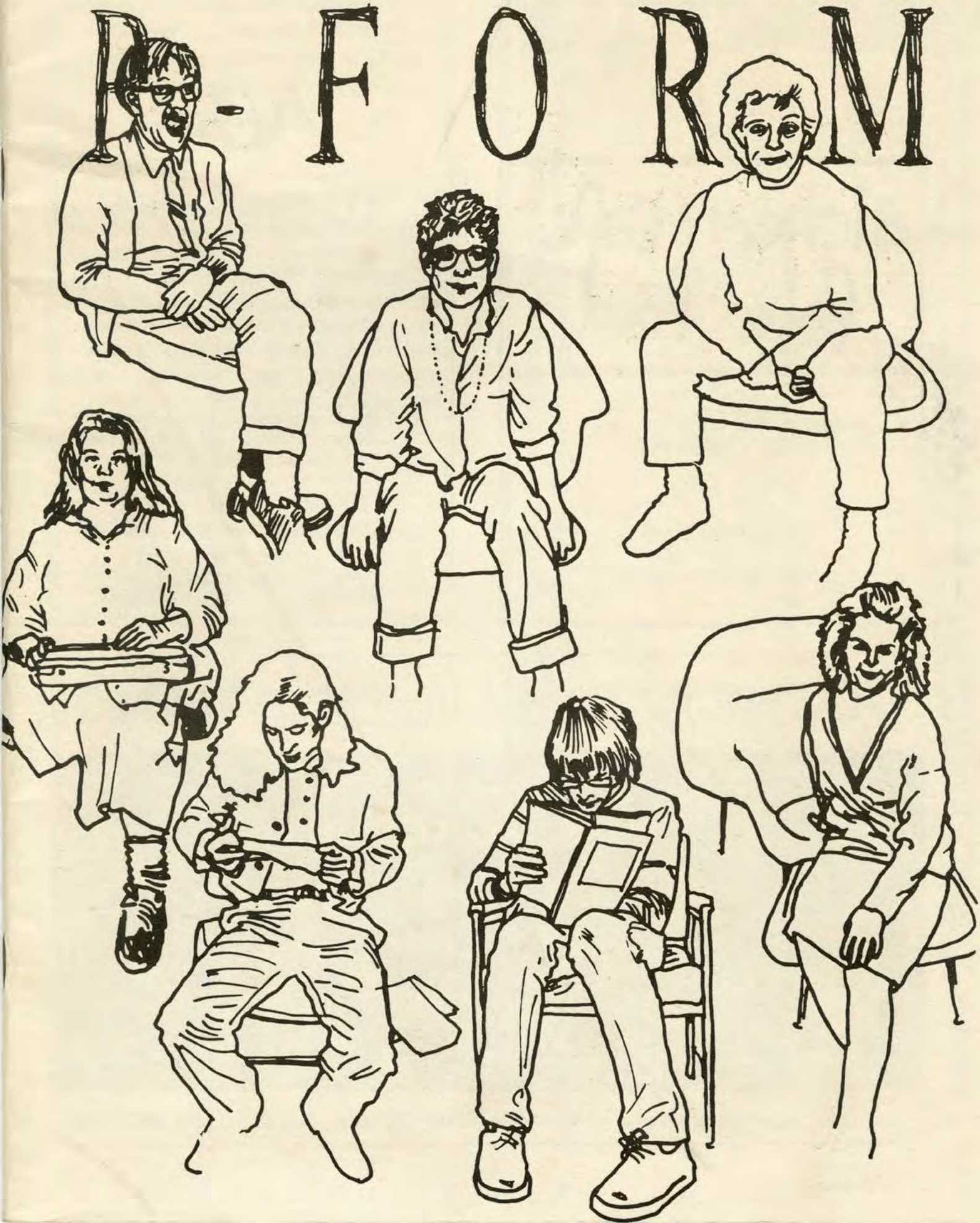
ISSUE 14 SUMMER 1989

PERFORMANCE ART MAGAZINE

P-FORM



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ILLINOIS ARTS COUNCIL ARTISTS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM DEADLINE SEPTEMBER 1, 1989

The Artists Fellowship Program awards non-matching fellowships in fixed amounts of $5,000, $10,000 and $15,000 to Illinois originating artists of exceptional talent to enable them to pursue their artistic goals. Applications are reviewed in the following categories: Choreography, Crafts, Ethnic and Folk Arts, Literature, Media Arts, Music Composition, Photography, Playwriting/Screenwriting, Visual Arts and, for the first time as a separate category, **Interdisciplinary/Performance Art.**

The Illinois Arts Council in cooperation with local arts organizations will be holding grantsmanship workshops free of charge throughout the state for individual artists interested in the Artists Fellowship Program.

Workshops to be held in Chicago include:

Thursday, July 6 - 7:00PM
ETA- Creative Arts Foundation
7558 S South Chicago
Local sponsor: African American Arts Alliance
312/288-5100

Tuesday, July 18 - 7:00PM
Randolph Street Gallery
756 N Milwaukee Ave
Local sponsor: Randolph Street Gallery
312/666-7737

Thursday, July 28 - 7:00PM
Casa Atzlan
1831 S Racine
Local sponsor: MiRaza Arts Consortium
312/829-1620

Tuesday, August 8 - 7:00PM
Chicago Filmmakers
1229 W Belmont
Local sponsor: Chicago Filmmakers
312/281-8788

For further information on workshops or to get a copy of the Artists Fellowship guidelines and application form, please contact the Illinois Arts Council at 312/917-6750 or toll-free in Illinois at 1/800-237-6994.

Sunday-Theater/Peformance 8:30 pm
7/2 **Ray McNeice**-Performance Artists from Boston who deals with the concerns of the homeless.
7/9 **Mainline Productions**-Experimental Theater featuring Katherine Chronis, John Harriman and Joe Laroca
7/16 **Mainline Productions**-Experimental Theater featuring Katherine Chronis, John Harriman and Joe Laroca

Monday-Music 8:30 pm
7/3 **Hal Russell + NRG Ensemble**- Saxophonist Russell leads a quintet and explores the boundries of free-form jazz.
7/10 **Santez**- Legendary Chicago Sax Man in an evening of solo and small ensemble works.
7/17 **Illusion of Safety**- Industrial sonic explorations
7/24 **Greg Bendian**-An evening of solo percussion by New Jersey Artist Bendian. Bendian performs regularly with Cecil Taylor and Derek Bailey.
7/31 **Cambodian Folk Music Ensemble**-Traditional folk music from Cambodia performed by a sextet of native Cambodians residing in Chicago.

Tuesday-Cabaret style performance art 8:30 pm
7/4, 7/11,7/18, 7/25
Some Velvet Tuesdays with your host ANDY SOMA and some Velvet guests

Wednesday-Performance/Music 8:30 pm
7/12 **Azalia Snail**-New York performance artist
7/19 **Bill Barnes and a Thousand Excuses**- 9 piece jazz/funk/rock/classical/avantorama featuring poet Barnes.
7/26 **Paula Killen**-Chicago performance artist specializing in continual-tunnel-nautilus-mirror monologs

Thursday- Film/Poetry/Music 8:30 pm
7/6 Films by **Spencer Sundell, Jim Sikora.** Performance Poetry by **Dale Goodson.**
7/13 Readings by **Mary Hawley, Sussanna Ruth Berger, Achy Obejas, Cindy Salach, Pat Smith, Deborah Pintonelli.**
7/27 **Liof Munimula**- Michael Zerang, Daniel Scanlan, Don Meckley. Musical improvisors and instrument inventors.

Friday-Guest DJs
7/7 **Kurt Gutezow**
7/14 **Jim Baker**
7/21 **Daniel Scanlan**
7/28 **Pete Nathan**

Saturday-Guest DJs
7/1 **James Porter**
7/8 **Jimi Jihad & Erik Red**
7/15 **Kent Kessler**
7/22 8:00pm-Special Book Release Party for **"The Dresdful Swimmer" by Lydia Tomkiw.** + Guest DJ- **Doug Taylor** 10pm
7/29 **Joe Bryl**

Events programmed by Leigh Jones, Andy Soma and Michael Zerang

COMING IN AUGUST.....

Sundays - Theater curated by Karen Kessler
Mondays - 14th Hal Russel + NRG
28th Cacophony
Tuesdays- curated by Lynn Book
Wednesdays-9th Stockyard
23rd Damon Short
Thursdays - 3rd & 10th curated by Brendan DeVallence
Fridays - Guest DJ's
Saturdays - Guest DJ's

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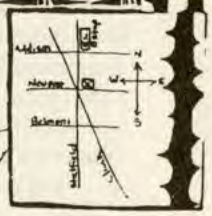

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P-FORM

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Summer 1989

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GUEST EDITORIAL

I love P-Form and I hate working alone. So, when the editors invited me to guest edit a special section, I happily called together a group of my favorite Chicago Performance Artists. Although I couldn't include everyone I wanted, because of space limitations and individual's schedule conflicts, I'm pleased with the results.

We met together often at my temporary quarters in Hefner Hall and, trying to follow the tradition of previous special issues, we struggled to find a theme to connect all our contributions. The best we could come up with were a set of dichotomies: memory/nostalgia, solutions/band-aids, elite artists/ mass audience. In the end, no simple theme categorizes all our efforts. Rather, these themes weave through the works, surfacing as concerns shared by eight artists.

Nancy Forest Brown's response to a TDR editorial expands the arena of consequence for artists' actions and points out the degree of responsibility inherent in our acts and intentions. We can find overlapping references in Carole Tormollan's photograph of a Milwaukee Avenue store window display--to survival, real and metaphorical energy sources and a humorous, ironic play on the marketing of these. The conflict of public actions with personal relationships reoccurs as text or subtext throughout these pieces.

Nancy Martell places herself within some cases of audience-performer relationships and examines her needs as an audience member. Brendan deVallance relives a private experience that has left outwardly apparent evidence. John Lebrand directly addresses his audience with a message full of contradictions. In an excerpt from Deborah Hede's ongoing story of Julia, a passive-aggresive character just barely recognizes but never resolves a conflicting relationship. Robert Daulton's litany on the ponytail can be read as a performance artist's memory of those adrenalin and anxiety-filled moments as we stride through the audience from the back of the room to the playing area.

While there is no simplistic thematic connection at work here, it's clear to me that our time spent together created points of contact, nodes of connection between us. Whether we capture an image to remember ideas or reconstruct our memories in writing in order to build new possibilities for shared action, I like to believe that artists never work alone.

I'd like to thank the editors of P-Form for giving me the space to celebrate my four month visit back to Chicago. This issue's cover is drawn from my memories of visits to my Hefner Hall rooms by Brendan, Nancy Martell, Nancy Brown, John , Carole, and Robert. In my mind, it symbolizes all of you who have accompanied me on my adventures and misadventures during this past Chicago season.

Linda Novak

John Malpede Interview

In 1985, performance artist and director John Malpede began a series of performance workshops for the homeless of downtown Los Angeles. The abundance of talent that emerged led to the formation of L.A.P.D. (Los Angeles Poverty Department), a performance company made up of the homeless and disenfranchised, as well as interested activists. The company rehearses after hours at the office of Inner City Law, a firm devoted to the legal interests of the homeless. Since its inception, the company has travelled around the country and performed over one hundred times in art spaces, theaters, and public sites.

On February 28, Lin Hixon interviewed Malpede, who discussed the birth of L.A.P.D., its subsequent four performance pieces, critical responses to the work, and the economics and realities of homelessness.

The Beginnings of L.A.P.D.

I just wanted to find out what was going on. That was number one. Beyond that, the goals of the workshop were to create a community on Skid Row and to get the real deal, what was going on, out to the general public. Those goals have turned out to be the enduring goals of the group.

I had already been working at Inner City Law, and so I had friends among the homeless people. I sent them out to pass out these fliers for this workshop, because I was sure no one was going to come. But people did come. In a way it was like, open the door and permission is granted, and people just ran in and started doing stuff immediately.

Within a couple of months we did a few little things. A short, ten-minute performance. We did some street shows in the neighborhood, that fall, that winter, and that spring. But it wasn't until Scott Kelman [1] read an article about us in the Village Voice that we existed, that he got interested, that he offered to put us on the bill at the Boyd Street Theater. That was our first opportunity to get something together in a bigger way.

