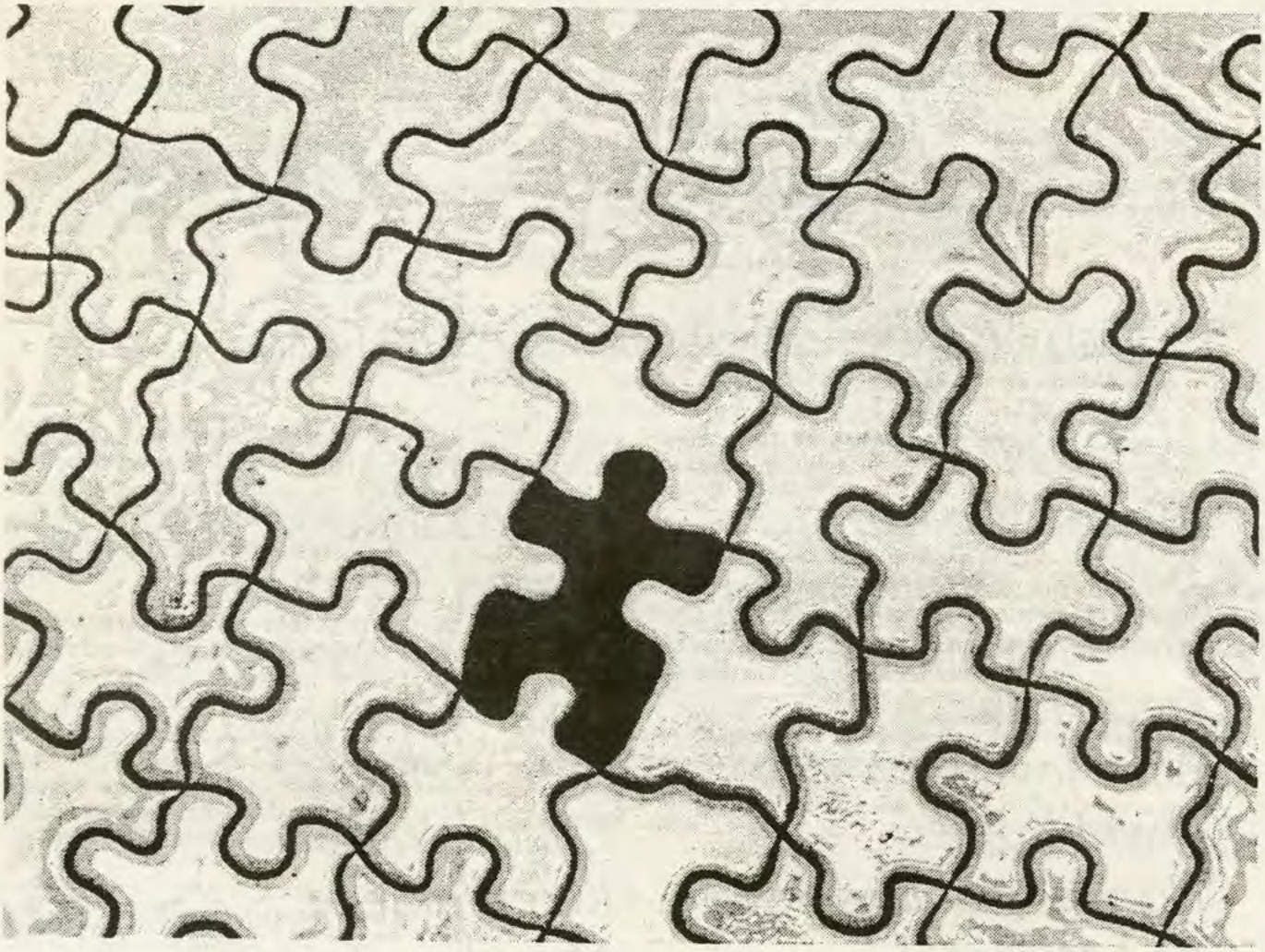
P - FORM

PERFORMANCE ART NEWS

April / May 1987 no. 4 $1



including...

Adrian Piper feature
Tom Jaremba interview
Performance Artist Survey

"Artists Call Performances"
"Spoken Word Cafe"
...and MORE!!!

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4th Floor

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dates of show May 5 - May 30

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EDITORS NOTE

Hello and Welcome to Number Four!

Performance Art in Chicago is growing continuously, in scope and diversity. P-FORM, in responding to this growth, is interested in tracking, rather than defining, performance art. Our attitude is open and exploratory, and our goal is to provide information and insights into performance art and artists. In order to be effective, we rely on you, the performance community, to inform us of your interests and to notify us of events.

In this issue we have included the first in a series of Performance Artists Surveys. If you did not receive a questionnaire and would like to be included in our future efforts, be sure to contact us at Randolph Street Gallery. If you have comments or criticisms based upon your reading of this issue's Artists Survey, again please contact us. We request your input, as we would like to establish an active dialogue with a wide variety of artists.

As always, we welcome and solicit your ideas and suggestions, letters, whatever. Thanks for your interest and support.

- P-FORM Staff

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TALK TALK TALK

"Talk Talk Talk"
Second anniversary benefit for Letter eX poetry newsletter
February 7, 1987

A cold wind blows down South Wabash the night of February 7th, whipping a barely-noticed sign: "Talk Talk Talk." That theme, unrelated to a topic, will carry part of the evening; "Show Show Show" could cover the rest. Upstairs the loft is packed - with artists and artistes, poets and poetry lovers, scene-makers and minglers. The school colors of the Art Institute and Columbia College are out in full force, which perhaps is why audience response will run high.

Carl Watson, founder of Letter eX whose monthly poetry newsletter is celebrating its second anniversary, mills with the crowd. His benefit will start just an hour late, an extravaganza including four poets, a performance artist, a singer (who will inexplicably cancel), a double-fashion show, and two films (one, by Matt Straub, will not be shown due to pre-announced technical problems). Not mentioned on the handbill but still notable are the long intermissions, which allow performers and viewers alike time to fulfill a necessity to evaluate and be evaluated. If Watson is right, the poetry "scene" isn't only well, but growing, attracting more and more non-poets. Why this is so is not evident and Watson's opinion will be challenged by the first poet to read, Lorri Jackson (whose work will be included in Letter eX's next issue).

Debbie Pintonelli, now eX-editor due to her imminent leave-taking of Chicago, comes out as the Smart Bar music goes down. She announces Columbia College student Jackson, head-to-toe in a uniform of black. Lorri Jackson is a transplanted Kentuckian with a vision, and one of the poets on the reading circuit. She startles the loft-renters by spray-painting "No Way" in big orange letters on a wall. She holds up a mask, then quickly drops it to launch into an epic recitation situated mostly in New York's East Village. Jackson reads several more poems, some raw, some dream-like, pacing the stage like a black cat in a trance: bad luck personified. Her previous work presented in a reading before Christmas - short bursts of decadent autobiography - was more satisfying to hear.

Following Jackson is prose-writer David Sedaris, an SAIC student who also frequently reads. He gives a deadpan political parody of a neighborhood artists' collective's "manifesto," and sweetly intones dryly humorous vignettes on travel to tacky lounges and having embarassing objects removed from his person. Dr. Seuss is a popular selection. And Sedaris' reading has earned him a place in the second annual Cabaret Genet this summer at Axe St. Arena.

During one of numerous breaks, a film appears on a high-up screen: David Hauptschein's "Fecundation." This short, disturbing work might be about creation - or AIDS. The claymation holds everyone's fascination as bright abstract chunks, like abused flesh, are cut with razors and pricked by pins. Crackling sounds plus gibbering voices add to the repulsive if oddly sexual tone.

After this successful refresher comes Suzi Greenspan, whose dramatic stage presence makes hers the most performance-oriented poetry to be read this evening. Shrink-wrapped into a floral outfit, a blue span in her hair, Greenspan throws down each poem in surly abandon as she finishes. Her act gets the male reaction, her topic an endless explicit explanation of sex: sex in the bathtub, sex on a car hood, sex in her fantasies.

Chet Long is next, less engaging than the previous three poets, but his intended obnoxiousness is polished by the advantage of his years. All these performers have their own Act, even if it's a non-Act, and Long certainly has his down. Plopping into a chair, he barks "Shut up!" to the delight of an apparent fan club up in front. His one triumph is a poem to a dead friend (and one by G. M. Hopkins). The rest are an attempt to prove his hardened experience On The Street, but in this case all streets lead to boredom.

Despite the length of the evening so far (one does at least get a lot for one's money), there is more to come. Brigid Murphy gives one of three quite professional performances for this date; the theme of "Talk Talk Talk"'s untitled piece seems to be men's skewed view of women. Murphy begins as a fat, sexist male clown and ends as a saccharine Southern belle in bra and girdle. She starts off telling anti-woman jokes in her male persona, lapsing on and off into a woman's voice to recite lines from a dessert recipe - removing an item of clothing with each line. The clown continually returns to chortling, "There's nothing like a good joke!" and ". . . a good woman!" Murphy's final phrase echoes the sentiment ironically, as she sighs, "There's nothing like - that one, special man!"

Finally, warned that we are about to lay eyes upon "the wildest shit ever seen in Chicago," come the fashion collections. Despite some confusion over what is whose, Grant (a.k.a. Nest Noys) presents "The Mad Tailor in the Attic for Years." The tailor, evidently inspired by opera music playing overhead, sends shuffling onto stage a pack of studiedly absurd models who manage a smirk as they go into a brief dance. Experiments get troublesome when they're so self-conscious. This is Grant's problem, as his clothes end up wearing the models instead of the other way around. The sixties-inspired garb features such accessories as baby dolls dragged on string and five sizes too-big shoes, the outfits of totally unmatched fabric without patterns. Their sloppy, albeit colorful, "wildness" may have gone better with Lorri Jackson's earlier Acid Poem.

Immediately following are clothes by Spax (Jean Riordan and Sandra Soss). Set to Tom Waits' eerie "Clap Hands," it's a relief to find a more wearable, subdued, and balanced collection of fashions. Spax's imagination and originality seem tempered by two sharp minds.

The evening's performances drop off suddenly, requiring a check to make sure they're over. "Talk Talk Talk" was not necessarily all that and no action; but the action, and the energy in view, was undirected, as in a group show lacking a unifying theme. The weakness of benefits such as this is often their urgent intention to raise funds. What came out was a bit of wearing down by entertainment, lacking a unifying thread and emphasizing separate personal views.

JO PEER

TRYING TO GET OBJECTIVE AND A FEW IDEAS ABOUT PERFORMANCE ART, THEATER AND OTHER THINGS...

1. Theater and/or performance what? (a survey)

The arts dilemma of the 1980's: Theater contra Performance Art or, What exactly is performance art? Theater and Performance Art, two labels, one ancient and venerable, the other contemporary and now a somewhat trendy catchall. The impression is that they are both distinct, if not in opposition, each having their own vocabulary and aesthetic. Theater is about conventions, traditions, literature and the art of stage craft. Performance art is about the moment, direct and visual, and expression by the artist that by its historical imperative, rejects the traditions of literature, acting and stagecraft.

After all is said and done, the distinction between performance art and theater art is essential and fundamental: theater is the attempt to create another world whereas performance art attempts to respond directly to the artist's immediate world, that is, the postmodern world. The criteria by which to judge a theater event are how well the event transported an audience; how well someone became a character; or how well a long ago and different world or place -- in style, language and atmosphere -- was created. In performance the criteria of judgment are centered on how well and how insightful the performer(s) have expressed their personal reaction/expression of their postmodern world. "How many times have I heard theater artists discount performance artists as bad actors, self-indulgent, illogical and superficial." In the company of performance artists, theater is dismissed as all about style and craft, lacking in artistic expression and personalization, and content with its morbid bound nostalgia and traditions.

How is it that two art forms, so seemingly alike, are so different? Both use lights, costumes, props, music, scripts (sometimes); most significantly, both share that ancient social/cultural phenomenon of a performer in a space in front of an audience. What's going on?

2. A little bit about the scene of theater.

Theater enjoys a long history, one that is possibly as old as man's. The basic need to communicate and perform an insight or event to one's fellow man existed when our ancestors, the crude caveman, danced around his fire expressing the day's hunt or some weird new event. The nightly stories in front of the fire caught on in popularity, and true to man's ever-evolving nature, those who could dance and communicate best did so; enter the performer. As societies grew, so did the need to reflect and consider that growth. The caveman's paintings and pottery were revealing expressions of his world, but I'm sure nothing could compare with the immediacy of some cave dweller making sounds and movements, portraying emotions and ideas that could be related to physically.

Because of the special talents and abilities required of a performer, and because of the dark atmosphere of ignorance that surrounded early man, the tendency in the good old days was to make the performer religious, or part of a ritual. Whether in ancient Greece, on a Druid mount, or in Aztec Mexico, the priest, the dramatist, the performer, the shaman, the whatever, had a prominent social/cultural function.

