

Special Issue: Community-Based Art

P f o r m

PERFORMANCE ART MAGAZINE

Issue 27
\$3.00

Reno
O! Klahoma!
Amerika Nowhere
Carolee Schneemann
plus reviews, of course



P=Form

Issue #27
Jan. 1993



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P-FORM, ISSN #1067-2222, is distributed nationally by Fine Print Distributors, Austin, Texas. P-FORM, published quarterly, is dedicated to the development and understanding of performance art. Contributions are welcome. Contact Randolph Street Gallery by phone or send manuscripts including author's name, bio and means of contact. Features should be limited to 4000 words; reviews 800. Copy should be typed; Microsoft Word disk is strongly encouraged.

P-FORM is published by Randolph Street Gallery. RSG is supported in part by its members and by grants from the following agencies: The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, The Illinois Arts Council, The National Endowment for the Arts; and by private agencies including The Chicago Community Trust, The Joyce Foundation, The John T. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Charitable Trust, and the Sara Lee Foundation. RSG is a member of the National Association of Artists' Organizations.

Subscriptions to P-Form are available to individuals for \$10.00, \$15.00 for institutions and foreign subscriptions. Send checks to RSG at address below.

published by
**Randolph
Street Gallery**

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A PERFECTLY HAUNTED CIRCUS October 31, 1992 A Benefit for P-Form

This was our third annual circus, and baby, we couldn't have done it without you. It was a great and spooky time for all, and we only wish we had the ink to thank everyone who came by. Your time, sweat, and cash will keep P-Form publishing throughout the next year. Special thanks go to the artists, without whose talent and energy P-Form would have no reason for being:

Meg Houston, Kapra Fleming, Tom Palazzolo, Steve Buckley, Mary Zerkel, Katharine Boyd, Lola DeJong, David Kotker, Joel Klaff, Ames Hall, The X-Girlfriends, Matthew Wilson, Steve Barsotti, Lester Brodzik, Pat O'Donnell, Jacqui Disler, Andy Soma, John Connors,

Elizabeth Britton, John Woodruff, Jon Schnepf, Joan Dickinson, David Jacobson, Thax Douglas, Jay Batman,

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A mighty toast of appreciation to our sponsors and donors:

The Dome Room, 632 1/2 N. Dearborn, Copy Max, Chicago Brewing Co.'s Legacy Lager, Genesis Creative Oases, Lonnette M. Stonitsch, Carmela Rago, Lester Brodzik, The X-Girlfriends, Dixie Que Restaurant, Myopic Earwaxx, Hand Car Wash at Lake and Canal Streets, No Palace Studio, Howard Zee and A-1 Entertainment, Andi Pihl, Gina Caruso, Cafe Strada Coffee, Hair, Mind & Body (formerly Trend Hair), Emily Gould, Mary Ellen O. Wilson-Godoy and Debra Levie.

And finally a profusion of small, continual kisses to our fearless organizers:

Pickles Oksietowicz, Michelle Manes, and Nena Samardzija, who had much help from Carmela Rago, Mindy Schwartz, Ken Thompson, Seamus Malone, D. Travers Scott, Marty Mroz, Mark Els, Andrew Wyatt, Steve Finn, Bob & Dan, our strange, weird and wonderful volunteers and all the Randolph Street Gallery Staff.



Katharine Boyd and Mary Zerkel.

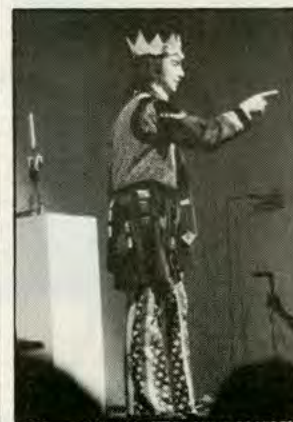


Photo: David Northcutt
Andy Soma.

Photo: Debra E. Levie

HIGH PERFORMANCE

Those of you who have tried, through the years, to

follow the world of performance art no doubt read *High Performance* at some point. It was inevitable. For 15 years it has been the only magazine devoted mostly, if not entirely, to performance. If you were busy smashing rats between cinder blocks in Cincinnati, how were you going to find out about that dance/film/voice-based/slide projection-infested one-man-opera in Phoenix? You know the answer.

As the climate for arts support shifted in this country at the end of the Eighties, *High Performance* served as an eloquent voice for the newly dispossessed. It ran some of the most important and unapologetic responses to the crisis in government arts funding. This was not coincidental as it was primarily performance artists that got Mr. Helms and other religious and congressional far-righters all het up. At the same time, anger over the U.S. government's pathetic response to the AIDS crisis drove many artists out of the studios and theatres and into the streets. For the first time in recent history artists, *en masse*, made overtly political art about a single social issue. The point of this art was not to please the senses, rather it aimed to change society, and change it quick.

These little snippets of (unfortunately, continuing) history are important in light of the editorial changes that have occurred at *High Performance*, namely that *High Performance* has chosen to eliminate all reviews. The only art journal in the country covering the national performance scene will no longer report on the aesthetic quality of individual works of performance art, leaving a void that is only partially filled by the magazine you are reading.

The new emphasis at *High Performance* is on artists working in the community. Not just performance artists, any artists. They are, however, retaining the name *High Performance*. Steven Durland, the Editor-in-Chief of *High Performance*, writes in his N°58/59 editorial, "Other changes you can expect in the magazine will include...an even broader interdisciplinary sweep than we've covered in the past. Performance has been, and in many ways continues to be, a primary source for the development of broader cultural approaches to art, but it is not the only source. It would be insincere to suggest that such lofty goals are the province of any single discipline."

And yet, perhaps they are. Can a sculptor work with/in a community without coming in physical contact with it? Could any artist work "in" the community by mail or telegram? Isn't there something about the physical presence of the artist that's necessary? And any time an artist's work entails the physical relationship of the artist to the audience/spectators/community, aren't we talking Performance? Admittedly, this is a broader definition of performance art than implied in Durland's editorial, but it is relevant to any discussion of community-based art.

For me, teaching is the ultimate performance art act. And the teaching issue seems to be at the center of the issue of artists working "in the community." It proceeds from the assumption that we have something to teach. Interestingly, probably the most important thing we have to teach is a way of thinking, rather than anything specific to think about. Funny, isn't it, that even here formal issues are somehow paramount to content issues. Not to say that this country doesn't need some guidance on specific issues. And artists, with

Art, in disgust, abandons the art world.

their propensity to examine and process current social trends, are in the perfect position to lead the public, so many of whom seem to be lost, and have either given up having any priorities, or never had any to begin with. While I do not wish to place performance artists quite in the role of shaman (only somewhere near it), I do hope that perhaps American artists are finally ready to assume a role of responsibility in and for their culture. And this means teaching. The woman who taught me to teach, Hannah Wiley, told me that the best teachers have no secrets. They teach everything they know; they aren't afraid to give away every secret of their success. For the past 50 years the consumerist U.S. economy has kept the art world in its grip, has pitted artist against artist and sought, by its very nature, to make art (and artists) into a scarce resource. Give our secrets away? Create more artists? How could we afford to?

When in the Sixties parts of the art world turned against the art-as-product gallery system and turned to non-product art forms like conceptual, video, and performance art, artists had an opportunity to look outward and examine the world. Instead, we chose to turn inward and examine ourselves. A little introspection is healthy, but an entire generation of artists was tragically doomed to making art about itself. Artists moved from making art about themselves to making art about art. Big improvement.

"The Queen is dead! Long live the Queen!"

Perhaps now, artists, lead by the live physical bodies of performance artists already familiar and comfortable with the role of teacher and with the human interaction of an audience, are prepared to teach what they know. And I would argue that artists might have the solution to some of America's problems. The creative impulse need not be limited to abstract ideas and forms. This country could only benefit, economically and spiritually, from a bit more creativity. Whether Americans are prepared to accept artists, as Eastern Europeans have for years, as social and political leaders, remains to be seen.

* * * *

While I view community-centered art as a positive movement in the art scene, I must also register some reservations about *High Performance*'s shift to cover it. The first ones are purely selfish. For hundreds of performance artists, *High Performance* provided reviews of their work that local presses would not cover, and which were essential to getting grants. Given the totally inadequate coverage of performance, particularly in art journals, losing the pan-national source of performance reviews pains me greatly. Also, since I don't live in a performance art vacuum (*mental note: idea for a piece!*), and I can't afford to subscribe to 20 local arts weeklies, I enjoyed finding out what everyone else was up to. No more.

Also, from a completely academic standpoint, the demise of *High Performance*'s reviews does not bode well. Without an indexed journal, it will be much more difficult, in the future, to get an idea of what the scene was like at a certain time. Historians and scholars will have to depend on

"The times, they are a-changin'."

spottily indexed local newspapers, which may not even

exist outside the major cities. We face an entire art form that could historically vanish in terms of widely accessible documentation.

Moreover, I have a quibble with *High Performance*'s idea that reviews are passé, somehow inconsequential. I feel that there is something to be said for the aesthetic experience. And I feel that intelligent criticism can enlighten both the artist and the reader/audience, place the work in a historical and biographic perspective, and promote and propagate interest in the art form and in the arts in general. Further, and I realize that I'm out on a limb here, I feel that there is such a thing as beauty. And beauty is essential to continued life, particularly in modern Western cultures.

Like performance, beauty is an expansive concept in my mind. It certainly includes natural and non-art experiences and objects. What beauty offers is a chance at transcendence, an opportunity to enter a state similar to a dream or hallucinatory state. Much learning happens in these states. In terms of performance, a kind of ritual time is entered; normal beliefs about identity, time and place are suspended. This is an incredibly important human experience, one which we in Western society constantly devalue.

I asked Durland about the changes in *High Performance*'s philosophy regarding reviews, and specifically what he would say to artists who feel abandoned. His response was twofold. First, he

challenged performance artists to see to it that their art form is adequately covered by daily and weekly

papers (which it is now, to some extent at least, in the larger cities) and also by art magazines (which it is not). Art journals have done a piss-poor job covering performance work, even *New Art Examiner* (one of the 2 or 3 journals that even run performance reviews) has shrunk its Time Arts coverage down to half a page. Although it is a rather drastic tactic, *High Performance*'s cessation of reviews may cause other magazines to pick them up. Durland stresses that it's up to artists to see that this happens. Secondly, and relatedly, Durland asserts that *High Performance*'s original mission was to report underreported events in the art scene. At the time of *High Performance*'s conception, this was performance art. Although performance has not gained widespread acceptance, it certainly is more visible than ever before. And *High Performance* has done its part in creating that visibility.

I see the new direction at *High Performance* as vital to the art community. I also find it sad and unfortunate that the editors of *High Performance* did not have the resources to start a new magazine dedicated to exploring the place of the artist in the community, while leaving *High Performance* intact. I feel, as they probably do, that performance art is vital to the art world, and to the actual world, and any voice of advocacy should be amplified rather than silenced.

For too long a time the art world has only been concerned with itself. It was happy to comment only on itself. It stretched out the "me decade" to last twenty years. After two decades of navel contemplation it seems to be slowly looking up. Perhaps now, metaphorically, it is focused on the floor in front of its feet. Perhaps from this vantage point it is in a position to move forward.

Ken Thompson is a choreographer, performance artist, and the Managing Editor of *P-Form*.

BYE PERFORMANCE

The Artist In Society

In the nineteenth century, American writers, Walt Whitman, Melville, and others, had a vision of the artist-writer in America as the voice of democracy, integral to the daily life of a pluralistic society, representing diverse, hidden, necessary points of view. But there have been only few times when this vision actually became a reality, as in the 1930s when the economy collapsed and artists aligned with workers and intellectuals to form a strong progressive movement—not unlike what we are now seeing in Eastern Europe. But “modern art,” as we know it in this country, has often existed outside the lives of many Americans. Although it does reflect the ontological changes of daily life, most find the forms employed by the art world to be incomprehensible and obscure, because these are often dependent for effect on knowledge of the art-historical precedents which are removed from the recognized iconography of many people’s daily lives. In other words: Most people simply don’t have the information or training that would allow them to “get it.” When post-modernists attempt to use popular imagery to break down the distinction between high and low culture, and to adopt forms already popularized by the media, they are in a bind, because many outside the art world see such work as a joke, a scam, perpetrated on them by artists. People outside the art world rarely understand the seriousness with which even humorous, parodic art is executed. And artists have often remained silent, unwilling, or unable to explain their work to a popular audience—hence the hostility people feel to the art world which excludes them and which they fear deceives and mocks them as well: While all this is going on, the art world itself feels alienated, misunderstood, and definitely unsupported by mainstream society.

At this moment the art world and the general populace, although actually closer than ever in their shared post-modern dilemma, are nonetheless at a stand-off. Into this historical mess walks Jesse Helms, ready to promote his career by furthering this confusion and aggravating this tension. But ironically, at the same time that artists in this country are personae non-gratae, fighting to be heard and understood, artists around the world are much in demand, and asked to assume, of all things, politically useful positions.

Right now, while students, artists, poets, philosophers, and workers have made a revolution in Rumania, and intellectuals are influencing the reunification of Germany and the transformation of Poland, Vaclav Havel, the playwright, actually has become the transitional president of Czechoslovakia. He is the only President in history, as *The Village Voice* proclaimed, “who can quote John Lennon, Samuel Beckett, and Immanuel Kant” in the same interview. Havel has spent decades of his life in and out of prison opposing the governing ideology. But at this moment he is in the Prague palace as the voice of Civic Forum—a movement which brings together artists, intellectuals, students, and workers—a coalition of diverse groups which is inconceivable at present in the U.S. Imagine, if you can, a person of creativity, morality, integrity and vision—imagine an artist—with enough mass support and backing to become President of the United States. Imagine if that person were a leading playwright. Imagine Sam Shepherd, for example. He might one day run for President, it’s possible, but if he were elected it would be because he is a handsome, glamorous movie star, who has appeared on the pages of *People* magazine—many times. Art in this society, like politics in this society, has been relegated to the realm of entertainment. The

rest of the world understands this about the United States and felt it perfectly fitting, poetic justice that Ronald Reagan, a Hollywood actor, a bad actor, actually became President.

For twenty years, five hundred Czech writers, Milan Kundera and Vaclav Havel among them, officially were banned. However, they were still stars. They mimeographed their manuscripts or smuggled them out of Czechoslovakia, printed them in the West and smuggled them back to Prague and all cities where there were Czech readers. They voiced the dreams and courage of the people. These writers were forced underground because they refused to infuse their work with the “obligatory optimism” demanded by the party in power. There was no comfort in their work, and there was no comfort in the life of the artist. There was no money to be made. There was no quantifiable success to be had. Success was measured by the strength of the work in conveying the complexity and absurdity of the Czech situation—poetically. Most writers went into exile, or to jail. Those out of jail, formally banned from any established positions, were forced to work as waiters, waitresses, janitors, furnace stokers, for low wages. When Joseph Papp tried to get Havel out of jail and bring him to the Public Theatre as a dramaturgist, Havel agreed to go, but only if the Czech government also released all his

co-defen-



dants.

The result: Havel did not go to New York. In fact, he spent the next years working in a prison foundry, where he almost died of pneumonia. The point is that these artists stayed true to a personal political vision that kept their spirits alive—kept them in touch with all those, in all areas of Czech life who shared this vision. They appeared to be repressed and silenced, but in fact they were neither. They were preparing for history to take an inevitable turn, at which time they would be ready—intellectually and philosophically ready—to seize the moment and assume real political power.

Why do I go on about Havel and make this seemingly obscure analogy with Czech society? Because these dramatic changes are living proof that the role of the artist is an historical, social, construction. It is not an eternal fixed role. It is not romantic. It is not without context, as many of the art world’s recent opponents would have us believe. It changes, evolves, grows, diminishes, dictates and is dictated to by history and by the market economy. And as such, the creative vision of an artist can be utilized both to construct art and to construct a new society, because these goals each depend on bringing into creation that which does not as yet exist.

In many societies in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia and here, artists use their voices to struggle against the master text, to create alternative narratives in visual imagery, dance, in music, in theater. They interweave all that is silenced, repressed, feared, hidden, and attempt to make it known. The difference between these countries and ours is that here there is no public recognition of the importance of art to daily life.

The recent “A Day Without Art: A National Day of Action and Mourning,” was a brilliant, powerful and successful attempt to make people recognize the place of art and artists in society, and the loss of both as a result of the AIDS epidemic. But imagine a day that was truly without art, not just a day with paintings covered in museums and galleries, but one without architecture, interior design, graphic design, fashion, film, photography, video, theatre, music, dance, magazines, books. Imagine every place where these would be, shrouded in black, and you can understand the power artists actually do have. They fill the void, give meaning to the tedium of everyday life, and make society civilization. We do not feel that collective power in the United States because art has been either placed on a pedestal, removed from daily life, or pushed to the peripheries of the society, manipulated by politicians or used as a means for rich people to become richer. And although artists in this country can produce what they want (as long as public funding is not involved), art actually has little direct societal impact. I believe we are beginning to see that in the nineties this will change and that the goals of the art world will change as well. I think we will be hearing more from those who may not have received visibility in the eighties but who have a great deal to say—those who cross over, move between cultures, those who have struggled to raise serious issues of gender, class and race, those who understand the process of self-definition to be a political act, those who refuse to allow the imagination to be colonized. I think these artists will find ways to seize visibility and to control the means of distribution. I think the more superficial aspects of postmodernism will die a natural death, and from the best of this movement will evolve a new form, which will attempt to reach out to an audience greater than just the art world and will not see it as enough to mirror the fragmentation, banality, and destructiveness of this society and its physical environment, without also offering some vision for developing a less alienated future.

