hasn't written. Instead, using the "found" material from

the diary of a New Englander, the woman of the title, who died in the early part of this century, she fashioned a theatrical work that is more performance than play.

A handsome, simple pine wood interior of a house served as the setting for two performers, Margaret Harrington (an actress) and Aileen Passloff (a dancer)—both of them called Evelyn—who move about the nooks and crannies and the deep reaches of the performance space. The spatial structure collaborates with the textual material to reveal all aspects of inner, private space, for this is a piece about Evelyn Brown and her home.

The text was comprised of the stark diary entries which were simply the unadorned repetitions of the woman's daily activities. Live and on tape she recounted her chores of cooking, cleaning, and organizing a household, never including an observation of her own be it joy, anger, tiredness, irritation or desire. Her universe was founded solely on what work she did at home.

One might be tempted to believe that Fornes's piece, which she also directed, centered on oppression of women by housework, but this was not the case. The precise, simple movements of the two performers, setting table after table, cleaning, and folding linens, sometimes even dancing, as the text was repeated created a pattern of a woman taking pride in a job done with a great deal of care and precision. Yet, there were moments of quiet desperation in the performance of Passloff—in my interpretation Brown's alter ego whom Fornes as a woman of 1980 created as the other side of the silent woman—who could be found staring into a wall, or muffling a scream in what were powerful dramatic moments to counterpoint the lack of commentary in the ex-

ecution of the tasks.

It was, however, the beauty and simplicity and pride in quotidian tasks that Fornes emphasized, not the oppression of Evelyn Brown, and only those looking for a feminist polemic would think otherwise. Housework is belittled now, so Fornes offered something of a statement about another way, another time, of living, when the work that women did in the home was appreciated for its certain grace not, as it has now, fallen into disgrace.

Fornes, who has long been a feminist, is by no means calling for a return to pre-mechanized drudgery: I think she's just reminding us of an attitude toward the home that is lost today. If you look at the handwork in a crocheted lace doily, do you admire its delicacy or think about a woman trapped in her home making gender-identified objects which consumed much of her time and energy?

What was most rewarding about *Evelyn Brown* was its integrity of form that at every moment showed Fornes's directorial care. No visual or technological gimmickry, no imagery outside the text, no dogmatism. Perhaps the fact that Fornes is a writer unaccustomed to working in this more performance-oriented area of theatre accounts for the emphasis on text when more trust in imagery might have substituted for words.

Still, I applaud this clean, honest work as I applaud that of Tillie Olsen whose women, though often more politicized, inhabit the same universe of steady, silent workers.

**Bonnie Marranca**

Steve Busa, *Audience at Large*.  
Directed by Leslie and Steve Busa.  
Re-Cher-Chez Studio (June).

Chris Kraus, *Disparate Actions/Desperate Actions*.  
Directed by Nancy Reilly and Gale Pike.  
Re-Cher-Chez Studio (June).

Re-Cher-Chez Studio has been the recent scene of interesting and vital new work in performance. Since May, when the variety of projects being undertaken there were featured in a month-long festival, some of the productions were developed further. The two considered here, *Audience at Large* and *Disparate Actions/Desperate Actions*, are a testament to the value of a workshop situation in aiding the development of talented writers, directors, and actors.

*Audience at Large* offered a comparison/contest between the slow, southern, naturalist style of Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie* and the hyper neurotic New York sensibility. The use of the *Menagerie* text, which was interspersed throughout with the monologues of a punk-ish filmmaker (Keith Champagne) and a disco-slick chick (Joan Batson), was ironic without being snide.

As the play progressed, parallels between the filmmaker character and Tom (both liked adventure—Tom dreamed of it and went to the movies for it, while the other lived and filmed it) and between Laura and the sexy woman (who described in a quintessentially Leslie Gore voice having seen her heartthrob kissing another girl) emerge, so that their texts become not only the thoughts of an attention-wandering audience to Williams' play, but alter egos for the '30s characters as well. What is especially interesting is the clash of sensibility—the naive illusions



*Audience at Large* (Busa)

and attachments of the '30s: the mother's beaux, Laura's glass animals, Tom's dreams of movie adventures, war glory and the merchant marine—and the much more disturbing signs of '80s self-absorption: the punk filmmaker's most erotic attachment and effective turn on is to a sleek but no-longer-functioning old-model car; the disco woman speaks of herself-as-object, specifically using the

metaphor of remodeling buildings for revamping the psyche ("You don't want to find that you've become a vacant lot.")