Any human endeavor passed on through generations has the tendency of carrying the methods and practice of the generation that preceded it. And so, passed on through the generations, and more specifically from the focal point of the occident, ancient Greece, a tradition has been passed. It was only recently that practices from other cultures have made their way to our culture, to begin a new age of heterogeneous culture. Which, by the way, is a big part of the postmodern event; more later.

Modified and adjusted, theater was, nonetheless, passed through the ages and transported to different places on the map. As theater traveled through time and over geography it bent itself to local customs as it absorbed and reflected discoveries of the intellect and heart.

3. Something about performance art and other things, too.

Performance art. Its history is rooted in the visual arts. Its progenitors were the Dadaists, the futurists, Artaud, Happenings, and the spirit of the 1960's cultural rebellion.

All rebellions are, by their nature, short lived; fading quickly into mainstream absorption until another rebellion is mandated. The performance art of the 1980's can place its immediate origin in the late 1960's. The beginning began with Robert Wilson, Laurie Anderson, Richard Foreman, George Ashley, et al. In the cauldron at that same time were the Living Theater, Bread and Puppet, Open Theater, the Performance Garage, and Grotowski, among others. Back in the days when a liberal arts degree, questioning authority, and understanding and expressing who you were was the norm -- performance art was born. Performance art was a defiant act. A knee-jerk reaction to conformity; questioning why we exist, the limits of self and of consciousness.

Simultaneously, visual artists, having reached

the limits of their medium, found the impetus to break out of their convention-bound two and three dimensions to deal with time, the final frontier. These artists sought ultimate creative ability; they wanted the ability to paint and sculpt space and to expand upon the limitations of their medium. Their performance work was the logical extension of modern art's preoccupation with perception, dreams, immediacy and movement. In a sense, modern art outgrew its canvas and leapt upon the postmodern floor. The perceptual explorations of architect Robert Wilson were simultaneous with the dream/reality/surreality explorations of Richard Foreman. Early Laurie Anderson was doing what she still does by commenting and reflecting the pop world we live in through her technological prism of artistic insight.

Modern art gained critical mass and spilled out performance.

A significant event around that same time was the consumer acceptance of the color television. Color TV made its appearance and impression on the American collective retina. Color TV was an evolutionary step for the media that reflected man's evolutionary perception of self; that subtle barrier between objectively distanced black-and-white and life-like has been forever broken. We are now like the moving mirror of TV and the TV is like us. With color TV also came the evolution of visual awareness of the popular masses which has subsequently been followed by the popularization of cable, the VCR, the multi-cut 15 second commerical and the metaphysical massaging of special effects. In the last 20 years we have evolved from media cavemen to creatures that are visually saturated and obsessed.

Couple the 1) spirit of rebellion with 2) color TV and add to that 3) the coming of age of the first television generation and you have some powerful (pop culture, visually sophisticated and ultimately postmodern) ingredients. In an era that also marked the dawning of the global media network, early performance artists questioned the what and how of thought and expression. In an era that saw the evolution of the popular visual sensibility, performance artists questioned and considered the fundamentals of perception.

Since performance was in a sense a new medium for visual artists of the 1960's, the educational process of discovering basic elements was in order. In its beginning, performance threw off all of the preconceived notions of what constituted performance to define it on its own terms. Performance artists sought an essence and were trying to find the starting line of form and expression

With this came the expression of a minimalist vision. The performance artist would stand in front of an audience and relate to artistically divined objects and moments and the event would be full of meaning and simple being. Meaning nothing more or less than what it is. Historically, the advent of performance art, which led the way for theater and other art forms, was a timely and strategic contribution to our culture; helping us gain some point of view of ourselves in an ever transforming and accelerating environment.

Performance's deep-rooted difference with theater is based on this premise: theater is about being in another place and striving to believe it. The difference between theater and performance lay also in that theater attempts to have an accumulative or story effect on its audience (theater is generally narrative and/or linear). Theater attempts, by its nature and function, to evoke a personal, emotional and intellectual response (all of which can be orchestrated/manipulated by craft). Performance is less concerned with story, narrative or linear form, and significantly, not as concerned about its audience. How many visual artists (read performance artists, too) think about communcating their piece to their audience? That opinion cannot be held in the commercially aware theater world (art and commerce in theater/performance is a subject deserving its own discussion).

So the performance art that followed the minimalist explorations of the late sixties begot a less inspired performance art of the mid to late 1970's. No longer fueled by its since-faded rebellion and the impetus of minimalism, performance was, and remains, a rebel without a cause.

The performance of the last decade still maintained a visual emphasis and likewise was centered on personal explorations and expression. But latter day performance differed from earlier forms in that it was less compelled by an overriding movement, being driven instead by the artist coming to terms with the articulation of the expression of performing itself. With this development performance started looking towards theater for insight into how to better control its expression. Performance was no longer a diversion, but a serious pursuit that had found its starting point and was growing into maturity.

By the mid to late 1970's the basic elements of performance were established and now the frontier had to be explored. Established was the conduit between the visual arts and the performance arts. Performance became as accessible and as accepted as an exhibition, different only because it arranged molecules and energy differently. Performance art has had a profound effect on the nature of theatrical visualization, energizing theater events and pointing the way for theater to address the postmodern world. Performance has also influenced the nature of dance, music, and the fine arts, bringing to them a sense of humanity, event and audience interplay; all appropriate for an age that requires it.

In a world where everybody has something to say and nobody wants to listen, where pop celebrity and exhibitionism are virtuous aspirations, performance,as an expression of the "being" of the art world, has taken on unforeseen significance.

The world in the 1980's has become one large performance event, and with this, the postmodern vocabulary of performance is best suited to make sense of it. But at the same time performance is a maturing art form; it has passed through its private exploration and discovery phases. And in its maturity, performance looks to the form that now has the most to offer it, theater.

The maturity of performance urges it to grow or to die (a law of nature). The survival of the performance art form will be marked in the next few years by its ability to enlarge its vocabulary and fluency to that of theater (as so many performance artists are currently in the process of doing). The performance art for those who resist maturity and the gravitational pull towards theater will be a sort of show-and-tell between fellow artist, a small closed-circle event, simultaneously a show of communal affirmation and a retreat in response to a world that is becoming less human and more senseless. If performance remains a closed society it risks the threat of becoming like a Kiwanis Club.

Performance is more private and insular than theater; it plays in small spaces for a limited run for a limited audience. Artist playing to artist is what performance expression has become, in many instances, with the seeds of solipsism and its own destruction laying within. The next evolutionary step for performance, which is already taking place, is in the direction of theater's vocabulary, practice, craft and methods. Performance needs to pick and choose what it needs and finds worthy in theater and need not fear the threat of absorption by tradition -- like any art form it has room for variance and expansion. The laboratory years of performance are coming to a natural conclusion with the next step being the crossover into similar/dissimilar theater.

The boundaries are already blurred and the rest is postmodern destiny. ✱

TOM RICCIO

The MARTHA*(A Possible Opera)*

"The Martha (A Possible Opera)"
(A Possible Review)
Marcia Biasiello/Robert Metrick
Randolph Street Gallery
December 12-13, 1986

Sitting quietly in my rooms one bitter winter night, yearning to stave off, for a few hours more, the inevitable arrival of feelings of loneliness and despair that clutch my identity in the darkness, I sought to contemplate the various continuums, disruptions, and distortions that constitute this thing we call life. Inhaling deeply from my brandy snifter, I mused over the wonder of birth, that wrenching fantastic spectacle that condemns each of us to this world. Then comes the word, the confusions of communications, the rituals of denial, the confinement of the mundane. I pondered the myriad of preposterous schemes we conjure up in the never-ending fight to ward off disconnectedness. That awful fact of never knowing, never fully comprehending our own deaths. Slowly as the liquor languished in my warm mind, I began to think...of Martha.

I remember with amusement how the knowledge of Martha first filtered into my consciousness. Offhanded mentions of the person, overheard on the street, at social gatherings, allusions in the papers, glimpses of half finished portraits...the evidence collected began to take the shape of a very consequential presence. I became overly agitated, hypothesizing about the possibilities of Martha, and you can imagine my surprise when it was brought to my attention that this very Martha was to be the subject of a public affair, an opera! Eagerly I awaited this actuality...

In the trendy art world of post-modern spectacle, wherein work is happily made to be unwittingly consumed, the performance artist is best suited to work on the art-factory line, schooled in all of the media that best captivate the masses. Biasiello and Metrick pooled their resources and experiences in the sprawling "Martha (A Possible Opera)." Biasiello's learned sense of graphic and sculptural design and composition merged with Metrick's expert manipulation of movement and sound to create a formidable succession of 19 vignettes, each about, or not about, some character named Martha, lasting altogether almost an hour. Using live performers, film, and slides, accompanied by a lively chorus mixed with sections of taped music, the combo exploited every convention of performance art, in an extravaganza visually and aurally stimulating, though motivated almost entirely by that single word, Martha.

White drapery covered the walls and ceiling of the entire set, at first inhabited only by scientific types in lab coats, who seemed to be making the final calculations before the launch. Their objective presence remained throughout the possible opera, constant reminders of the purity of data. Thus ensued a lot of data to be entered. A troupe of singers entered the space all yelling/singing the name "Martha" in long wailing strains which mixed into a sad discordant invocation. The chorus was dressed in wild angelic costumes, a humorous allusion to the Chorus of Angels. As they settled onto risers to the left, four figures in pajamas, inhabiting center stage, began to speak of the amazing abilities of this: Martha. "One couldn't help but notice...how she could step through that doorway...at the exact moment she happened to enter the room..." all in a deadpan delivery. Next a black and white film was projected onto the wall to the left, while eerie sounds emanated from the speakers. The camera looked around a kitchen, very normal except that written on the cabinetry were phrases like, "How strange to run into you here...." The emptiness of the room was filled with these verbal vestiges of its long-gone inhabitant.

"Hey, Jimmy!" I shouted out toward the kitchen. "Could you bring me a beer?"

"What?" came his reply.

I reluctantly got up from the typewriter and trudged into the other room.

"Do you remember Martha?" I said, opening the refrigerator.

"That girl you went to school with?"

"No, no," I said impatiently "The opera, the show."

"Oh, yeah, right."

"Did the 'guilt dance' come before or after the 'fish story'?"

"What?"

"Remember, when Lynn Book came out like a whirling dervish, dancing crazily, and then would suddenly stop and say things like, 'I'm sorry I'm putting you through this.'"

"Yeah, that was cool," Jimmy said. "My favorite part."

"Well, was it before or after when Allen went over and drank, and the voiceover was about how Martha was making everybody keep the tank clean, sucking the algae off the glass, and that he wasn't going to succumb to the wishes of this Martha, 'What was she going to do, scale me?'"

"You remember all that?"

"I took notes," I said.

"I don't remember," Jim replied. I went back to the other room.

It is interesting to note that the overall semantic structure of "Martha (A Possible Opera)" was derived from a grammatical convention: Subject/Verb/Object, yet the components of this simple equation lose any linear connectedness, floating in a polysemia limited only by the horizon of the tangled dialectic that emerges from their tenuous contact. The subject is of course the individual: the I, the ego that asserts or questions. The verb is contemplative or passive, "to remember," "to think," "to guess," "to wane." The object, obviously, is Martha.

The patient crossed his legs, left over right, obviously refusing any further communication.

Biasiello and Metrick presented this collage of non-memory, a collective yearning for the "answer," but ultimately refused to offer any realistic political alternative. Jamirte Trott's rendition of "Strangers in Paradise" was an amusing nod to the power of linguistic control. Slowly walking across the stage, she spoke the words, with a Brazilian accent, over the music, thus changing the contextual clues, turning the pop lyrics into ludicrous seductive lies, but offered no alternative to acceptance of the norm.

Metrick's clever use of various genres -- the sappy pop song, the Dylanesque folk song ("Paperback prophets speedread your future, Zodiac pigeons stare at your toes"), lyrical new age, endless minimalism -- lambasts any idea of hierarchy of quality. Biasiello's choice of stereotypical images of the "waiting," "distressed," as well as fashion images, accomplishes a similar breakdown of pictorial meaning. But does this quoting suffice?

Then the players lapsed into a reverie.

"It is the heart alone that can destroy them. I made a solemn vow, standing before the Buddha's image, to carry through this task, come what may. Now that I have started, I cannot go back till I have reached the..."

Next, the players lip-synch the dialogue of a play, their words appearing on the screen above them, white on black, like in an old silent movie. The characters become children acting out: "Let's say this is the house, and it's night, and we all want to be in the house safe together...." "What if's" continue towards scary ends: "What if there are many sharks in the water?" "I don't want to play anymore." "But you must play."

The doctor mentioned Martha.

"What in hell do know about Martha anyway??" grimaced the patient.

The doctor's legs crossed right over left.

Well, you can imagine my surprise. Martha had in no way measured up to my expectations.

I drew near to her.

In the trendy art world of post-modern spectacle, wherein work is happily made to be unwittingly consumed, the Martha undermined any healthy stereotypes, and merely waited.