South of the Clouds

The show we did at the Boyd Street, the first show we did indoors, was a series of monologues except for one scene. I said at the time, and I've repeated since then, that at that time there were only two people in the group who were capable of interacting with another person in the way you need in order to do a scene. So the rest were monologues.

They were based on a sort of an acting exercise. I asked people to choose a physical activity that they liked doing, that they felt confident about. That when they did it, it made them feel good. And to do it for a while, and really get into it, and then to talk about whatever came to mind.

Frank Christian had been a boxer, so he was boxing. Kevin Williams was jumping rope. Robert Clough was washing clothes. Jim Beame was playing baseball. Pat Perkins was sort of adulating a singer. Those were the ones we used. What turned out to be interesting about them, and the reason they went beyond exercises, was, even though they were consciously about something that made people feel good, all this subtextual stuff came in that revealed all

sorts of other emotions. Like Robert's, for example:

"Boy, I love washing clothesssss! (snif-f-f) Mmmmm. The smell of the Downy and the Tide and the bubbles between my--"

...and on and on...

"And another reason I love washing clothes is because (wringing out the clothes) it reminds me of wringing my father's neck! And revenge against my father! And he used to beat my mother! [2]

...and all that.

So the conjunction of those elements made it worth doing. And sure enough, after the first performance, something did happen. Robert disappeared. We later found out he went to San Francisco, which became the subject of our third show, two years later.

The way we solved it, we didn't just take it out, was Kevin did Robert's monologue, and every time he did it, he would give an update on the latest rumor as to where Robert was. Robert's having cosmetic surgery in San Francisco. Robert's having a sex change in whatever. There were all sorts of stories going around, and we'd just add them in.

That show was scripted. That's the only one that we've done that was scripted. Jim Beame, who ended up winning an L.A. Weekly performance award for his baseball monologue, by the last show he actually knew it. During the first show, he screamed, "Lines!" or something like that to the wings a couple times, which was a big hit, actually. Stuff got structured and written down. People learned it, and then did it, and that was the last time we did that.

No Stone for Studs Schwartz

The next show was the following Fall, called "No Stone for Studs Schwartz." It was sort of based on giving in to the chaos that existed, as opposed to trying to order it. Things like Jim screaming for a line became real important.

Jim was actually the central character of that show. It was a B-movie story that he'd come up with about a guy who was being chased by his buddies because he'd organized the wrong union. They were Teamsters, and somehow he had organized the AFL-CIO. So they were chasing him all over the map, and they were going to send him to a kibbutz where they could watch him.

As a frame around that, I put something sort of like "Sunset Boulevard." You wake up, this guy's dead on the stage. He gets up, he tells this whole B-movie adventure. Then at the end you see how he got killed.

At the time, Jim was living outside, in what he called Schwartz's Litvak Heaven, which was on a hill on the edge of Chinatown, just north of Sunset Boulevard. He would talk constantly, and you couldn't shut him up. He had trouble telling stories, because it would sort of bog down into--"Irving Schwartz: lawyer from Brooklyn, born April 12, 1942. Mother: Sadie Schwartz, born, 1898..." He would get into this obsessive stuff with the facts, and the story would never get anywhere. Plus, as soon as we started trying to do any of those scenes, he'd start throwing in all these things about how--"No no no, he went to this law school," or, you know, all this stuff from the side.

I decided we would just keep all that, and that would be the texture of the show. We had a show that had like thirteen or fourteen

or fifteen people in it, not always the same number every night. In the Boyd Street, the way it's set up, we played on three sides. Later on we got into playing on four sides whenever we could for that show and for the next one. The cast would sit in the audience when they weren't on the stage, so they could either jump into their role or somebody else's, or they could call in comments about what was going on on the stage. Since everything was improvised, things would get called in that would create a lot of readjustments, and energy would fly. People would be dropping in and out of character. Playing the character, playing themselves, playing somebody else's character. It was really about capturing the energy of skid row, which is a very chaotic, volatile, wild energy.

The reason I put this frame around it, about "Sunset Boulevard," is that when Jim was sleeping at Schwartz's Litvak Heaven at that time, there was a serial killer going around whose thing it was to kill homeless people sleeping on the outskirts of skid row. That's exacttly where Jim was sleeping, so the idea was to show the vulnerability of someone in Jim's situation. To show what his energy was like, to show what the reality he lived in was like, and to tie it up with this real thing that was going on, which is that those people are very, very vulnerable to all kinds of attacks.

L.A.P.D. Inspects America

In February of '88 we went to San Francisco. We had access to the gallery at the Art Institute there for five weeks. We did "Studs Schwartz" at the beginning of that time, and then six of us stayed, and the idea was to do workshops in the Tenderloin, which is the skid row of San Francisco, and recruit homeless people from there, and develop a show about our experience.

One of the people we brought with us from L.A. was Robert Clough. I knew he had gone to San Francisco when he had disappeared from "South of the Clouds," so I knew there must be some story there.

The other reason I brought Robert was because there are a lot of real macho guys in the group who didn't give Robert a lot of respect, and I felt like Robert had a lot to offer, and he was real smart. I thought if he was to come up with a smaller group and away from some of those influences, there would be an opportunity for him to do more.

Our five weeks in San Francisco became five weeks about trying to keep Robert out of trouble, trying to keep him from alienating everybody around us, and trying to keep everybody else from going off on him.

So we were really frustrated in our attempts to work with street people there. We did work a lot with them, but what we realized at the end of it was that it's very hard to work with street people and develop anything in five weeks. It just takes being around a lot in order for people to feel like there's something more important than trying to hustle a dollar out of the situation. It took several years just in our group to get beyond that point. So to go to a different place-our expectations were really way too high about what we could achieve.

Anyway, we kept spending more and more of our energies on Robert. The show really became about what happens when you drop a bunch of Skid Row people in a fancy neighborhood when one of them's totally out of control, both because of his mental state, and, it turned out, a lot of drugs.

It raised the issue of how far, sort of like the limits of love, how far does staying with somebody...what is that worth? Because for us, that's what we do. We feel like anybody can walk in, but they can't walk out, and if they do, we're all going to walk out with them. We pride ourselves in going the whole ten yards and more. The kind of intensive involvement people on Skid Row need other people is that kind of involvement. Not just five minutes a month.

We were pushed to the limit on our end of that, and ultimately something happened three days before the show where Robert got in a fight with one of the other people in the group and tried to throw a jar through a window at the Art Institute. So we felt we had to send him home, because our integrity was on the line. So we sent him home, and that's when I jumped into the dress and played his part.

When we got down to L.A. we put Robert back in the show, and he and I both did that role, sort of like what we had done in "Schwartz." In "Schwartz," I played Jim's alter-ego. I would sort of sit out, then when things weren't going anywhere, when they'd get terminally bogged down, I would jump in and take over from him. Sort of like a narrator, but I was doing it in the same voice, supposedly, as the lead character. So Robert and I were doing something similar to that here. The thing about Robert is you couldn't count on him to explode--in the show we had a lot of explosions, those were the scenes--you couldn't count on him to explode when he was supposed to. You could only count on him to explode when he felt like exploding. So we didn't really find a good balance there between me and him. And then what happened was he got into more trouble, so we didn't take him to San Diego when we went down there, and then he got into serious trouble later on and ended up going to jail, so then I did the part after that.

So in "Schwartz" and in "L.A.P.D. Inspects America," we developed this totally improvised style, and it came out of the fact that people couldn't interact around a script for a couple of reasons. One is everyone wanted to do their own thing. Everyone wanted to be the writer. And the other thing is it inhibited people too much. I was really interested in getting people to work together. Like in "Studs Schwartz" people continually would cut one another off. Those are problems if you have a text, or if you're trying to get to some particular point. In order to find something that would work, we were forced into working very, very collectively just because no one would work together.

Jupiter 35

What's happened now--a new phase--in the last couple of months we've developed a new show called "Jupiter 35." It's about Sunshine Mills, LeRoy Mills, one of the guys in the group, who got thrown out of a fourth story window in an abandoned building on skid row and ended up in the hospital with the name Jupiter 35 on his chart. It's about what happened to him and his recuperation.

In the other shows, when there was something serious to be said, that was done in the form of monologues. But this is the first show

where--as usual it's pretty funny and there's a lot of wild stuff in it, but it's basically a "hospital drama," so there are a lot of interactions that we went through all this Fall. Sunshine thought he was dying, and he thought they were going to take his eye out, and he thought they were going to amputate his leg, and he looked like E.T. There's a lot of real emotional stuff, and this is the first time that any of that has come across in the form of scenes of people in relation to other people that they care about. It's an enormous step for the group in terms of the development of the people involved.

Another thing in the show is that some of the people have gotten so damn good, some of the actors have gotten so damn good, that we're in a situation now where it's like pretending to be wild and crazy people who can't keep it together. So we're in a different place now, and the horrible thing about it is that it's more regular, it's more like what other people do. Now that we're encumbered with this kind of ability disability, we're going through adjustments trying to figure that out. What is the place for these thrown in things from the side? Is that just distracting in a way that we don't want if there's something going on that is important to all of us? So we're trying to re-find that balance.

Art and Therapy

Some of our critics have accused it of being like therapy. They come to the conclusion that this stuff shouldn't be performed in public because it's therapy.

I don't think it's art therapy because, number one, I don't even know what art therapy is. I know something about being an artist and making performances. And I know the processes that I go through, and then we're inventing the processes that we go through as we do it. For me, it's all just doing art. It has certain valuable effects. I don't know whether they're therapeutic effects or not. But in terms of people's being able to relate to one another and function, I think there've been a lot of good effects. There've been some real disappointments too. There've been lots of them. And I certainly don't think this is a wonder drug. But I think for a lot of people it's really enhanced their lives, and to that extent it could be called therapeutic. I don't know enough about therapy. I don't know what that's about, so if it's therapy, it's only by accident that it is.

If it was just some group of people that didn't have "homeless" attached to it, doing weird theater, then they would still have problems with a lot of these critics because it pushes a lot of those concerns to the limit and beyond. But not because it's got "homeless' attached to it, "just therapy" has all sorts of new meaning on top of it. We aren't very compromising from an art point of view. We're really pushing the boundaries, and to conjoin that with something that's marginal already, because it's homeless people doing theater, lets us in for all sorts of shit.

Political Art and the Homeless Issue

When we started doing this, I felt like it was really important not to do what everyone recognizes as political art, and that includes not doing the antiseptic version of what the real deal is. I felt that was really important because I'm bored with that shit, and everybody in America's bored with that shit. We didn't want to see a reincarnation of the sixties. So I thought it was really important to find some new way of doing stuff, and I think that goes right into the political situation. It's become increasingly clear, especially since "liberal" became a dirty word over the last election, that people are stuck in their ideologies, which means stuck in the past. If it ever was manifested in the world, it's in the past. Or just stuck in their brains, one or the other. So at a certain point it seemed to me that what we were doing was actually right to the point politically, because what we were doing was forcing people to rethink their ideas on the homeless issue. And since there ain't no adequate solutions out there, it's probably good for everybody to rethink their positions about it.

The homeless issue is not about people not having pork-and-beans. It's not about them having blankets. It's a much more serious, much bigger problem than that. That's why we're ecstatic when we get a line that says they came away from our performance feeling like all liberal efforts and solutions are hopelessly inadequate. Because they are.

As one of the lawyers who I work with said, by the time people get downtown, it's too late. It's too late. I think solving the homeless issue in Los Angeles involves a massive commitment of money to redeveloping south central L.A., which is the Black area. We have a Black mayor in L.A. He's done a great job of redeveloping downtown Los Angeles, which I appreciate. But it's been done at the expense of not only the homeless population downtown, but also completely ignoring his own community, which has now become the gang capital of America, the crack capital of America, and the drive-by shooting capital of America. So that's a totally different issue. That's the issue of gangs and drugs supposedly, right? This is the issue of homelessness. But underneath all of those is the issue of whether there's anything out there in terms of jobs and any sort of future for the people growing up there. I see kids who graduate from high school, and they take their diploma, they're down at the welfare office, because what they've got to look forward to is a life on welfare. So forget the homeless issue. What is needed is massive redevelopment of the Black and Latino communities--I'm talking in L.A. now. and then you're still going to have homeless people, or people who for other reasons can't care for themselves. But you're not going to have people who could have, at one point, cared for themselves, but, because of the desperate situation and getting trapped in drugs and the whole system, end up in a place where they don't know how the hell to function in society.