Artists in this country now appear to be refusing the place of isolation and marginality they have been given and which they themselves romantically have often confused with freedom. It is time for artists to challenge that with which they cannot live, and to bring into view that which they refuse to live without. This task of confronting contradictions in all forms, at all levels, of crossing beyond the parameters of the art world to do so, is not the work all artists will have the inclination to choose. It need not be understood so much as a “responsibility” which we all must assume for securing the survival of this planet—but rather a possibility which I personally hope many will embrace.

Carol Becker

Carol Becker is currently Associate Dean of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The preceding is an excerpt from Ms. Becker’s 1990 pamphlet *Social Responsibility and the Place of the Artist in Society* (© 1990) and is available from Lakeview Press, P.O.Box 578279 Chicago, IL 60657.



Dissolving into Everything

A PERSONAL LOOK AT ART AND COMMUNITY

*There was a child went forth everyday,
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day
Or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.*

—Walt Whitman
"There Was a Child Went Forth" from *Autumn Rivulets*

Beginnings

I remember in grade school finding a book called *The Essential Theatre* at the Coldwater Public Library. I loved this book because it had pictures of naked men and women from *Oh! Calcutta* in it. It also had a few paragraphs which discussed strange and fascinating groups called the Open Theatre, the Living Theater, and the Bread and Puppet Theatre. I loved reading about these strange troupes of "avant-garde" artists that traveled the world experimenting. I wanted all my classmates to hear about these people. These magical radicals making giant puppets, performing naked on stage, protesting the war, getting arrested. They seemed the most interesting and exciting people I'd ever read about. Unfortunately, in Coldwater, Michigan, almost no one shared my enthusiasm for Marxist theatre troupes. My friends and relatives all told me they sounded like weirdos and creeps. Only my fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Adams, listened to my stories about these theatre revolutionaries without silencing me. She simply said they sounded very interesting and that she hoped I got to meet them one day.

I thought this was the extent of her encouragement of my obsession until a few weeks later when she called me to her desk to tell me that this year the Christmas play would be a group created piece. Now I don't know if this decision had been influenced by my discussions with Mrs. Adams about my avant-garde heroes or not, but I like to think it was.

Working on this piece was magic time for me. It was not the first time I had worked on a play to be sure. I was constantly writing and rehearsing scripts with friends during and after school. The difference was that this was the first time anyone had given an experimental process validity in my world. Needless to say our Christmas show was not exactly *The Serpent*, but it did express some of our individual hopes and fears. And I can say that life has not been the same for me since creating and appearing in that play fifteen years ago. It made legitimate my belief in collaboration, coalition, and community building.

I go back to this moment in my childhood to talk about art's relationship to the community because my grade school classrooms were spaces where I felt most directly connected to a community. I remember these spaces as mini-societies full of conflict, compromise, division and solidarity. The brutalizations experienced in these spaces are taking me a lifetime to remember and resolve. The positive experiences opened pathways for my future artistic development.

I regularly reflect on these early days spent at Jefferson Elementary School for inspiration about how to move forward with my own work as an artist/educator/activist. I remember small freedoms that were allowed, such as the hours Ms. Morrison allowed my best friend, Steven Schmidt, and me to spend collaborating on our "Were-wolf on the Titanic" novel in fourth grade; or Mrs. Flick's encouraging my first piece of choreography in second grade, a movement piece about elephant poaching in Africa set to the soundtrack of *Dumbo*; or Mrs. Miller allowing our of us to do a research project/performance on vampire legends in sixth grade.

I remember these and other grade school cultural projects as quite democratic collaborations. The patience, sacrifice and commitment that truly collaborative work requires seems to have come more naturally to Craig, the child than it does to Craig, the adult. This is not to infer that these early projects were bereft of conflict, to the contrary, young passion raged high as we worked on our creations. However, I never seem to remember doubting the validity of the collaborative enterprise as I have in adult life. Working together as a community seemed in younger days the only logical way to go.

Currently, I work for Insight Arts, an expansion arts organization I helped found in 1991, with other artists and community members in Rogers Park. Insight Arts, in partnership with the United Church of Rogers Park, provides arts programming, classes, lectures and residencies benefitting the Rogers Park community. The majority of my own work with the organization is organizing and/or conducting free performance workshops for youth. While these workshops vary greatly in terms of length, size and intensity they do share certain key goals: 1) promoting literacy and critical thinking skills, 2) facilitating creative problem solving and conflict resolution, 3) using artistic collaboration as a model for community building, 4) encouraging multi-cultural interdisciplinary approaches to the study of art and the humanities, 5) nurturing the development of individual creativity as an essential component of human development. Most of the longer

performance classes culminate with the presentation of a collaborative piece created by the students and the teachers working in partnership.

Apart from this work with youth in Rogers Park, I also meet weekly with The End of the Ladder performance collective. The five members of this ensemble share an interesting history since we all met in workshops I conducted as an outreach artist at Wisdom Bridge Theatre in 1988.¹ All five of us were instrumental in the founding of Insight Arts and continue to lead workshops with young people in Rogers Park. Our shared commitment to children in Rogers Park often reflects into our art making as we create collaborative performances which are usually performed in the sanctuary of the United Church of Rogers Park. We work on individual pieces for periods of twelve to eighteen months holding regular work-in-progress sessions to gain feedback from invited artists and community members. Our unique history and our cultural diversity (African-American, Euro-American, Latino) pushes us to explore issues of "race", gender, class and history, influenced by our relationships to each other and to the children we work with.

Now I struggle to regain the sense of community I felt for my classmates at Jefferson School. Perhaps it was easier then because as children, in this society, we needed each other's support if we hoped to be heard at all. Our cultural production and political concerns were considered childhood confections, never to be taken too seriously. We knew back then that some things seemed wrong and unfair in our lives. Most of us suffered from some form of psychological, physical or sexual abuse at home, but even for the lucky few that had "functional" families the political reality of a cold, uncaring world provided a silencing gag.

Years later, as I sit in a library at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago reading about one of the most significant public art works of this century, the Visual Art Workshop of the Organization of Black American Culture's *The Wall of Respect* (1967), I am reminded of the early days at Jefferson school. What has been raped out of me as I grew to adulthood in rural Euro-America, was here before me in a sophisticated, precise adult form. This Chicago mural project represented that sense of democratic collaboration and community identification of my distant youth. Anyone familiar with the story of the work knows that it was an intense collaboration between ten to twelve African-American artists of different disciplines and backgrounds. The goal of the project was to create a wall that would commemorate the significant contributions made by African Diasporic men and women through American history. In 1967, in the fascist city-state of Chicago, funding for such a project would have been impossible. But, this was not a project about funding or career enhancement, this was a project that demanded change and confronted history. *The Wall of Respect* remains a magnificent symbol of democratic artistic production. The collaborators worked without salary designing and painting the wall, the paint was supplied by local merchants and community members, the wall was written about in Black newspapers often by journalists receiving little or no pay. Yet most important of all was the way the Wall functioned within the local and national African-American community. Many African-Americans talk about making a sort of pilgrimage to see the wall. Even for the vast majority of African-Americans and other oppressed groups who were unable to view the wall firsthand it remained a symbol of what was possible when cultural workers worked together toward a common goal.

Before going further, I want to suggest that this sense of the possibility of democratic cultural activity is not unique to the *Wall of Respect*, but is instead a dominant characteristic of the cultural production of the majority of Americans who happen not to be Euro-American males. Cultural production has always played a crucial role in the liberatory struggles against slavery, genocide, marginalization and an American apartheid that women and non-white males have had to engage in. Therefore, one of the first tasks that confronts us as cultural workers interested in working "in community" is the need to search out and reclaim a more honest approach to the history of American art making. This will not be easy considering the genocidal bent of art schools that continue to force students to memorize the racist texts of H. H. Arnason's *History of Modern Art* which neglects to include artists of color, even when they have been canonized by the dominant art world.² The second task is to prepare ourselves for the onslaught of criticism that pours itself upon anyone who dares to suggest to the still dominant "Art for Art's Sake" boys that artistic production can be a liberatory practice. Finally, those of us interested in a democratic approach to art must remember to remain truly democratic, this means we must look closely at all forms of cultural production and not be too quick to judge less obviously "liberatory" work as insignificant. We must remember that in every artistic gesture, in a society that denies individual creativity, is an act of rebellion.

Transformations

My "home", Coldwater, Michigan, proved to be where I needed to go to reclaim the sense of community I'd once felt was a natural part of cultural production. I was invited

back to my own high school to conduct a four month residency which would result in the first school play in over a decade. I selected Nikolai Gogol's text *The Government Inspector* for inspiration. I felt the play's themes of greed, apathy, prejudice and injustice infecting the citizens of a small Russian town was an interesting parallel to my own sense of frustration at living in Coldwater as a high school student.

I told the large cast of thirty young people that we would be "confronting" rather than merely presenting the play. We worked movement and character improvisations to develop ways we related to the text. New characters were added and the gender of many of the characters was changed from male to female. The role of the mayor's daughter, a wicked caricature, in Gogol's text, was expanded into a tragic heroine. Special committees were established that read other works by Gogol and studied art of the period. We also studied and made references to the great Russian avant-garde director Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of the play.

My major models in undergraduate school had been the experimental directors Anne Bogart, Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner and Peter Stein. All four of these directors deconstructed "classic" texts in ways similar to mine. They also all encouraged performers to connect in personal ways to the material. The difference is they had been working with professional or college artists on their productions. I, on the other hand, was working with young people, most of whom had never been on stage before. My ideas for the production first seemed to terrify the young cast, yet, because we had the luxury of time, the cast eventually became engaged with the process. By the time of our presentation every cast member seemed to feel empowered by our work. I, too, for the first time felt a very real sense of accomplishment with my work. As if I had found a way to use myself effectively as both educator and artist.

Although I would consider this residency easily the most important and successful work I've been part of in my artistic life, it is often difficult to explain to "art world" friends why I feel so strongly about an "outreach" project. After one admirer of my work wrote to me from Dayton, begging me not to get so caught up in education that I forget to do "real" art, I began to realize that I needed to explore history to see if I could find other artists who had experienced similar fulfillment when working in a non-traditional setting.

I turned to the work of one of my favorite visual artists, the sculptor, painter and printmaker, Elizabeth Catlett. Catlett describes a similar shift in her thinking when she moved from New York to Mexico City in 1946. Her initial reason for moving was to distance herself from teaching responsibilities so that she could focus on a fellowship project. She explains her choice of location as follows:

"I chose Mexico as the nearest place without racism and segregation, but also because of the public art movement there, with its mural painting and printmaking - two mediums that reach great numbers of people. Beginning to realize that as a Black woman privileged to have become a sculptor and graphic artist I owed by dues to Black people. I was looking for ways to link my personal expression with broader black cultural needs."³

Once in Mexico Catlett joined the Taller de Gráfica Popular. The collective, dedicated to democratic art making, created posters, leaflets, booklets and illustrations for textbooks. TCP held meeting every Friday night when community members could discuss their personal and political problems and ask for graphic help.

Catlett has described the years at TCP as thrilling, mind expanding times. She particularly points out the significance the collaborative process and community input has had on her development as an artist committed to social change.

Four decades later, we find another community project significantly transforming the work of performance artist, Anna Halprin. Halprin was certainly no stranger to "non-traditional" art making. As early as 1965, she was creating "dances" with untrained community members. Always informed by chance and change, Halprin created pieces that relied upon active audience participation and she worked with a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural group of collaborators known as the San Francisco Dance Workshop. During the late seventies, Halprin began using her work "holistically" to combat the cancer that was occupying her body. After successfully winning the battle against the disease, Halprin decided to use what she had learned from the experience and once again connect with a larger community.

This began simply enough as a series of workshops in Marin County, California, led by Halprin and her husband, Lawrence Halprin. In these workshops, the Halprins led hundreds of community residents in an exploration of the natural environment. The participants moved together, talked together, enacted scenarios together, and drew pictures of images that came to them. One image, the form of nearby Mount Tamalpais kept reappearing in drawing after drawing.



This wasn't totally surprising, since Mount Tamalpais had become a local site of fear and grief because of a series of brutal murders of women that had occurred there. The mountain had become an off limits zone, especially for women traveling alone. What once had been a place of peace and beauty was now associated violence and death.

Halprin suggested that the workshop members use their relationship to the crimes to create a dance/ritual. This led to the creation of a performance called *In and On the Mountain*. The first half of the performance took part in the theatre of the College of Marin. The dancers moved to invoke the spirit of the mountain and enacted representations of the murders. Two days later the second half of the performance took place. Performers and witnesses went to the mountain peak and walked down the trails where the victims had died. The performers and the audience were publicly reclaiming the mountain for the community.

Less than a week after the dance/ritual the police received an anonymous tip and the killer was captured. As word of the performance and the following events spread throughout the "art world" Halprin was accused of being everything from a crank to a hustler. The "art world" seemed particularly hostile to the idea that the capture of the criminal and the workshop/performance were in any way, shape, or form connected to each other. Halprin was quick to point out that the "holistic" power of the performance was more evident in the transformation of the performers and the community than in the abduction of the killer.⁴

Halprin's work has continued to develop towards large scale holistic performance/rituals. She has created global "dances" aimed at combatting AIDS, facilitating world peace, and promoting understanding among different peoples.

What Halprin and Catlett represent in their very different approaches to community art making is a fierce commitment to growth. Both women have ceaselessly challenged themselves to transform and evolve their processes in attempts to create empowering artwork.

These individual examples serve those of us interested in working outside the traditional art world as powerful reminders that artists have been questioning their relationship to society throughout this century. They also remind us that there have been and will remain many different roads to be traveled and strategies to be experimented with. Working "outside" of the "art world" cannot be accomplished by trying to follow rigid patterns and systems. It is by its very nature a release into fluidity and change.

Reactions

The gradual growth of my work towards an integration of my interests in performance, political activism, community development and education brought angry protests from many of my peers and teachers. Some of these arguments were so passionately articulated and so regularly voiced that at times I doubted my own validity as both a cultural worker and a political activist. Fortunately, I found strength and solidarity as I read interviews with and essays by and about artists such as John Malpede, Anna Halprin, Willie Birch, Judith Jackson, Suzanne Lacy, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, James Luna, Adrian Piper and Charles Simmonds, who dared to work in and with various communities in complex multi-faceted ways. These artists and many others empowered me by example.

As I began to study artists who chose to work "in community," I began to see certain similarities in the criticisms being lodged against us. Often the criticisms crossed media and sensibilities. As objections to my own cultural practice arose I began to divide negative responses into three major categories: 1) concern that I was neglecting my own voice 2) concern that I was dooming myself to the creation of sentimental "politically correct" ineffectual art, 3) concern that I was limiting my "real" talents as a community activist by bothering with art at all. I want to take this opportunity to answer these critics in what admittedly is a more thorough and reflective way than I usually respond in person. (Generally I become strident and/or dismissive when challenged on these issues.)

The most common response begins as a patronizing compliment before dovetailing into patronizing concern. The concerned party begins by telling me how wonderful I am and how important it is that I'm "really out there, changing things." Once they think they have me sufficiently stroked they tell me they are very worried about me. Aren't I giving up too much of myself working with these children all the time? Won't I lose my own voice trying to always give voice to others?

I reassure the concerned party that I have not in any way given up working with grown up people. I work weekly with the End of the Ladder, I've appeared in films, collaborative performances and plays, and I even sometimes obsess on myself and work up a solo piece. I think it's important to work in different structures and with different venues as often as possible. I don't plan to give up any of my current artistic preoccupations.

Now about this great fear that I will lose my individual

voice giving voice to others, I can only tell the concerned party to drop in during one of my workshop sessions and hear my voice getting quite a workout. My work outside of the official art world has only strengthened these vocal chords intellectually, morally and aesthetically. Suggesting that the only way one can protect their voice is through mono-cultural isolationism is a little much.

It is also crucial that I personally have never claimed that I was giving "voice to the voiceless" in my work at Insight Arts. While the arts workshops in Rogers Park do provide forums that often lead to a greater sense of self-esteem and community consciousness, this is only because the young participants choose to develop these skills in themselves. Rather than seeing myself as a "giver of voice" I see myself as an individual artist that often engages young people in dialog. During our dialogs voices collide, confront, harmonize and change in pitch and volume. My voice may lead at times, but just as often a younger voice may be leading me. Obviously my role as educator requires a conscious effort to keep from silencing or distorting other voices in the group.

To provide as strong a forum as possible for these voices to be heard, I often choose to work with large teams of multi-generational artists/educators from a variety of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. I've found that the larger and more diverse the workshop leaders, the more likely all of the young participants can find a vehicle to develop their artistic visions. I will qualify this by saying that most of the time I personally fail to create truly multi-vocal structures in the workshops I teach and the artwork I create. We do not, yet, have enough practical and theoretical models for this kind of liberatory cultural production. Sometimes I feel I'm running into walls in the dark. There is an overwhelming temptation to fall back into a more hierarchical pedagogical structure. This is especially tempting when dealing with young people who often feel more comfortable in a more traditional repressive atmosphere.

Perhaps I can illustrate some of the threats and opportunities of a more dialogical art making practice by examining the work of one of the "stars" of the community art world, Tim Rollins. Rollins is a thirty-seven year old Euro-American, art school trained artist who has for the past twelve years worked with young African-American and Latino students creating collaborative visual art projects. Rollins, an original founder of the political art collective Group Material, began working as a teacher in the "Learning to Read Through the Arts" program in 1980. This program put him in touch with a number of "learning disabled" and "emotionally handicapped" teens who loved art and inspired Rollins to found the group Kids of Survival and later the Art and Knowledge workshop. Rollins's work has been genuinely successful on a number of practical fronts. The young people taking part in the programs gain a forum for their artistic voices as well as gaining skill in literacy and critical thinking. Rollins and KOS have also had incredible financial success. They have received show and commissions around the world (including Chicago's Harold Washington Library), appeared in numerous art journals and received several prestigious awards.