I turned once again to my brandy, pondering the intricate shadows produced by the flickering candlelight. I had gotten close, quite close to the presence of Martha, the velvety facets were all very detailed, but alas, they offered only a refusal of solidity. And yet, I was profoundly calmed, as if pleased by this denial. Understanding swelled in my breast. It was now obvious that my Martha was not to be issued forth tonight, nor on any other night.

"Jimmy."

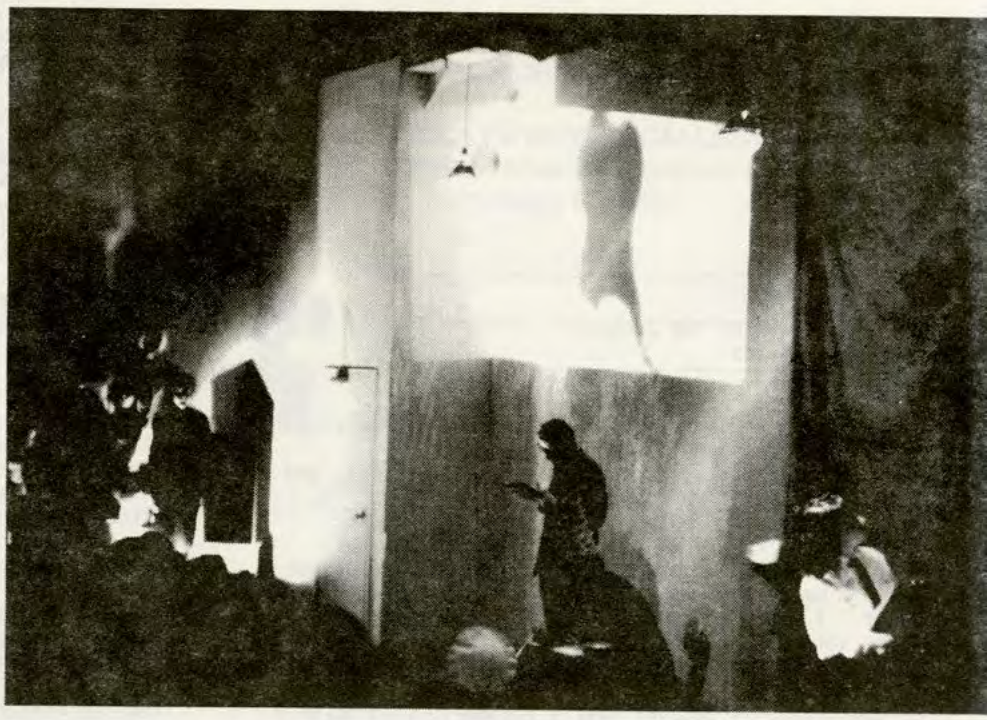
"Yeah?"

"Any beer left?"

"You laugh at my conundrums, but I do not know how to swim!"

(This review dedicated, in part, to Martha.)

KATHRYN HIXSON



An Interview with

TOM JAREMBA

An Interview with Tom Jaremba
by Dani Kopoulos

DK: Pertaining to Orphee, how did you begin working in a theatrical mode?
TJ: I read the play Orphee in the mid-seventies, and I really wanted to perform the role of Orphee. The play seemed to encompass exactly what I was going through in a relationship with a woman, and I just felt like I understood what Cocteau was talking about when he wrote that male character. I liked the form of it. I never attempted to do the play until many years later when it just happened with this group of people. I was committed to it because I felt that it really spoke very wonderfully about the battle of the sexes. I thought that's basically what it was about, and that it was very funny in the way it portrayed both characters - and also sympathetic. That is, the braggadocio of the male character, strutting around like a peacock, mouthing off constantly, this typical father image - and the manipulative power of the woman, and what she does to him.

So my intention was not to do something theatrical, my intention was to do Orphee. I just knew that's where I wanted to start. As I studied the play I got to really like the words a lot. I thought they were beautiful; they were a musical soundtrack. I like being able to have it almost like it could be sung, so that this dance-drama would then include an ongoing soundtrack.

I'm interested really still in dance-drama. I'm interested in physical action in front of people, that is, touching people. It might be gestural - it might not be triple pirouettes or leaps - it might be merely gestural in a traditional sense, but it has to convey the emotional context I want and the image I want.

My work has generally been theatrical, and I'm really not ashamed of that. I don't know what people mean sometimes by "theatrical," but my work has been meant to have a magical element, that is, a visual magical element, which I suppose people would think of as theatrics. When Yvonne (Rainer) was setting down the rules, anti-theater, you know, in Judson Church, that's what she was fighting against. She wanted a new world, a much cleaned-up world where there's less pretense. I still always want pretense - I want to create that, that's what I'm interested in. And that's what I like in painting, as well - I like that kind of work. I like work that does have, for me, an immediate physical response, or at least, if not immediate, a physical response that I just can't account for on an intellectual level.
DK: The piece you did before this was Les Enfants Terribles, which was also from a play. By theatrical I mean is there something specifically about starting from an actual play?
TJ: As a performer, I'm so conscious of the understanding of how vulnerable people are on stage. And I wanted to be sure that they were going to be well-housed and -clothed, and that's why I chose a story that was not my own. Because I could be objective about a story that was not my own, whereas with my own story I can't be, I'm too caught up in it.

I love choreography - I really want to move bodies around. I don't really care if people look at my work as dances with performers. I'll probably do it in an art context rather that a dance context because that's where I'd rather work. I really don't like the dance context - I never have. I think it's small, and the art scene is much, much more sympathetic to artists. I think that dancers forget that they are artists sometimes, and that's the problem. So I don't care what the work's called.

I'm personally looking for, in my own work, a method that will be positive expression rather than going through the anxiety that I've gone through before. I think I'd like to get rid of that as I get older. I don't think it's going to happen easily, but I'd like to work towards a kind of art where I would have the process be as wonderful as the performance.

As a performance artist my idea was always to really shake 'em up, and the kind of work that I'm talking about wouldn't do that in the same way - but I think that happens as you develop a kind of work. I'm still in favor of shaking them up in any possible context. If you can make a surprise, and affect people with that surprise, it's wonderful. The surprise really gives some kind of breath, so if you can do that in a work it just makes it lighter. I think that performance has to keep in search of things, otherwise it seems it's just dull, dull, dull. I like that there aren't restrictions about what it is and what it isn't - I think that's just stupidity. Students always thrill me because there is always something new and fresh in them, completely spontaneous - you know when it happens, it hits you between the eyes when they do it, and you'll never forget it. But it doesn't happen a lot on stage because it gets contrived, and that's the hard part.
DK: Well, okay, what about, there's just a big sort of hooplah, well not exactly, but about distinguishing between theater and performance art and. . .
TJ: Why is that hooplah, though? I think that's just stupidity! They benefit from each other. If performance art is going to become established then it's going to become theater. There has to be another context, but always a new context - it has to be a cutting edge context. I don't think people should care what their work is called. I believe that the whole reason I went into performance art was to do what I wanted to do. Is someone going to tell me I can't do this now because it's not performance? I think there should be an audience of artists, and artists doing work: live art. Whatever the live art is - whether it be a Bach cello suite, or a pas de deux on pointe - why couldn't that be in the same context as Brendan deVallance? It could work. It could be wonderful if it was intelligent.

It's too simplistic to be offended by one form or another form. That's really an old-fashioned idea. They think it's so modern because it's new wave or something, that's just horseshit. The world is all too small, we are all everything. We all have our hands on everything. It's mass communication, we all have to build the ability.
DK: How do you feel about doing group work?
TJ: When my last relationship ended, I knew that I had to do group work again. I had to work, that would be my plan. I wasn't going to have what I thought I was going to have - a family - and the only thing

that would replace that for me would be really to work with people more intimately than in a student/teacher relationship. As a director one is a teacher, and I have taught most of the people I have worked with, but it becomes different when you're working on a piece. My group work ought to be about larger stories inspired by literature, inspired by music, or whatever. To give people an honest thing to hook into besides me. I want to play with a visual auditory edge in large scale performance. I want to direct that.

DK: What do you see as the significance of presenting in 1986 a play that was written in 1925? I mean, you already said something about that on a personal level. . .

TJ: Well, the significance of it is that I think it's a really interesting play, and I particularly identified with it, and I wanted to do it. I don't think I have a responsibility to be significant to anyone except those who want to come see it. If I thought "Is my art significant?" I would be doing something other than making it. I'd be curating or writing about it. But I would not be making it. Because when you're making it and ask that question at the same time I think that's when it gets as dull as it's been.

There's been an anathema of dullness in art - real dullness. I think it took the Neo-Expressionist movement just to make people realize how dull it's been. But I don't think that was the answer either. And I don't mean to say that I know the answer. But I think art's been just marketed beyond description. It hasn't been juicy enough, because before it gets anywhere near the marketplace all the preservatives are in.

So I guess if I had to rationalize the significance it had, I think it has something to do with having a look at what an artist knew how many years ago?. . . Sixty years ago.

DK: Do you feel performance art has been taking a particular direction or style?

TJ: I think performance, in a way, at the moment, is more interesting than it's ever been; there are so many places that are aware of it, and it's become a much more generic term. Nobody used to know what performance art was. Everyone knows now - intelligent, educated people anywhere have heard of performance art. It may only be Laurie Anderson, but at least there's some connotation of something other than dance, music, or theater. I don't object to it at all, that Laurie Anderson is doing what she's doing. Some people think it's a sell out, I don't think it's a sell out. She's bringing at least a consciousness somewhere. I'm not saying I want to do her work, or perhaps even see her work in the end, unless there's a new one. But I think that to be upset about that kind of stuff just takes too much energy away from what I want to do with my own work.

I'm critical of a lot of work. But I can't help it. I just always want something, we all do, we all want to come out with something. I feel like I want to have connected somehow, so that when I leave I feel less alone, I feel like a connection's been made. That could be on an intellectual level, or a physical level. I like to be touched, I like when I can't really explain why I feel this way. I like things to be poetic, rather than theoretic. I don't think there's anything wrong with theory, but I don't think it belongs in art -- I think it belongs in the books.

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WHAT DO WE DO?

"What Do We Do?"

In the presence of the oppressive desire to create art that overcomes all boundaries - those set by society, high legitimized culture, and the guy next door - we are faced with the language of the world, which attempts to describe and delineate art in all of its forms. From this comes the opposition, the forceful clash, between the categories of critical, or rather essentially linguistic, abstraction, and the artist, who must somehow fit in or not fit in, and in either case be doomed to dissemination through discourse that by its very nature is an abuse of the subtle reality of the artists' creative complex.

So, what do we do? What is the position of the language of even the simplest review, the harshest critique? How can we know what it is that the other guy is doing when we can't be there to watch? When we are there to watch, and the veil of ambiguity blinds us? Can we ever hope to apprehend each other's intentions? No. So then, how are we to come to useful conclusions about the meanings and non-meanings involved in creating art and talking about it? This is the subset of a larger crisis that I cannot hope to answer. A life's work of inquiry couldn't solve the mysteries of meaning, but perhaps a few short words can explain the benefits of communication and potential cohesion in a concentrated, but free, space.

Artmaking is as noble as any human endeavor. Performance is as noble as any art form. As it is noble, and at the same time ultimately worthwhile, the practitioners of the craft and those who involve themselves in its production must necessarily recognize and continually act upon their emergent responsibility to the act. Continuous is the important word here. (That which continues in the life world of human beings must necessarily encounter disruptions and discontinuities, but these form a part of the continuity.) By consistent engagement in the craft, it matures. Neither through assimilations and imitations, nor through the encounters of similarity between one artist and another, one art form and another, maturation occurs in the space of its own becoming. Through persistence and self-exploration art, and specifically performance art, can reach out to itself and draw into its boundaries the limitlessness of the freedom of a potentially disrupted and rejoined continuum.

Performance art needs to incorporate its history into itself and release the binding, misconceived "necessity" of that history. Performance rests in a world that is potentially rich and nurturing, if the constraints of what are perceived as "objectively necessary" factors are proved fallacious and abandoned. The language of criticism binds through abstractio and false delineations that serve only to construct a mistaken notion of what art should or should not be. When critique speaks of intention, possible o actual, it also oversteps its bounds. Discourse as well as art, must flow freely and unrestraine by one another's expectations, to produce two distinc final products that are complementary. This is no to say that negative criticism couldn't exist, jus that it would not be binding through false notion of the rightness of things. Art and criticisms mus seek to eliminate these delineations that cut th sphere of each of these practiced crafts into al too convenient categories that serve the interest of taxonomists and lazy historians and ignore th possible benefits of flux and the liberty of the ambi guous.

I'm not making a call for anarchy here. Nor a I saying, in apparent contradiction to my introductor laments, that we should release meaning to the win or cease all definition-making. On the contrary, we can do just the opposite and still retain a desperately needed freedom. A liberated meaning in artwor and criticism, accompanied by an undogmatic acceptanc of the complementary roles they hold in the interpla between one another, would complement each practice and bring them closer together in the search for unified purpose, that purpose being the searchin and free flowing of the two, sort of like a cartoo amoeba with no place to go on an infinite screen but without the connotations of nausea and nothingnes of the metaphor.