(This interview was prepared for P-Form by Matthew Goulish.)

Notes

1. Scott Kelman and Alex Wright operated two small theaters in the heart of downtown Los Angeles, the Wallenboyd and the Boyd Street Theater, under the production name of Pipeline, Inc. See: "Pipeline: Pumping Life into Theater," by Linda Frye Burnham, High Performance #39.

2. For the complete texts of this and other monologues from "South of the Clouds," see: "Hands Across Skid Row: John Malpede's Performance Workshop for the Homeless of L.A.," by Linda Frye Burnham, Drama Review, T114: vol. 31, no 2 (Summer 1987).

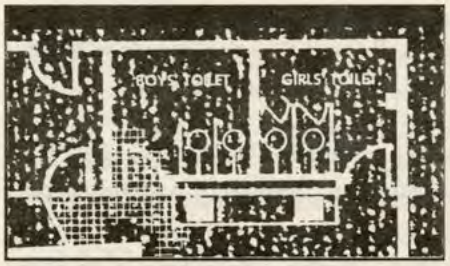
ALL KINDS OF NEWS

Welcome to *All Kinds of News*. This section of P-Form will have useful information for performance artists, such as the scoop on spaces, performance opportunities, and competitions. Please send any interesting tidbits, hot news items, or idle gossip to Douglas T. Hoope at *All Kinds of News* c/o P-FORM.

Space Survey

Process Studio, located at 935 N. Damen, opened February 17, 1989. Process Studio consists of three parts--a performance space, an art gallery, and a well-equipped, affordable recording studio. Although the art gallery is not scheduled to open until September, the performance space and the recording studio have been open and running since the Studio opened. Process Studio is also available for private rental and as a rehearsal space.

SPACE STATISTICS



Process Studio

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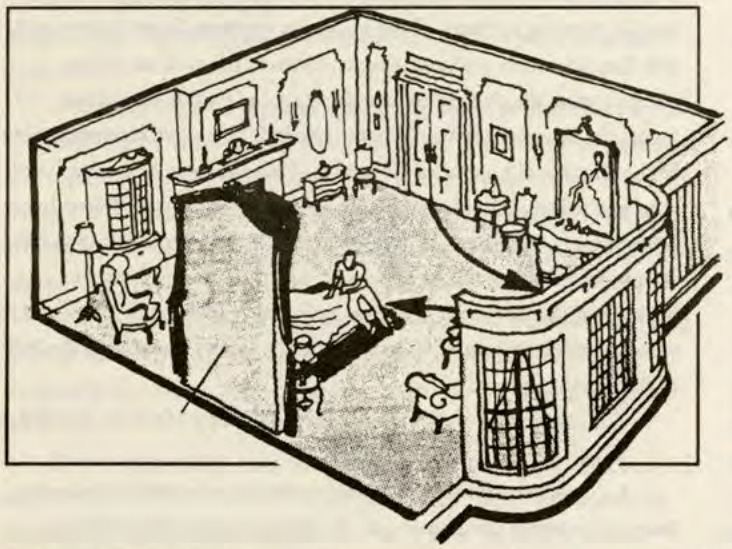
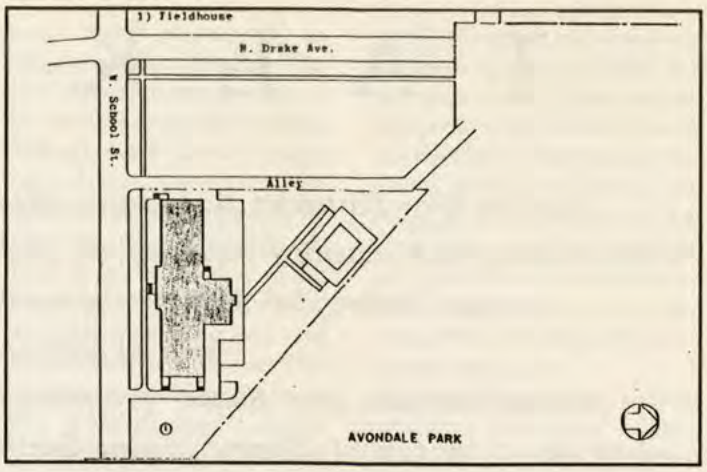
Engineer: Kerry Brown
Rate: $15 per hour

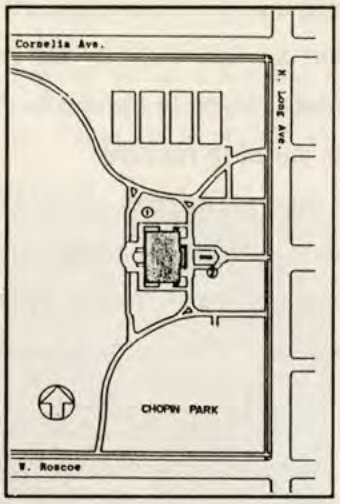


PERFORMANCE SPACE

Where: 2nd floor, rear
Accessibility: Stairwell and small freight elevator
Shows: All forms of 4-D work; performance, films, video, music, etc.
Size: 30' length, 20' width, 11' height
Floor: Wood
Seating: 50 chairs
Exits: Audience exits at stairwell, exit stage left for performers' use only
Equipment: The soundproof projection booth contains one slide projector, one super-8 film projector, cassette player (for sound system), and a 16-mm projector is available with advance notice. Equipment located in the performance space a total of 9 lights positioned on 4 channels, one video monitor,videodecks that can play all tape formats, and a VHS camera for the artists' personal documentation.
Advertising: Mailing list of 1000, and fliers are provided for the artist to distribute.
Artists Compensation: 50% of the admission price

Debra and Kerry are very responsive to artists' needs and are eager to show new work. They have also expressed an interest in creating theme shows in the future between the gallery and performance space. To reach them, call 276-6360 or send a proposal, slides, videotape, and SASE to: PROCESS STUDIO *935 N. Damen Chicago, IL 60622*





ParkART

A new project of Friends of the Park.

ParkART is an ambitious new project of Friends of the Park, a non-profit, non-patronage organization of concerned citizens serving as a catalyst for improving Chicago's parks. Conceived and directed by Anita Kirsits, with help from the Department of Cultural Affairs, parkART seeks to bring together artists and Chicago's parks for their mutual benefit. Kirsits believes that "Chicago parks could fill the growing need for additional exhibition and studio space, and artists working in them would help enrich the life of the communities as community involvement would enrich their art." In addition, Kirsits believes that working in these centers of community activity does not support gentrification, because "artists will be working with communities, rather than against them.

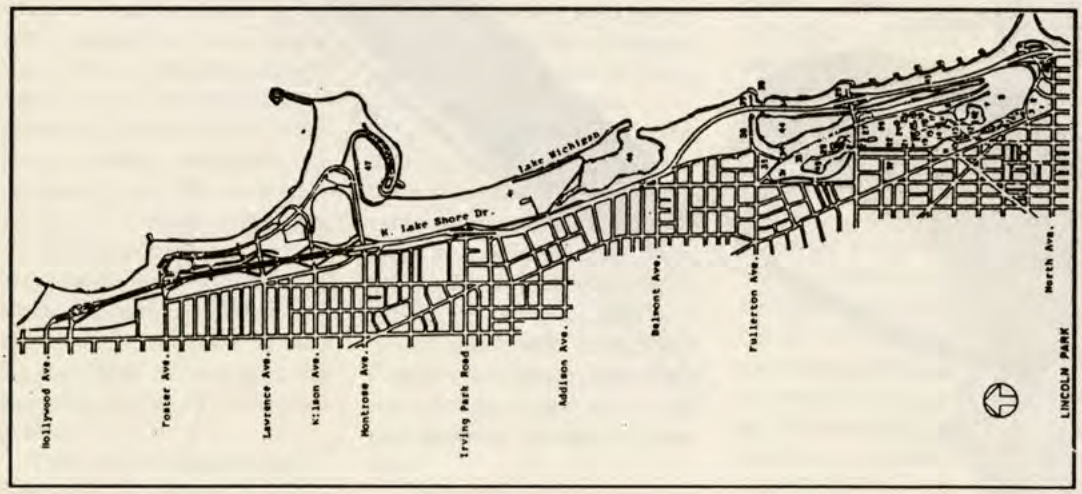
ParkART has four phases. Phase 1, which has already received funding, has two major components. Part 1 is a survey of all Chicago's major parks, conducted by individual artists and performing art agencies who toured the park facilities on four separate tours in April of 1989. Part 2 of Phase 1 is the production of a Directory of Park Resources, which will include information ranging from square footage to funding opportunities to lighting equipment to, perhaps most importantly, a listing of contact people at the Park District for scheduling events. These directories will be distributed extensively to all visual and performing artists and arts organizations in Chicago. Currently awaiting funding, phases 2, 3, and 4 deal with a travelling show of art and performance to acclimate parkART to the arts community, the establishment of formal contractual agreements between artists and the Park District, the establishment of "incubator labs" (i.e. studio space on an on-going basis), and strategies for established fiscal solvency for the long-term parkART project.

I attended the last two parkArt tours, and I found that performance artists would be particulrly interested in parkART, because many of the Park Districts' fieldhouses have some of the most compelling spaces available, from large dance studios to eerie hallways, heavy with unspoken history. I also believe that performers interested in their relationships to their audiences will get some refreshing and unexpected results from performing at these under-utilized community centers.

ParkART needs your participation, ideas, and enthusiasm. For more information, write to:

Friends of the Parks
407 South Dearborn
Chicago, IL 60605
312-922-3307

-Douglas T. Hoppe



T A L K L I N E S

BY SU MONTOYA

Dancing Bear, Bartender, Bodyguard—like ancient Toltecs they take on names—Magnum Shiloh, Rebel—naming their sexuality—Aquaman, #2, Bachelor, Switch—voicing the self that was not christened—Iceman, Shadow, 5-0, M & M—the one that has stayed in the dark—Smiley, Donutman with his hand on the yielding receiver

Lollipop, Cupcake, Love Button—projecting her internal mirror—Wild Woman, Surrender, Tigress-where she has the control—Summer, Flame, Sunshine—emanating from her soft hot mouth unseen—Song-bird, Fantasia, Ice Lady—the images wending their way from that cave where the stories are borne—Naughty Girl, Lady X, Hiawatha, "J" into the receiver