The '80s persona are completely self-absorbed, unable to have satisfactory relations with others, or to get in touch with their own feelings, yet, by the end of the play, their presence amidst the scenes from *The Glass Menagerie* seems somehow appropriate. The combination of clever writing, dynamic directing, and a few virtuoso performances made this one of the most pleasurable performance events this season.

Chris Kraus's *Disparate Action/Desperate Action*, performed by herself and Tom Yemm and directed by Nancy Reilly with assistance from Gale Pike, was her reflection on "political imagery and personal experience." The subjects addressed were complex and diverse, and the theatrical choices varied with the material. The didactic political commentary which introduced the show was presented as a meeting-hall lecture, whereas other parts of the presentation were "acted out" by Joe and Susie, characters whose whining platitudes made the political points in a lively and fun, if somewhat disturbing, fashion. (Susie: "We could take a walk." Joe: "Where." Susie: "To the bank.")

The repetitiveness and banality of Susie and Joe's concerns with money and their boredom underscored Ms. Kraus's comments on the commodity of sex in our society: the couple's interaction was filled with images of sexual control. Susie, woman as object, subject of representation rather than active agent determining her own life, was contrasted with Ulriche Meinhoff, the German, middle-class journalist who became a terrorist, taking action against a complacent society. One of

the best images of complacency and control, of the programmed man in the play is of Tom Yemm, his face blank, his eyes rolling from side to side to the beat of funky music. Although the piece doesn't resolve the questions it raises, both the questions themselves and the manner in which they were staged were provocative.

**Lenora Champagne**

**Badomi De Cesare, *Kiss Me, Kill Me.*  
Economy Tires Workshop, A.T.L. (April-May).**

**David Antin. *Victims & Victimization: A Question of Fit,*  
Franklin Furnace (April).**

*Kiss Me, Kill Me* is the story of Lucky Legs (aka Victoria Lake, who changed her name "so as not to be confused, if there was ever any doubt, with Veronica") a down (and perhaps on her way out) B-Movie actress and singer. The piece was conceived and performed by Badomi De Cesari, written by John Howell, and directed by Seth Allan.

Lucky has left her seedy past (i.e., one murdered boyfriend/club owner) in New York for a shot at success in Hollywood. The Los Angeles police are very interested in her whereabouts, she is interested in a screen test for *The Lady in Black*; the transitions between the police questioning and the screen test, between screenplay and reality, and between fact and fear are provocatively negligible.

The piece opens with a studio thunderstorm, and De Cesare, clad in a raincoat and fish-net stockings, enters with a swank that would put Bette Davis to shame. A crime has been committed; there is the sound of two gunshots, a siren, and some deliciously sleazy detective music (the

Perry Mason theme). Lucky is questioned by two (unseen) policemen, one sweet, one tough. She answers their questions (unheard) with jokes and banter, alternating between coy and defensive, becoming demure, getting hard: "He didn't say anything to me. He was already dead." A shadowy figure makes his first appearance in the darkened wings, hovers, then disappears. Is he the murdered Johnny?

Lucky Legs *sings* (in her raincoat, in her corset, during rehearsal for a screen test); she sings vamp songs and torch songs, some Nat King Cole and Ella Fitzgerald, some blues tunes, a rock and roll number, and she is very good. The cynicism is hot and passionate, the self-analysis brutally truthful. De Cesari sings "Samson and Delilah", and "Kiss Me, Kill Me (Slay Me with Love)," but only the Shadow knows for sure.

Rumor has it that *Kiss Me, Kill Me* will be performed again sometime next spring, and it's worth catching if it does. It is one

of those rare pieces where artfulness and entertainment mesh nearly perfectly. In an era when nostalgia for the pop cultures of the past is in itself an aspect of contemporary pop culture, *Kiss Me, Kill Me* has a special timeliness.

David Antin's talk poem, *Victims & Victimization: A Question of Fit*, as performed at the Franklin Furnace, could have been the slightly crazed lecture of a manic psycho professor. Or one voice from one of those late-night, caffeine-induced dialogues that get recorded in journals the next morning. Or the mimicking routine of a stand-up comic. Or the gleefully opinionated testimony of a witness under cross-examination. Whatever it was, the audience sat up and listened, like good students, because Antin talked about talk.