Language can serve art without chaining it to the wall, and art can grow and stimulate thought without becoming self-serving. Writing shouldn't become wha it thinks it ought to be nor place false, arbitrar constraints on that which it chooses to talk about. Art should also avoid becoming what others expect it to be without degenerating into something meaningless, objectless, and masturbatory. Performance an criticism in Chicago have the potential to overcom the trappings of conventionalized and apperceive necessities and emerge as a self-identified and self-justifying community, if those involved remember that "schoolisms" and formalisms are like a gun to the head. Engaging in categorization and bringing the different to bear on each other is like pulling the trigger. ✱

DAVID RISING

P-FORM

ARTISTS

SURVEY

Performance art, by virtue of its dynamic and impermanent nature, has never had a very wide audience. Yet, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in performance art, and a concomitant increase in the number of galleries, theaters, and clubs that present performers. At the same time, increased attention in media ranging from Esquire to "Doonesbury" to Hollywood has brought performance art both recognition and notoriety.

P-Form approached Chicago performers directly to learn their views on this very public art and how shifting public perceptions of performance may affect their art.

These are the questions that were asked of the artists:

1. In what ways is your identity as a performer influenced by pop entertainment?

2. How do you as a live artist relate to or perceive your audience?

3. Do you attempt to determine the consequences of your art? If so, what are your working methods?

4. How do you describe the differences between high and low art?

5. In what ways is your art a public art? A private art?

PERRY VENSON

Pop entertainment:

Identity-wise I am not at all influenced by pop entertainment, but I have been influenced by the situation of pop entertainment; its primitive relationship to the audience. In pop, people are into it on a gut level, no rationalizations. In art, people intellectualize, look to critics, and "authorities" on art to find out what's happening. No one wanted to see Jimi Hendrix's resume - he was happening and everyone knew it, end of story. In art, too often a "case" must be made for why something is "great." I'm not interested in having a "case" made for my work (pun intended) - let the people who see it decide, end of story.

Audience:

The audience is the catalyst for my work. I love them for taking the time to see me perform, and I wish to give them something meaningful. Without them it's just an empty space with a lot of potential.

Consequence:

Law is what men have devised to control consequences. You do this and X is going to happen to you. In art, the consequences are uncontrollable; this is what I like. But, paradoxically, I am interested in the consequences of my work. I've resolved the whole thing, though; if my life is positive then my work is positive by definition, and the results of positive work are always positive no matter what the particulars of its consequences.

High art, low art:

If I find a painting on Maxwell St. for $3 or see a Monet in a museum surrounded by armed guards what's the difference as far as art is concerned? The only difference is how people think not how the art is.

Public art, private art:

My work is about me finding ways to grow in a culture that has found astonishing ways to stunt growth. In this sense it is very private. But I do need to show this work as part of its reason to be and so it becomes public as a matter of necessity.

JAMES GRIGSBY

Pop entertainment:

A Party Is Not A Party Without Cheese

As a hostess you will find cheese a wonderful ally in your plot to add new zest to old dishes. . . to whet the jaded appetite. . . and to achieve both eye-appeal and toothsome concoctions.

Audience:

How To Get A Party Started

Sometimes it's hard to get a party started. Here is an idea that might help to change that hostess's horror, the tableau - where everyone stands posed and silent - into a lively, merry party. Fill a tray with clusters of flowers for the girls and another with matching boutonnieres for the boys. Makes it easy to divide the group into two teams if you play games later.

Consequence:

Prepared Mixes Make Giving Parties So Easy

Who says you can't cook and bake? Well, don't let them kid you! In fact, the results of your efforts can be so delicious. . . and so attractive. . . that you will fool even the experts!

High art, low art:

There's Party Magic In Cans

Though you pride yourself on the fact that everything in the food line you serve comes straight from the garden or the hoof, don't overlook the magic that comes in cans!

Public art, private art:

Did Your Party Turn Out As You Had Planned It?

First, last and always. . . it is the hostess who sets the pace for her parties. If they end up being boring. . . chances are you, the hostess, were bored with the whole idea from the start!

If your guests sparkle with enthusiasm and show obvious pleasure at being among those present. . . it is you who have drawn out this response.

KAPRA FLEMING

Pop entertainment:
It's not entertainment as much as commercials which influence my work. I use advertisements from 1940's magazines, contemporary media advertising as subtext or narratives.
Audience:
Within the way I formulate the space and the performance I ensure that the audience will have to make choices in the process of watching the work. They must relate to what they may or may not see during a piece based on their choices of where they sit, what they block out, when they look away, and what they eventually forget.
Consequence:
I've often been surprised myself at what occurs during a performance. I am not always sure of the consequences, but that's also what makes it worthwhile. My hope is that people are able to take with them one image or idea that they intermittently recall, whether they understand this image/idea or not, a sort of memory implant.
High art, low art:
High art is worth filing away in our little memory banks and retrieving while low art is disposable in this sense. It doesn't matter what it is, a "masterpiece" or a found object. If it can persist within our thoughts, then it's worthwhile.
Public art, private art:
It is private in the sense that the language used within the work and the performing is understood and seen by a unique audience. Not that it could not be understood by a more universal audience, but at this time there are just a few performance vigilantes who have taken the time to become conversant in this language.

MATTHEW OWENS

Pop entertainment:
I often employ a comedic vocabulary in my work which is derived from various sources including theater, television, and the cinema. My best work, I hope, appropriates without imitation, expands and exploits without dependency.
Audience:
For me the true power of performance lies in the fact that the assembled audience, like props, lighting, sound or text, can function as a direct integral part of a work. The audience is, possibly, the determinate element which makes the medium imperative.
Consequences:
My primary goal in creating a work is to elicit a response; any response from an audience I view as being gorged with imagery, sound, and stimulation of all kinds. Thus, the specific effects, to inform, coerce, entertain, convince, etc., become secondary to the manifest dual challenge of getting someone's attention and then keeping it.
High art, low art:
If there must be differences between "high" and "low" art then they exist primarily in a critical vocabulary of convenience. Labelling a work for its formalism, content, aesthetic, what have you, has less to do with the production of the thing than critically contending with the response.
Public art, private art:
My work is public insomuch as I make it available for mass scrutiny, private in that I decline to elucidate for the audience the connections between what they are viewing and whom they see doing it.

MICHELE FITZSIMMONS

The early image I had of woman as torch singer permeates my stage persona and colors both the content of my poetry and the style of my delivery. The only way I know to determine the consequences of my work is through the traditional polishing methods: practice makes perfect and leads to intricate knowledge that allows the material the freedom to grow. Inspired by the primal forces of nature I walk the dog and recite my poetry to the wind, the weeds and the waves as the world listens benignly. My art is private in conception and becomes public as it matures. The audience is the completion of this process.
High art, low art:
Shakespeare/Three Stooges

KAJA OVERSTREET

Pop entertainment:
Pop entertainment's influence on my identity as a performer is marginal. I use popular entertainment as a referential device (e.g. historical precedent) to indicate cyclical structures, as an ironic device, and as a way of handling narrative text.
Audience:
I construct work in terms of what I would like to experience: distance and proximity in an event, usually in extremes. I often enter the audience's space physically and through sound, at times intrusively. Through minute gesture or detail and muted sound I draw the audience into the performer's space. The shifting between distance and proximity creates an immediacy important for me and in the audience's experiencing my work. While communication of my ideas is essential in performance, I do not seek to persuade the audience to accept and support my ideas or any particular ideology.
Consequence:
I often title work, provide a program and on occasion write program notes. I use lighting to indicate beginnings and ends, and to direct attention to specific images in a performance. I use costume, voice and movement to indicate what is to be interpreted as the intentionally performed activities. I use improvisation, but it is always structured so as to limit the possibilities to those that relate or conform to the overall concept in a work.
High art, low art:
While I acknowledge that distinctions are made and that in varying degrees I understand and accept some, I feel uncomfortable contributing personal distinctions or even making them.
Public art, private art:
My work is public. I perform my work publicly with the intention of making a public statement. It's public in its frequent references to ideas, events or other work that occur/exist independently of my experience. I use allegory and appropriate other artists' work. My work is not autobiographical. It's private in its process and when exploring issues or problems that reflect private personal conflicts and/or solutions. It's private in its motivation.

Greg Green

Pop entertainment:
Art or the artist as commodity is dependent upon the existence of a secondary system that has no true relevance to art in its pure form. However, one must eat, and pop entertainment is a potential source of income. That creates a strong temptation to abandon the gallery environment and attempt to function within the more lucrative field of mass popular culture. This does not mean that an artist must sacrifice personal or artistic integrity. It only means that those with the power to make choices function by different standards.
Audience:
With fear, I do not appreciate my time being wasted, nor do I wish to waste another person's time.
Consequences:
Any form of art whether it be visual, verbal, audio or movement

is nothing more than a means of communication. With this in mind, an artist must utilize signs that are accessible to their audience, and explore issues that are relevant to contemporary society. If these concerns are not recognized, then that activity is nothing more than an inconsequential form of masturbation.

High art, low art:

Price Tag. Intellectual Obscurity. I would prefer not to. This is a game that is played to establish a false caste system, that effectively destroys the real purpose of art, by alienating and excluding all audiences except those with the power to control the true value of art.

Public art, private art:

Art can only be public. Its purpose is communication, and that requires the presence of an audience or public. Thus, any question that refers to a private art is a contradiction in terms.

KEVIN HENRY

Pop entertainment:

My attention span has been forever shattered by television's indiscriminate parcelling of time - the effects of which aren't yet known. On the other hand, pop music, film, cartoons, and serialized TV permeate my "middle" culture more than Jackson Pollock or any other high art hero. I can say that I am a product of popular consumer-oriented culture, and that more and more my work attempts to find where I can stand comfortably in that setting, that is not deny it but better understand it. I have to accept the formats of popular culture because they are the grounds by which so much is experienced, yet I do not have to accept the content, or lack of content, in those formats. I can safely say the wrapping has always appealed to me.

Audience:

My work is more theatrical in nature which means it is less "live" than what I would consider "performance art." I'm not directly interested in the dynamic of truly improvised work, but rather use rehearsal time in developing a show. I like a show's parameters to be set and the individual performances to be variable, that is to leave it up to the people performing. I can't honestly say that I have a general perception of the audience - there are places I would do my work and places that I wouldn't.

Consequence:

I attempt to bring something in front of an audience that has a basis in experience, yet is opened up far enough so as not to be didactic.

High art, low art:

High art is something the Europeans invented. Low art is something the intellectuals came up with to describe "naive" art or "folk" art. These distinctions don't seem to amount to much; it's about attitude and intention. We now have the "good taste" to appreciate "bad taste" for what it is - that's progress. I think "middle art" is becoming as big as the middle class and it's getting broader and more sophisticated and just like the Joneses, part of "middle art" will eventually creep into "high art." There's a ladder that runs from low to high and like all ladders it's not based solely on ability.

Public art, private art:

My art is public because I choose to take it before a "live" audience. My art is private because I try to work out presentable obsessions.

LYNN BOOK

Pop entertainment:

Little if any.

Audience:

It varies. For the most part, however, I employ theatrical distance "between" myself and the audience. Lately, I've been interested in both the creation of "distant" scenes or states of being, and very close, more "in the moment" circumstances that have to do with improvising within the predetermined structure - which means that I am listening in a different way, in time, to the audience and to myself.

Consequence:

I determine the structure and the sensibilities that fill it up and trust that the "consequences" (how it is received by the audience) will be individually determined by the various audience members as they experience the work in real time and later on. Granted, they are influenced a great deal by me and my imaginings in performance, so that way I'm not "attempting" to determine the consequences of my art. I do by virtue of who I am. My working methods are less about determining consequences and more about discovery through experimentation.

High art, low art:

Art that has at its core intentions toward capitalism is low art. High art, ideally, does not concern itself with that base, and therefore is better able to fly.

Public art, private art:

It's private in the making, becoming public for a brief time when the audience arrives. What is very interesting, for me, is the week that precedes the public performance where private and public start getting crossed in the final shaping of the work in the space where it is to be performed. The process of exchange from private to public (and finally back again).

MARK ROTH

Pop entertainment:

Pop entertainment's influence upon me as performer and person is so vast and sweeping as to rival the influence of my very father. At odd times and not under duress I'll find the angle of my elbow or my exaggerated gait parallel those of my father. In similar and unaccountable fashion, my life seems to conspire to unfold like a TV sit-com. On stage I, knowingly or otherwise, conjure the image of the archetypical talkshow host, DJ, and stand-up comedian. None of this, being a mere acknowledgment of my inner-urban-televised landscape, need be particularly distressing. I am pop entertainment.