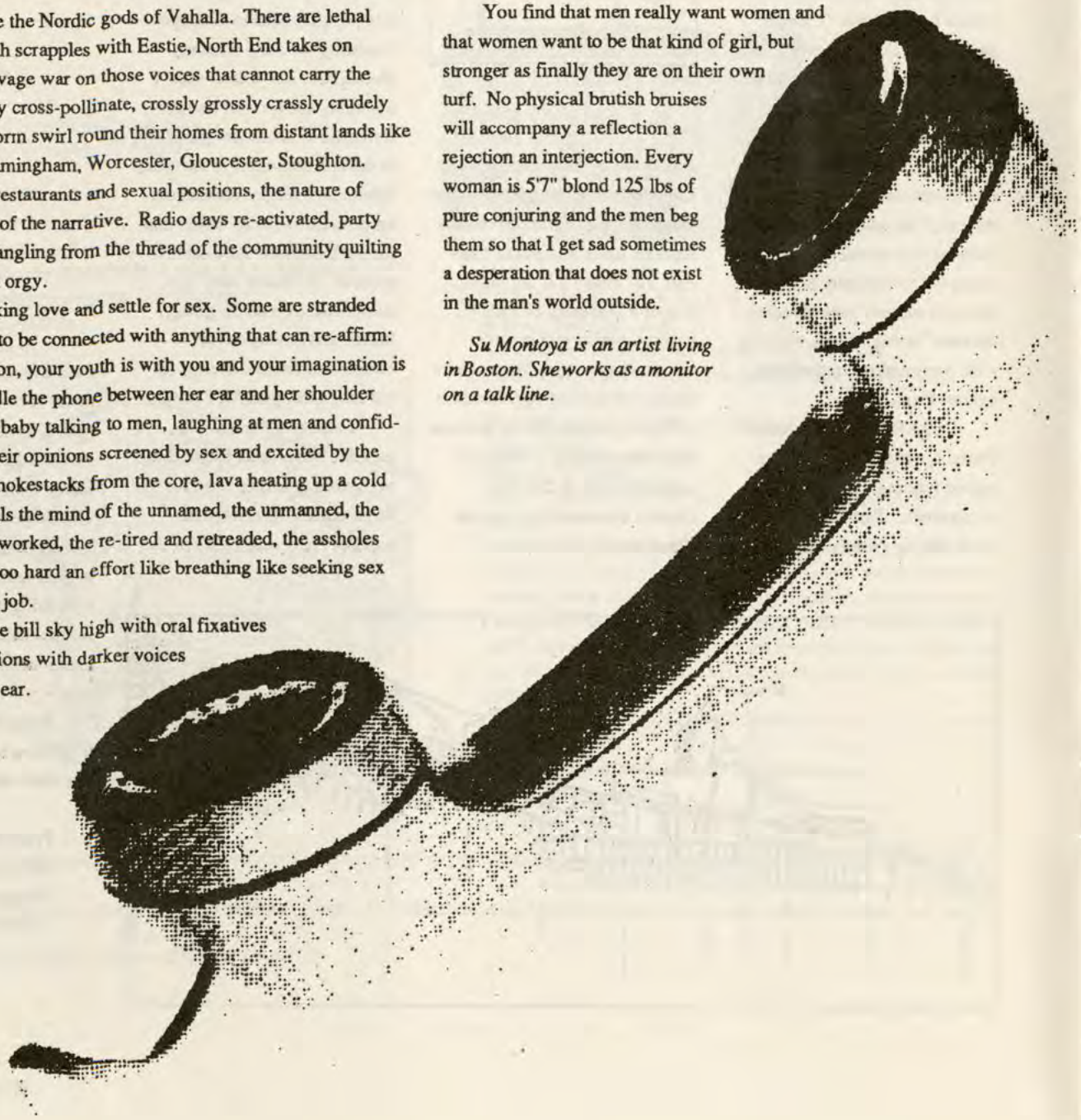
They clash like the Nordic gods of Vahalla. There are lethal combinations--South scrapples with Eastie, North End takes on Southie. Tongues wage war on those voices that cannot carry the proper accent. They cross-pollinate, crossly grossly crassly crudely lewdly seeds of inform swirl round their homes from distant lands like Peabody, Lynn, Framingham, Worcester, Gloucester, Stoughton. They learn of new restaurants and sexual positions, the nature of humans and the art of the narrative. Radio days re-activated, party lines resuscitated dangling from the thread of the community quilting bee and the modern orgy.

Some call seeking love and settle for sex. Some are stranded with love and long to be connected with anything that can re-affirm: yes, you are a person, your youth is with you and your imagination is alive. She will cradle the phone between her ear and her shoulder while changing the baby talking to men, laughing at men and confiding in each other their opinions screened by sex and excited by the possibility of it. Smokestacks from the core, lava heating up a cold existence and reveals the mind of the unnamed, the unmanned, the under ed., the overworked, the re-tired and retreaded, the assholes that can make life soo hard an effort like breathing like seeking sex like searching for a job.

Runs the phone bill sky high with oral fixatives and dark masturbations with darker voices pulling at the inner ear.

You find that men really want women and that women want to be that kind of girl, but stronger as finally they are on their own turf. No physical brutish bruises will accompany a reflection a rejection an interjection. Every woman is 5'7" blond 125 lbs of pure conjuring and the men beg them so that I get sad sometimes a desperation that does not exist in the man's world outside.

Su Montoya is an artist living in Boston. She works as a monitor on a talk line.



HARD COIN

April 13-15, 21-23, 1989
MoMing
James Grigsby

From carefully crafted words and images James Grigsby's visions erupt like bombs underfoot while we walk laughing on top of them. These two works are no different.

James Grigsby

Premiering was "Hard Coin," a humorous portrayal of a man's lonely search for perfection. Grigsby performs in a visually powerful and thematically potent set: a suspended working clock, angular blocks covered with billboard advertisements, a swing with a broken doll and a feather hat. The set, like the text, reflected the buying and selling of perfection, and the failure of objects to remain perfect with the passage of time. The work climacted with Grigsby riding out, amidst a sea of smoke, on top of a lit up cloud placed over a billboard block. He delivered a hilariously hallow evangelist number exclaiming that there are non-believers present and we're all running out of time.

There were other humorous elements as well, including a half-man, half-woman outfit which he concluded was just ambiguous enough. There were wonderful commercials for three products : "Perfection Magazine," delivered while wearing a pinocchio-like nose (lying or imperfect); "The Get Him System," actually a 1960's portable cap hair dryer; and a taxidermy kit, recited while wearing a hand-operated wing flapping bird/hat. But, as with all of Grigsby's work, the intent was not simply humor, but pathos. As the work closed, in the shadow of the swing rocking side to side, Grigsby methodically recited a list of imperfect objects ,".. chipped china, an uninscribed olympic medal...." One was left with the sad portrait of the impossibility of physical perfection, even when accompanied by perfect memories.

"From Here to Detroit" (work #2) consisted of a narrative and the construction of an unknown contraption stretched across the space in a series of tubes, bells, balls, bubbles, found objects, enlarged Tonka toys, ladders, a candle, a flash bulb, and a Fisher Price toy record player. Both works were cleverly rigged by the rigging master of Chicago, Jim Janecek.

The building of the contraption was accompanied by a wonderful sound score co-composed by Grigsby and Don Hedeker. "Detroit" showed us a man unsure of direction yet constantly building, pushing towards "Detroit," reflecting the human quest for technical advancement and control over all. Yet, ultimately we are left confused by the by-products of this obsession : nuclear proliferation, ecological breakdown, and most of all the loss of compassion. This was demonstrated ingeniously in "The Art of Kissing," a section dedicated to learning romance and passion. Grigsby read from a kissing pamphlet while the propeller on his hat spun and a jet pack puffed out smoke at the completion of the act.

No matter how grand or small a feat, for Grigsby's character any event was somehow anti-climactic, leaving him bewildered in his mechanized environment, attempting to solve his confusion by yet another invention.

-Brigid Murphy

THE STATIONS OF MARY

Crane Gallery/Chicago
Produced and performed
by Deborah Boardman

Boardman's independent installation consisting of a heavily framed panel of several paintings, a high, throne-like chair, and an altar-like station with a mirror, all connected by an inner path, delineates the space for Stations of Mary. The audience sits inside this dark, chapel-like environment, while slide-texts click on and off the "stations" before Mary's entrance.

Mantled in long white sheets, 'Mary' the Virgin, stands on a low platform, and open-armed, she accepts her "duties of high priestess." 'Mary' washes her feet and her face, and roams through some of the stages of her journey indicated by the previous slide-captions. But she's apparently tormented by 'sinful' thoughts, and frantically returns to the washing basin. She prays, she cleans fish and supposedly cooks it, she eats bread, reads and meditates. Then she gets this idea of putting on make-up and taking off all of her clothes . Repenting, she redons her long gown and opens it wide before her to receive the projection of swimming fishes, indicating her return to sacrosanct grace.

Allegedly, Stations aims at coalescing "a woman's" - Boardman's? - sociopsychological and spiritual understanding while confronting both her sense of self and her construed reality. The allusion to socioreligious feminine mystique within the confines of the sacred and profane is a highly interesting idea. Likewise, the allusion of 'Mary' as a female Christ is in itself fascinating. But the overriding push-and-pull between their spiritual construct` and biological or sexual nature thus expressed in a collision of media, styles, symbolisms, historicism, a dash of Frida Kahlo-ish and past-decades feminist anxiety, undermines any possibility of the woman's sense of will. Thus unable to find a way out of her predicament, Mary looses patience, frenetically cuts up the hairs of her long wig, strews them about in patches, and discards the "saint."

The staccato unfolding of 'Mary's' quandary is animated by

From Stations of Mary

chanting, moaning, weeping, heavy-breathing, grunting, sweeping and stumping sounds made by three women. The women are supposedly different sides of 'Mary' as they echo or translate, in sound, the different stages of 'Mary's' dilemma. Albeit recognizing the reinforcing element of the sound-echoing of Mary consciousness, the three women's confined role becomes increasingly obvious, although they do slip their feet into high-heeled shoes at the end, suggesting the final transition between the saint to the whore. But that was already understood when 'Mary' cut off her hair, and left.

As a result, Stations' organizational and thematic conflation seems unwilling or unable to define Mary as either a stylized priestess, confused modern chic, or a woman really contending with a socially prescribed sexuality which she cannot, or will not, accept. As a result, 'Mary' is confined in the polarity of the saintly and the profane. Left behind, all the parts of her fragmented self climb onto high heels and leave us with the sad impression that all the emerging facets of this woman and, by implication, of womanhood, will go on wobbling on the edges.

-Jamirte Trott

PROBLEMS W/ READING RE-READING

Rhona Hoffman Gallery
Curated by Jeanne Dunning & Hirsch Perlman

With the invention of the lenticular stereoscope in the mid-19th century by Sir David Brewster, the eye was given access to view what it had not to that point in history been accustomed to seeing, that being that the pictorial landscapes and architectural landmarks of the day had become fully enveloped by the eye. The casualness, and immediacy, of such a simple piece of machinery given to the physiological nature of optics, rendered possible a spectacle of technology that was at once useful while providing an entertaining, and acceptable, method for reading the familiar.

It could be said that the stereoscope not only offered a renewed sense of visibility to an already existing performance retardaire of looking at pictures, but then by locating it squarely between the eyes where vision becomes blurred and doubled, it exaggerates the phenomenon of the apparatus.

The new binocular reader has gained a significant responsibility within this institution of reading, a responsibility which has made the viewer implicitly aware of the apparatus, through which invisibility and complicity have become equal partner.

-Mitchell Kane

WILL THE REAL DAVID MAMULA PLEASE STAND UP!

March 30, 31, April 1, 2 1989
MoMing Dance & Art Center
David Mamula

In his latest one-man theatrical show, David Mamula reiterated that his work is not performance art. The self-proclaimed "leave my show feeling good" entertainer billed as "Chicago's only multiple character performer" recently brought to the public his latest regurgitation of lite performance "Will The Real David Mamula Please Stand Up!."

Though his technique, movement and voice exhibited a talented, disciplined actor, the threads of supreme effort, in quick change characterization were all too often woven through his coy collection of pieces. The show began with a spotlit Mamula running through a labored study of facial mannerisms and voice juggling. With capable technical support, he galloped through a total of 18 characters, some of which have been seen in past shows. Mamula's basic premise is to play all the roles of his quirky slice-of-life portrayals - a white man who assimilates black culture, twins who do everything together, a man whose every action is somehow related to carrots, a singer/songwriter dedicated to himself, a know-it-all stage hand, and an eccentric woman who cooks with lard, mayonnaise and Wonder bread. His assemblages take two paths: vignettes focused on one character or he, him, himself attempting to play a number of roles in quick procession. The former pieces, such as a boy who finds refuge playing on the floor of his single mother's bathroom floor or the portrayal of a white, middle-class Rastifarian from California (which pokes fun at EST) are mildly engaging. Latter pieces, where Mamula plays several old men, women, and children in rapid succession, are a trifle more interesting, such as the old movie flavored rendition of Vera, a separated, society alcoholic interacting with the mixed-up house guests that surround her. Often the multiple character skits become obstacle course races with roles occasionally blending together. The dashing about, from spike mark to spike mark, is somewhat distracting, as well. Such flaws take away from the canned, pre-cooked vaguely original script. A short film of his satiric protrayal of a star-struck girl dancer evoked the most laughter from the audience.

What's most disturbing about Mamula's work is a polarized focal point and an on-going reliance of safe material brought forward from past shows. The show leaves one wondering if risk taking and exploration are character traits of the real David Mamula.