Rollins, however, has been sharply criticized over the last few years for number of quite legitimate reasons.⁵ The major critics of Rollins have charged that his relationship with KOS smacks of careerism and plantation politics. Several have questioned why the collective calls itself Tim Rollins and KOS, emphasizing Rollins's individuality and making invisible the identities of his young collaborators. The troubling situation is exacerbated by the political realities of Rollins and the young peoples cultural identities. Rollins the white, male, college educated, artist is named, the African-American and Latino youth are simply Kids of Survival.

In Rollins and KOS's cultural production we see a reflection of the trouble in the naming process. Rollins/KOS are best known for their work dealing with literary sources. I mean this literally since Rollins/KOS paint over the pages of books. Rollins has said that this formal strategy was introduced to him quite accidentally by a young student in the reading program who grabbed one of Rollins's books and began painting on its pages. Rollins's anger quickly disappeared when he realized the young man had found the perfect metaphor for the links between literacy and artistic inspiration. The question critics pose to Rollins now is why does KOS always use books from the western tradition. When questioned by Michelle Wallace about why the young people aren't encouraged to use a text such as Toni Morrison's *The Song of Solomon* as inspiration, Rollins replied "we're too close to it."⁶ Rollins seems to be suggesting in this and similar statements that KOS should dedicate their energies to confronting "western" culture rather than reclaiming and redefining multi-cultural American perspectives.

It is rather presumptuous of Rollins to suggest that the young people of color he is working with should use their critical thinking skills solely to deconstruct white culture. If this is Rollins conception of a critical pedagogy it is quite limited. However, I must admit that I can empathize with Rollins's pedagogical flaw, for I have struggled against similar hole in my own thinking from time to time. It is very easy for Euro-Americans to ignore the complexity of

African-American, Asian-American, Latino and Native-American culture. We remain ignorant to the fact that the enormity of historical repressions experienced by these various communities have produced a polyphony of strategies. There is not a "black" take on things that Morrison would somehow represent, anymore than there is a "white" take represented by John Updike.

This means that young African-American students in KOS may not necessarily be as "close" to Morrison's world view as Rollins thinks. We cannot forget that most economically disadvantaged young people connect most often to films, television and popular music rather than literature. The schools they are forced to attend usually reinforce a mono-cultural, denial of difference and historical persecution. Many of the children I teach for example, are hearing about everything from Nat Turner to the Harlem Renaissance for the first time in their lives. I have found during many a lively seminar discussion with young people that it is always abortive to assume who will or will not connect to any piece of literature.

Furthermore, I think it is extremely important to encourage young people to engage in critical thinking with all forms of cultural production. It is patronizing and destructive to encourage a child to read Thoreau's *Walden* with a critical eye yet simply absorb *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* because s/he is "closer" to the text. Dr. King's question *Where Do We Go From Here?* has been answered by several members of every cultural group in a variety of different ways. Space must be given for young people of color to examine their own cultural traditions for necessary tools of personal empowerment.

With all of this said, I want to focus on some of the more positive aspects of Rollins's work with KOS. One of the strong suits of Rollins/KOS is the extremely high "quality" of the visual works they produce. The work is often remarkably beautiful and ideologically challenging. It is also evident that within an agreed upon formal framework one sees strong personal visions emerge from the various participants. When we view a retrospective sampling of the work over the past ten years we see that Rollins is not simply a dominant voice leading the pack, but that Rollins/KOS have been challenging each other every step of the way.

Tim Rollins naming of himself, even in problematic terms, actually proves to be one of the most laudable aspects of this work. Too many "outreach" artists covet the role of "invisible facilitator" claiming to be almost supernatural guides giving "voice to the voiceless." In my experience these "invisible" artists often exert more manipulative control over the voices of the collaborators than they would wish to admit. A perfect example of this is Free Street Theater's award winning musical *PROJECT!*. *PROJECT!* was billed as the "voice of the people of Cabrini Green" and sold to a blindly enthusiastic press as the epitome of artistic empowerment. In reality the director, writer, lyricist and composer were all white artists interpreting the "gritty reality" of life in the housing project. Evidence does show that the production was built with community input and collaboration. However, it never seems to have been questioned that every creative decision was made by a white director and his white collaborators. (The choreographer was the only African-American at the decision making level).⁸

The form of *PROJECT!* reflects the hidden Euro-centric bias of the enterprise. The performance consists of traditional "Broadway" musical numbers intercut with videotape interviews with members of the community. The combination of documentary and artifice is undeniably moving and at times, illuminating of community concerns. Unfortunately, the entire piece has an almost anthropological form explaining to "us" what its like for "them" in the ghetto. I have no problem with targeting a performance piece about poverty towards a middle class audience. It is just important to admit that you are making this choice rather than distorting it into a slice of life portrait. The musical ends with a sense of hope for the future. I have to question who is being empowered with this sense of hope; is it the economically disadvantaged people the musical claims to speak for, or the middle class target audience that the musical is speaking to?

I would contend that the real failure of a piece of work like *PROJECT!* is its refusal to confront the cross-cultural aspects of its creation. The piece is really not the voice of the people of Cabrini. Rather it is a strange inter-cultural project; a very wealthy white "auteur," Patrick Henry, engaging in dialog with an economically disadvantaged, primarily African-American community. The project could have been about crossing these borders of "race", class, culture, education and opportunity. Exciting exchanges could have been initiated around issues of racism, classism, historical memory, economic reform and cultural genocide. Unfortunately, Henry chose to keep his cultural reality invisible and used his "vision" to fabricate a "giving of voice" to the community. A newspaper in North Carolina went as far as to say that the now deceased Henry had given a Cabrini resident and *PROJECT!* cast member, her freedom by creating the musical.

What I'm suggesting is, that although Rollins may open himself up to legitimate criticism by retaining his visibility in this work with South Bronx youth, he is actually serving a



photos by
Craig Harshaw
Insight Arts Prod.

more empowering role than those artists who pretend they are simply facilitating others voices. A young person working with Rollins knows exactly where s/he stands in terms of the collaborative process. S/He knows that much of the formal strategies of the work are determined by Rollins. S/He realizes that the work created is partly hers/his, partly Rollins's and partly the collective's vision. This seems far more empowering and less confusing than the relationship many "community" artists establish with their collaborators. The person working with Henry, for example, must be quite confused when told s/he is solely responsible for work that was orchestrated and edited by Henry and company. How do people "empowered" by Henry move on to create what really is their own art? Or, is part of this type of "empowerment" the establishment of artistic dependency in the community? Do some community artists enjoy the power trip of knowing they are "giving voice" so much that they set up structures that necessitate their "facilitating" presence at all times.

Questions about the coercive nature of our well meaning work must always be asked by those of us involved in "community" art. This is especially true for those of us working with children. We need not to be afraid to challenge ourselves on deeper levels than critics are willing to challenge us. I am not suggesting that Rollins, or myself for that matter, should be let off the hook when the pedagogical/aesthetic practice seems questionable. All of us working in community art need to work to confront our own biases and our own limitations. We need to struggle to find adequate structures to maintain our voices in an honestly dialogical relationship with our collaborators young or old.

As I struggle forward looking for these structures I constantly run into fellow artists that tell me I am doomed to failure. Usually these artists speak with the voice of experience telling about a disastrous outreach experience from their past. I'm told that spending too much of my time working with children will force me to "burn out."

These doom sayers are often shocked when I tell them that I have also failed on numerous occasions. In fact, failure is built in component of doing art in non-traditional settings. Most of us who work in economically disadvantaged communities find ourselves bombarded by tragedy and confusion on a daily basis. I cannot begin to express the level of grief and outrage I've experienced when told that a student of mine has been the victim of a gunshot or stabbing. The sense of failure when a former student begins to drift towards criminal activity or chemical addiction makes you re-examine your every action with the child. We do not need to be warned about failure, we see it every day.

Often, friends and teachers have warned me about a more aesthetic kind of failure. The idea that community artists get so wrapped up in politics (content) that they forget about art (form). While I usually dismiss such statements as snobbish and classist, I do have to admit that a kind of transformation occurs when artists shift to working outside the traditional gallery/academic/museum/theatre structure. What many call a loss of formal precision I suggest is really a shifting of formal strategies.

This shifting of formal strategies can perhaps best be illustrated by turning to the work of the radical Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés. Sanjinés usually works in collaboration with a collective of fellow activist film makers called the Ukamau group creating films which hope to empower the Bolivian Native American community towards revolution. Sanjinés's early films were formally complex works obviously influenced by the French new wave and the Italian neo-realism. The films tended to have rebel protagonists and conservative antagonists.⁹

During an extensive tour of his film *Blood of the Condor* (1969), Sanjinés and the Ukamau group began to realize that the work was failing to communicate to the Indians of the countryside. As Sanjinés wrote:¹⁰

"It is not that they could not understand what was being said; it was rather a formal conflict at the level of the medium itself which did not correspond to the internal rhythms of our people or their profound conception of reality."

So the Ukamau group decided to open their film making process up by producing film, not simply for or about but actually with the community.

Fears that the films would lose a sense of formal experimentation were soon put to rest as the artists began their collaboration. The films actually became more fragmentary and elliptical as the community dictated that the content reflect commonly shared events. First hand testimony and re-enactments of events by survivors began to be favored over traditional dramatic recreations. Most dramatically the community had little interest in conventional heroes or villains and began exploring episodes of collective triumph and responsibility.

Sanjinés's evolution as a community based film maker serves as a model for the artist seeking to work dialogically with a community. Many of the audience members for the film are active participants during the film making process. This has allowed the Ukamau group's work to function in some ways as community based "home movies." The

content, form and process of production are all based in shared experience between community members. Sanjinés works for political and economic empowerment through art making. he and his collaborators create films that become the cultural property of the community. The films themselves serve as a catalyst for coalition building amongst the makers.

Perhaps Sanjinés with his work begins to answer those persistent questions about the place of art in the modern world. Looking at the Ukamau group's work we see that the films actually do provide more than simply an ideological, entertainment or educational function, they also allow a community to begin to define a kind of collective aesthetic sensibility. An artistic language emerges that allows community members to make sense of the world around them.

Working in a very different environment, the fragmented inner city landscape of Los Angeles, California, performance artist John Malpede has embarked on an artistic voyage similar to Sanjinés. In 1984, Malpede began to actively engage with the homeless population in L.A.'s Skid Row.¹¹ After having performed solo pieces dealing with the issue, he decided he wanted more direct contact with the population. His first course of action was to begin working with an activist organization, the Inner City Law Center, which watchdogs the rights of the poor and homeless citizens of Skid Row. While continuing his full time work with Inner City Law, Malpede proceeded to organize a touring ensemble comprised of residents of Skid Row. The members of the ensemble, named the Los Angeles Poverty Department, create performances informed by their own daily experiences as second class citizens in America. The performances are usually brutal looks at the realities of the artists' lives.

Surprisingly, LAPD most often receives criticism from the "politically correct" camp that objects to the content and the form and even the validity of the work. For example, when LAPD appeared here in Chicago two years ago at Randolph Street Gallery, a huge outcry was heard over the "sexist" nature of the enterprise, when LAPD conducted a residency program with several homeless men in the Chicago community and developed a performance in collaboration with the men. The performance piece contained graphically misogynistic language and was structured around an autobiographical story of severe childhood abuse suffered by one of the men at the hands of a foster mother. Angry protests were raised in person and in print that this was not the sort of material worthy of presentation at Randolph Street.

To me the protestors missed the point of the piece. One of the major concerns of the evening seemed to be the way trauma clouds words and deeds. The other story which lent structure to the evening was about the loss of a custodial job that had been the catalyst for another man's homeless condition. The two stories, one of economic dependency and the other of childhood abuse, began to suggest the complexity of the individual artist's current disenfranchisement. It did not offer simple analysis or simple solutions. It forced the audience to begin to confront the myriad economic, political, psychological and social problems that work to create and maintain an underclass in our society. My own feeling was that the sexist language was part of this complex analysis of the problem. We were allowed to reflect on the way "victims" often become "victimizers."

Perhaps this sharp dose of reality was a little too much for the mostly white liberal art crowd to stomach. As one "art world" acquaintance of mine remarked after seeing the show: "it failed because I didn't feel sorry for those men at all. They deserve to be homeless for all I care!" As I reminded this acquaintance, perhaps the failure had been his own lack of humanity - no group of artists should have had to justify their basic human right to adequate shelter, food and clothing.

After the performance an angry letter appeared in Chicago's free weekly, *The Reader*, attacking Malpede's work as inherently careerist and exploitive of the homeless. The writer of the letter, who was "tired of artists who use social issues" informed Malpede that if he really cared about the homeless, he would become a social worker and not an artist. This letter, written by a man who admittedly had never seen LAPD's work (he became incensed just by reading Justin Hayford's review in the previous *Reader*), was arguing that cultural production should be as far removed as possible from social activism. To the writer of this letter Malpede has no right to call himself an artist if his work also addresses pragmatic issues of social justice.

The opinion that art making and political activism are diametrically opposed vocations has often been voiced as a critique of my own work. Surprisingly, it is not a criticism exclusively voiced by artists wishing to remain "apolitical." In fact, I have often been reproached by former art makers who stopped their cultural production to allow more time for their political agendas. These activists often tell me that I would be more useful as an educator or a child's rights activist than I ever will be as an artist working with children. These criticisms seem to parallel the ones coming from the more traditional members of the art world. Basically, I am being chastised for what is seen as an inability to clearly choose a vocation. In other words, I am

being informed that I must either make "pure" art or do "pure" community empowerment. That there might possibly be a strong and natural relationship between artistic production and community development never seems to enter into the discussion.

The negation of the relationship between creative expression and community development stems out of years of isolationism by the Euro-American art establishment. Certainly, the discourse that has contextualized and canonized the work of white male "modernists" has willingly contributed to this problem. The continued toleration of this obviously inadequate mode of discourse has created the current state of confusion we find ourselves in. Because the art world, in alliance with the academic world, continues for reasons of racism, sexism, classism, and fear of change to cling to these uninspiring models, American cultural workers continue to struggle to justify their very existence in society. What those of us interested in the progress of democratic cultural production and community empowerment must now do is articulate the necessity of creative expression as crucial to global health. If this challenge is attempted by artists and arts organizations the question of choosing art over action will become redundant in our lifetime. If the challenge continues to be ignored we will face a future of censorship and funding shortages as our work drifts further and further away from the crucial issues of the day.

Choices

Perhaps the choices I make today are the results of my early experimentation in grade school. These early projects that I reflect on were possible only because of the nurturing spirit of a few teachers who took the time to listen and respond. It shouldn't really be any surprise then that I have pursued a path blurring the boundaries between educator and artist. I suppose these disciplines have since my early days been seen as two sides of the same coin. Why, then, has this belief system so often offended the art establishment?

When people react aggressively to the idea of working "in community", what exactly are they reacting against? I believe many artists may simply feel threatened by those of us who work outside the gallery/ museum/ theatre system because they sense a not of accusation in our voices. But listen more carefully, look more deeply at the multiplicity of strategies artists working "in community" use and I think it will become more difficult to generalize about the "quality" of our work. Conversely, I hope that I have not suggested that the artist more comfortable in his/her studio is somehow less worthy than the artist more comfortable in the street. We live in terribly complex times and we need a variety of artistic means to get us through our lives.

I am suggesting, however, that currently a structure exists that limits our appreciation of individual human creativity. This structure is supported by the art world which seeks to block most citizens' capacity to think of themselves as artists. It is the responsibility of those of us named "artist" to make sure we are supporting the rights of all people to express their creativity in the manner and form they see fit. Many would argue with me that the "quality" of art will fall if individual human creativity is respected. They fear that art will disappear. In this they may eventually be right. However, I choose to believe, along with the Cuban film theorist Julio García Espinosa that "Art will not disappear into nothingness; it will disappear into everything." This is certainly the utopian concept that I aim towards in my work. One day I believe the walls surrounding the "art world" will fall. Only then, when the term becomes redundant, will we truly have an art of the community.

Craig Harshaw, 1992

Footnotes

1. This Summer Teen Workshop was co-directed by Tricia Alexander. In the fall of 1989, Alexander and I initiated a youth ensemble which the participants named Theatre Bound. This ensemble financed by Wisdom Bridge Theatre performed regularly throughout the city as well as creating a book and exhibiting visual art. The development of my work as an artist "in community" was profoundly shaped by my experiences with Theatre Bound. The twelve members of the ensemble, most of whom continue to create art were: Robert Banta, Shalona Byrd, Keyshaun flowers, Vivian Garcia, Megan Kondal, Radiah Sewell, Freda Washington, Terrence Washington, and Karl Wymbs.

2. H. H. Arnason *History of Modern Art* third edition revised and updated by Daniel Wheeler (New York, Henry N. Abrams Inc., 1986). This "updated and revised" edition for example fails to include any mention of artists such as Romare Bearden, Aaron Douglas, Jacob Lawrence, Faith Ringgold, or Betye Saar, while including information on a host of less influential European-American artists.

3. Elizabeth Catlett, "Responding to Cultural Hunger" *Reimaging America*

4. Anna Halprin TDR

5. Michele Wallace "Tim Rollins and KOS" *Invisibility Blues* (New York, Verso Press, 1990) pp. 199-210.

6. *ibid.* pp. 206-207.

7. In 1989/1990 while working with Alexander/Theatre Bound, I accepted the term facilitator as a legitimate description of my work. I have since come to believe that terms such as this actually serve to create a more manipulative hierarchy than the use of traditional terms such as teacher or director. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the members of Theatre Bound for encouraging me to analyze the use of the seemingly nurturing title.

8. *PROJECT* was directed by Patrick Henry with music by Douglas Loftstrom, lyrics by Tricia Alexander and choreography by Donald Douglas. It is important to note that Loftstrom and Alexander have been instrumental in the development of Insight Arts and that Douglas worked briefly with Theatre Bound in 1989/1990.

9. Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987) pp. 293-304.

10. *ibid.* p. 300.

11. Linda Frye Burnham, *Reimaging America* pp. 168-172.

Light in Floods

HINE, TEPLICA

AND THE
DOCUMENTATION

OF CHILDHOOD

TRAGEDIES



In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Carl Jung puts forth the idea that artists are those people who have no free will, in as much as they are destined to be the channels for the demands of the collective consciousness, so that the desires of society become manifest through them, be they destructive or constructive. I find strains of this in much of the contemporary discourse regarding artists and socially active work. Refreshing as it is to dispose of the idea of the egocentric artist/auteur, there are inherent dangers in remaking the idealistic 19th century social artist, and likewise much to learn.

My interest in social activism as artwork has been through my association with David Teplica, a photographer and plastic surgeon. The combination of these two careers has placed him in a position to respond to the tragedy of childhood burn trauma both as a physician and as an artist. His exhibition (in collaboration with video artist Greg Boozell and Ellin Brown) for the Children's Burn Awareness Program became the springboard for my interest in socially relevant work and in turn the focus of this issue. The exhibition, *Scars of Childhood* as displayed in the Athenaeum Gallery in the AMA building in Chicago contains text about the personal experiences of Ms. Brown, herself a survivor of a childhood burn, a video installation by Boozell, and a collection of photographs by Dr. Teplica.

Upon entering the exhibition area (inset partitions with series of photographs and framed text) one must deal with the cold statistics of childhood burn victims - over half are preventable and a frightening number are the result of abuse. The next image is a text which reads "I had

just entered kindergarten when the flames consumed my flesh. I spent the next nine months in the hospital," images of delicate children's hands, legs and torsos wrapped with yards of fraying gauze. The exhibition continues this play between story and image, drawing us into this child's world through almost sensual images that are betrayed by the reality of the pain of permanent scarring, physical deformity, social isolation and emotional trauma as told by the accompanying text. The viewer senses an odd tugging from the teary eyes of a small Mexican child, and sinking hollow feeling when confronted with the medical probes, caged cribs and body restraints these children must suffer on top of their physical trauma.

The last area is a visual debate between two video monitors that switch between an interview of a mother

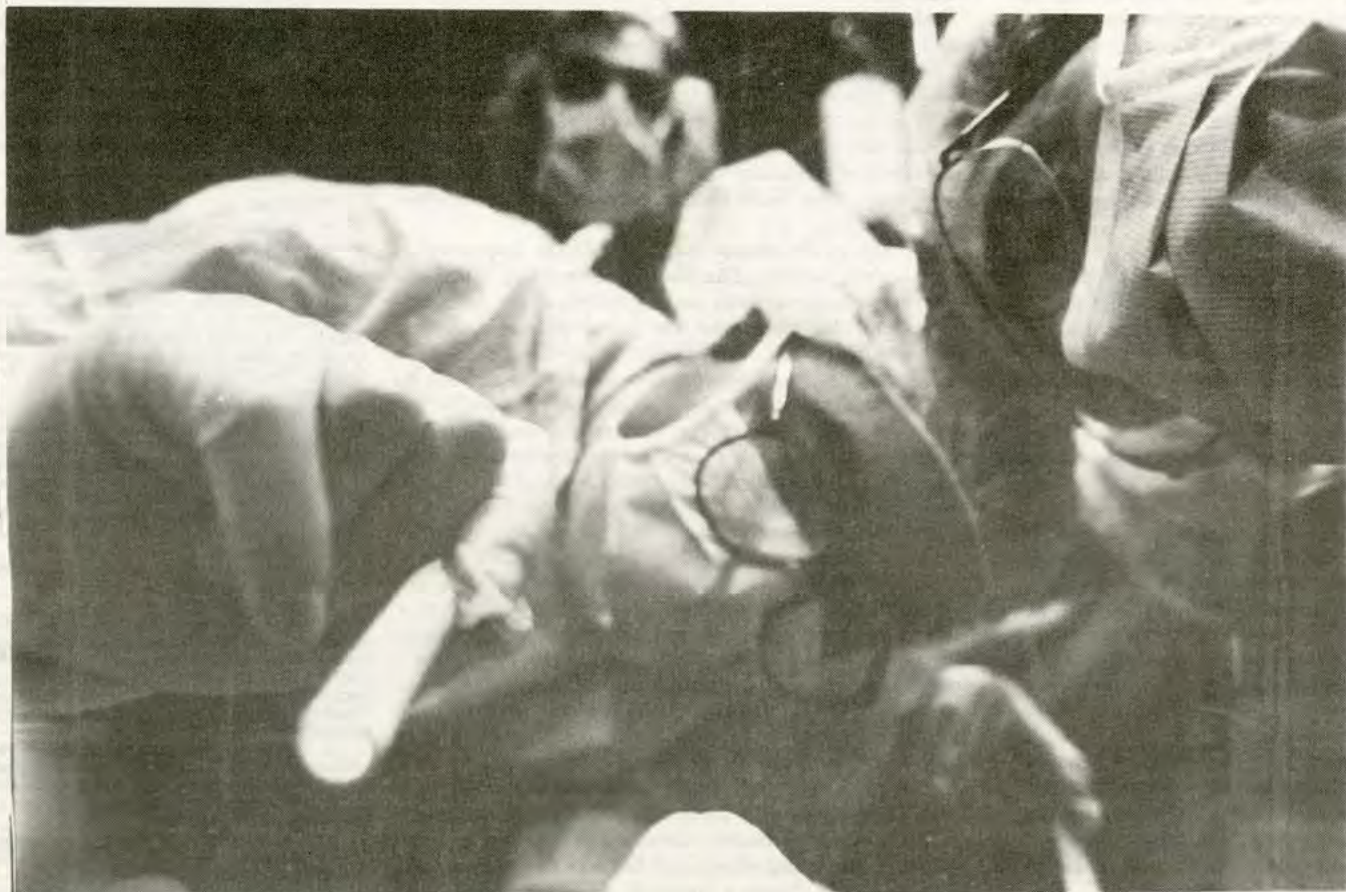
(focused tightly only on one eye), who was wrongly accused of scalding her son, and the doctors, social workers, psychiatrists, and nurses who must deal with the larger issues and greater social concerns. Not to say they are without sensitivity, as from the video we gain an understanding of the difficult resolution between the personal impact and the demands we, as society, place on these people to do something.

Boozell's video worked to offset some of the child fetishization with an exposé of the other victims. All are able to tell their story - there is no one to blame. So often tragedies of society create scapegoats rather than responsive solutions. The video seems to augment the single viewpoint of the child, by examining the true complexity of the situation. In this the three artists were successful in their message of confronting the average citizen and putting the responsibility squarely on her shoulders. We, as a society, are challenged to protect those who are (in this case, truly) unable to help or protect themselves.

In creating the Children's Burn Awareness Program,

four years ago, Teplica drew on the work of photographer, Lewis Wickes Hine, and the precedent of Hine's work for the National Child Labor Committee, which in the early 20th century used photography and public education exhibitions to highlight the escalating abuse of children as laborers in grueling and dangerous workplaces. It is undeniable that since its invention, photography has been used as a means of documentation and propaganda. Hine took on the camera as an educational device and luckily had a good eye (Hine was an educator). With Teplica's training as an artist, his visual images are more packed, perhaps slicker and more "readable" to a mass audience (which is itself more visually literate); there is a savvy sense to his image making, which lends itself well to contemporary educational use.

The aim of social awareness programs such as The Children's Burn Awareness Program or The Child Labor Reform Movement is straightforwardly to elevate the awareness of a condition, and through that awareness (or propaganda) effect social behavioral change. The CBAP works at this awareness through public service announcements (a child audience geared claymation by Chris Fagan), posters and advertising, "sloganeering" (Be Aware, Beware), and exhibitions of provocative



artworks. Many of the same devices used by the National Child Labor Committee to end child labor abuses. The difference I see is in the contextualization of such an organization. By directly comparing the two, one may certainly see the influences of civil rights history, feminism, and the implications of political correctness as artistic discourse.

Following Teplica's parallel to the social activism of the 19th century one must question if this is all a repeat of Victorian moralism from which the NCLC came, or the wealthy feeling pity for the "less fortunates". Hine, I believe, is a direct descendent of British social activism beginning in the mid-19th century, particularly with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the various offshoots of that movement who promoted the use of artwork to illustrate stories of moral and ethical intent. High on the list was the recurring theme of the fallen woman and the femme fatale (Judith, Salome, Lilith, etc.), placing the burden of moral upkeep on women.

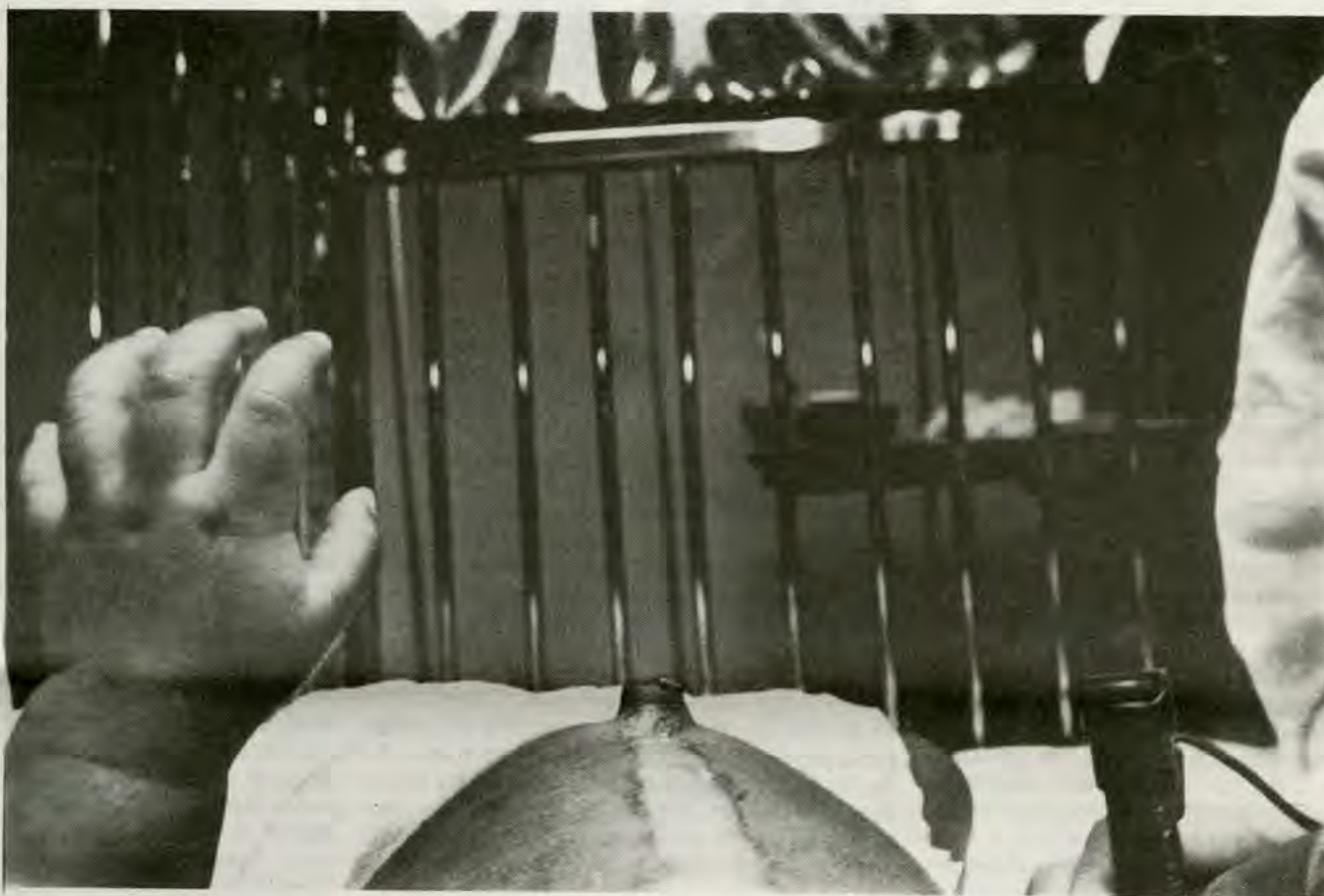
The failure of Hine (though certainly from a contemporary perspective) would be in the maintenance of a superior role, pitying the "unfortunates", and underscoring visually the Us/They separation. To point, his photographs of child laborers were generally taken from his point of view, eye level, and framing the subject as an object to be studied. All of this seemed to reinforce the pious position of the middle class Victorian do-gooders who formed the committee and were generally the bulk of the audience. There seems to be something in that position that says, "you are an other and are incapable of helping yourself," and an implication that

the photographic subjects would not be the type of person seeing these images. He was giving his audience (middle-class society women) exactly what they wanted - the dirt and grit of life without getting their hands soiled, and an opportunity to exert their pious Christian morality upon the poor. To his credit and theirs, however, these do-gooders were motivated to pass legislation that eventually eliminated the employment of very young children and kept even older children out of extremely hazardous workplaces.

In contrast to this, the postmodern artist (in accordance with what I take as the new imperative) must be responsible and involved, all products and actions are seen as having effect. The benefit of this new mode is in that the artist is again recognized as citizen and social participant and is no longer separate from those around her. The critical objectivity of looking at the product as pure and uninfluenced by the artist's character or social concerns, is as well as discredited. At the same time, I would be concerned about the myopia of social activism, as the continually changing context that generates social agendas is based on current social mores and personal ethical judgment.

Particularly interesting is the new turn that is taken in addressing the position of the camera. A large majority of the photographs taken by Teplica are from the child's point of view. The viewer is immediately and powerfully placed in the position of a child, being caged, probed and swarmed by surgical instruments, masked doctors, and hulking medical equipment. Teplica's artistic sensitivity, then, is in not being a voyeur, much as

Hine and many artists doing social documentary were. There is genuine empathy for the subject, made clear by placing the subject (the child) as the center of the photographic world, seeing from his point of view, not the photographer's. One major influence performance has had on the art world is promoting individual voice and self, particularly in feminist performance of the late 70's/early 80's, emphasizing the personal as political. Along with a sense of speaking for oneself came an exposure of truth and in many cases that meant exposing abuse. As art becomes more and more about dealing with denied truths, it has increased the single voice aesthetic each person speaks their own truth. In the case of many very young childhood burn victims, they are unable to communicate clearly enough to tell their own story. The question then is: should artists or anyone take the presumption of telling that much needed story? Having faulted Hine as being unable to transcend the Us/They dichotomy, I actually see the success in Teplica and Brown's collaboration in creating a single voice in their combination of text and image. Each stands alone and complements the other without being illustrative or



narrative. They have submitted their individual egos to the project. It is not really Ellin Brown's story or David Teplica's view, one reads it simply as *the* story.

Though a far cry from many of the class issues which may have affected Hine's work, the scrutiny of Teplica's work, as a postmodern artist, falls instead on his personal character and agenda and identification as an individual. Is his photography of burn victims more significant because he is a plastic surgeon or less because he is not himself a victim? Is being a witness enough or must one be of that ilk for it to be important? If you are of that "community," is the work then important simply because of your ethnicity, sexual preference, or gender? Political correctness is the new aesthetic judgment. It seems to matter little whether these photographs are in and of themselves beautiful, intelligently conceived, technically well taken, developed and printed; they could just as easily be snapshots developed at the local photomat, or polaroids. Under these standards, the artworks are constantly (eternally?) tied to the artist as person and being. Does the work of a social artist become decreased if they themselves change? Is the work of an environmentally active artist, for example, diminished if he is later arrested for dumping PCB's into Lake Michigan, or is the recipient of kickbacks from Exxon?

If our judgment of "quality" in a work is then based on its social or political outcome then isn't the inherent process of selection creating a critique of a more dangerous kind - moral and ethical. It is unlikely that liberal art reviewers will show the process of Project Rescue in the same light as they will show an ACT-UP action, or

credit them with more artistic merit, though the goal may be better achieved or better executed.

Accepting this as an aesthetic, does the immediate success of a work then justify its artfulness? Historically, dare we compare the "work" of Carrie Nation with her ax and her successful passage of the Prohibition Amendment as being more successful than the Women's Liberation movement, which failed to get the ERA ratified, yet has revolutionized women's position in society. Prohibition fostered the Mob and became a codifying agent to racketeering and other underground illegal activities. Does this decrease the amplitude of Nation's original actions? Are Jacob Riis's photographs of the tenement slums of New York less significant because he did not end poverty than Hine's work, which did have a greater effect (as measured in legislation and quantifiably fewer child laborers)?

There is a value to pure (dare I say objective) artfulness. Stripped of its context, Hine's photographs are still beautiful, and evocative. I am particularly reminded of a photograph of 4 or 5 young boys playing leapfrog with a fire hydrant in New York's Little Italy. To our recontextualized eye, it looks

like fun, to the moralists of the period, the streets were a dangerous place that bred pickpockets, murderers and teenage thieves. In contrast, many artworks are now seen as extremely demoralizing, sexist or bigoted, though at the time, they were considered sensitive and socially significant. If one grounds the work in a current set of social issues it is vulnerable to the transient quality of social change. (I am referring to the specificity of a bracketing language - what are now the

homeless, were at one time hobos, or "the forgotten man", or tramps - each implies a different attitude and approach to the situation which is based on an ephemeral or social moral judgment).

The ability of the artist to step outside the functioning of society to arbitrate or comment allows her to become a free agent. It implies a willingness to take on the social issues not an irresponsible unconscious reaction to them. Social free agents also take on their different titles according to the society they exist within. Like the wise-women granny doctors who were burned at the stake for being witches, our history is full of examples of the society changing and the role not conforming. Perhaps what is now being proposed is that the work of the artist no longer fits the job description. Our global community is calling for social change. As free agents, artists respond to that call, and as with Vaclav Havel, may have to take on the duties of political leader. Perhaps the free agents once known as artists will be known as community facilitators, educators, activists and concerned citizens.