Public art, private art:

I cull performance material from my most private moments in the hope of engendering a collective privacy - a conspiracy of laughing to oneself.

JEAN PARISI

Pop entertainment:

I don't believe my identity as a performer is influenced by "pop entertainment." In my work I feel influenced by cartoons, the characters and their dilemmas, the imagery and its stretch of reality, and the timing of the action.

Audience:

As a live artist I perceive the audience as another equally important and active element in my work. In installation/performance pieces the audience is physically integrated into the work, being both the observer and the observed. The audience is often the source for improvisational actions or dialogue/monologue responses from the performer. In a theatrical setting the sense of audience involvement greatly influences the performance itself; the pace of the performance changes with a "dead" audience or a "live" audience. It is to the audience that I am giving - their reception affects my methods, i.e. performance.

Consequences:

I attempt to determine the consequences of my art by inviting critical feedback from fellow performers, the press, and the general public. Listening before explaining allows for an accurate assessment of the performance's effects.

High art, low art:

"High art and low art" are classifications not in my vocabulary. I believe an hierarchical viewing of art is detrimental to the creative person. Class distinction always gets in the way and as artists we should work to abolish that system which preys on us all.

Public art, private art:

In the actual performing, my art is public. It invites an audience by advertising to the general public and presenting in accessible sites, often free. It seeks public reaction and response to its exposing expression. My art is private in its process. In the many hours of preparatory dreaming, thinking, sweating: the sits and stares in the chair, the struggles with the emotions, this productive part is very private.

NANCY FOREST BROWN

Pop entertainment:

No influence.

Audience:

Most of my performance work deals with human psychology and sociology. Generally, audience reaction/interaction forms an integral part of the content of the work. For that reason, I expect of myself that I should understand my audience as well as possible, empathize with them, respect their autonomy as individuals, and assume their potential intelligence and complexity. I expect of them vast diversity in response and interpretation. I use this diversity as a formal dynamic of the work, so that, for instance, one audience member may perceive content not only in what I'm doing, but also in how another audience member is responding to what I'm doing.

Consequence:

I think it's important to analyze possible consequences, insofar as consequence determines the apprehension of content. If I want some particular feelings or thoughts to be evoked I obviously have to consider the outcome of my actions in order to determine what actions will be most effective. Even so, some of the most evocative material is unpredictable, impossible to interpret without the defining aspect of audience response. To limit options to those in which consequences could always be predetermined would reduce performance art to the realm of "I knew that was going to happen."

High art, low art:

To my knowledge, there is no exclusive definition for either high art or popular art that would allow for an absolute description of their differences. Traditionally, the only people who are concerned with the high art/popular art critique are those who have a vested interest in maintaining the distinction of high art as being, by definition, superior to popular art.

JEFF ABELL

Pop entertainment/High art, low art/Public art, private art:

I can readily answer questions 1,4, and 5 as a group. I tend to feel that so-called "pop" culture is indeed the tribal language of today. We are all shaped, willingly or un, by pop entertainment - not because it is manipulative of us, but because we choose to identify ourselves with it. Or we identify ourselves "versus" pop culture, which is still using pop culture as reference. I use these tribal references as often as anyone else, and to a certain extent I feel these references allow public access into private art. The information contained in my work is often very intimate and very direct from my experience. But my method of presenting this information publicly often taps overtly theatrical means . . . a song and dance about the problems in my love life, if you will, with all the appropriately placed pratfalls.

Audience/Consequence:

As for questions 2 and 3, to continue the discussion, I see my audience as people with whom I share certain types of mediated experiences - TV, books, etc. I tap those reference points in how I approach my autobiographical content. The result tends to be pleasantly cathartic for the audience - they encounter someone attempting to deal honestly and with a sense of humor with problems in his life, problems shared by the audience, but perhaps not clearly articulated by them. In this way, I feel I establish a very close and direct form of communication between myself and the audience. I used to feel that music was the best way for me to communicate about my "feelings" to an audience, but it was a highly abstract method and one which was most often performed by others. My current work attempts to establish the most direct communication between myself, my ideas (and feelings), and the audience.

WERNER HERTERICH

Pop entertainment:

Pop entertainment probably influences everything. I resist the temptation to take it seriously.

Audience:

They are people who come to check out what I'm up to now. I'm glad they take the time to do this. I reckon they must be friends if they do this.

Consequences:

I get an idea and try to manifest it. You can never really tell what's going to happen, though.

High art, low art:

Who cares?

Public art, private art:

It starts in private. At some point in the making it becomes public, either because I'm using lots of collaborators or just because it gets shown.

LAWRENCE STEGER

Pop entertainment is a strong influence on my performances. Because of this, my identity as an "artistic" performer as opposed to a "commodity" performer is under constant evaluation. This is reflected in my work; I use pop entertainment conventions to "seduce" the audience in order to allow them to feel the breaking point or the plot twist that is a subversion of those conventions. With a set of rules and expectations that is so neatly packaged (but more loosely defined) as Pop Entertainment, I feel as if I have a whole barrel of monkeys to play with and to delight an audience with, but what is more important to me and what is certainly more difficult to decide is exactly what format or convention of pop culture (i.e. Entertainment) to use/abuse with/for the audience. This, for me, is like what someone described as "trying to make love with a gorilla." The lines between the two opposed ideas become hazy. What this questionnaire suggests about pop entertainment, by implying that perhaps I (as an "artist") am not within that smarmy crowd, eliminates the possibility that perhaps my work is Pop Entertainment and not Art (re: Capital Letters and Punishment).

As cynical and insolent as this may sound, this relates directly to my influences and expectations of performance. When I sit in the Audience Section, I do not expect to help the performer by diffusing all that I've seen previous to walking into their arena. Nor do I expect them to give me a reiteration (ad nauseum) of the proliferation of the outside world - the fourth wall, that I've encountered in getting to their arena. I want it to be different and I want it to be a new way of reforming our language that we don't experience outside of that arena, that space. That pace is the gait that determines the consequences of my own art. That discussion afterwards, the lobby talk, the remembrance, the applause whether warranted or unwarranted are the ways in which I determine the consequences of my own art and the way I act as an audience member and how I perceive the audience. (This perception of the audience while in the midst of performing is a whole other can of worms that I can't go into now.) These things are also the way descriptions of low and high art are described to/for me. That is how I determine them. The telling of these is what make my art both public and private. ✱

CHROMAMAN

"Chromaman"
Written by Jerry Haislmaier and Lillian Spina
Directed by Steven Ivcich
Stage Left Theater

"Chromaman", presented by Stage Left Theater, is billed as an original performance art piece about "the ongoing 'love affair' between man and his new best friend -- television." This billing is misleading. It is about man and television, but love (even in quotation marks) and friendship are fairly scarce in this production.

"Chromaman" is a series of vignettes, performed in varying styles and summed up by a TV counterpart of the title character talking to his "real" self, saying things like, "The only ideas that exist are those that are invented by me."

One would think that 21 actors, two writers and a director could have put their heads, hearts and bodies together, harnessed the power of the several media available to them, and delivered a fresher message than, "If I don't exist, neither do you."

Television is a powerful subject, one that affects us all. The actors in "Chromaman" are talented and focused (especially riveting was the videotaped curtain call, in which they interacted hilariously with the camera). The set -- equipped with eight playing areas and 13 TV monitors -- and Sheila Myric's costumes are inventive and fun. There are sparks of ingenuity through use of props, transformational devises and video sequences, but in general the 90 minute production yields very little insight or even entertainment.

According to the program notes, "much" of the work was created by the 21-actor ensemble through a workshop-type rehearsal process conducted by director Steven Ivcich. Scripts were not introduced until the third week of rehearsal. Because the piece gives the impression of having been written by committee --with its lack of focus and plethora of tepid and superfluous material -- I can only imagine that Ivcich and the two writers, Jerry Haislmaier and Lillian Spina, were trying to attain some equality of inclusion that should have been subjugated by poetic license.

Somewhere between the cliches of the mind-numbed TV-watching nuclear family, the wise-ass emcee, the dumb blonde, the sitcom spoof and the laughable old TV clips, bits of brilliance effervesce -- unusual connections are made and the pacified audience is affected. These connections are at times upfront and physical -- as when three white-clad "TV Repairmen" use accordion tubes to television sets. Sometimes the connection is a cause and effect situation between media -- as when the inactive stage family views a series of sporting accidents on TV, the TV action is paused, and the sister hits her brother. The most moving of these moments comes when the nuclear family members are at odds with one another and turn to the father for a solution. The simultaneous connection and disparity between this pathetic patriarch and the TV dads of the '60s (and the '80s now that Cosby's show is around) are painfully apparent. The "connecting" phenomenon is most effective because the stage image summons up the TV reality with which we all grew up, and which has embedded itself in our visions of reality -- but this stage reality if closer to our personal truths, and not nearly as rosy as TV's black-and-white. The stage father is at a loss when confronted with responsibility in an emotional situation; the theatre audience at last feels their responsibility as active participants in the creative process.

While these few precious moments spring from the work, the talent and time that went into it (and continue to go into it) spill over the edges and are lost, leaving us to stare at a dry, distanced, lethargic, new-wave, old-hat vision that has much to do with the reproduction of vapidity and little to do with friendship or love between anyone or anything.*

LOREL JANISZEWSKI

CHARLY KROHE BRIGID MURPHY

Charly Krohe
Brigid Murphy
Randolph Street Gallery
February 6-7, 1987

George Bernard Shaw's "St. Joan": A Subversion of the Text.

Deconstruction and intertextuality are not pretty. Ask the audience that witnessed Charly Krohe's and Jack Helbrig's subversion of Shaw's "St. Joan". We got chicken, fish nailed to black crosses painted on the gallery wall, microwaves, a man in a bubble-wrap suit. In fact we got everything but blood packs and I was surprised that those weren't thrown in somewhere.

Audience participation usually isn't pretty, either, but then what's the fun of subversion if only the guy up there gets to subvert? As we entered the gallery we were given slips of paper with a number and a line (mine was "Number 2. Into the fire with the witch!") that referred to a projection proclaiming, "When your number comes up, read the line you have been assigned." We were greeted by Helbrig, our emcee, narrator, inquisitor, and quizmaster. He began by soliciting questions from the audience. The first question was, "What's it about?" See what I mean about audience participation?

Well, it was sort of about St. Joan according to Shaw according to Charly Krohe who played Joan some of the time and interacted with Elise Ferguson who played Joan some of the time. A chicken (the supermarket kind, not the farm kind) played Joan some of the time, too. Early on this Joan (call her Joan Number Three) was put into a Weber Kettle and then into a microwave to rotate on a carousel and cook for the duration of the piece. A kind of a visual metaphor.

A tall, gangly "Inner Spirit" (according to the program) wearing tiger print fake fur and a large silver mask vaguely suggesting the head of a praying mantis, clumped into the space and announced Joan's miracles in order of their appearance. The miracles and their consequences were presented in several ways: slides were projected of "The St. Joan Story in One American Dialect" ("Dis creecher" -- vaguely offensive), Elise Ferguson read Joan's exhortations to her troops while Helbrig threw lit matches at her (vaguely offensive, kind of stupid), slides of cows were projected (not offensive, just stupid), Helbrig, in blue tights and red suspenders, interrogated Krohe-FergusonJoan as they lay on a futon covered by a sheet (a little less stupid), and Krohe, wearing plastic bags filled with water and goldfish on his hands and feet, feinted around and blew out candles which were attached to a pink armchair (really stupid). There was some music too, I guess: a few guitar chords, some choral reading of the text, a few knocks and bangs, your basic subversive soundscape.

Midway through, Helbrig asked if there were any more questions from the audience. I guess the other performers needed setup time. He was asked, "What was the longest night of your life?" and, "Do we get to eat the chicken?" Sort of subverting the subversion, or at least that's what I was hoping for.

The performance was characterized by that intentional raw-blase quality that passes for native charm in better pieces. Were they, as the lady behind me wondered aloud, just underrehearsed? Were they embarrassed? Confused? Making a comment on the issue of performer competence or a meta-comment on the narratives of theatrical conventions? Who knows. Who cares.

As the Banana Peels.

When Brigid Murphy rolled in wearing high top skates, huge gold false eyelashes, a white flouncy prom dress and a straw hat filled with fruit, I knew I was in for a good time. I wasn't disappointed. "Loving you," Murphy trilled, "is like trying to fit a Cadillac into a Chevy Chevette parking space." This was Part One of her Poetic Saga in Three Parts: a hilarious, lyrical bump-and-grind reflection on Making It Fit. Then off came the skates and the hat, on went yellow shoes, bananas in the cleavage, a pillbox hat with foot-long bananas sticking up from the top, and we were into Part Two. With a boom box slung over her shoulder, Murphy flounced and posed to tunes by Donna Summer ("One-two-three-four-love-to-love-ya-baby"), stopping to deliver poetic reflections of a more domestic kind: "I'm the third butt in a two-butt kitchenette" and "She's the hot pink gum you sat on." Murphy reminded me of Karen Finley-plus-lots-of-artifice. She's raw and sassy and cute and she's going to tell you what love is about. Here, it's about getting your hand stuck to the gum that's stuck to the seat of your lover's pants. Murphy's persona was everything. With her dumb, charming schlep through "Love to Love Ya Baby" and her vain attempts to get her false eyelashes to stay put, how could one resist her?