-Tim W. Jacobs

KAREN FINLEY

April 8, 1989
Cabaret Metro

I was walking away from a bar that served bourbon, northbound on Clark Street just south of Addison, on one of the first warm and comfortable nights of early spring. From a cab standing inert in a line of entropic traffic stepped a friend of mine, joining me to walk the last three blocks to the Karen Finley show at Cabaret Metro. It was a bit like two business associates meeting unexpectedly at a Turkish bath. After exchanging pleasantries neither of us mentioned the many filthy familiarities associated with the Dumb Bar and environs. It was understood: our very mien bespoke the milieu toward which we strode, a late night Wrigley stride firmly entrenched in our movements.

Arrival at the facade of the Metro bid us queue twenty persons south of the door. Even from this distance we could feel the sidewalk vibrating from the low end of the sound system. Tentatively resigned to the indignity of waiting to be admitted to the dump, I smoked to douse the odor of sweat and liquor which I recognized a half block away. This bar really has a smell all its own.

The six dollar cover broke me - I had no clout with the bouncers that night. We ascended the stairs to the balcony, tossing careless and schmoozey lyrics of greeting to persons recognized from previous encounters with performance art or the bar itself. The balcony, though, was as packed with persons of every nature as the lower strata, and our raised elevation didn't help to find a seat. The main stage yawned just beyond and below the overhanging railing before us. I claimed a spot to stand and stood my ground, watching a huge video of The Weenies singing their hit, "Fuck You." One of my creditors bought me a bourbon in exchange for some proffered drugs. As she returned from the bar, Karen was beginning: the video screens dropped out of sight, a roar went up from the crowd of five hundred plus, and she walked from backstage to a microphone and her prop table.

Amused, casual and self-assured, she began her schtick: banter, nice to be here, her favorite club in le monde, stripping off her housewifely attire to reveal lingerie, then total nudity. Well really nakedness - bare-ass-nakedness. Accompanied by the screams of the crowds, provoking the en passant, she covered her body with warm chocolates from a heart-shaped box bearing her name, followed by shimmering tinsel which clung like a sweaty disco dress to her sticky frame. Let's face it - she

looks good in chocolate.

With her sing song delivery, Finley testifies. Punctuating her invective is that crazed OOOOO sound, the "O" as when sounded in tool or fool or Sue. The mad rant rambles, touching upon the filth of society, medial constructions, George Bush, the nuclear family, sex and abuse, the exploitation of women, Rich Daley, rape, food. In mid-rant, screaming a particularly disgusting image of a girl being raped by her father, she stops. Some drunk in the crowd is singing "Happy Birthday," and she has to stop long enough to heap abuse, fearlessly, upon the asshole. Fed up with having to take the harassment and oppression of white male bullshit long enough, borrowing beer slugs from various persons standing at the front of the crowd near the stage, she progresses from insult to indignity to wallowing to exploitation, all to the screams of her drunken rowdy audience. And yet, as she progresses, it becomes clear that the crowd is identifying less and less with Karen onstage. With each exhortation and spitting exorcizing word of disparagement for what are plainly the motives and moralities of the very persons in attendance - the posers, the drunks, the jocks, the suburbanites, the yuppie wanna bees - the audience in the area surrounding myself and my cohorts in the balcony became increasingly quiet. The nudity, foul language and grotesqueness of Karen's images had brought them to cheers of R-rated inebriation, but these attacks upon the things the group holds sacred and dear, such as pastel sweaters and Rush Street and renovation has left the pastel sweater wearers visibly annoyed. This wasn't quite what they had come to hear. Every other statement is punctuated by that OOOOO sound, that southern preacher's wife faking orgasm sound, drilling the words into my head.

-Robert Daulton

Karen Finley

SIGNIFYING THE SEXUAL OTHER: Works by Lydia Schouten

March 22, 1989
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago Auditorium

Although it is structurely inappropriate and a potentially unbelievable activity, the poverty of meaning varies in definition and execution. Understandings range from the commonly argued two-folded conquests of deconstruction to the reconstitution of authenticity, re-insuring dominant representations including those questioned by marginal voices. Narratives framed from denying meaningful, politically documented time, set the stage for Rotterdam artist Lydia Schouten's performance, photography and video works. It is in this arena of manipulated mediation that Schouten wishes to create a feminine sexual psyche using powerful sequences of primal, sensual, and metaphysical experiences.

According to Schouten, the media has neutralized the normal resistances of our desires leaving us to seek out extremes in order to remove the everyday banality of heterosexuality. She takes full advantage of the shock value involved with using sexually charged imagery accompained with an often misread strength that evolves from the nude figure. Several explanations offered by the artist included readings of her later video work. Schouten taps into advertising, television, and popular misbeliefs brought on by glamour as sources for support material while rejecting issues surrounding the male-gaze, feminism and the expansion of a social collective consciousness.

Leaving Europe and performance behind in the early 80's, Schouten moved to New York City and experimented with Polaroids. Having always appreciated the instant quality of photography, she began to construct images which continued ongoing themes from her former time-arts based work. In these photographs Schouten gestures herself in highly charged ready-for-sex positions. She submits to cut-out, cartoon-like animals and fish, all apparently engaged in sexual activity with her. Such imagery is found in the series "Animal Space" (1980) and "The Lone Ranger Lost in the Jungle of Erotic Desire"(1981). In these successful works it is Lydia Schouten, the artist, whose voice is heard and whose desires effected. The primal need to self-generate emotional, sexual, and/or cultural representations in order to historically exist and therefore acchieve self-bodily sexual satisfaction is also evident in the early photography and Schouten's video works "Beauty Becomes the Beast" (1985), "Split Seconds of Magnificence" (1984). Similar to her still images, these two pieces present a woman interacting with hypernatural surroundings, experiencing an honest physiological sensation which questions the traditional dominance of male aggression. Also, these two pieces function as avenues for creating new space and time for experiencing a true feminine sexual identity. Schouten's recent work re-establishes self-refelcting existance through passive/aggressive, power to victim, or specifically in Schouten's work, heterosexual male to heterosexual female strategies.

Does Lydia Schouten leave behind art history, ignore feminism, and shed social responsibility? She doesn't actually instigate a palpable stance and therefore leaves the work open for both positive and negative feminist and art criticisms. What problematizes the interpretation of Schouten's art, is their neglect to consider the viewer's ability to relate conceptually to her own figure. Leaving the audience lost in the adventures of autobiographical art, her videos, particularly "Echoes of Death/Forever Young," (1987) and "A Civilization Without Se-

crets, " (1988) began to tell us more about the artist's personal losses and gains via the media's power combined with the historicization of male and female heterosexuality rather than present a formula for seeking out individual erotic pleasure through the discovery of one's sexual self.

-Robert Blanchon

PERFORMARAMA

Friday April 14th, 1989
Chicago Filmmakers

Tom Jaremba - In absentia (due to recent hospitalization)

Nancy Forest Brown - (in the guise of art patron/collector) fills in, setting the tone for the evening.

Tone - one of absence/masquerade/impersonation

Frank Navin - drawing source material from "real life" incidents revolving around "first-job-in-the-city" spins a yarn chock full of flat impersonations of "seventies-style" victims caught in LIFE's treadmill (as represented by hospital ward). With a Greenbergian sense of flatness and a "Dukes-of Hazardesque" sense of hyperbole, Navin tailors piece as if material were drawn from a bolt of polyester and intended for the ultimate leisure suit.

Kyle Gann - In absentia, sends two pieces on tape and one "live" piece played by two musicians. "Live" piece sounds very interesting after listening to tape - moody minimalism for flute, soprano saxophone, and tape.

Nancy Forest Brown - As Evelyn Gottwald and stand-in host, segues into slide show fundraiser with anecdotal tale of woe concerning fictitious daughter's love affair with selfish man, purchase of California dream house, birthday party, Halloween party (replete with aforementioned daughter impersonating Marilyn Monroe), and attempted sale of aforementioned dream house to benefit NAME Gallery, all done with the kind of finesse that is truly frightening.

Larry Steger - Dressed in black "gay biker" leather "recites" Jean Genet's speech to the Black Panthers (originally delivered at Yale in 1970) prefaced with a "coming-of-age" story (gay sexual politics, religion, and power) all backed by the blasting thump of New Order - a "Tom of Finland" character come alive in a macabre recitation of a dead man's provocation to the most radical element in America 19 years ago - tongue in chic?... chills run down my spine just the same.

-Kevin Henry

P.S. 122 Field Trips

April 11 - 16, 1989
Goodman Theatre

For the most part, the P.S. 122 Field Trips functioned exactly the way such a "showcase" evening is supposed to function: it provided Chicago audiences with the chance to see four artists that might not have otherwise come to town, and the works were short enough that you never had a chance to get bored. I for one would have preferred to see some of these artists in full-length pieces instead of excerpts, as noted below, but overall it was a very entertaining evening.

Violinist/composer Guy Yarden acted as "continuity man" throughout, providing preludes and interludes for the other acts. Yarden's "A Place of Forgetting" plays elegant and sensuous games with time, using digital delays and other electronics to alter and extend his violin-playing. Yarden's music further blurs temporal distinctions by making cross-references through history and geography, leaping from modal scales suggesting a medieval dance tune to passages that suggest the Middle-Eastern kemanche.

Ann Carlson is a charming and witty monologist, with a keen visual sense and a wonderful quality of composure in even the most preposterous situations. In "Middle Child" she appears as a 3-foot-tall munchkin in a white party dress, and it somehow seems perfectly natural. When she lolls onto her back, wearing a black evening dress, and sticks her legs in the air like fins - which is precisely what she does in "Sarah" - it is a completely graceful gesture. Both of Carlson's works were excerpts from longer series, and they left me with a strong curiosity about the other parts we didn't get to see. Perhaps someone at the Goodman will bring Carlson's complete "Animal Stories" to Chicago in the future.

Ann Carlson

It was good to finally see Ishmael Houston-Jones in Chicago. Houston-Jones moves with a dangerous grace, a violent elegance. In "DEAD" he very nearly beat himself up, while his own voice on tape recited a list of all the important people that had died during his lifetime. He fell, rolled on his back, leapt in the air and hurled himself to the floor, again and again. It was tremendously powerful to watch. It was more difficult to access the excerpt from "The End of Everything" out of context of the complete work, but Houston-Jones created an indelible image of sensuality, emotion, and pained intelligence.

And then there was Danny Mydlack, who looks like some sort of psychotic yuppy at first sight, though you gradually realize the yuppy part is wrong. Mydlack has the wonderful "crazed vaudevil-

Nancy Forest Brown

lian" quality that is (in my perception at least) at the crux of performance art. It's a style that can be traced back to Fluxus, and it's what prompts the wise-ass remarks about "Didn't I see that once on 'The Gong Show'?" In the course of his "Danny Sampler," Mydlack lip-synched (lip-sank?) a song with a close-up video of his mouth; he inflated a plastic bag over his head with a hair-dryer and drew a smiling face on it; he covered his bare chest with shaving cream and wrote on it with his finger like a blackboard. That fact that during these escapades he also managed to tell some poignant stories bespeaks the strength of the medium and Mydlack's own wild skills.

Frankly, I could have lived without Pat Oleszko's trés, trés cute little film, "Footsie," but it passed the time amiably enough.

It was good to see this sampler of New York performers here in Chicago, and P.S. 122's Mark Russell is to be commended for sending this entertaining divertisement our way. What I wonder is why no one is packaging Chicago performance artists and sending them around the country in a similar road show? And if anyone gets inspired to do so, how about letting everyone do longer works?

-Jeff Abell

Obsessions of a Queer Nature

April 14 & 15, 1989
Randolph St. Gallery

The evening opened with Dominique Dibbell..."Please welcome Miss Nancy Bin!" Nancy was a grey-wigged, polyester clad, folk singing, lecturing lesbian, who made a transformation from the mundane to the awkward as she dove into stories of what she was meant to be, from a cowboy farting on the range to a pirate pillaging on the high seas. But she concluded, after two humorous, involved stories of adventures from other centuries, that really she was just Nancy Bin and that was enough. However, underneath the humor one saw a portrait of a sad woman with no place in society, whose ideal life would always lie centuries away.

Pool-Side Addictions by D. Davis was a solo work which dealt with obsessive/addictive behavior of all sorts. It was set primarily in a make-shift bathtub with a few props. Applying her wildly exaggerated circus skills (Davis, Jennifer Miller, and Susan Seizer were members of a women's circus which toured Nicaragua), Davis walked out on stilts, wearing a bedspread and complaining about her pumps. I would like to have seen even more of Davis' circus skills in this work and I felt, in general, that this piece needed editing and was heavy handed with its message.