From the cold factual statistics to claymation public service announcements to high profile endorsements, the project is extremely thought out as to its impact. The imagery highly readable, the text painfully real. As postmodern artists, Brown, Boozell, and Teplica have taken on this role of free agent in order to look at a serious and tragically preventable situation

Ames Hall

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Imprints and Re-Visions: Carolee Schneemann

Randolph Street Gallery, November 6 - December 23, 1992



Carolee Schneemann's films and videos, and her kinetic multimedia installation *Cycladic Imprints* (1988/92), arrived at Randolph Street Gallery mid-way through the challenging three-week festival *That Time of the Months* featuring women in a multi-faceted program of visual and performing arts, media arts, martial arts, and public discussions on issues of feminism. Although I don't want to claim a central role for Schneemann's work among the amazingly diverse voices and strategies presented in the program, it is worth listening to curator Carole Tormollan's suggestion that *Re-Visions*, the programmatic exhibition project in RSG's main gallery (which opened the week before the festival), presents feminist art "from a new center and not the old margins."

Tormollan urges us to look at the whole range of similarities and differences among feminist strategies in theory and practice, and at the history and dynamics of the internal divisions that have changed feminist discourse over the past decades, in order to re-imagine the ground on which a new and empowering dialogue can take place. Creating coalitions between different positions means for women to re-examine their "split subjectivities," Tormollan argues, since many of the older oppositional stances within feminism were based on a paradoxical relation to a patriarchal value system that reproduced the inequities of that system. Carolee Schneemann, whose work as a painter, performance artist, filmmaker and writer certainly represents a major "re-visionist" practice contemporaneous with the progression of feminist politics and aesthetics since the 1960's, would be the first to acknowledge the complexities of the challenge to that system, since it involves taking on the entire fabric of social and cultural formations of identity and knowledge, and the psychic formations of perception as such. It seems crucial to me, however, to see Schneemann's work, as it continues to emerge now (as it did in 1963 with her *Eye Body* performance), in both its continuously marginalized and yet central significance as an embodied re-vision, especially in light of today's emphasis on the body as the site of political struggles.

Or is that struggle still predominantly theoretical; a struggle over representations and discourses? Is the body in contemporary performance art, activism, and in the visual media reduced to the function of a political discourse on representation and power? Can bodies be reduced to the surface-effects of gender-bending strategies, dressed up or down at will, dragged into the theatrical scenes of "gender performance" and transvestism? To what extent are such "theatricalizations of the body" politically effective in disrupting ideas of the body, sex, gender and sexuality that are considered normative by mainstream society, even as we witness an increasing cultural anxiety in America over the non-enforceability of such ideals?



Some of these questions surely come to mind if one examines new popular-culture styles, performance, art practices, or feminist theories that question rigid dichotomies of gender. All of these practices re-examine the main assumptions of identity politics, including the very notions of sexual identity upon which gay and lesbian politics and the bulk of women-centered work had historically been based. Evoking the work of body artists has often meant to invite charges of essentialism from radical feminist and lesbian theorists who dismiss the valorization of the female body or of a feminine aesthetic as an uncritical replication of the (hetero)sexual difference on which patriarchal representation is grounded. Within this representational system, they would argue, the female body can be imaged only as the site of male desire, the object of the male gaze and of male fantasies. Without challenging the phallic order as such, a woman cannot "be" except by being alienated from her own desire. Millie Wilson (in *Re-Visions*) plays on this theory by painting her historical model's "split subjectivity," ironically negating her absence by drawing (on) and re-photographing another lesbian painter of an earlier era who remained invisible to the male-based history of art.

Schneemann's work may present a problem to new feminist historians because it has consistently refused to be disabled by the theory of split subjectives, as it refused to be censored and to censor itself in terms of the "political correctness" enforced by some of the more dogmatic feminist theory-politicians themselves. Schneemann's resistance to the cultural schizophrenia of female-phobic theories based on sophisticated psychoanalytical models or more bluntly oppressive male ideologies is evident in her unflinching and powerfully visceral celebration of her creative energy, and her unrepressed libidinal, heterosexual physicality. If Annie Sprinkle, Karen Finley, and other incendiary performance artists today challenge the taboos and the sickness of a culture pathologically uneasy with sexuality and women's bodies, they are indebted to Schneemann's pioneering role as a forerunner of "performance art" (that genre didn't exist yet when Schneemann came out to do it).

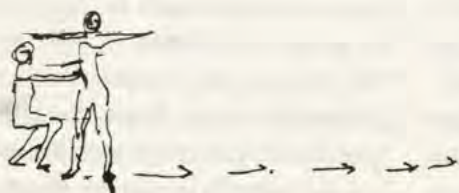


The impact of her body work was immensely enabling, perhaps precisely because it broke with a sacrificial and sadomasochistic tradition of art in a Western culture that could only acknowledge the primacy of bodily experience through shame, guilt, revulsion, and torturous acts of self-denigration based upon archetypal phallic mythologies. Schneemann's work, on the contrary, represents a revisionist archeology of female iconographies through which she recovers her ecstatic, erotic body as an unconscious and conscious source of knowledge. She cuts through the abstractions of a Western idealist metaphysics and regains control of her female sexuality and spirituality as the subject of her desires and visions, and not as the fetishized object of others. At the same time, her practice must be seen through the material and formal choices she makes to explore kinetic and temporal processes in the enactment of image-making, drawing her body into the extended force-fields of the media she interweaves and simultaneously subverts and supersedes.

Her new installation, *Cycladic Imprints*, is a complex example of her evolving work; it is dense and multi-layered, a dreamscape of impressions that live on in the imagination and yet elude our firm grasp. Like her films/videos and performances, this installation does not stand still. Rather, our experience in the room is closer to that of being at a concert, with the sound of more than 70 different string-music sources (collaged by violinist Malcolm Goldstein) pulsating across a cinematic space in which Schneemann's projections are edited to follow, merge, and dissolve upon one another. The slide projections pull together images of archaic and Cycladic sculptures, art historical images of the female body in painting, sculpture and photography, images of Schneemann's own nude body, and images of the violin and the cello. Projected onto the walls in a cubistic rhythm, these images overlap with painted double curved shapes of the female form/violin form and with 15 mechanized violins that rotate and gyrate in front of the silhouetted shadows they throw onto the walls.

This moving visual collage is a painting-in-action, but it is also an animated, acoustic laboratory (with each musical instrument creating its own gurgling motor-like sound) in

10



Objects by Dorothea Baer, Jackie Ferrara, Marty Greenbaum, Lulu, Carolee Schneemann





which the female form, drawn and re-imagined in the art and sacred icons of different cultures and historical epochs, implicates us and our own fleeting associations to our more enduring ideas of the female body and its erotic anatomy. It is almost as if Schneemann wants to share with the viewer a wealth of symbolic information, for example about the sacred, matriarchal representations in Cycladic sculpture vis-à-vis the well-known surrealist fetishization and misogynist disfiguration of the female nude, next to the anonymous Victorian image of a woman musician playing herself, playing on her own body, and so on. There is also a strong sense of irony at work here, since we cannot watch the disappearing and reappearing female figure without becoming aware of the contradictory tensions not only between erotic body and instrument, artistic "form" and repressed content, but also within the mechanism of the theatrical scene itself, since the latter restages Schneemann's search for archetypal iconographies of the female body while at the same time forcing us to consider the idea of female identity - or of the female body - critically. This collage-construction, which includes photographs of Schneemann's real body and of her own vulva, in fact displaces the very idea of an essentially feminine body since it focuses attention upon the transformation and dissolution of an idealized body and, instead, suggests that the actual morphology of the body is phantasmic and imaginary. It also implies, however, that this morphology, which generates the formation of our subjectivity, is gendered or presupposes gender.

What makes Schneemann's work so uncompromisingly difficult, and thus central to any debates on (institutionally marginalized) feminist art, is her thoroughly dialectical method of using both painterly/constructivist concepts of formal representation and her real physical body, her erotic self, and her intuitive "animal" energies, as she calls them. Having emerged in the early 1960's in close relationship to the experimental avant-garde (action painting, fluxus, Judson Dance Theatre), she soon became known for her use of the naked body in solo performances and multimedia happenings such as *Meat Joy* (1964), in which the participants of an erotic ritual extend and integrate their bodies into paint, shredded paper, and the raw flesh of chicken, fish, and sausages; or her famous *Interior Scroll* (1975), in which she reads from a long narrow scroll that she slowly removes from her vagina. Her first film, *Fuses* (1965), is a non-sequential collaged vision of Schneemann and her longtime companion, James Tenney, making love at their house, with occasional shot of her cat, Kitch, looking on. An explicit personal, erotic film that confronts traditional sexual taboos and the barriers between private and public subject matter, *Fuses* was shot by Schneemann herself (with wind-up Bolexes) while participant in the action.

Plumb Line (1968-70), *Kitch's Last Meal* (1978), and the more recently completed *Up To and Including Her Limits* (edited in 1986, but based on performances during 1973-76) and *Vesper's Stampede to My Holy Mouth* (1992) display a thematic and textural continuity in her films/videos that is both autobiographical and performative insofar as their "interior knowledge" (an image-concept for "vulvic space" that she transformed into the *Interior Scroll* performance) unfolds as a continuous, intertwined double rhythm of the sexual and the painterly, of the intimate and the iconographic, the latent and the manifest, the unconscious and the quotidian. However incongruous some of the disparate motifs may appear at first (e.g. Schneemann's erotic relations to her cat Vesper; clitorectomy; and medieval witchcraft trials in *Vesper's Stampede*), the rhythms of the films are so physical that the material (images, colors, meaning, the celluloid itself) becomes energized and begins to dance, thus escaping analytical definitions that would arrest the dynamics.



To make a painting or a film dance is not at all a paradox for Schneemann who has always claimed to be a painter who paints with her body, with words, with extended structures in space. Pushing her materials became equivalent to breaking down psychological and conceptual barriers, subverting and converting male-defined art forms, genres, and cultural connotations. Contrary to the ideology of some performance art that submits the body to technological abstractions, pain, or the disfiguration of (self) repressive ordeals, Schneemann's trust in the erotics of her body is a purposeful provocation as it challenges repressive authority and cynicism alike.

I don't think Schneemann simply idealizes an authentic female self; rather, she posits a "primary knowledge" of the world through the body which is not determined by the existing power relations and ideologies of gender. After the presentation of her films at RSG and during a lecture tour-de-force at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Schneemann addressed this primary knowledge indirectly by pointing to the recurring movement of certain shapes in her image performances. Some of these formal and symbolic shapes could be named but not explained. When Schneemann referred to her dreams as a source of inspiration for her research/performance, she meant to indicate perhaps that it is the process of exteriorization itself—putting her body where her mind is—which creates the movement and the means of discovery.

The margins between the unconscious and the real body, between the imaginary and the symbolic, are primarily psychic. Yet Schneemann's insistence on the physiology of perception ("the body is in the eye; sensations received visually take hold in the total organism" she wrote in her 1979 book *More Than Meat Joy*), and on the constitutive role of her body in the apprehension of the world, works towards radicalizing women's relation to the kind of "femininity" or masochism regulated and pathologized by psychoanalysis. In Schneemann's work, intuitive channels of self-discovery are neither denied nor denigrated; her (re)constructions and enact-

ments of the erotics and the fantasized images of her body are methods to tease out the repressed content of the cultural imagination. And in locating this repressed content in the lost history of female sexuality, Schneemann's dance with her naked body and its projections and indefinite traces, forever permutating and repositioning its activating vitality in different sensory constellations (media), cuts a dangerous path across the rigid relations of knowledge and power in our disciplinary society.

It comes as no surprise that her work has been rarely theorized, written about, or collected by major museums and art institutions; she is not on the syllabi at the school where I teach. The work's anti-disciplinary energy does not lend itself to be easily appropriated or copied.

Seeing *Fuses* at RSG for the first time, I was shocked to realize how strongly the film resists any and all conventional notions of the erotic or the pornographic. There is no objectification of Schneemann's body, no titillation, no possession or fetishization, none of the generic pleasures of soft- and hard-core films. By subverting and confusing the viewer's identification of the images (in one instant one may believe to have seen a woman's genitals turn into a man's, but it may have been an illusion), the film draws attention to its textures and kinetic rhythms, to the fierce transformations of the celluloid itself. Schneemann has suggested that she wanted to visually approximate the emotional, "felt" experience of lovemaking in the body, and therefore treated the film as a kind of materiality transformed by energies, by burning, chopping, steaming, staining and baking the emulsion of the film itself.

The experiential body can transform the medium through which it speaks, if it does not subordinate itself to the conventions that govern the imprints of form. Schneemann's life/work is a continuous cross-examination of such imprints, of (re)imprinting, and this is how I understand *Cycladic Imprints* and her commitment to a psychophysical process which she describes as follows:

"Pay attention to the direction of unconscious information. There has always been something irrepressible in my work - the pure thrust of intuition, trust of the body. Putting my body where my mind is unravels contradictions in our culture. I resist social, erotic, and aesthetic restraints - open energies to finding materials, forms which confront and evade predictive directions."

Trusting one's own body is a proposition that flies in the face of much current theorizing that is bent on reconstructing, theatricalizing and parodying gender. At the same time, Schneemann's work offers rich inspiration to all feminist practices that seek to examine and subvert the conventions (and parodies) imposed upon our trust of our own bodies.

Johannes Birringer is a theatre and video artist who currently teaches at Northwestern University.



Recommended Reading:

- "The New Voyeurism" *Newsweek*, November 2, 1992.
- "The Body You Want" *Artforum*, November 1992.
- Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* Marjorie Garber, 1992.
- Gender Trouble* Judith Butler, 1990.
- Culture Wars* Richard Bolton, ed., 1992.
- Race-ing, Justice, En-Gendering Power* Toni Morrison, ed., 1992.
- How Do I Look?* Bad Object Choices, eds., 1992.
- Black Looks: Race and Representation* bell hooks, 1992.





All communities are
i m a g i n e d
communities.

We imagine ourselves into communities
because we fear isolation.

We imagine ourselves individuals
because we fear the group.

Both mean a loss of self; both mean a
discovery of self.

Both have been colonized in our
imagination.

Group imagination we assault at an early
age. "Seperate desks, no talking, no
cheating. The group is hungry. The group is
less than you. The group will consume your
merit. The group will devour your soul."

Individual imagination we conquer with
ideals: "This lone man who has saved us
all" — or with shame: "You will never be
worthy of the group."

Some groups are sanctioned. They are
the team, the family, the males and
females, the fast readers and the slow
readers, the race, the nation, the rich or less
rich or poor, or destitute. Membership to
these groups is mandatory. We are told we
need lines between us. These lines
serve and protect money. They allow some
people to get paid more, some less, some
not at all. If everybody were to receive just
rewards, things would fall apart. And it is
sometimes necessary that groups oppose
other groups for the good of money.

Individual selves have also been sanctioned
or forbidden, maybe with a wider range of
possibility, depending on the encircled
group.

Do not choose a group. You will have
one placed around you. You will then
receive a short list of individual selves, from
which you may choose one or two."



Accept; accept and
resist; reject.

Accept: these boundaries are real and
just. These groups line up as they
should. These identities have been since
antiquity, and must always be. Accept no
others.



FEAR/DON'T FEAR THE GROUP



Accept and resist: these boundaries are
acceptable, but the groups must
repositon, and the identities within the
boundaries must be resisted, redefined, and
improved.

A community whose very imagining is a revolution.
An impossible community. A temporary
community. A community that doubts its own
existence. A community that refuses to exist, but exists
nevertheless, until it becomes something else, or
doesn't. A community that is two things at the same
time. A community that doesn't talk, but only listens. A
community that appears only when it rains.

Reject: these boundaries have been
imagined, and we may imagine them
differently.

By imagining the
community, we
imagine the self.



Subjective and knowingly imagined.

I was once walking in a field. It began to
rain, so I stood under a tree. Now when I
stand under a tree, I think about that, even
when it's not raining.

This community is a small thing on the way
to becoming a smaller thing.

They have nothing in common. They
didn't particularly like one another at first.
They really would have preferred to be
some other community than the one they
turned out to be. But events conspired, a
vast net, and they found themselves
together.

This community gathered to put out the
fire.

This community helped the wounded man
drive to the hospital.

This community found itself sweeping up
the ashes, the bricks, the glass.

This community now lives only in the
memory.

They are skeptical. They question what
they did and who they were. They doubt.
They think about it and they talk about it.
Delicately the fear subsides.