Part Three was also hilarious. In blond wig and black feathers, Murphy sprawled across the Randolph Street Gallery bar and crooned, "Life with yooo was tooo loungy.... Here Murphy was every cabaret singer and every parody of a cabaret singer at once. Her energy and charm oozed everywhere like, to co-op one of her images, thigh fat from too tight jeans. ✱

JUDITH HAMERA

While the Swans Slept
KAJA OVERSTREET

"While The Swans Slept"
Kaja Overstreet
Links Hall
December 13, 1986

"While The Swans Slept" was entrancing -- so much so that I left Links Hall in a kind of fog, unable to discern the meaning behind the piece, but giddy from seeing something so mysterious and beautiful. Kaja Overstreet obviously attempted to make a statement; unfortunately, that statement remains unclear.

The piece is loosely based on the myth of Cassandra, who receives the gift of premonition from Zeus. After she spurns him, Zeus negates his gift by bestowing upon Cassandra a lack of credibility. Although Cassandra can foretell future events, she is no longer believed by those she warns. Overstreet alludes to themes of recognition and enlightenment, but in an internally inconsistent fashion that results in vague, piecemeal references rather than specific conclusions.

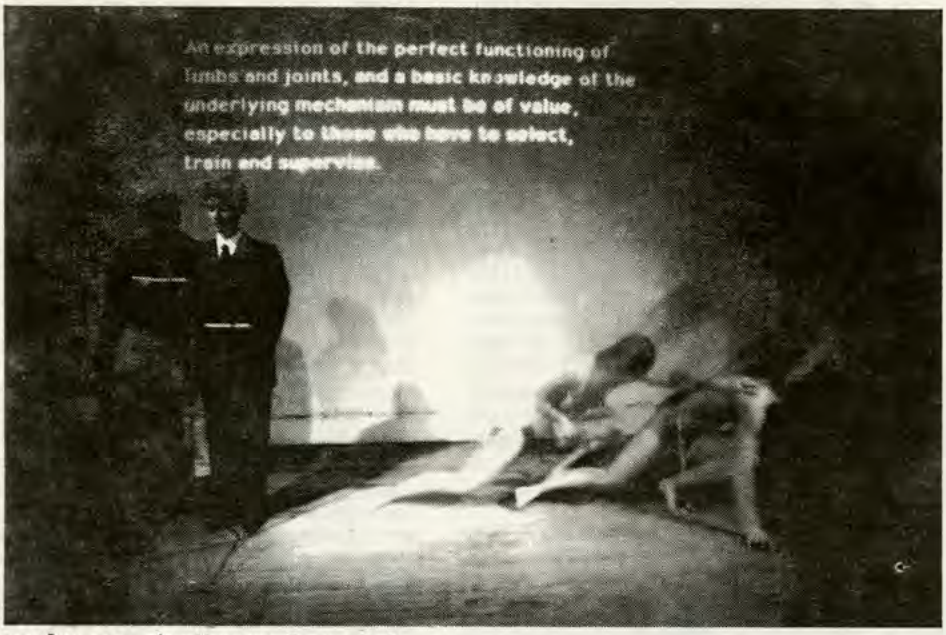
Overstreet, dressed in a grey-streaked robe, emerges slowly, like a swan, from behind a white paper curtain. She glides across the floor, guiding herself and pointing with a long, thin metal rod. As she discovers an egg buried in the decaying industrial floor, three more swan figures (Jean Parisi, Larry Steger, and Gilbert Medalle) appear and begin to comment silently on Overstreet's recognition of the egg, upon which she has conferred great importance. After further examination of the egg, Overstreet moves to a table where she performs with an ornately feathered fan. The piece reaches a crescendo when she sets a feathered box on fire. The flames cause her to move in a carefully frenzied manner toward the other three swans, whom she eventually leads through the white paper curtain from which she emerged.

The Butoh-influenced movements and facial gestures of the swans are controlled and deliberate and suggest a calculated avoidance of overt political or social commentary. But the use of symbolically-charged images such as the egg, videotaped protest marchers, fire, and illuminated ice, certainly not arbitrarily selected, are in no way defined and become oblique attempts at metaphor. The swans' movements are so precise that a conclusion, however open-ended, should be as clear. Yet the potential clarity of content is muddied by glib references to objects that here seem extraneous and more cliched than metaphorical. Overstreet's actions, quite beautiful in themselves, do not help illuminate the purpose of her props. The mystery is never solved.

In "While The Swans Slept" Overstreet seeks narrative, but abandons the search to movement. She wants to achieve commentary, but falls just short. It is ironic that this piece, which is characterized by precise, clean movements, lacks aesthetic clarity. But merely referring to potent objects, objects to which we attach such varied metaphorical baggage, is not enough to convey a statement, political or otherwise. Reference alone is not always sufficient. And it is dangerous to assume that it will necessarily be interpreted or understood. ✱

IRENE TSATSOS

ARTISTS CALL



performance by Werner Herterich

Axe Street Arena
January 17, 1987

Randolph Street Gallery
January 23, 1987

"...all aesthetic decisions are moral, really."
Ann Rice: Interview with a Vampire

The mixing of art and politics has become a crucial issue to the art world, since American post-WWII artists, having become disillusioned with possibilities of social change, turned inward into their expressive psyches for inspiration. Artists' denial of their social being fed nicely into the economic structure, which began to use their art in the commodities market by exporting the objects to Europe and fabricating the supremacy of U.S. culture, as described at length by Serge Gilbaut and others. Pop art of the sixties sought to expose, but still prosper, from this forced separation of art and the world, and seventies pluralism addressed the problem from within its various factions -- feminism, conceptualism, etc. The eighties brought new political problems-- a return to rampant nationalism, and renewed, and publicized intervention in cultures close to the States -- Central and South America, especially, and that of the small country of Nicaragua, because of the successful socialist revolution there. Fearing another Viet Nam and shocked out of the lull of the encounter group, artists banned together in political statements. They were being spurred by those that had been consistently politically aware, notably Lucy Lippard, who led the organizing of groups throughout the country in the first Artists Call of 1984.

The movement has continued organizing annual events. This year there were many scheduled in and around Chicago, including performances at Axe Street Arena and Randolph Street Gallery.

Work that is politically motivated falls into two categories -- either openly addressing the particulars of the issue at hand or using veiled metaphor to suggest the frustrations and horrors felt by the individual residing in a society that perpetuates a politic contrary to the individual's belief. "Word of Mouth", a performance by Mark Howell at Axe Street Arena, addressed the particulars in a series of skits that illustrated U.S. aggression and the confusion of the American public. He started by licking whipped cream from a globe covered in the stuff, exclaiming about its wonderful taste. He and a female companion discussed the situation, from the Right, the Left, and more to the point, from the successful Yuppie point of view -- confused, disturbed, but inactive.

Artists Call at Randolph Street began with introductory remarks by Axe Street Arena's Michael Piazza, organizer of Chicago's Artists Call events. He delivered a lengthy diatribe of classic leftist propaganda that detailed the offenses of the U.S. government against Nicaragua and included many calls to action of the radical elite. He read tediously from notes, and catcalls came from the audience. Piazza's sincerity won out as he finished this "performance" with a plea for conscientious art-making: "If, as artists, we can silently witness the destruction of other cultures, we forfeit the right to make art of our own."

It is doubtful that the audience took his words seriously, but the following performance, "Pinata," pounded his point home. Matthew Owens, assuming the voice of a 19-year-old White Anglo Male, recounted the tale of his acquisition of a mail-order bride, a nice girl who had "earthy peasant beauty...you should see her make tortillas...! But there was a language problem." As he spoke, Owens hoisted from a leaf-covered bier a hideous skeleton dressed in a tattered wedding dress. He hugged and fondled the skeleton, explaining that she was going to bear his baby. Then, calmly, he put on a blindfold, took his big stick and while muttering "ooh, baby, oh yeah..." he violently struck his pinata, until a little skeleton baby dropped out, his prize..."We all want to be Americans." Owens' expert manipulation of timing, text and image -- yet another great one-liner (in all of its complexity) from this artist -- smeared the grotesque nature of the political situation into this smug audience's face.

Su Montoya and Luann Ponder also enlisted the aid of the grotesque in their "Becky and Juanita." Juanita, dressed in exaggerated "Mexican peasant" dress brought out Becky, a "hydrocephalic since birth" with a huge disformed head and confined to a wheelchair. A taped voiceover explicated the ravages done on Becky by a Man Who Came to Visit and delivered very off-color racist/sexist jokes. Then Juanita pulled rosaries and tamales from between her legs. In no way as successful as Owens' piece, this was nauseating and embarrasing, but did make its point.

Other performers concentrated on the political manipulation by the U.S. government. Richard Loos, dressed in a great suit made of money, asked the audience what they would do if a minority moved into the neighborhood, trying to bribe them into answering, "Use any extreme to keep them out." His halting performance was endearing, though the timing was a bit off, and he clearly commented on our acceptance of foul play by our government. Nancy Forest Brown was a superb imitation of Jeane Kirkpatrick, delivering a speech called "Nicaragua and Her Neighbors," actually given to the U.N. Security Council in 1982, that detailed the U.S.'s concern about the Sandinista menace in Central America. A calm dark man translated her speech into Spanish, selectively editing his words. White mice started to crawl around her podium, her speech began to falter, until she stopped, spitting out blood and teeth, imploring of the interpreter, "Why are you doing this to me?" This direct use of political double-speech effectively revealed the unreality wherein our leaders reside. Ellen Glantz discussed the incestuous relationship between politicians and the military, acting out the effect this has on The People, using puppets and money and all sorts of props, in a piece that lasted for a time far longer than necessary to express this idea. Dani Kopoulos' "Glory Glory" and Robert Daulton's "Untitled" presented the "Latin" song, with twists, in their performances. To the strains of tunes from West Side Story, Kopoulos used hand puppets in a little puppet theatre to act out the lyrics, while slowly a large male sex organ pushed its way through the stage below the puppets. Inexplicably, at the end of the songs, the organ got stuck, the other great one-liner (again, in all of its complexity) in the show. Daulton sang one of those banana boat songs, jovially at first, then he would pause, seeming to forget the words, then continue until the lyrics changed -- words like "Bombs," "Soldiers," "Death" replaced "Rum," "Women," "Sun." A furious solo tango ensued until exhaustion overcame the performer. Typical Daulton.

Several of the artists wrapped their minds around the political subject matter, creating works that were heavily metaphorical, veiled, and dense. Perry Venson assumed his new persona of the street tough, discussing the need for self assurance at the expense of communicative understanding, in his "Man to Man, or anyone else who cares to listen." He changed into a contemplative character, spun little globes around with Eric Leonardson, and played with the ambiguity of gestures, to comment on the mixed messages driven into the American public concerning themselves and their relationship with the world. Larry Steger's "The Circle Dance" powerfully addressed the force of stereotype in society and in the world. A young hooded figure helicoptered on the floor while a black woman lipsynched to tape a repetitive rap about the dancer: "He be doin' that dance, be goin' round and round, he be doin' it and doin' it, he ain't happy, he ain't sad, goin' round and round, I don't know what it is..." as an abstract film was projected onto the characters. The woman jolted back to reality, undermining the stereotype by clipping at the end, speaking live: "You know what it is and it's a film and it comes from right behind you," pointing at the projector. Steger dramatically illustrated the power of illusion.

Werner Herterich's "Untitled (#5)" was the most spectacular piece of the marathon evening. The cast consisted of a very large and angrily alive pig, two very cool pig trainers, three hooded naked men, and a woman dressed as a man. Two of the naked men attacked the third with knives, creating a succession of theatrical vignettes, while the woman read, in German, text that was projected in English above her, about spinal abrasions, posture, and backbone surgery. (Whew!) Whatever Herterich was trying to express about political order, manipulation and aggression was definitely overshadowed by the audience's fear that the pig would run amuck. The presentation far outweighed the ideas supporting it. The only detail that saved this piece was the idyllic manner in which the pig trainers stared off towards the ceiling. Were they aware of Herterich's manipulation of them?

The marathon ended with a performance by the inimitable Brendan deVallance, who sported a drum and tape players strapped to his chest. He dipped his glasses into mud, tried to sell cola to the audience, did a diatribe on mon(k)ey: "Don't monkey with me man, leave me my monkey, my money, don't monkey with my money, man," then dunked a big coat into mud while drinking his cola non-stop. These deVallancisms skirted the political issues via metaphor, but his message was clear: high tech society has paid a price for its affluence -- a willing blindness and an unwitting exploitation of other cultures, ultimately to its own detriment.