Before intermission Dibbel gave a word of warning concerning the contents of her next piece. Although it gave away the "punchline," so to speak, it was a considerate gesture. Bill Parker Sings The Ballad of a Ruined Man was the forewarned work. A twisted song-singing man is in search of his daughter, who has run away to escape his sexual abuses. The piece paints a pathetic picture of a man who exclaims, "No one would ever love me as my daughter did."

Jennifer Miller was inventive, engaging, exciting, and bearded. She is one of my favorite performers. She performed with great skill, primarily structured improvisation. Miller used inventive text and possessed a dynamic movement vocabulary and expert circus skills. She tossed several ideas into the air like a skilled juggler, gracefully returning to them before they landed. Her work was humorous and political, and her rapps about Samosa and Nicaragua were wonderfully on edge. It was as though she was balancing the audience on her shoulders as she traversed a theatrical tightrope. Miller's work ended with a powerful section about AIDS. She stated that it was the most important issue of our time as she dunked her torches into a flammable liquid. She then went into her literal bag of tricks and returned wearing a red nose. Miller then proceeded to do a clowning section which transformed the audience into eight year old guests at a birthday party. Pulling off her nose and her shirt, Miller lit the torches. The electric lights went out. She juggled the torches steadily until they dimmed and all that remained was the sound, and then silence.

The evening closed with a wonderful circus/tumbling/slapstick lesbian flirtation, Civilized Circus Sleaze by Davis and Susan Seizer. The piece was performed in tuxedoes while Strauss' Danube Waltz played. The work dealt with that "WHY?" so often left unaddressed in performance, particularly performance of a political nature. "Why keep going when it is all so overwhelming?" This section, placed intelligently at the end, (after Jennifer Miller's intensely touching piece), was joyful and celebratory, reminding us why we should all want to run away and join the circus. That is, joining the circus in which the topless bearded woman is the star performer and not a freak in the side show.

Brigid Murphy

A Weird Night with John Schnepp and Kevin Landers

May 20, 1989
Process Studio

John Schnepp and Kevin Landers parody elements of the popular culture in an highly amusing and energetic fashion. "A Weird Night" was composed of several short performances, films, videos, and songs that were held together ont by an order of progression, but rather by an order of energy. Among the most memorable of the parodies were the heavy metal and rap songs. The absurdist lyrics inverted the violent and sexual content of the songs, yet the timing and excellent back-up band mimiced the form so well that it crearted an amusing re-evaluation of the genre. Schnepp and Landers have the innocence, spontaneity , and enthusiasm of children coupled with the technical skills and wry sense of adults. The most engaging part of "A Weird Night" was not so much the comical aspect of their work, but rather, the way the young men work together. When they parodied "The Êhree Stooges" they actually were The Three Stooges. I felt as though I had seen two grown-up boys performing--boys who knew and trusted each other and liked to play together. Schnepp and Landers evoke a sense of play that most of us have put aside, but would gladly re-create.eity , and enthusiasm of children coupled with the technical skills and wry sense of adults. The most engaging part of "A Weird Night" was not so much the comical aspect of their work, but rather, the way the young men work together. When they parodied "The Êhree Stooges" they actually were The Three Stooges. I felt as though I had seen two grown-up boys performing--boys who knew and trusted each other and liked to play together. Schnepp and Landers evoke a sense of play that most of us have put aside, but would gladly re-create.

-Douglas T. Hoppe

John Schnepp and Kevin Landers

PERFORMARAMA Saturday April 15th, 1989
at Chicago Filmmakers.

Saturday smoke wafts still
from the embers all aglow
On Huron, on Orleans; and the gibbous moonbeams
of this aftermath's evening
Illume the crumpled walls of Sullivan's modernity
On the ill-named street, Superior.

Exquisite lofts and condos
bespeck the River North:
The dealers, the dowagers - patrons of gas -
Telephone and fax their losses,
Their liabilities, bereft of tangible artifacts
in late night lit rehabs.

Completely out of the loop
in Podland and Wicker Park,
stunned and silent craftspersons wait powerless
their works destroyed, gone,
burnt-smelly by kindling the spark of inspiration
that passed from dust to dust.

The night before (a Friday)
at Filmmakers Belmont address
(another immaculate rehab), the alternative NAME
ends another benefit; Genet's
fearless words from Steger's lips - the best
teeth he'd ever come across.

Genet's lovely advocacy
of disenfranchised revolution
Hung, object-like, resonating, an impotent force,
to be contended with now
that the static and material things in SuHu
Caress the first tiny flame.

Gone Zolla, Gone Lieberman
by Saturday's nightfall all;
the third Performarama eve's rage sublimes on
in gracious Esperanto.
Adieu Mr. Klein, fond farewells to van Straaten-
upped your premium?

Murphy's bonnie Kitchenwares
shake for the exorcism
of this museum mileu to benefit who knows who
(certainly not Brigid);
Steve Jones soaring drum duets make angels sing
in a gathering patronized

by the light of no Negroes.
Inka spoke some realism,
but you've got to run with it people, don't
hide in the upper rows and
Not even know how one should applaud a poet
when rap rhyme runs done.

Between works Utopian language
garners meta-meanings, not
comprehension or static things to be bought
in boutiques hemmed and booted
to streets just West of Wells, or as some say,
In Wee-Wee land.

Ciao to East and West, bye
Bye Objects, adios Habitat -
Where does the one-sided dialectic of ceaseless
commodification of visionary
turpitudes flee when such a tree falls in the woods and
and some one is listening?

Attorneys, Dubina! lawyers
filing motions and briefs
Will sort through ensuing snarled disagreements
the Shopkeepers can't untangle;
it would seem as if a postmodernist should have
someone to lien on.

Policies' importance now
Outshines pedagogy or art;
where has Peter Miller gone? His photocopier
is buried deep under soot
and wreckage, the brilliant works of Mary Lou
are buried too, uncovered.

And so performance once again,
ephemera and transience,
more durable than paint and bronze, more keen
than shiny lithographs,
lie memory uncountenanced by object-hood or -ness:
the museums must go next.

For Bailey and Metrick
haven't their art to
Look at and fondle, either: just mounted transparencies
blurred and poorly lighted,
a videotape, a program and an epic exhilaration
Bordering on pandemonium.

Like Brendan's epic Mayberry
(Autistic Andy Griffith),
No evidence of understanding, ever ambiguous and thin,
sings out the blame--
so obviously arson, the cops have gotta know
soon whodunnit, Christ.

Stripped black and permanently
post-gentrified, who gave
A Louis for this hub of openings and yuppies but
the artists; the alternatives
had forsaken long ago this future site of high rise
Condominium dwellings.

Stern and imposing stairwells,
never again to have left upon
Proud banisters a plastic cup half empty of cabernet:
no more frantic openings, no
schmooze, no air kisses, no expectations of waiting
lists, no post-imagists.

The last past master's gasp
of wafted smoke and bitter ember
Dies out now, and the audience and artists take leave of
Both scenes, Belmont and Orleans;
the audience minus eight bucks, the artists with nothing
which is just what they came with.

-Josephine Perez

Whose Home by Nancy Martell

After attending a recent performance of "Mouthpiece" by Joanna Frueh, I found myself wanting to determine or clarify some ideas concerning performance-audience relationships. My position as an audience member in Frueh's piece alienated and distanced me and I decided to make an examination of how a performance does or does not set a tone that places audience and performers, if not on equal terms, at least at the beginning of a balancing act of recognition.

When Robert Daulton sits at a table at Lower Links, stands up, walks several paces to the stage and begins singing, it is as if he has casually but consciously enlarged his tableside conversation to include the entire room. This very simple device is engaging yet doesn't allow the distinction between the performer on stage and the audience members to become hierarchical. The grace of this particular entrance sidesteps the struggle to dominate an often noisy and crowded cabaret audience.

In the mid-80s, some members of the SXPU performance group created another kind of performer-audience relationship during their piece "Holy Real," at the nightclub Medusa in Chicago. The audience, upon entering, was immediately confronted by a wall constructed of volleyball nets across the stagefront. The entrance door was locked and the performance began behind the netting. While the spectators could watch the SXPU members enact a series of S&M style vignettes, the curtain prevented them from entering the stage area or making physical contact with the performers. The themes of bondage, discipline, vulnerability, and voyeurism were foregrounded by the cagelike performing space and the flimsy but clearcut barrier between the audience and performers.

Each audience member participated more actively during the "Foot Show" (original title was "Sole Food"), an earlier SXPU performance. This collaboratively written and performed piece created the possibility for each audience member to have a very private experience. After surrendering their shoes and socks at the door, participants watched a film while their feet were washed by SXPU members. Then, one-by-one, they walked barefoot through a maze of highly tactile materials--feathers, sand, astroturf, spongey foam, etc. At the end of the maze, the solo audience members found a twin-like male couple intently, fondly, sucking each others toes. If the spectator chose to stay and observe this couple's activities--taking place on a waist-high platform--they quickly became aware of an attendant watching them watching the "show."

In this piece, both the audience and performers entered into the complexities of their relationships. On at least three levels the audience was the activating force. The performers demonstrated lavish devotion to each guest during the footwashing sequence. Then, each participant had to experience the textured maze alone. Finally, they found themselves mute before the shrine/spectacle until the attendant commented on his/her passivity and warned them it was "time to go now."

During the "Foot Show" the SXPU members not only acknowledged, but also played with the contact points between audience member and performers. The intricate interdependancy of audience/performer relationships to desire and power were questioned and reinforced.

In "Mouthpiece," Joanna Frueh gave much lavish attention to the themes of power and dominance. During the hour-long piece, Frueh read from two kinds of texts. She alternated between reading a very personal, diary-like story of a sexual liaison and offering quotations from feminist theoreticians and the dictionary. Frueh, dressed in an expensive-looking leather strapless minidress, first stood behind a music stand and spoke the theory-laden text into a microphone. Then

she walked, wearing spike heels, about eight paces across the stage area to sit and read from the "personal" text.

She took power, or empowered herself, through telling a personal story using taboo language and confident, almost confrontational eye contact. She validated her own "personal" experience by quoting from authorities ranging from theoreticians to the dictionary. But, she blocked or incapacitated this spectator from being empowered in turn. One way this happened was that my identification with the characters in the story was confused or manipulated. This did not create a space (rupture) where I could enter into the text on my own terms, but substituted Frueh as the "authority" that delivered the word. The involuntary identification with the characters that occurs in a narrative was thwarted when characters seemed to shift and re-form as the story progressed. The character of the Lover, for instance, seemed to start out as female, then was coyly reversed to male.

Perhaps the most telling quotation Frueh offered was a definition of the phrase "to testify." While I sensed that I was being allowed to witness Frueh testifying to her own personal mythic, romantic, obscene, sexual experience, she did not seem to need my validation or active participation in the process. All that energy, all those secrets, all that power enacted during the performance of a testimony wasn't really for us (the audience). She was declaring herself to a power that seemed to carry greater weight than the audience's--the authority of the written word.

A Knee-Jerk Response by Nancy Forest Brown

In the Fall 1988 issue of TDR, the editors presented an impassioned plea to "performance specialists" and the population at large to save the planet from human plunder ("Ploughshares or Perish" TXXX). The editors declared that "The $300 billion U.S. defense budget must be spent on environmental rehabilitation and enhancement." The goals of this reallocation include world population stabilization/ reduction, reforestation of tropic and temperate zones, ocean management, and the development of safe fuels. For the editors of TDR, the ills of the planet are the result of misaligned priorities. In order to facilitate these goals, "a real change of priorities must take place." The role of performance specialists is "first to help shape the awareness of the gravity of the problem" and to "be among those building the constituency for change," since performance specialists "will be needed to develop and rehearse specific programs or scenarios for the future."

This call to action is certainly noble, but before we all run out to start shaping awareness, we should examine the situation more closely. The TDR editors suggest that our problem lies in having chosen to exhaust our resources, "material, fiscal, and creative. . ." on a "war machine" instead of on our environmental crisis — a simple either/or proposition. They have correctly identified that the earth is a "single interlocked system of ecosystems," but seem unaware that money is a single interlocked system of economic systems.