0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

A tone is heard. Farmer pulls cast on 4-wheel cart into performance space – They sing “TED” (General lights fade up during song. At song’s conclusion, lights fadeout, 10 seconds of silence, then music begins, slides appear while Klahoma sings variations on chant)

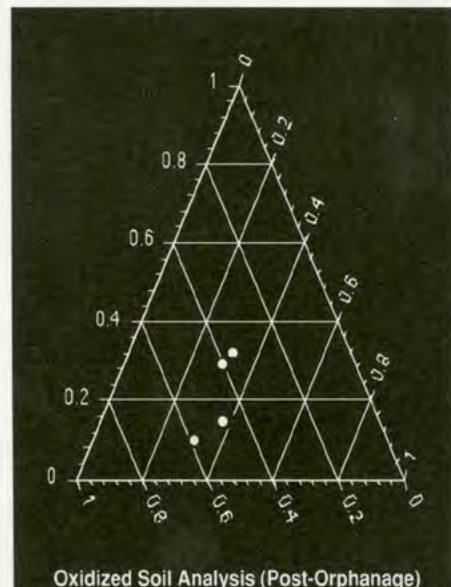
- Slide: O Klahoma
- Slide: Or
- Slide: The Farmer In the Astral Plains
- Slide: By Robert Metrick
- Slide: Featuring (Not necessarily in order of appearance)
- Slide: Jamirte Trott as Rowina Davenport (RD)
- Slide: Matthew Goulish as the Farmer’s Stepchild (SC)
- Slide: Otto Stecchinelli as The Feed Store Manager Who Speaks In Tongues (FSM)
- Slide: Joan Dickinson as the Pony and The Farmer
- Slide: Iris Moore as the 17 Year Locust
- Slide: Katy Hoffer as the Goat
- Slide: Robert Metrick as The Farmer (F)
- Slide: And Susan Abelson as Klahoma (K)
- Slide: The Farmer lives inside a hollow tree...at the edge of the pasture.
- Slide: He lives there (in this tree) with an assortment of people he has come to know through and through
- Slide: These people, who co-habit the tree with The Farmer, don’t really know each other, per se. They never acknowledge each other when they pass in the vestibules, or greet each other in the laundry room.
- Slide: But The Farmer knows each and everyone of them through and through.
- Slide: “I’ve come to know them very well, extremely well, as well as I could...” boasts The Farmer, “At least as far as its possible for one person to really know another,” which, in those days, was not very far.
- Slide: So that’s where he lives.
- Slide: That’s where he hangs his hat and broils his pork-chop.
- Slide: So The Farmer lives inside a hollow tree and its not quite a house and its not quite a home, but more like an orphanage.

(RD and SC stand at opposite sides of stage. Farmer and all others stand spaced apart, several feet behind them.) (Spots on RD and SC)

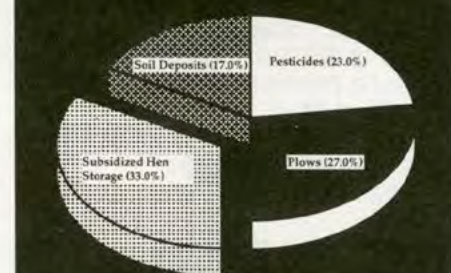
- Slide: Chart 1
- RD: So The Farmer lives inside a hollow tree and its not quite a house and its not quite a home, but more like an orphanage.
- SC: More like the orphanage where The Farmer arrived to spend the night...on his way to that funeral in Grand Rapids...Michigan.
- RD: Like that orphanage in Michigan where he left his shoes behind.

(slow fade up of general lights and/or follow spot)

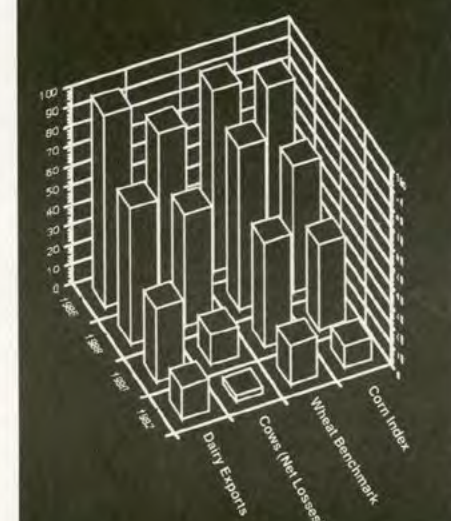
- SC: Surely he can recall how he left his shoes behind. His friend, The Feed Store Manager was the first to notice and he pleaded, he implored, he beseeched the Farmer not to panic
- FSM: (Paces around Farmer while speaking to him) Ich gab Dir Zeichen mit allen jenen Körnchen von Stärke auch immer, die in meinem Herzen übrig waren... Ich gab Dir Zeichen, was auch immer zu tun innerhalb des universalen Gedankengebäudes der Möglichkeiten - nur nicht in Panik auszubrechen. Und genau das hast Du schließlich getan, nicht wahr?
- Slide: I beckoned you with whatever grains of strength were left in my heart ...I beckoned you to do anything within the universal construct of possibilities, except panic, which was precisely what you ended up doing, wasn’t it.
- FSM: (To audience and other performers) Und dann pflügte der Bauer durch die Korridore, befragte jeden, der vorbeikam und verdächtigte jedes Waisenkind des angeblichen Diebstahls seiner angeblichen Schuhe. (Ti Farmer) Erinnerst Du Dich? Du mußt Dich erinnern!
- Slide: And then the farmer plowed through the hallways, interrogating anyone who would pass, making each orphan a suspect in the alleged theft of his alleged shoes. Do you remember? You must remember!



Oxidized Soil Analysis (Post-Orphanage)



Farm Estate Gainshare And Expenditure Spectral Deficit Breakdown (Pre-Orphanage)



Farm Estate Gainshare And Expenditure Spectral Deficit Breakdown (Pre-Orphanage)



Pony:
We lie upon a blade of grass
in trampled meadowlands
We search for food in treetops
As we sink into the sand

ALL:
Na-na-na-na
Na-na-na-na
Naa-Naa-Naa-Naa-Naa Naaaa

Stepchild:
When all is said, when all is done
the fire rages red
We set the woods on fire
and we name the fire Ted

ALL:
Na-na-na-na...etc.

Feedstore Manager:
The leaves began to tremble
and the seas began to part
The sun has lost its orbit
and there’s nothing left to start

ALL:
Na-na-na-na...etc.

Rowina Davenport:
The beaches are deserted
And the fish are filled with lead
We set the lake on fire
And we name the fire Ted

ALL:
Na-na-na-na...etc.

7-Year Locust:
I gave my love a promise
not to wander or to flee
If I should ever love someone
I’d rather set them free

ALL:
Na-na-na-na...etc.

Farmer:
I used to dream until they found
a crater in my head
We set the moon on fire
and we name the fire Ted

ALL:
Na-na-na-na...etc.

Goat:
We set the flag on fire
Stars and stripes,
blue, white and red
America, America
God shed its grace on Ted

ALL:
America, America
God shed its grace on Ted

Stepchild:
America, America
God shed its grace on TED
(All sing on final TED)

SC: But the Farmer just stood there, a fixture at the public pay phone, calling every police station in the county, while line after line of orphans stretched all around the building, each waiting patiently for his or her turn.

FM: **(To audience)** Unter Quarantäne gestellt an der einzigen Telefonzelle im ganzen Waisenhaus, unablässig wirres Zeug redend, den städtischen Behörden und Skizzenzeichnern deine Schuhe beschreibend... (To Farmer) Wie konntest du nur so zwanghaft sein? Wie konntest du nur so wenig Sinn für uns alle haben?

Slide: *Quarantined at the only pay phone in the entire orphanage, ranting interminably... describing your shoes to the civic authorities and their sketch artists- How could you be so obsessive? How could you remain so oblivious to us all?*

FSM: **(screams at Farmer)** Antworte mir! Das ist gar nicht mehr lustig!

Slide: *Answer me! This isn't funny anymore!*

RD: But The Farmer stayed put for several weeks, calling the police over and over and over

FSM: **(still screaming)** Wieder und wieder!

Slide: *Again and again*

SC: The Feedstore manager was strung out with exhaustion in the lobby, he refused to intervene for fear of being associated with the Farmer, but Sister Hortense tried to console him. She told the Feed Store Manager that his very presence could be a healing force, and besides, this was not his cross to bear. Ultimately it was the Farmer and only the Farmer who disgraced himself.

FSM: **(English)** Yet rage and responsibility overwhelmed me. I couldn't decide if I should pity or despise you...

Slide: *Jedoch Zorn und Verantwortung überwältigten mich. Ich konnte nicht entscheiden, ob ich Dich bedauern oder verachten sollte.*

FSM: Du, der Du den Namen der Landwirtschaft für ein Paar abgetretener Schuhe schändest. Du, der sich Bauer nennt! **(He spits on Farmer)**

Slide: *You who desecrates the name of agriculture for a pair of worn out shoes. You who calls himself a farmer!*

(Black out, except for spot on Klahoma)

Slide: **The Goat's Lament (spot on Goat)**

Goat: The ex-wife of the dead Roman slave who served as goatherder for our herd used to remind me that the desert was no place for a vacuum cleaner. I said thank you. Thank you for reminding me of that. That saves me a lot of unnecessary toil. Sometimes I need to be reminded of these things. Now I can go on, no longer plagued by those obsessive questions of the past... Does my nose bleed for its own convenience? Do I sink or swim for your approval? Am I a glutton for punishment or would I rather punish a glutton? But that's really what I am. A glutton. I am gluttony. What was once a mind is now a paper towel. My instincts are defrosting in the refrigerator. I pride myself on just being able to move from one point to the next, pushing my legs into something akin to motion. This is something I happen to be rather proud of.

(Klahoma wanders stage, continuously chanting, during slides, finally returning to her corner position.)

Slide: ...but each time the Farmer called the police the exact same voice answered the phone and explained that no one could help him find his shoes because it was the Captain's birthday and so the entire police force had taken the day off in the Captain's honor

Slide: ...except for the voice on the phone who apologized that she couldn't assist the Farmer because - being the only officer on duty - she had to guard the station just in case intruders should break in.

Slide: And then she would wish the farmer well with all of his future crops

(Spots on RD/SC/K and general lights)

Slide: Chart 2

RD: Negatives grow tired of themselves/just as positives grow tired of themselves.

SC: Opposites grow to weary to attract opposites

RD: It seems as if the whole community is so tired of itself. All the vegetables,

FSM: All the animals,

Goat: All the minerals,

P: The liquids,

Locust: The solids,

SC: The gaseous air -

RD: Everything has grown stale and overtired with itself.

(Fade out all lights)

Slide: **Return of the Locust:**
(Spot on Locust, fade up dim spot on Klahoma)

Locust: My thorax hurts in places I didn't know even existed. At first, I thought it might have something to do with sleeping in a strange position for such a prolonged period of time. Also, my eating habits had become more or less irregular over the years. Everyone said I should regulate myself more... take more walks, drink more water, eat more fiber products... and one would assume that your farm would provide the ideal setting, wouldn't one? I was prepared to spend the summer here until I recalled what happened the last time I visited - when I happened to be in a similar physical state. In the early days of the illness, you took me in your care, you practically insisted on guiding my convalescence through my complete recovery. But after about a week, you seemed agitated, morose. I just assumed you were preoccupied with the pressures of a late harvest... but when you ranted on about parasites depleting your resources, I began to take it personally. You described my ailments as a psychotic delusion, as a physical manifestation of my own spiritual impotence, as if I were the one to blame. And in a certain sense I am to blame, I mean, what other kind of imbecile would return to such an inhospitable environment, and then continue to return generation after generation?

(Fade out Locust spot and fade out tape music, full spot on Klahoma)

Slide: Chart 3

K: **(sings)** You're the Farmer In The Astral Plains
You're tapping at my window panes...
The fruited plains you grimly reap
The fruit of all your labors
Lies burning in a compost heap

(Lower spot on Klahoma. Spot on Pony)

Pony: Oh, Farmer, where you go I can only follow as far as my chain will take me.

Slide: **The Pony's Epitaph**

(Fade up tape music)

Pony: In the dilemma of finding a name for today, to distinguish itself from all the other days thus far, I can only think of "purgatory without redemption." Hang ups hang up, irritants irritate, the bank has just foreclosed you, the drought has just deposed you and isolation conquers all. Myself included... Yet I am not one who can easily speak for myself, since I live among creatures who rarely allow me to complete a single thought and even insist upon completing most of my...

Goat: Sentences.

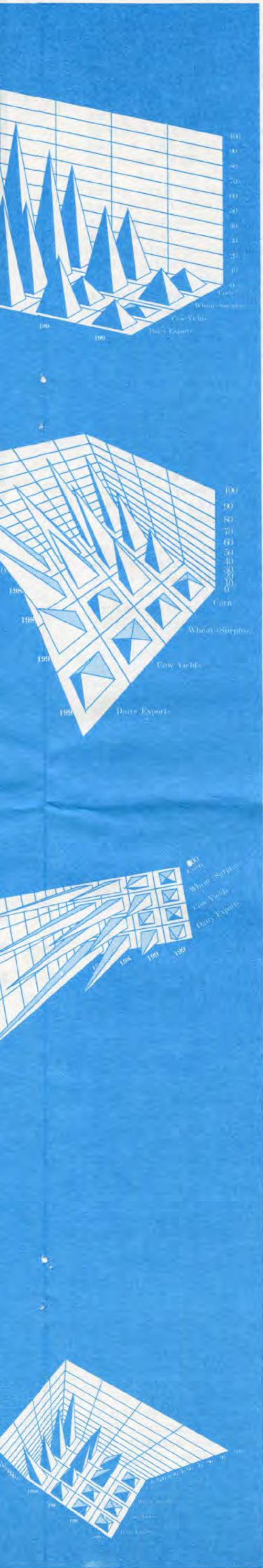
Pony: Most of my sentences. Yes, Mr. Farmer, I'm afraid I may be a great disappointment to you. I who am emptied of all passion and reason... hungover by doubt and bloated introspection, drinking coffee and squirming across the kitchen floor, too broke, too numb, too well fed to push out to push out towards anything that might require the least amount of effort, a receptacle... a mere receptacle of sugar and fodder, with a little phallus reaching out to an indifferent world exactly at the wrong moment.

(Fade out P. spot. General lights and spots on RD, SC, Klahoma)

F: (Stands, SC and RD turn to him) (Music and chanting begin to fade out) I'm sorry to be the one to interrupt your little story, here but I've been sitting here all night listening to all of this and I just couldn't take it anymore. **(Quick fade out tape music. Klahoma stops chanting)** I thought... I assumed I had made it clear - I'm not a farmer, I haven't farmed a thing in almost 6 years. I don't even own a farm anymore. I don't work on a farm. I don't live on a farm. I live inside a hollow tree. So I'd really appreciate if you would stop calling me a farmer because it really brings up some bad implications which I would much rather not get into at this moment... so I wish all of you would just... stop, please. **(Farmer walks out of space. Slams door)**

RD: Well... perhaps some background information is necessary at this point... I yield to The Farmer's child.





SC: Step-child.
RD: Step-child.
Slide: Photo of sky with clouds

(Fade out generals. Spots remain on SC and Klahoma)

SC: It was an overcast, suffocatingly humid afternoon in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

(Very slow fade up of tape music and Klahoma)

SC: Back at the orphanage, a messenger arrived at the Farmer's doorstep bearing a letter sent via express mail all the way from the farm. The Farmer appeared overjoyed yet somewhat agitated when he recognized the lyrical penmanship of his friend, the chestnut tree. The letter began, "Dearest Farmer"...

(Fade out spot on SC/fade up spot on RD/low spot on SC)

RD: Dearest Farmer - I am writing to you on this day of inertia and lead...I can't seem to get started. What is happening to me? I watch myself emerge from these thoughtless roots as a stunted specimen growing nowhere beyond its stunted capacity. The lonely days pass by bearing no fruit -I feel so full of emptiness I could burst. But what would come out? This farm you have forsaken destroys and crushes me. Never a cloud! Never a shadow and forever this red, dripping sun which stares down at me like the laser beam at a tanning salon! Anyhow, we thought you'd be home by now. That's what you told us when you left, and I, as usual, took you literally.

(During slides, Klahoma wanders stage, chanting)

Slide: So off they fled the Farmer and the Feedstore Manager, they drove by night in the Feedstore Manager's rusted out pickup truck.

Slide: After 33 months on the road, they finally arrived at nightfall and the Farmer went straight to bed in his hollow tree.

Slide: The next morning, The Farmer went out to tend the fields, only to find everything around him in utter disarray.

Slide: Nothing was what you would call "dead" but all of the crops and the farm animals and the farm machines were covered with a thin coat of grayish blue lint

Slide: Nobody knew how the lint got there or where it came from. The Farmer was understandably devastated.

Slide: He roamed far beyond his properties, into the wilderness, screaming at the sparrows all along his way.

Slide: Rowina Davenport and a performer representing the Farmer will now present a brief simulation of what The Farmer screamed to the sparrows hovering above:

(General light and spot on RD. The Pony now sits in the Farmer's chair and wears the Farmer's feed-store cap)

Slide: Chart 4
Pony/F: Oh woods, Oh sky, Oh trees so low.
RD: Oh woods, Oh sky, Oh trees so low

Pony/F: Why do my fields ignore me so?
RD: Why do my fields ignore me so?

Pony/F: I once was starving for attention...now I'm feasting on woe.
RD: Stop inflicting us with your bad childhood in the name of agriculture! Haven't we all suffered enough?

(Fade out general and spot on RD)

Slide : The Step-Child's Indictment (Spot on SC, low spot on Klahoma, chanting softly)

SC: Oh Step-Father Farmer, what hath time wrought upon your face? - have you ever asked yourself that question? Not so long ago, you were the envy of every corn and cattleman in Klahoma County. And when I first met you, on your wedding day, I told your beloved bride, who, it turns out, was also my mother, that you struck me as the kind of man who takes the bull by the horns, the kind of man who likes to ride his own grain elevator. My mother said, yes, how aptly I had described the Farmer she had come to know, at least as far as it was possible for one person to really know another. ...Over the years, I came to love you as only a step-child could love. How I loved you as only a stepchild could love the farmer who removed my mother far far away from my outstretched arms, leaving a fathomless void that can never be filled.

(Klahoma begin long fade out)

SC: Step-father Farmer, you have inconvenienced me beyond good taste and for that you shall surely suffer. Yet I see you respond to the urgency of nothing. You're more awake in your sleep than you are awake, more aroused by the ravaged livestock grazing within your dreams while the living can only point through the glass and make gurgling sounds. As for me, I am spewed out from the hollows, forever condemned to wander this refuge for sanctified vegetation that you call a Farm. Your legacy....my inheritance. Oh Step-Father Farmer, wherever you go, I can only follow...as far as my chain will take me.