But back to the Political Situation in Nicaragua. These many artists individually addressed the Issue, but the ultimate question of the efficacy of this work to motivate political change remains unanswered. It is heartening to realize that these people care, but the bureaucratic impetus for the work -- Lippard's Artists Call -- and the fact of the tiny size of the audience -- in no way approaching the vast numbers of middle class voters who elected Reagan -- makes the work seem hollow, pretentious, self-serving, and unrealistic. These works reaffirm feelings of political impotence, they are not a call to arms.

The only brilliant stroke of the interminable evening was the showing, during set changes, of tapes of the Senate hearings concerning the sale of arms to Iran. The Reality.

Colonel Oliver North: "I don't think there's one person in America who wants to tell his story more than I do." Plead the Fifth. *

KATHRYN HIXSON

A Dialogue with ADRIAN PIPER

In 1952, at the age of four, Adrian Piper "started getting socialized into white society." Raised in Harlem and educated on scholarship at private institutions, the ambiguity of Adrian Piper's identity as a black woman and very light-skinned appearance caused her to feel as though she was "commuting between two cultures."

Facing protestations from white peers against "boring monotonous disco music", "the more it seemed to me that there were some really deep issues around black culture that just weren't getting dealt with. I didn't really understand how to deal with those issues myself because I was busy trying to identify with the predominant white power structure."

I found that response [to funk music] so often that it seemed to me there was a gap between the purported attitude of openness and receptivity to popular culture that is usually espoused by the art world, according to which anything is adequate subject matter for appropriation and re-use within the context of high culture. And what actually seemed to be the case is that in fact only some things can have that function, and in particular, black working class culture cannot have that function.

Now, why is that? Well it seems to me that one problem has to do with the overt sexuality of that music--it talks about fucking, it talks about making love, it talks about bodies, and it's very hard to assimilate that in a way that's not threatening into white upper-middle class culture. Another problem is that it requires a very highly structured use of one's body in order to respond to it. It's music that in fact lends itself quite a bit to analysis, and I mean serious musicological analysis, but ultimately an appreciation of it depends on people really responding to it in a more visceral way.

Adrian Piper contends that the white middle class has difficulty responding to funk music not for aesthetic reasons but because of its "crude", "salacious", sexual content and the physical requirements of response. She claims the music is rejected by white listeners for, among other reasons, its sexism -- an element she calls "sexuality". And, she says, to really respond to funk music one has to boogie, an undignified act that is potentially embarrassing to a white middle class listener.

Adrian Piper developed performances that pertained to political subject matter, such as the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, into which funk music and dance were incorporated. She found her use of funk was frequently misunderstood by her predominantly white art audiences, members of which suggested that her material and its serious political content had been "cheapened" by the use of funk music.

I was essentially confronted by two alternatives. Either I forget using that music as part of my performances, or I use the music and confront the inability of my audience to deal with it. I considered not using the music because it just seemed to be tactically a difficult thing to do given that people were going

Adrian Piper
Randolph Street Gallery
January 30, 1987

to misunderstand it. That to me was ultimately unacceptable because it meant suppressing a part of my culture that I happen to think is extremely interesting and a source of innovation in many areas of contemporary culture and is also an important source of self-expression to me. So I decided to do this performance called "Funk Lessons."

"Funk Lessons" culminated in a participatory performance that gave Adrian Piper "a chance to assimilate and work through a broader range of responses to this music and get more of a sense of why it's so upsetting to people." The piece (no longer performed) attempts to offer a way of "simply getting involved with the music and confronting it in order to work through the racism...that I claim necessarily accompanies the rejection of this music." "Funk Lessons", "a cross-cultural experiment in transfusion", consists of demonstrations, replete with printed handouts, that explain exactly how to dance to funk music. "Funk Lessons" is structured in an academic format, one with which Adrian Piper (who teachers philosophy at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.) is familiar. She distributes handouts and discusses and deconstructs the presumptions brought to funk music. She then alternately leads her audience in body isolation exercises and talks about the structure of the music, which she finds "particulary difficult...just because we don't have a very well-developed vocabulary for talking about rhythm." The piece is advertised as a dance party, into which it transforms if successful.

The audience reactions to "Funk Lessons" varied, ranging from antagonistic and resistant to affirming and celebratory. Adrian Piper describes the worst Funk Lesson she ever taught, in the spring of 1984.

The very worst time I ever had was at the San Francisco Art Institute. It was just really the pits for many reasons. First of all there were technical problems... lots of sound problems. Also, the attitude of a kind of studied nonchalance of the students there was just impossible to crack. People just could not be honest about their feelings. I remember talking about some of the sexual associations and some of the racial associations of the music and someone got up and said, "What do you mean? We're all cool here." That was really a perfect expression of people's attitudes that evening.

This is difficult for most people and one can understand why. Even the suggestion that one is not politically correct in this respect is cause for feeling offended. And so people had a lot of trouble. There were a lot of expressions, "Well, why are you telling me this? I already know all about this. I don't need to hear this. I'm hip. I've done all of this already...." And so on. Whereas of course what you would expect if they really were at peace with themselves as far as this music is concerned was that they would

just party and enjoy it. And that's not the way it went. It was just absolutely a deadly evening. I'll never forget it.

"Funk Lessons" originated as a series of performances in which Adrian Piper would invite five or six colleagues (primarily white academicians) to her house for dinner. She would start the evening quietly, with Mozart, for example, as background music. During dinner she would segue into something snappy like Artie Shaw or Woody Herman. And during dessert she would lay on William "Bootsy" Collins.

At that point different things happened on different evenings. Sometimes people just left -- they said, "Well, gotta go -- it's been great...thank you so much." Closer friends of mine, who know me a little bit better, would say, "Why are you doing this?" And then we would have a discussion. And sometimes it was fairly enlightening. Sometimes it became very tense because people felt I was manipulating them. They felt as though I was putting them in this situation where they were essentially a captive audience and couldn't escape and I had to deal with that, because of course ultimately they did escape.

In a brief discussion after her Randolph Street Gallery presentation Adrian Piper elaborated upon ideas of manipulation, intention, and power.

Manipulation is a number of things. One thing about manipulation has to do with intention. As a responsible agent, if I intend to bring about a certain effect and I set up an environment and put people in it in a way that's designed to bring about that effect, then I'm manipulating the people for a certain end. But the other part of manipulation, which I think has to do with perception of the individual feeling manipulated, is the issue of power. Who is perceived to have the power to alter the environment or the power to leave the environment or change their own status, and who's perceived to have less power? Usually issues of power are conceived as a zero-sum game--if one person has more then the other person has less. Now I think there's some circumstances under which a person will feel manipulated in the second sense whether or not anyone is actually manipulating them in the first sense. That is, even if I don't intend that they have these responses, the fact that they have these responses will make them feel as though I must have intended it.

Many of Adrian Piper's early performances are conceptual pieces that challenge conventions pertaining to painting and sculpture as well as theater and other traditional performance. Now, with "My Calling Cards 1 and 2", she is using polite, genteel behavior to subvert the racist and sexist practices that her previous work challenged explicitly.

Dear Friend,
I am black.
I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.
I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.
Sincerely yours,
Adrian Margaret Smith Piper

"My Calling Cards 1 and 2" are very small cards--they're literally calling cards -- and I have them on me at all times. The first one is geared for dinners and cocktail parties. And it has to do with my racial identity. I identify myself as black -- I clearly don't look that way. Very often I forget to announce to people in advance that I am black or I don't have a friend in the environment ahead of me to let people know that I'm black. And the result of that is that I found that people in those environments, at cocktail parties, say, when people start drinking, or dinners, after people start relaxing, they will say things -- and I'm talking here exclusively about white people, of course -- they will say things that they would not say if they realized that there was a black person in the room. So if you'll show the first card...

This is the response that I determined in response in order to deal with that situation. I call this a reactive performance in the sense that I don't set it up at all. I simply have the cards with me when I go to these dinners or cocktail parties. And if someone makes one of these comments I simply give them the card. Now this is the most recent solution that I have determined on. I don't know that it's the best solution, but it's the most recent solution to a problem that has been really plaguing me for as long as I can remember, which is the question of how to resolve the ambiguity of my own racial identity and deal with other people's responses to it.

One alternative would be to say nothing, and simply allow the remark to go on by. Now if I do that I get to feel bad. I get to feel insulted and offended and I also get to feel compromised for not having stood up for myself. A second alternative is to raise the issue in the abstract, without saying anything about my racial identity. I tried that, and I find that it feels self-deceptive. It also feels hypocritical. It keeps the issue at an abstract level where it can degenerate into a kind of academic discussion. The third response possible is, as I've suggested, to announce at the very beginning of the evening, "I'm black." This is a sure way to ruin a good party. It makes everyone uncomfortable, it makes them regard me as pushy and manipulative, it makes people feel as though I'm trying to guilt trip them, perhaps get

continued on next page

some kind of advantage from affirmative action policies in the case of academic parties, or something like that. And it also disrupts, socially, the evening in ways that I don't like.

When I show this card to my friends and I told them what I was going to do, they say to me things like, "Wouldn't it just be simpler to pass for white across the board? Just decide that you're going to blend into the American melting pot and just put all of this behind you." That also is not an option for me, for a number of reasons. First of all, if you say you're white, in this culture, it means you have no black ancestry, which means that if you do have black ancestry you're implicitly denying that you do. And that's not something that I can do. I'm proud of my ancestry and I'm proud of my family. So that's really not a possibility for me at all. Also, if you say you're white, it seems to me, or I should say if I say I'm white, I'm also implicitly disassociating myself from a certain struggle that I feel very much a part of. And the struggle is manifested precisely in situations like this, which presume to be politically correct and presume to be sanitized.

> After discreetly giving her card, Adrian Piper continues to interact in the social situation as though nothing had happened, thus allowing the recipient to respond immediately or later, or publicly, to all present, or to her, privately. Ideally, she says, the recipient would approach her later for private discussion. This has not yet happened. So far, all who have received her card have "invariably" become "enemies".

I don't want to make someone feel even more violated by requiring of them that they confront me. Or engage with me in some way that they may not be ready to do. I want to make a change and I want to be allowed to progress through my life without dealing with this kind of feedback. But I don't want to make it harder on anyone than it already is.

The question of dialogue is something the person involved has to decide. The experience of being caught -- that can't be underestimated. Most of us have gotten caught at one thing or another somewhere along the line and it's a horribly shaming experience. I don't think, ultimately, that any individual wants to be a racist, and wants to be malevolent and spew out all of this poison. And so I feel very reluctant to ascribe ultimate responsibility in the way that saying, you know, "Why don't you let me help you resolve this problem you have?" would do. I think people are at different points and more or less ready to deal with these issues and if they're ready to deal with them they will. But I don't want to force that. I feel as though, especially in these situations, just the fact of my identity, and the fact of my appearance, that ambiguity, that dissonance, is forcing myself enough. And believe me, people definitely feel forced -- there's no question about it.

> "My Calling Card 2" is for distribution at bars and discos and, presumably, anywhere Adrian Piper as a lone woman is confronted by a man who aggressively pursues her company.

It's been my experience in this situation that this card usually does not put an end to the dialogue. It almost never does.

> Dear Friend,
>
> I am not here to pick anyone up, or to be picked up. I am here alone because I want to be here, ALONE.
>
> This card is not intended as part of an extended flirtation.
>
> Thank you for respecting my privacy.

My sense is that there really is this problem of the other. Recognizing a woman as being an other, an independent other, not subject to ultimate interpretation in terms of a certain set of expectations about how, you know, no matter what she says she really wants it, she's just flirting, and so on. Actually, I have had some success with this card, and I guess my sense is that with this card some of my success comes from the prefabricated nature of the card. And not only that, it conveys the message that I expect this, I know what your response is going to be, it's not the right response, I'm really serious, please go away. So I think ultimately, usually the repartee is just a way of saving face before the person really does go away.

It ruins my evening to have to even reject the person verbally, to have to say no, I'd prefer to sit alone if you don't mind. I wish it were possible in this culture for a woman to go to a bar or a disco and just sit there without other people making the assumption that she was there to be picked up. I spent a year in Germany when I was in graduate school and for some reason the convention in Germany is very different. A woman can go into a disco and dance, alone, without being accosted. She can sit at a bar and read the newspaper, and not have anyone come over to her. And after a year of living that way it was just insufferable to come back to the United States and not be able to go out at night anywhere. It was just awful. So I think that experience made this card seem even more pressing to me.

> Adrian Piper wishes to discuss with recipients of "My Calling Card 1" the specific reason it was given as well as racist attitudes in general. Yet she rejects direct confrontation due to an appreciation of and unwillingness to violate conventions that allow her to converse politely and interact socially with people with whom she has little in common. But by avoiding direct confrontation and instead using the card to mediate, her point is potentially misinterpreted.

What are the responses? Either you say something, or you don't. My sense is that the card is kind of an intermediary between saying something and saying nothing. Saying nothing is no good because I feel compromised. Saying something is socially disruptive and also after a while it's just psychologically ennervating. It's just awful to have this same discussion over and over again. So why not just kind of codify it?