Victimizers know a victim when they see one, he said, but sometimes they make mistakes. For instance one time a mugger had the misfortune of reading "mug me" in David Antin's walk, when in fact the



Larry Piet

*Kiss Me, Kill Me* (De Cesare, John Erdman)

hesitant step and slumped shoulders meant, "I just came from a Gertrude Stein reading." David Antin informed the would-be mugger in no uncertain terms that he, David Antin, was by no means a victim. The mugger, realizing his error, turned and ran. Moral: one will not be victimized if one does not send out "victim" signals.

Antin went on to talk about "mad discourse," the signals sent out by the senile, the psychotic, the neurotic. It is the exception in performance art when the performer can intimately deal with personal experience without making the audience feel as if they have been dumped into a bin full of someone else's dirty laundry. When Antin spoke of his attempts to soothe the paranoid delusions ("the bank is stealing my money, the super is stealing my ice trays") of his aging mother, one had more the feeling of something freshly laundered and hanging in the breeze to dry.

"Follow discourse" was the subject of the final part of the talk poem, and here Antin spoke of the Allard Lowenstien Murder Case. Dennis Sweeney, besides being a paranoid schizophrenic, was also a pathological follower. It was allright for Sweeney to hear Lowenstien's voice in his head during the sixties—a *lot* of people heard that same voice. In March of 1980, Sweeney went to kill Allard Lowenstien because he still heard that voice in his head. Had Allard Lowenstien said, David Antin mused, "Dennis you should not be hearing my voice because I stopped transmitting my message nearly ten years ago," rather than, "Dennis you are sick, let me help you," things may have happened differently. Allard Lowenstien's fatal mistake, said David Antin, was that he failed "to fit" Sweeney's "mad discourse."

**Nancy Jones**

**Leeny Sack, *The Survivor and the Translator*.**

**Directed by Chloe Wing and Stephen Borst.**

**The Performing Garage (May).**

**Mario Prosperi, *Uncle Mario*.**

**Theatre for the New City (May).**

Leeny Sack claims that "Child of Survivors and Performer (Artist) are my major means of self-identification." In *The Survivor and the Translator* she explored her indirect experience of the Holocaust—as the child of concentration camp survivors—through performance. The piece used excerpts from Anne Frank's diary and her grandmother's recipes as well as her parents' memories of life in the camps.

Sack's performance in *The Survivor and the Translator* was extraordinary. Her rich vocal range and changes in facial expression hauntingly evoked her grandmother (especially when she spoke in Polish), a young Jewish girl (Anne Frank), and the emotionally distanced translator. An especially moving section was the "soup and fish" recitation when, from her bed, she recited her grandmother's recipe for gefilte fish in a horrified voice, then coolly translated the words into English. The juxtaposition of the terrified Polish words and the cool English ones invited comparison between the machine for grinding fish to the later discussion of camp apparatus in her parents' voices. The noise of the bedsprings as she ran in place on the iron bedstead, her questioning of the empty rocking chair that suggested all the dead, the irony and distance in her voice when she referred to Anne Frank's "sweet secret"—every detail reinforced the direction of the performance with both emotional and structural weight.



***The Survivor and the Translator* (Sack)**

*Uncle Mario*, part of the Italian theatre festival that was to have included Dario Fo (the U.S. State Department denied him an entrance visa at the last minute), was a man's homage to his nephew's spontaneous creativity. The Mario of the title, a disgruntled, melancholic playwright whose master is Artaud, and who consults the theories of Piaget and Lacan before writing a line, becomes momentarily energized by his nephew's invasion of his work territory. Donning the costume of one hero after another (from Tarzan and Zorro to Napoleon), the nephew bullies his uncle into playing the necessary roles—a bungler swordsman, a gorilla, a horse. Following each exercise, the uncle speculated on the theoretical implications and tried to con-

struct a clear concept of his play (using, for example, the "tadpole" development of children). The rhythm of delightful play juxtaposed with introspective pedantry was very funny. This extended academic joke worked so well largely because of the well-structured text. The graceful movement and accomplished performance of Mario Prosperi and the genuine delight on the part of the small boy (Edoardo Ballerini in the New York performance) added to the success of the piece.

Lenora Champagne

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