(Fade out spot out on SC, full spot on Klahoma)

K: (sings) You're the Farmer In The Astral Plains
The cattle speaks your name in vain
That scarecrow is a broken prop
If you are called The Farmer
Then I must be The Crop

(Fade out spot on Klahoma)

(All sing "Good-bye" - accompanied by slides of chart/landscapes, orbiting out into space)



K Goodbye to the earth and to all I was worth at the bank SC/K Goodbye to the earth and to all I was worth at the bank SC Running away as the mortals decay under a silo rooftop here my ass will stay Goat (G)/RD Okie Okie dokie Okie dokie Okie dokie dokie doh	RD Goodbye to the race to the negative space on the wall K/SC/RD/G Goodbye to the race to the negative space on the wall Locust (L) I'm as absent as can be to your present misery and I won't call back when you reach out for me FSM/SC Okie Okie dokie Okie dokie Okie dokie dokie doh	G Goodbye to the birds to the obsolete words that I sing K/SC/RD/G Goodbye to the birds to the obsolete words that I sing Pony (P) Farewell to the lies of our last compromise So please excuse us if we kiss the skies Farmer (of stage) Okie Okie dokie Okie dokie Okie dokie dokie doh	FSM Goodbye to the rain and to all I've acquired in vain ALL Goodbye to the rain and to all I've acquired in vain K Goodbye to the kings of mass sufferings to the holy secret armies the march RD/L/G/K Okie Okie dokie Okie dokie Okie dokie dokie doh	K/SC Goodbye to the earth and to all I was worth at the bank ALL Goodbye to the earth and to all I was worth at the bank ALL Running away as the mortals decay under a silo rooftop here my ass will stay ALL Okie Okie dokie Okie dokie Okie dokie dokie doh (hold last "doh" as lights/sound fade out)
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PROLOGUE

It is a Hollywood sunset evening. I have packed up my things, and dash out to the street, staring at the deep red sky, simultaneously thinking of at least three things: the beauty and pollution within this sunset (this takes place in the back of my brain); the state/feeling of being broke (this mildly disturbing thought takes place in the middle of my brain); and attempting to figure out what I am doing next (the front of my brain). The sun is huge and blaring crimson across the horizon (a trick of atmospheric optics that used to make me think it was the end of the world when I was a kid). Away from the sun it is dark with a fuzzy protuberance of what looks like low treetops. I look again to the sun, and I see a dark shadowy thing moving closer in to me. It is a horse, with a rider. It gets larger and larger and gallops up to me and stops. It is Bill Clinton on a white horse.

"Hey," he laughs, holding out his hand, "it's really nice to meet you. I like to meet the little people — they are what makes America great."

"Bill," I say, giving him my limp wrist, "you don't have to do this anymore. The election's over. You won."

He grins a big grin, bites his lip, and stares into the sunset, his blue eyes pondering, and turns to me and says "The American people had to make a choice, and they voted for change." Is this real? I don't think so.

THE STORY

We have had an election. We haven't had an election. We have. No, we haven't. We have.

From a post-modern perspective, as political theater, the election was two things simultaneously, a performance and a political process.

I think of Baudrillard's "theory of simulacrum." Those darn deconstructivists. Tear it all up. Rip it all apart. What do you have left? Some sort of a constructed mind set. You start with one. You end with one. Even if everything is broken, you have a broken set from some certain trendy phase of cultural thought. There has to be something there. The absence of something is something else. At least in theory. (Post-structuralism/deconstructivism versus psycho-history versus random solipsism) I bring Baudrillard into view of this recent election because he said: "The work of the right is done very well, and spontaneously, by the left on its own... It would be naive to see an embittered good conscience at work here. For the right itself also spontaneously does the work of the left. All the hypotheses of manipulation are reversible in an endless whirligig... manipulation is a floating causality in which positivity and negativity overlap..." Perhaps it is just hope that creates a belief of difference between the two parties.

In *The Feminine Mystique* Betty Friedan discussed the influx of skilled women retreating into kitchens after World War II. Their new options in life: a) *Skippy* b) *Jif*. They were so busy exercising these democratic rights at the marketplace it took them nearly twenty years to notice. Freedom can be viewed as an *idea* or as a *belief*. Within this concept of freedom, do we have real choice or do we just have the *idea* of freedom?

In the simulacrum of a political system we do not have a choice. We are guided by the polls (which foster opinion rather than indicate opinion). We are fed information. In the case of the recent election, even though we might vote it is for the same system. They are just pushing a different faction this election; they are the same party. It's a grandiose paranoid conspiracy theorist's dream. Surely everyone has seen the footage of the 1960 Kennedy/Nixon debates in which popular theory alleges that the camera angles (looking up at makeup clad

Kennedy, making him big and powerful, down at sweating, five o'clock shadowed Nixon, making him seem

THE SUNSET, THE HERO ON HORSEBACK, THE SIMULACRUM, AND THE UNFOLDING DRAMA OF IT ALL...

bitter and weak) influenced that election, contributing to Nixon's defeat. Kennedy created. Articles were written about George Bush's reconstruction for the 1988 election. Coaches (acting/drama) used video techniques; psychologists/psychiatrists worked with the candidate to get rid of the shifty look in his eyes, the nervous hand movements that researchers found inspired distrust, the clipped speech that sounded cranky and patronizing, everything that might have any impact on *The Audience*. Rehearsals for *The Big Performance*. The lead character was recreated. Bush's reconstruction team and other forces which enabled this most magical makeover to occur (political advisors, etc.) and Bush himself all figured that the public wouldn't vote for him the way he was. And then, *Voila! New George!*

As a rule, all politicians are reconstructions. Did the public vote him in because they were inspired by the new warmth and caring in his voice, because of the new strength he exuded, because his new hand movements inspired not a feeling that he was nervous and uptight but actually so brilliant that he gracefully used them for expression or powerfully for emphasis? Did they vote for him because the speech writer's words were carefully edited and evaluated by marketing pros? Would the real George Bush have won? If he wasn't able to physically inspire trust/ warmth/ caring/ power in the hearts of the voters, would they have voted for him? Would the Reagan Democrats vote for George? Maybe they might for *The New George*. Maybe he wasn't an actor like Reagan (much more malleable, plus there were all those fun theories of his 'hearing aid' being a two way receiver so that he wouldn't have to worry about forgetting his lines or worse have an embarrassment at an 'improv' Q&A session.) Proper acting classes and the best coaches Republican money could buy enabled George to play the part.

What's the difference between a real and a simulated election, if we don't know the simulated election is *simulated*? In a performance, it is usually apparent when the performance is over. But what about when those edges of simulation blur? Maybe a hit show, that gets held over because it is so popular. Perhaps elections inspiring the *idea* of choice. In the simulacrum eye, we could in actuality be living in a fascist state, ruled by economic interests and the arms industry. We wouldn't know.

In Polish writer Stanislaw Lem's "The Futurological Congress" the protagonist finds himself in a utopia. Everyone has enough to eat and drink and they all have everything they could ever want. There is no war. No one has a degrading job. All people in this utopia work in fine buildings and drive fine autos. But they gasp a lot. When the protagonist manages to avoid the daily drug, he sees the true reality as slave labor. He realizes that they are gasping because they have to sprint to get around while under the assumption they are driving or taking a bus. They are gagging and sick and leading horrible lives. Under the influence of the daily drug, they are oblivious to their true status. The *Idea of Freedom* becomes more important than freedom itself.

Just as in that novel, *The Futurological Congress*, we are happy thinking that we have a choice. If the illusion is successful the country can continue ad infinitum. The dysfunctional country can choose to avoid certain pertinent facts, just as a co-dependant ignores the addict's problems.

George Orwell pointed out the simulated reality we live in. Too bad the year 1984 came and went, even featured a movie of the same name, and nobody noticed that the message of the novel was exemplified by the Reagan administration, the

growing right, the *m e - m e - m e -* generation. What has happened to make it different now? A four trillion dollar debt? Is that real? Can the public conceive of the difference between a four hundred eighty billion dollar debt and a four trillion dollar debt? The existing administration didn't think so, apparently, or they wouldn't have given the green light to (and participated in) the circumstances that led up to the savings and loan scandal. *All just part of the show*. Responsibility is transferred to the voting and non-voting public. We, the audience are all at fault.

Was this election real? A lot of people obviously thought so, registering in droves, fierce on the issues. They didn't seem to think this time that it was a simulated election designed to placate their sense of liberty.

The show of votes for Ross Perot is a sure symbol that people thought this election was different. People thought Perot was talking to *them*. Did you think he was talking to you, you, personally. *You, yourself. Yes you, I mean you who are reading this, you?* Perot added something different to the normal and increasingly depressing humdrum elections we had been seeing for a while. Without a party line he had to follow, without worrying about who was or wasn't going to like what he said (besides the voters), and without the polish to act out any number of speeches about a potpourri of whitewashed solutions to complex issues, and without being a slick experienced politician, he was able to say what he felt. He was able to connect with the average Joe who complained exactly the same way at barbecues. He was simulating a cross current of the American public. He was one with us. He fulfilled many an American's dream of putting themselves in the White House. Too far right for real liberals, too simple for real intellectuals, too shallow for real depth, he nevertheless touched a communal nerve in the collective unconscious of a problem that seemed too far away and too entangled in bureaucracy for hope till now. Nineteen percent of the voters believed he was real enough to go out and vote for him. That is close enough to one fifth of the voting public saying that they don't believe the present political system. Deconstructivist Perot shone in this light, this "rip it apart and we'll start all over again with a different, simple, more understandable (in its very simplicity) light." A Perot supporter said "We read into him what we wanted in an ideal candidate...In a sense, we made him up."

The closest the voting public could come to bucking the system this election was to vote against the reigning faction of the ongoing system. And what of the New George? Did the right do the work of the left? A friend of Bush was quoted as saying "If you asked him why he wanted to be re-elected, he'd have to look at his note cards." Perhaps the characters who won (the heroes in this simulated election) have stepped outside of the realm of the simulacrum and have broken through the fourth wall. The plaster has chipped, the cardboard has eroded; inside are these Greek heroes prepared to do battle and come to the rescue.

EPILOGUE:

All three regions of my brain have cleared.. The sun is still blaring crimson and melting on the horizon. I stand (still) outside of my house, gazing at this sunset and watching Clinton on horseback retreating/galloping into the distance. I hear music fading in, and laughter and a resounding foot stamping ovation. The treetops I thought I saw, are actually the audience. The show must go on. Blackout. Applause.

The show: a continuing saga, every day and night in the print media, television, radio and conversation you cannot avoid. *We are all part of the show.*

PICKLES OKSIETOWICZ

Reno



An Interview with Reno by Audrey Colby and Carmela Rago

We are at the Third Coast in Chicago, having lunch with Reno, it is mid-September, 1992. Introductions have been made. Reno begins the discussion.

Reno: For many, many years I kept myself away from the entire way the world works, because I felt I wasn't going to make a difference. I did nothing except complain and yell and scream at all the crap that came down on me. And not only was I not doing

anything with my own life (I was wasting that). But I also was not helping the world at large which was what I really wanted to do.

Carmela Rago: Did friends say, "You've got to have your own show..." when you were yelling and screaming and complaining?

Reno: No. I was complaining to people on the street, strangers. I'd get into trouble on the street all the time. Yeah, I'd make everybody's business my own. I'd hear "There's a guy beating up his wife on Broadway..." Oh, I've gotta go....I was like looking for trouble all the time—always—and not facing my own [issues]...I see people in the bank line or the supermarket line with pampers, and I'm in their face.

"Do you really need those pampers? Have you ever thought about a bicycle delivery service?" I was spinning my wheels. About five or six years ago when I stopped using drugs—it all happened at the same time.

Someone wrote this big, big article about what I was doing and sent this incredible photographer to come see me. I was performing once or twice a year at the Wha Wha Club, Wow Cafe, Limbo Lounge, or uh...

C.R.: P.S. 122?

Reno: Oh that was a big deal! Then I hadn't been at P.S. 122 yet—or maybe I'd been there for Avant Garde A-Rama—their "A-Rama"...This was after I got sober, that article got written and I had this photographer coming to my house and I thought, "My God people will be listening so I better say what I mean to be saying."

This woman, Laurie Stone, checked me out. I don't know how she found me. Well, I tried to be a stand-up comic. I used to go Uptown every once in awhile. It would be so unbearable, that my friends would say, "Stay down here, Ren, and somebody'll figure it out..." And that's very fortunately what did happen.

These \$60.00 a night bowling alleys, where they have shrimp one night, comedy the next night, the next night is strippers, and the night after that is wrestling. The level of attention, and the level of existence in your life is so low that the discouragement, the despair, reinforced the self hatred which was affecting my whole life anyway. So I wanted to stop doing that.

Audrey Colby: Were you dealing with similar issues in your performances at that point?

Reno: Sure, yeah always. There would be three comics, or four and they would try to protect me. And they'd be all guys, and they'd put me in the middle. Because they knew. And they would talk about "shit" and "piss" and all that, and I'd get up there, and look out and see The

Giants football team. Like the fucking Giants football team happened to hang out at this bar, and this night, that's where we were. I just like skipped to what I considered to be my heaviest indictment of sexism—so I skipped right to that for twenty minutes. Five minutes later I was off the stage, and the other comics said, "Don't worry, 60-90 bucks, three hour drive..." So my form was not commensurate with the form of stand-up comedy.

A.C.: Are your audiences different in different parts of the country?

Reno: Not necessarily in different parts of the country, but in different venues. If I'm at a place like The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, undoubtedly a whole array of people would be excluded who normally wouldn't go to such a gig.

Sure, some towns I get to do two interviews. Because I'm not really a performance artist, I'm not really a comic either...I find performance art is something you could not describe in any other way. It's like if this person were a painter, these would be paintings, but they're not—so they're performing their own art. Whereas what I'm doing is a lot more "meat and potatoes"—a lot more content oriented. Not that performance art couldn't be content oriented... I think that somebody like Linda Montano is really a performance artist. I don't even know that Finley is [a performance artist]—well Finley I guess we could describe as a performance artist because Finley is—she's out there doing like

"One time a club owner said he supported me, but he would ruin his business if I kept talking..."

poetry—yeah, I suppose. They're very illusive terms. I think people call them performance artists in order to get a descriptive or specific term that explains [what they do]. I mean, I'm not a stand-up comic (to get back to me for a minute) yet I'm definitely not a performance artist. I don't think what I do is performance art—what I do is yellow journalism on my feet...So the validation of the museum world and the validation of the HBO Special is a double-edged sword. On some level it's hard for people to figure out who I am; producers don't know how to promote me, and then on the other hand, it's great because I get to straddle two worlds. I get to hang out with Barbara Jourdan, or Gloria Steinem or Susan Sontag, because we have something in common, though I believe they're in a way, way different league than me. It's my service. It's the only thing I can do. And I don't do it well enough and I want to do it a hell of a lot better and that's all I care about really. It's just stuff is just channeled through me. And luckily I'm just silly enough to try to get it out there. If I were serious—if I were *only* serious—if I were not funny; I would not have a place—because I'm not able to focus long enough to be a Susan Sontag. Through default, I developed my own method of performance, because I can't do it any other way. People say, "are you a dancer?" No, no way am I a dancer. Dancers ask me if I'm a dancer.

C.R.: Audrey and I were just talking about how you look like a dancer...

Reno: No, no way—I need those extra movements. I don't think what I'm saying is clear

enough, so I move with it to try to make it clearer. You know, people talk with their hands...

A.C.: But when you do your piece on a different night, is it different or is it choreographed?

Reno: It's already inculcated—it's just where I am when I say it—it's not choreographed—[with] any piece you've eventually got to place it. It's simply adding another sense, it's like when people write the answers when they're studying. When they write it out, maybe it sticks in their mind better. It's just to get it across.

C.R.: I try to picture you as a little girl—and I just imagine you mesmerizing your playmates with these stories.

Reno: Mesmerizing?!? No one would hang out with me. I had an awful time, I didn't like life at all—I was in despair until five or six years ago. Everything you've ever really done in your life contributes to who you are. Whether or not it's conscious on your part.

We've got to be out there, you can't kill the Jews, the Arabs, the Blacks...you can't kill all the faggots—now that you know that, let's take it from another point of view. You've got to stand up for what you believe and say what you believe. One time a club owner said he supported me, but he would ruin his business if I kept talking, so he paid me for the whole week, and sent me home—that was Albany, New York—that was a comedy club and—

C.R.: Did any part of you think, "Oh maybe I'll do an alteration here or there, and then I'll be able to do my gig..."

Reno: No, no way, it wasn't possible. Because what I talk about—it doesn't occur to me to talk about anything else, it just doesn't. My big problem is writing what I mean. What I mean is so far back in my head, and I have such a hard time getting it out of there. That's where talking to Susan Sontag is very instructive. She asked, "Do you sit down and write one sentence, and then the next sentence in sequence?" And she said she did. But at another time, she said she was told to do a new introduction to *Illness as Metaphor* (because it was up for reprinting). It was maybe ten years after she had written it, and AIDS was now happening, so she resisted, and resisted and then she said, "OK," and finally she agreed to do an introduction which was just not enough room to say what she was going to say, and it became the book *AIDS in Its Metaphors*, so maybe she does write the sentence in sequence. Maybe a lot of it pours out effortlessly, but maybe it's not what it is—maybe it's 100 to one. I can't keep my mind on what I'm saying because I fear it's not going to be brilliant so I shut down.

A.C.: How do you collaborate with your director?

Reno: My director, Evan [Yionoulis] is like a coach. "Oh you've got it now—move!" I say, "I've gotta make a point here." She'll say, "Why don't you put it there?"

The process is very exciting. What happens between us is great. She keeps saying she wants to make it funny, personal, entertaining. I hired Evan because I wanted to do a stage show, I came to her saying "I have no idea how to make my work visual."

I so want to be an intellectual, but I have trouble reading, I have Attention Deficit Disorder. When I say I've read seven books my entire life, I mean it.