It's a problem, controlling the interpretation of the card, controlling the explicit intention behind it so that people understand its intention. I don't think that anyone has taken the second card as a clearly veiled invitation to a flirtation or a pickup,

SPOKEN WORD CAFE

Spoken Word Cafe
Chicago Filmmakers
January 24, 1987

Poets are an odd lot: their exposure is thin, their recognition thinner, and their rewards practically nonexistent. Poetry, of all the arts, seems the least penetrated by popular culture. Poets are serious people and their art an elemental one: they write words that beg to be spoken aloud. Their language has that quality that can fill a room full of the most extraordinary sound; that is, when the poet is on. The Spoken Word Cafe is a very good idea -- live poetry spoken by the poet. Filmmakers hosted this group, along with two pre-"Eraser Head" films by David Lynch, and by the sounds of it, the crowd was there as much for the poetry as for Lynch's Freudian nightmares.

David Sedaris opened the night with poems from his diaries: a collection of short, slice-of-life vignettes that play on language and observation. The poems' sophistication come from Sedaris' understated, almost ironic use of language to freeze the commonplace into a picture-perfect photograph in which judgment is forever withheld. His language is that same spare, carefully placed rhetoric invented by the newspapers, elevated to an art form by Hemingway, and most recently resuscitated by the short stories of Raymond Carver. Sedaris, however, seems comfortable with himself as a poet and writes like only a poet could, while the tone of his voice (dry and distant) is so perfectly matched to what he hears that there is something very authentic to his work: he is a camera with words.

Deborah Pintonelli is anything but a camera -- all of her experience seems etched into her skin. There is no intermediary between her and what she feels and it is painful at times to listen. Her work is full of opposites -- the push and pull between experiencing something and trying to communicate it. The immediacy in her words and phrasing contradicts or denies the feeling that experience can ever be (re)membered; these are poems with very rough edges. Unfortunately, her live readings do not always deliver that same edge -- the rhythms of the poems are occasionally broken, and the knife pulled out. Two or three of the poems came off with the kind of timing and inflection that really make an audience uncomfortable. It was in these few poems that she was able to truly lose herself and connect with the rhythm of immediacy where pain is really felt, not simply recognized.

Chet Long has "thespian" written all over him -- he seems to know theatrical conventions inside and out. His voice bellows, his presence is assured, and his timing, if occasionally drawn out, is good. What I don't understand is why his writing is so dry and lacking all those qualities he himself possesses. The work is interesting, but not in the context of a live event-- its density seems better suited to the page where one can turn back to a passage. With all of his ability to write and speak, I wish he would do the audience the justice of reading something that begs to be heard rather than seen.

As for David Lynch, his obsessions show up a little too closely in these early films -- like a wound without a bandage. Lynch is a visual poet, which is definitely a rarity, and in these films he relies too heavily on surrealism and Freudian psychology to carry the real weight. So much of what works in "Blue Velvet" is only embryonic here -- in fact it's hard to imagine that the obsessions in these early shorts could ever have been contained in the fluid style of Lynch's Midwestern Baroque. If nothing else, these films remind one how far an esthetic can be stretched and still be true to its origins. David Lynch is certainly filling that strange but wonderful hole that Hitchcock left at death.

KEVIN HENRY

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but people have attempted a certain response which I've encountered in other contexts, which is to say something like, "You don't really mean it. This isn't really what you mean. You mean something else." And to kind of deflect the interpretation that way.

I'm a very non-confrontational person. I really don't like engaging with people hostilely around issues like this. So I decided that this would be the best way to deal with the situation because it puts the burden of acting in a disruptive way on the other person. They are free to either slip the card in their pocket or make a big fuss or to laugh at me or to say this is ridiculous, but at least at that point they have initiated the disruption and I haven't. Which certainly means something to me.

Adrian Piper's presentations at Randolph Street Gallery as well as "My Calling Cards 1 and 2" question the definition of performance and obscure the lines (perhaps nonexistent) between art and personal or political action. Her presentation, which in essence consisted of a discussion of her work, was artfully done in a gallery to an art audience. It was a highly structured piece that incorporated video, slides, narrative, and audience participation -- all elements of performance. Yet it was a by-product of "Funk Lessons" and "My Calling Cards 1 and 2", existing solely as documentation. Adrian Piper's concerns were not performative and as such challenge their designation as performance.

Nor are the concerns of "My Calling Cards 1 and 2" performative. Adrian Piper does not stage special environments in which to distribute her cards (with the possible occasional exception of "My Calling Card 2") but uses them in already existing "normal" situations in which she is involved on a regular basis. "I have a sense of sort of putting myself in (an) environment and watching people get upset, watching them get ashamed.... For me, the effort is simply to violate and break through certain conventions that prevent me from living my life." She uses her personal card to make her life livable. All creative acts (performance art or any other kind) are personal, but they should in some way transcend the particular if they are to be understood. Obviously, bigotry affects us all. But Adrian Piper's acts against bigotry, almost a political action, become so particular and self-referential that their application beyond her world becomes questionable. Her actions are intruiging, but one should ask why they are called performance, or art.

IRENE TSATSOS

VISUAL NARRATIVE/ NEW CHICAGO VIDEO

"Visual Narrative/New Chicago Video"
Co-sponsored by The Center for New Television and Randolph Street Gallery
February 12-13, 1987

It was not so much the narrative bent of "Visual Narrative" that revealed the "new" in Chicago video. It was rather a certain videotic self-assertion, and perhaps a stronger sense of direction. Thus focusing largely on contemporary issues of social, political, or psychological nature the show displayed some degree of sophistication in controlling this multi-faceted medium.

Although highly-skilled in the art of video-making for a number of years, Ed Rankus' "She Heard Voices" pushed the sharpness of his technique and the eloquence of his imagery so as to create a kind of silent movement without the use of sound. As if assimilating the inconsistence of the process of human thought, "She Heard Voices" is structured like a game seeking to dismantle the authority of Reason. As such, it depicts a woman who roams in a dreamspace where suggestions and associations expand meaning beyond the possibility of stable congruency. "She" listens to voiceless voices supposedly coming from an invisible telephone, while an isolated hand occasionally moves major pieces on a chessboard. As a primary structural link, the chess game, as well as the voices, determines the woman's alternatives, as she moves accordingly in a game of broader context. Trapped, the woman attempts a frantic exit, and the same isolated hand points out how easy it is to escape. But the world of tangible reality is likewise in constant flux. Thus, "She" returns to her dreamworld surrounded by a multitude of silent phones frozen beneath the snow.

Instead of a chess game, Kevin Huotari chose a detective's method to deconstruct conventional modes of social perception. His tape "Mystery and Intrigue: Myth and Ideology" seeks to reveal other layers of meaning in a conventional social scenario. Thus, while the detective's eye selects a few frames from a given scene, the brain of a computer freezes them and breaks them down to minutiae. In this sense, a seemingly casual encounter of a woman and a man on a particular street corner may turn out as a suspicious affair when further analyzed. The hands of the "detective" continue the work at the office probing electronic circuitry, and the social machine as well. Without offering conclusions, Huotari scrutinizes appearances - perhaps like a kind of Holmes who deconstructs social myths and ideologies. As a teasing and humorous relief from the necessary contrivance of his somewhat Sherlockian methodology, Huotari carries on his mystery with a nostalgic soundtrack similar to those of past decades' movie mysteries.

In a rather innovative approach to video-making, Sasha Sumner's "The Desecration of Innocence" uses the video screen as pages of an adolescent diary where "Barbie" scribbles a compelling tale showing how innocence can be crushed on the path to adulthood. In her tape, the journey is fraught with painful accounts, including that of a school teacher's cruelty, and a traumatic sexual experience.

Raphael Franca attempts to assimilate the process of narrativisation as a potentially hopeless process. His "As if Exiled in Paradise" depicts a writer trapped by his own inability to reconcile the act of writing. Confronting an unyielding communicative block, the writer sees suicide as the only way out. As though emulating the core of its own idea, "Exiled" does not sustain its initial impact.

Contributing to the pathos mood, Annette Barbier's "Forced Perspectives" depicts a distorted vision of corridors and alleys surveyed by a fish-eye lens. This work successfully conveys a strong sense of fear and anxiety, sometimes reinforced by the image of a barking dog. Since the tape's imagery carries enough telling power, the use of texts creates redundant instances whenever they appear.

Do we see the world upside down, and when straightened up, does language relate to human vision? John Timmerman's "Vision Test" suggests it does not. Seeking to depict the misleading specificities of the structure of human thought, this work creates a schizoid vision where language, sight, sound, and feelings fail to coalesce. Timmerman's imagery includes an eye all too weary of its own function, and a mouth expounding on the incoherences of the human rational process. Thus assuming, when the brain, already engaged in thought structuring, is charged with messages from the sensorial field it creates, at best, a perceptual kaleidoscope oscillating in divergent directions. This perceptual paranoia thus becomes ". . . a world of language fractured by the images which arise from it, or. . . the reverse could also be true."

On a much lighter note, Karla Berry's "Love Makes Shadows of Us All" decided to seek the humorous side of angst. In the beginning of the tape Berry introduces her idea as a nightmarish dream in which she tries to dance with an anonymous but loving cowboy, yet a weird stickiness on the dancing ground stifles her ability to dance. She suggests that dreams and fears consistently intercept the flow of human aspirations, and - as synthetic as they may be - such fears keep haunting you even if from a distance, thus provoking ambivalence and anxiety. Reinforcing this implied anxiety, the cowboy of Berry's dream finds no problem with the dancing floor as he performs a sensuous, hip-grinding dance. Neither does Berry's father and mother who gracefully waltz together against a peaceful landscape. Berry's chimerical mood was accompanied, as well as heightened, by Robert Metrick's sound arrangement.

Standing apart from the narrative direction of the show, Beth Berolzheimer held onto the power of visual imagery. Berolzheimer's "Acts" creates a beautiful orchestration of processed video and sound with the short span of a phone conversation where a female voice repeatedly says she is wearing her heels.

Evident in Jeanine Mellinger's curatorial rationale for this show, and as mentioned by Neil Seiling, video curator at UC Video in Minneapolis, Chicago video is moving toward the kind of story-telling video can do best: visual narrativisation. And as it does, it detaches itself from its known obsessive love-affair with the Sandin Image Processor.

Something else begins to emerge with this new direction. It seems that in seeking to add content to the image, video becomes less self-conscious of its media inheritance. Thus less concerned with its initial struggle for self-identity, it may acquire new means of self-assertion, and expand its contribution as video art. ✱

JAMIRTE TROTT

VISITING ARTISTS PROGRAM

THE SCHOOL OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
Columbus Drive and Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois 60603

VISITING ARTISTS

UTE ESKILDSEN *photography critic, West Germany*
Tuesday, April 7 8:00 pm School Auditorium

VERA FRENKEL *video/performance artist*
Tuesday, April 7 7:00 pm Center for New Television, 11 E. Hubbard
Will screen her videotape *"The Business of Frightened Desires(or The Making of a Pornographer)"*.
Admission: $4 general public, $3 CNTV, free to SAIC students with I.D.

DAVID BEHRMAN *composer*
Wednesday, April 15 1:30 pm School Auditorium

COY HOWARD *architect*
Monday, April 20 Noon Pakula Building Room Room 901, 218 S. Wabash

JOSEPH SEDELMAIER *producer of television commercials*
Tuesday, April 21 12:15 pm Pakula Building Room 901, 218 S. Wabash

RICK FEIST *video artist*
Tuesday, April 21 7:00 pm Video Area Room C57

PATTERSON SIMS *curator*
"Body Heat: Representation Since 1980"
Wednesday, April 22 7:00 pm School Auditorium
Voluntary admission fee.

CRAIG OWENS *art historian and critic*
"The Death of the Viewer"
Tuesday, April 28 6:00 pm Rubloff Auditorium
Admission: $10 general public, $3 students with I.D., free to SAIC students
Sponsored by the League of Arts and Ideas

HAROLD BUDD *composer*
Wednesday, April 29 7:00 pm School Auditorium

SONIA SHERIDAN *generative systems*
Thursday, April 30 1:30 pm School Auditorium

VERA FRENKEL *video/performance*
Live performance
Saturday, May 2 8:00 pm Performance Space

Unless otherwise noted, visiting artist presentations are free and open to the public

These programs are supported in part by grants from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

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Sharon Evans

World premiere of

Photo: Scott Simms

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Featuring Sharon Evans and Catherine Evans. Directed by Judy Morgan with set design by David Csicsko. Lighting design by James Card.

Michael Kalmes Meyers

New expanded version of critically acclaimed

Photo: Kim Tonry

"RECONSTRUCTING (The Temple) FROM MEMORY"

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Co-directed by Michael Kalmes Meyers and Vickie Hoch with lighting and sound by Lou Mallozzi and choreography by Diana Harris. Children directed by Mary Bonnett.

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