The $300 billion U.S. defense budget cannot be viewed as money to "spend" in the same way one spends one's personal money. If on any given day one person decides to buy a paperback book instead of a can of hairspray, the economic implications are minimal. Someone else will buy the hairspray and the hairspray makers will not go out of business. The $300 billion defense budget, on the other hand, is tied to many thousands of non-military jobs. The operating principle is that the government is paying many thousands of people to produce a product which doesn't have to be sold to anyone, i.e. a false product, *unlike* hairspray which must find a market in order for its manufacturer to stay in business. As a result, excess money is available for the purchase of commercial goods and demand exceeds supply, encouraging further production of commercial goods, more available jobs, and a healthy economy.

If theoretically, our false product can be anything that doesn't have to be sold, then our military budget could be reapplied to conservation. But how would that work in practice? Imagine a small city in South Carolina whose primary industry is producing parts for military helicopters. We have just consigned our military budget to environmental protection. No more helicopters. The helicopters parts company could be converted to manufacturing parts for commercial helicopters, but who's going to buy them? Other companies are already supplying that market. Now several thousand employees are out of work. Local support industries such as clothing stores, car dealerships, and furniture stores will soon be out of business becaue the flow of cash that supported them is now gone. Somewhere else jobs are now available in the environmental protection industry, but these employees are not trained for those jobs. Our small city in South Carolina will be thrust into economic ruin. Further, $300 billion is not one small city, but many.

According to John Maynard Keynes, who outlined this economic principle in 1930, this introduction of government money into the market economy can support the production of any false product — widgets or as TDR would have it, "environmental protection, rehabilitation, and enhancement." [1] Our present entrenchment in Keynesian economics is a result of our government's efforts to rescue our economy from the Great Depression of the 1930s. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal was an effort to juice the depression economy from the government side, the false product being social programs. F.D.R.'s New Deal failed to produce the kind of economic recovery hoped for because the American people were suspicious of its Socialist overtones. F.D.R. eventually found far greater public support (though not initially) for the U.S. involvement in World War II. Whereas, in 1936, government spending had risen to $15 billion (up from $10 billion in 1929) and national income had risen by 50%, during World War II government spending rose to $103 billion, resulting in full recovery from the Great Depression.[2] Since that time we have grown wealthy and stayed wealthy by maintaining a military=based economy. We are still haunted by the Great Depression and its economic lessons.

The economic difference between the manufacture of military goods and destruction by military goods, i.e. war, must be clarified. In both instances, our economy is accelerated through a system of military Keynesianism, but we only need to produce military goods in order to prosper, we don't need to use them. Indeed, we can't use them. Our involvement in Vietnam showed us that while war may be economically desirable it is considered by Americans to be socially

Heaters & Lifesavers ***-Carole Tormollan***

abhorrent. Now, as a result of Ronald Reagan's policies, our peacetime military budget for one year is more than our wartime military budget in Vietnam from the early 1950s until 1975. Clearly, Reagan's intent was not to create a gigantic war machine, but rather to maintain the economic advantages of military Keynesianism by building military equipment and putting it in storage, or in some cases offering it for sale.

TDR calls for "a real change of priorities," but doesn't clarify exactly what priorities are already in place, rather suggesting through criticism and advocacy that two opposing sets of priorities are available to us: conservation vs. exploitation. In fact, in the U.S. only one priority is at work, and we all share it. As a society our overriding priority is the welfare of human beings, our own citizens being our first consideration. We have opposing opinions as to how that priority should be served, but we are generally in agreement on what that priority is. Those who advocate our military Keynesianism do so on behalf of our citizen's well=being as they perceive it. Those who advocate the conservation of our ecosystem do so on behalf of our citizen's well=being as *they* perceive it. The advocacy of ecological conservation never puts ecology as a priority over human interest. For example, we don't advocate the abolishment of agriculture, which we know is ecologically unsound, since that would result in starvation for human beings. This shared priority is the source of our best economic successes as well as the cause of our self=created ecological disasters. To date, we have been unable to have our cake and eat it too.

Perhaps performance specialists can actively participate by helping to shape awareness of the problem. But in order to do so we must have a better understanding of the systems and forces at work in our economic ecology than that expressed by the editors of TDR. If our work is informed by economic, social, and political literacy, we can constitute a positive force — however small — in sparing our planet the ecological disaster currently available to it. If not, we do nothing more than add to the present confusion, paranoia and divisiveness surrounding these issues.

1. Keynes, John Maynard, Treatise on Money. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1930.

2. Heilbroner, Robert, The Worldly Philosophers. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953.

3. Chomsky, Noam, Towards A New Cold War. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973.

Deborah Hede

At her session this morning, Julia tells her therapist, "I am growing wings for the air and fins for deep waters." This is a joke between them. Julia hesitates to tell Paula that she really feels like a piece of arm or a breast or a disembodied brain — not joined to any part of her body. But, as Paula continues the massage, Julia feels very sad. Although she notices how careful and loving Paula's hands are as they touch her, Julia's neck feels fragile. Julia feels a raw, electrical pain at the back of her neck. She remembers meeting Charles at her door three years ago, as if for the last time, running to him and holding his shoulders to her face. He gave her a small basswood box filled with tiny seashells and then he left. There was a letter in the box, under the shells, telling her that he loved her, that he was confused. Julia remembers sitting on her futon that night, slowly pouring the shells into the palm of her right hand. She remembers cradling their cool, light surface — the shells becoming little bird droppings. She stands up, tosses the bundle through the open window, to the street. She washes her hands. Then she lies down, rests her neck against a down pillow, sleeps.

On her way home, Julia stops at the Walgreens on Broadway and buys a bottle of aspirin. Walking out the door, into the street, she sees a pay phone, picks up the receiver, drops a quarter in the coin slot. She dials Charles' number. Hearing his voice, Julia tells him she would like to take a picnic together. She wants to celebrate before he leaves for Japan.

When he picks her up, Charles is driving his mother's old station wagon. He was working in the studio when she called him; he still wears the cotton work clothes. She smiles to him as she walks out the front door. When she sits next to him, she sees that Charles is in pain today. His lower back often hurts since he dislocated a disc putting up drywall in his new building. She can see the pain because his lips are pressed together. He gives her a big kiss on the cheekbone, near her left eye. They laugh together and decide to drive to a beach out of the city.

On the drive, she formulates a prescription for Charles to get better — eat well, slow down, rest, and laugh. Julia realizes that whatever she tells Charles to do is best kept to herself. Charles is quiet during the two hour drive. When they enter the state park, he mentions that he would like to see an exhibition of drawings from the Princehorn Collection. He has seen the drawings before, but wants to see it again with her. Julia is pleased that he wants to spend more time together and so she agrees to his plan.

They park the car, walk out to the beach. The beach is empty except for two mothers, sitting on the sand—they are talking and watching their babies. The sun is partially covered by light clouds, the kind of clouds that gather and disperse with each breeze. The babies' cries drift in and out of hearing with each push of the wind. Charles sits on the white sand, close to the water. The women and babies look like colorful paper silhouettes from his vantage point. Julia walks by the edge of the water, trying to move nearest this line, without getting wet feet. She runs up and back along the curving slice of water and sand. Julia keeps to the dry sand, but when her feet don't move fast enough, a wave soaks her. She moves inside the tide so that her ankles and calves get wet too.

She runs back to Charles, heaving coyote=like yelps towards him. Then, she flops next to him. The mothers and their babies are leaving the beach, getting into a blue car. Charles is smiling at Julia. He notices that her hair is wet. He asks her if they could get back together again.

Julia, distracted by the smell of the water and sun, is surprised by his request. She thinks their intimacy is now a matter of the past, a friendship distorted by much pain and forgetfulness. She hates Charles for destroying her day at the beach, for putting his question in her head. But she doesn't say anything; she hears a honking noise in the sky and looks up. The sky is filled with the light clouds, the sun, and the blue. Julia feels the sun on her face and closes her eyes. The honking sound gets louder. Julia feels like she might faint, but she opens her eyes and, above, geese are flying north. Charles hugs her. He reaches into his left pocket and pulls out a small lavender wad of tissue paper. He asks her to open it. Inside, she finds a turquoise scarab. Chares says, "It's for you." He tells her about a pre=birth experience he has: when he holds a piece of string or thin ribbon between his forefinger and thumb, he remembers lying in darkness and hearing his mothers' heartbeat. He also remembers this moment whenever he is feverish.

Julia looks at Charles' mouth and thinks. She tells Charles about Paula touching her shoulders and wrists; how she feels the parts are being placed into one body. This massage reminds her of a fetus growing. Then she tells Charles that she is not going to sleep with him anymore. He refused to speak to her when she was pregnant; he just wanted her to get the abortion. She remembers how she wanted the baby, how the baby and she felt like one body, and how she got the abortion after four months of the pregnancy. She had moved out of his apartment before entering the hospital. Julia feels sad. Tears are falling out of her eye rims. She is very quiet. Still, the tears become tiny lakes around her eyes and fall onto her lap. Julia doesn't know what to say to Charles now. She feels the delicacy of language in his presence. She might say the wrong word, a harsh word, and crush him.

Charles is looking at the water. He is looking in the distance, at the green waves of water, moving towards their bodies. He and Julia sit on the sand until the sun touches a large bank of clouds. Charles asks her, "Shall we go?"

Robert Daulton

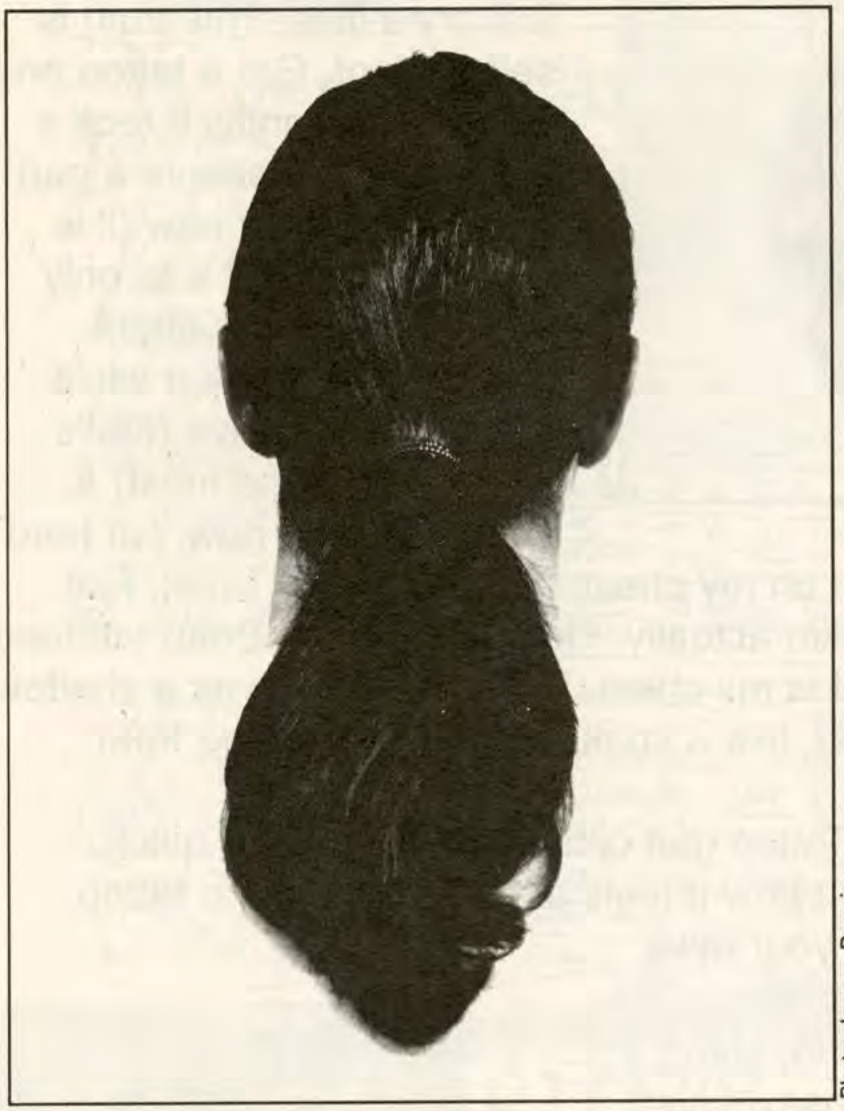


Photo: Jeanne Dunning

The kind of thing most often noticed when observing the back of another person's head (such as neck cowlicks and protruding ears), pony=tails are commonly seen when someone is walking away from you, or when they are standing in front of you, and facing in the same direction as you. Known as "pony=tails" presumably for their ordinarily diminutive size, these appendages have been known to rival in grandeur and sweep the tails even of horses. Some are loose floppy things, held by the merest flimsy rubber band: prancing and perfidious, these tails are as free as possible within the confines of retainment. Others, sternly bundled, pass judgement upon frivolity and tighten the skin of the possesor's forehead. Still another type, small and consisting of a group of strands seemingly unrelated to the head from which they sprout, weed=like and easy to disengage into the unbound but otherwise identical surrounding hair, this tail gives evidences of affectation: it is the ambiguous trademark of attitude.

A tail is the adieu of a head on its way.

The sheer ubiquity of tails makes it seem as if a strange evolution had come to pass among persons with hair, no matter how much of it. Perhaps the primary modus of such impressed servility of this ever growing extremity of the head was one of function. The untied hair obscures the vision, and interferes with the senses associated with orifices of the face, especially with the mouth if of sufficient length. With the proper discipline and including the use of a band or cord, these senses are allowed full range while the head is facing down or involved in a great deal of movement during the course of some task or labor. Yet, obviously, the motive of many of those who display pony=tails is anything by one of utility. Instead, an operation of natural forces beyond the dying cultural epidermis may be taking place.

The aboriginal nature of such an outpouching, though, must not neccesarily be seen as a re-envelopment or consumption by more primal, primitive motifs, although this may be the case in fact. The emergence of a flaccid lingham growing daily longer from the occipital cranial lobe is a phallic option available to either sex of any age provided the mane is extant.

From the perspective of an observer seated at the back of an event viewed by a crowd, many such appendages are to be seen: corded, tied, bondaged, harrassed by those in command of them. Their choreography afforded by the neck and shoulders they accompany, they move ceaselessly, quivering at the whip of a particularly quick nod; sliding in long, shining strands traversing the length of a sweater or coat; or, with the stiff, periscopic finality of a single seeing eye looking behind oneself. They are surrounded intermittently by their manumitted counterparts (some of which are held by a greater tenacity even then they, bonds like hairspray and mousse) and exhibit a sad stoicism or complacency about existance. Resolved and uncaring of them ourselves we move to the front of the audience, through the throng of thongs to a point at which the face of the group is visible in frightened and apathetic expectance of the sequence of events to follow. The house lights go down upon them and no longer is anything visible.

PERFECTLY VIOLENT

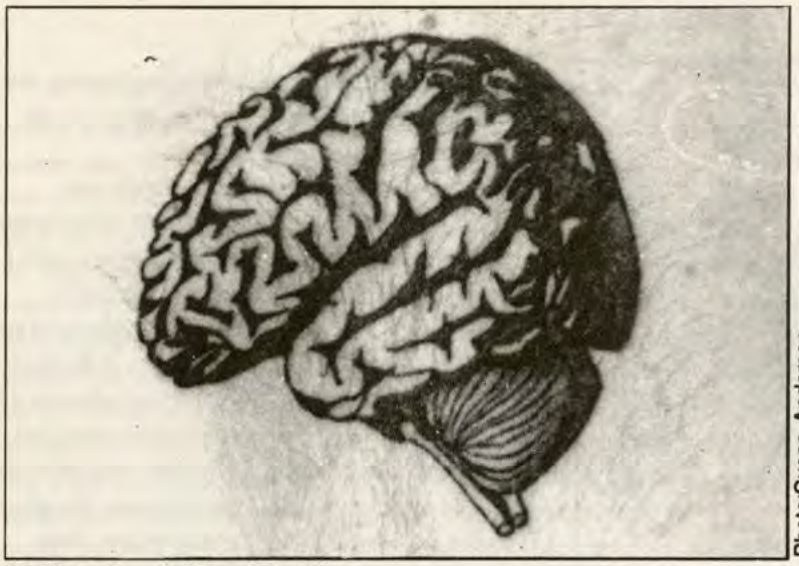


Photo:Susan Anderson

Tattoo by Jaime Trujillo.

Tattoos don't Bleed—they just cry a little. This truth is self-evident. Got a tattoo on my chest recently. It took a while for it to become a part of my chest. It is now (it is definitely now). It was only near my chest for about three weeks. Took a while. Now, when I shave (that's when I see it the most) It says "I'm here now, I'm here baby." I got a tattoo of a brain on my chest. Left side of my brain. Flat. Black and white. Black and skin actually. Fleshtone. Black Brain tattooed right on my chest. Right on. It is my chest. It's my chest. It was a shadow for weeks. Hurt, cried...Peeled, like a snake...Screamed at me from across my person—"HEY!"

Chainsaw cuts down a tree. Tattoo gun cuts me down to size quick.

Wish: The tattoo could tell you how it feels about me. That the tattoo could tell you this story. That your eyes would hurt just by reading this.

Does it hurt?: Perfectly. Burned, stung, imagine a dentist with a chainsaw. Just enough to weed you out if you're joking. Not enough to lose your lunch.

Does it come off?: Perfectly. As the flesh rots from your bones.

Doesn't it put you in strange company?: Perfectly. But no stranger than birth did. Ask my relatives.

I don't think I want one.: Perfect. I'll take two. Perfect. Perfectly Violent. I pay someone to do this to me. And my skin will never forget.

Brendan deVallance

Photo:Susan Anderson

Tattoo by Leo Zulueta.

TO ALL PEOPLE:

JOHN WIEBRAND
708 N. AUSTIN
OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

What do people need the most?

Is there anything artists can do to help people or is art not really a helping profession? Should I quit being an artist?

What do people need the most?

WHAT DO YOU NEED? WHAT DO YOU WANT?

I want to be the best friend you ever had. I want to be on an ethical level that will make me sure that I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world. I already care about you A lot. Sometimes I'm selfish. Sometimes I think about myself, especially in my dreams. I TRY REAL HARD EVERY DAY not to be selfish and to not be nice to other people just to get some kind of reward for myself. Every night I try real hard to treat the people in my dreams with compassion and respect because dreams are expressions of wish fulfillment and when you dream ill of someone it's just as bad as doing it when you're awake.

I have killed in my dreams. These people deserve compensation and I will somehow find a way to provide it. I BELIEVE THERE IS SUCH A THING AS WRONG AND RIGHT! There's a low road and a high road and both roads get you to the same place in pretty much the same period of time. Ultimately it makes no difference so we might as well take the high road. I think sometimes maybe I care too much. I think I do bad things, but they are almost always done for others rather than myself. I do not expect any punishment for myself. I profit from nothing.

I am willing to help you out in any way I can

I AM ABSOLUTELY DEAD SERIOUS.

I want very much to somehow make a

REAL CONTRIBUTION.

My art heals NOBODY and neither does yours.

Broken lives won't be mended through "pieces."

"Performance art" is the weakest of the mediums. The most pathetic. The one constant of all this is NO ONE IS ASKING US TO DO THIS STUFF AND CERTAINLY NO ONE IS PAYING US FOR IT.

Please take this personally

I want to give you what you need. If you need ANYTHING - labor, paintings, "some new concepts," or just someone to talk to, I want you to feel free to call me (443-3782) - ANYTIME.

Johnny's Been Good
by Linda Novak

The body's inside shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's "own and clean self" but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents.

Julia Kristeva: Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection

John Lebrand needs his audience. He needs us not in a generalized, narcissistic way but as a responsive, vital presence. He lets us know in his performances right up front. He cares for us--passing through the Lower Links audience, from stage to bar and back, he collected all the knives on the premises. Then he reassured us, "OK. Now we're safe. We can begin!" At Chicago Filmmakers, after a prologue delivered by Lynn Book expressed John's desire to give the audience "the best twenty minutes you ever experienced," he gazed miserably at the crowd, lowered his shaggy head and retched his guts out--a gangling body racked with pathetic puking. As suddenly as it began, the outpouring stopped and John carefully cleaned up his mess while mumbling apologies: "Sorry, I'm really sorry." Somebody help this man!

In the best of all possible worlds, we could accept this invitation to the real that underwrites Lebrand's appeals for help. We could, at least, call 911. But at the moment this potential thesis is sketched out, it's exploded by apparent contradictions. The pitiful puking is waved away with apologies and explanations of "nerves and stagefright." Lebrand quickly regains his confidence and enthusiastically launches into a series of gratuitous acts--"six gratuitous acts in 60 seconds." But when these first six are complete, six more follow--then six more, and more.

The carefully ordered tasks--eating boogers, swearing, burning money, eating money--spiral wildly up to confusion. Lebrand digs through crumpled paper bags for his props and repeatedly returns to a desperate hunt for his list of assignments. Given unearned or without response, not involving a return benefit, compensation or consideration--a gratuitous act is unwarranted. Drawn as we may have been at first into this scenario, we are suddenly blocked out. Lebrand always begins with an embodiment of abjection; a miserable and fascinating character. We want to watch him rise from his depth of dejection. But this trap for the spectator's gaze is not a place for the passive observer. Together, we break the rules and we pay the price.

Capturing the spectator by calling us into the picture, Lebrand needs us there. But once trapped in his world, there is no easy exchange between sovereign bodies. The flailing arms and legs, the unspoken (or sometimes spoken) appeals for pity or forgiveness can never be calmed with mere applause. Gratuitous acts need no recompense.

Desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject; Lebrand's acts are neither representations of our emotions nor simple demonstrations of his states of mind. During one performance, Lebrand introduces a balloon with a crudely drawn face as his father. The balloon explodes and the ketchup inside it splatters everywhere. In another piece, he pleads with an audience member to save his life, and silently mouthing the words "This is for real!" he flings his body to the floor. But we know his life is not really in danger, not tonight anyway, at least not right now. This irony mocks both our physical and emotional fears of mortality as well as our voluntary distancing in this Art(ificial) context.

But we are trapped. As any semblance of order devolves, as Lebrand fails to accomplish what he has promised, we are hurt. He asks us to witness the absolution of his sins, but again we are blocked. As the list progresses--"I smoked a cigarette, it's a sin and I'm sorry; I interrupted, it's a sin and I'm sorry; I made a joke at the expense of another, it's a sin and I'm sorry"--he stuffs more and more Kleenex into his mouth until finally we can't understand a word he is saying. We witness the act of contrition, but cannot hear spoken words, the sinful acts to be forgiven. Sins can only be forgiven by the maker of the laws. We are captured in the picture, but our place in the hierarchy is not above or below Lebrand's. The inside has become the outside, literally and figuratively. Lebrand pukes, not as our representative, not to suffer for our sake and save us--but to render a wound for us to enter. Of course, most of us think that we have largely overcome those fears of the abyss and have left them to the few remaining primitives and to the superstitious. And yet, if our enlightenment has left us so fully freed from the fright of the sacrilegious, why--I ask myself--are we so willing to enter into the picture and then so unhappy when he fails so passionately?

Let's consider this question. True, it's no fun to be invited in, to be offered possible solutions to desperate contradictions--and then have each possible resolution rejected. Time is not on our side, the order decays, the job gets boring. Easy solutions become increasingly hopeless. He seems out of control; but the job grinds on. He threatens: the piece won't stop until somebody hits him over the head with a sledgehammer. No, he won't promise not to prosecute for assault. Another piece ends with him tying ropes around his waist, and throwing them out to the audience, with no further instructions. He thrashes about in the mess until a group of spectators spontaneously pull on the ropes and drag his body off-stage.

Lebrand's "passionate failure," his always already grand failure, requires our joint effort. Gratification is always promised and always deferred. Easy solutions are not available. This deliberate violation of conventions both tests us and rewards us during the trip. For a short time we can enter Lebrand's "inside" world. We travel in his skin. If we are willing to dig into the wound Lebrand opens, his inside overflows and draws ecstatic new boundaries that include us. That explains the mess. Within these new boundaries we share the same skin, that "fragile container," and struggle, albeit hopelessly, to restablish the integrity of "one's own and clean self."

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