I think people want live performances because people really want a shared experience. That one moment of shared space and love, when you hit the ball with the middle of the racket.



REVIEWS

Rough Trade: Owner/Operator The Illusion of Conspiracy by Iris Moore and Bliss by Lawrence Steger and Rough Trade: The Switch Lawrence Steger in The Illusion of Conspiracy and Iris Moore in Bliss Weekends in June, 1992 Club Lower Links, Chicago

In reviewing the Steger/Moore collaboration I was far more taken with the conceptual attributes than the style the venue usually dictates. The set-up was simple and conceptually elegant. On the first evening, Lawrence Steger is presented in his own piece, *Bliss*, and Iris Moore performs her piece *The Illusion of Conspiracy*. The following night features a role reversal with Iris performing Lawrence's piece and vice versa. The elegance is that in the most simple shift of reference, we obtain an entirely fresh understanding. I find it interesting enough to have the artist detached from the artwork, making the text separate from the author (I needn't go into the huge post-structuralist/deconstructionist dogma on authorship now, but it hit the subject on the head), add to that gender differences—how is it really different to have a woman saying or doing this particular activity instead of a man? The final twist of the knife with the flip-flopping of sexualities is knowing that the performers are both gay. Mind fuck, gender fuck, sexuality fuck - you've got it all here.

There is first of all a beautiful symmetry and texturally rich continuity between the pieces. The structure and form of both performances were divided into smaller bite-sized pieces separately titled. Both performances collaged appropriated material from high culture and pop culture, forming a somewhat overly dense verbal text.

Though most of the evening is performed cabaret style, the performer standing or seated with a microphone, there are some wonderful jolts, such as the crawling, screeching opening of *Bliss* - (a lip synch of Yoko Ono), or a towel whipping scene done to a Peggy Lee tango. Add to that a little Nancy Sinatra, Albert Camus, Sharon Stone and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, deliver it deadpan in one of John Darmour's outrageous costumes, and you have hard-core performance art. Unfortunately, the unrelenting headiness and obscure sources (save a dialog/lip synch from the movie *Basic Instinct*) kept the textual aspects at something further than arm's length. This detached academic coolness, however, did serve to foreground the more conceptual concerns of gender, authorship, sexuality and identity.

Though these pieces could easily stand on their own, they do take on greater interest when seen with the change of performer. I saw them on a sequential Friday and Saturday, specifically so that I could compare the two more easily. The added bonus was in experiencing a tug-of-war between short-term memory and perception. What on the previous night I had interpreted as a slight flub which required side cueing was (when repeated exactly on the next night) understood as an integral part of the piece. The sequential viewing also emphasized the one costume difference (an underscoring of the gender issue) - Steger wears his towel around his waist during the "Neither Empathy or Sympathy" section of *Bliss*; Moore wears hers higher to cover her breasts.

The strength of the entirety again was in "the trade." In *Bliss*, Steger, seated on a levitating chair in a water drenched costume spoke of fluids and illness (the water drizzled from a plastic IV tube collar). In Moore's version of the piece it was a bawdy reference to wet t-shirt contests that forced me, as a viewer, to re-evaluate some of the imagery which surrounds the presentation of the female body that I seem to overlook in a male body. Gender differences were further underscored during a lip-synch to *Basic Instinct*. During some rather sharp, seductive interrogation, a chair

(rigged with an uplight on the crotch) empowers Moore with a vagina dentata, expressing the female struggle for power. The same scene however, pushes Steger, already in a dress, into the realm of camp and a pathos-filled transvestism that gives a hard edged spin to the text, as well as an additional layer in the gender/sexuality interpretations of the piece.

Certain phrases of text stuck out as having extremely skewed re-interpretations. Moore's jaded comment of having been "around the block", somehow read as an admission of insanity from Steger, who comes across as a tawdry Nora Desmond. It is also Steger who pushes the edge of gender and transexualism when he refers to "a minor surgical procedure" and then continually refers to his womanhood (in *Illusion*).

Those who thoroughly read the program discovered that it was not a woman's voice singing "Ave Maria" but a recording of a castrato. A flirtatious wink to the viewer already intrigued by a truly seductive set of performances.

— Ames Hall

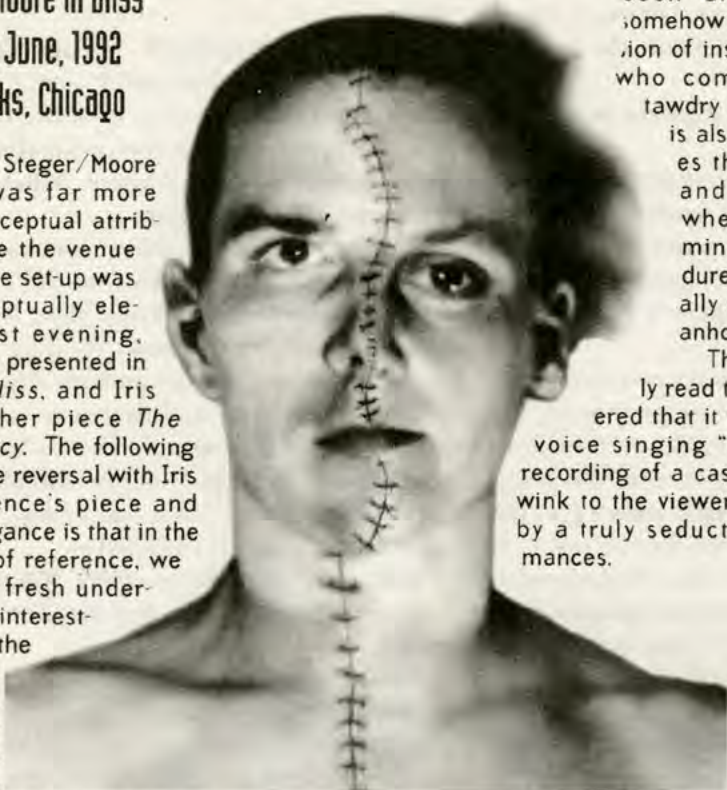


Photo: Steve LaFreniere. Surgery: Patrick Siemer

We Got A Date Goat Island October 9-11, 1992 Wellington Avenue Church Gymnasium, Chicago

It is 8:13 PM. Matthew Goulsh, Karen Christopher, Tim McCain and Greg McCain walk out into the long, hall-like space *church, a sporting event* with conference tables at either end, and they begin in unison to bend and hop forward, bend and hop forward *picking grass on a suburban lawn*. They repeat these movements down the entire length of the gymnasium, run around the back of the audience, and repeat the whole thing. They are dressed in blue shorts and white T-shirts *Junior High school gym class*. On the second repeat, Greg falls out of sequence *odd-ball, geek* and never quite catches up with the group. On the fourth repeat *conformity, individuality removed*, Greg drops to the floor, face down, and pulls himself along the floor using only his shoulders *a paraplegic fallen out of his wheelchair, a beached dolphin*. He travels the entire length of the gym twice like this. He leaves a trail of sweat on the floor behind him *the ocean, tears, a pool of blood*.

Greg rejoins the others, and they all run around the gym *laps*. Blaring (Asian) Indian pop music comes on. Matthew and Karen do a quirky little partner dance *Elvis, retarded children*, while Tim does a quick series of movements ending with his arm angled up behind him *a statue, professional bowling* and Greg lies on the floor feeling a particular spot on his back *sewing a wound*. It is now 8:18 PM.

9:05 PM. Tim, Karen and Greg are seated at the south conference table *conformity, a congressional investigation*, Matthew at the north table. Tim is answering questions about a childhood sexual experience in a cloakroom with his teacher *my elementary school, my second grade coatroom*, and Karen runs around the room to deposit a pair of boy's underwear in Matthew's lap *pederasty*. Matthew

interrogates Karen about a boy who stuck his finger up a dachshund *Anita, Clarence*. Matthew makes Greg list all the bodily fluids *Greg's sweat stain on the floor*. Matthew applies fake blood under his eyes with an eyedropper *Oedipus* and blindfolds himself. He talks about having never worn a condom *AIDS*, and deciding that people should die. At 9:14 PM, the song 'White Christmas' is played *Bing Crosby, snow, silence*.

Greg goes and lies on the floor. Karen leads the blindfolded Matthew out onto the floor and they dance the dance they danced at the beginning of the piece. The lights have dimmed to an orange glow *a high school prom, sunset*. Tim gets up and dances with Matthew, and Karen returns to the table. Tim returns to the other table and Matthew lies down on the floor near Greg. They roll over a few times *uncomfortable*. They end up together *lovers*. The lights fade out. It is 9:18 PM. *Blindness. Night*.

* * * * *

We Got A Date was first performed in 1989. It is one of 3 works Goat Island has created since 1986. As you can figure out if you do the math, they work slowly. Very slowly. Glacially slow, by modern standards. Typically, they spend two years rehearsing 10 hours a week to make a single work. Once again, if we do the math, we see that about 1000 hours are spent to create a one hour piece.

And what exactly is produced after 1000 hours of five people's (the four performers and Lin Hixson, the group's director) labor? Well, it's not exactly theatre, though if this country had an experimental theatre scene like Eastern Europe has, they might comfortably reside there. They're not exactly dance, though if this country had a stronger post-modern dance scene, they could easily be at home there. What we do have 'round these parts is an undefined gray area called performance art, which is where we must place Goat Island, by default. Though they work with many conventions familiar to the dance and theatre worlds (using a director, rehearsing regularly, working as a company), their pieces show the personally generated and conceptually rigorous qualities normally associated in this country with performance art. It is an awkward marriage.

You may justifiably be asking yourself, "Ken, what do they do during these 5000 man-and-women hours?" I will tell you: they torture themselves. Then they remember it all, and practice torturing themselves over and over again, until they are sure that they can flawlessly torture themselves for one hour in the exact same manner night after night. Then they torture themselves in



Photo: Ken Thompson

front of us for our enjoyment and mortification. And they are very, very good at it.

Their work is not easy, nor does it aim to be. I saw *We Got A Date* four nights in a row, and it only got harder to watch and hear. Harder as in difficult, not as in boring. Even on the fourth viewing, I saw things, bits of movement that I have never seen before, and the text became more brutal, the admissions of the performers more excruciating, more unbearably honest than before. The 5000 hours of torture have been collapsed into a densely interwoven body of text and movement, an essay on the physical and mental brutality of childhood, and the overwhelming pressure to conform that warps and twists people's lives, and leads them to warp and twist the lives of others.

"And this is our comedy," says Lin Hixson

— Ken Thompson

Amerika Nowhere Steirischer Herbst 1992 Graz, Austria

Graz is Austria's second largest population center (to call it a city would be a bit of an exaggeration), but outside of Austria it is rarely ever heard of. It is obscured by the shadows of culturally active and cafe-oriented Vienna (still riding somewhat on the coattails of *Jugendstil/fin de siècle*) and the kitschy-Sound-of-Music-Mozart-was-born-here Salzburg. Graz, however, does manage to attract some internationally known artists to its various festivals and events, especially to the mega-festival every fall, "Steirischer Herbst." This year's festival was centered around the odd theme, "Amerika Nowhere." The issue of national identity and culture was to be addressed in connection with both American and European artistic expression.

So what then was meant by the accusation, "Amerika Nowhere?" To quote the festival program:

**THE DIALECTICAL POINT OF NO RETURN
THE FIRST WAY: AMERICA IS
THE SECOND WAY: AMERICA IS NOT
THE THIRD WAY: AMERICA IS NOT,
BUT NOWHERE**

Peter Strasser, aus „herbstschrift 1+2/92“

"Five hundred years after the discovery of the New World, a historical mystery seems to be solved: Columbus' egg was really an "earth apple" (parts of Europe translate this also as "potato"). Even today the "Big Apple" remains a symbol for unlimited growth and expansion.

"An area of the world that goes by the stage name of America is trying to be everywhere at once on the other larger "earth apple," and so, it ends up being nowhere. This "America" fades in and out at will, on the assembly line it produces unrealizable utopias, of which it is itself the biggest.

"America nowhere," the central theme of Steirischer Herbst '92, is an investigation into an existence which is merely based on deception, illusions and simulations.

"We have all long been Columbuses, sailing blindly into the insubstantiality of that which we call psyche, relationships, or home. Nothing gets a lasting foothold in us.

"The result of all research shows: America doesn't exist."

* * * * *

Since the opening of EuroDisney, the national self-consciousness of the French has begun to erode, and European fairy tale figures have developed large, round mouse ears. In light of the American cultural advance bursts forth the self-defending exclamation: "*Amerika gibt es nicht!*" (America doesn't exist!) Around this rotates the metaphorical "earth-apple" in Steirischer Herbst '92 as Europeans ask themselves, "America: fruit or vegetable?" Among other things, a lack of constricting national identity is celebrated in the theme "Amerika nowhere." "Amerika" is not to be understood as synonymous with a certain collective mentality, but rather interpreted as a multicultural society, one in which expression is the way to freedom.

Also implied in the festival's title is that western culture is obsessed with the rage and spirit of discovery. We do not easily let anything in peace; one must go everywhere, burrow into everything, extract it all out, consume it, and spit out the unusable parts before continuing on to the next bit. When one has gone everywhere, burrowed and extracted all that one can, it is then realized that nothing has actually been found where one had searched. "Simply the fact that I know more about America than about any other country leads me to seriously doubt whether America exists at all," says Peter Strausser, main organizer of the festival.

Jana Haimsohn opened the festival at the Graz Opera House with a solo-performance in response to the theme "America nowhere." Her first reaction was "Hell no! America is here, baby!" and she then read-expressed-shouted-moved an endless list of influential American artists and musicians. Her performance was explosive, primal and full of energy. Her body merged with her speech into a direct, raw expression. She was riveting and drew one's full attention into her action without a chance for her or the audience to breathe. At the end of her socially critical and self-ironic text and movement,

the audience stumbled away, feeling the impact of her personal energy and carrying with them the anguished images and impressions of her world.

Also in the Opera House was the non-opera work, *Amerika*, by Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, a multimedia sound artist. This piece broke from the traditional boundaries of classical opera. *Amerika* delimited the usual opera format through the synchronization of singing, pantomime, lighting, and absolute 3-D sound by utilizing both the acoustic and visual spectrum of dream images.

Haubenstock-Ramati's piece is loosely based on Kafka's fragmentary novel, *Der Verschollene (Amerika)*, in which the anti-hero, Karl Rossman, powerless to effect his environment, is thrown into a foreign world (America). He is battered helplessly around in the angst-filled environment that is Kafka's "Amerika": the rushing sheep-like masses, an unhappy love affair, ridiculed by a bloated opera singer named Brunelda, the bureaucratic and stifling office work, elections campaigns, and racism.

Amerika envisions the downfall of the old world and the rise of the new, accompanied by "a song which sought another ending beyond the end of the song, but could not find it," and because of this failed search it ended up "nowhere." This disorienting, locationless "nowhere" was rendered through the use of recordings and ambient sounds, which sprang upon the audience from all directions. And through their ears penetrated and reverberated the sentence with which *Amerika* began and ended: "Don't despair, not even for the fact that you don't despair!"

Der Tod des Orpheus/The Death of Orpheus was a *tableaux vivant* performance from the Viennese artists' group Daedalus. Performers were arranged in various still positions within a monochromed space (everything was bleach-white: the floor, the walls, the performers). The models remained dead still for 15 minutes before moving to a rest position for 5 minutes, then returning to their original positions. One could almost hear their heartbeats in the deadly silence of this eerie and beautiful ancient Greek scene. The performers, their arrangement, and the stillness of the place and time demonstrated a vocabulary of history, myth and art. The still life, *The Death of Orpheus*, the waking dream state of the audience: the interplay between these elements made the very simple production quite compelling.

In response to the non-existence postulate, a film festival of African-American directors was organized with the title "America Now Here!" Nearly 50 films and videos directed by black Americans were viewed, providing Steirischer Herbst '92 with an alternative vision of America through the black perspective. The program included such pioneers as Oscar Micheaux as well as today's independents and new generation black directors such as William Greaves and Spike Lee. Invited directors William Greaves, Mario Van Peebles, Marco Williams, and Charles Burnett gave speeches and participated in several symposia. Austria's high majority of white Aryan viewers received a perspective of America which until then had rarely, if ever, been seen in Austria.

Along similar lines as the film festival there was a music festival, Musikprotokoll '92, based also on the theme "America Now Here." It attempted to show that a real tradition of new music has been developing in the U.S. In contrast to most new music festivals, Musikprotokoll '92 deliberately dealt with music as a multi-media art event. In the 10 events the festival visitor experienced a many-faceted, wide-ranging overview of American new music. In some cases, the audience even participated directly in the event, as envisioned by John Cage, who had been scheduled to be the guest of honor. The festival became a dedication to John Cage and conceptually oriented around his thoughts. Cage as an artist achieved a union of several genres, and his creations are the simultaneous exploration of what it is to be a composer, painter, author, philosopher and internationally recognized mushroom expert. Through such eclectic inspiration as the practice of Zen, use of the I-Ching, and help from chance operations, Cage has liberated music, musicians, listeners, and even time itself. Musikprotokoll '92 presented Cage's work as a true *musica humana* for our One-World. Besides Cage, the spirit of new music was presented with the works of other American composers such as Morton Feldman, Charles Ives, Steve Reich, Ron Ford, and Christina Wolf.

As it can be seen, there has definitely been some division or miscommunication between the

philosophy of the festival, "America Nowhere," and all the events, even the titles of some of the events. This reflects, to some degree, the split feelings that many Europeans have towards America and Americans. Like the glass of water that can be seen as half empty or half full, American can be seen as being everywhere or nowhere. The programming for the festival reflects this split philosophy, pieces like *Amerika* having a rather gloomy view of American life, while the Black American Cinema Festival celebrated the diversity that the U.S. contains. With the exception of Vienna, Austria does not contain much ethnic or religious diversity (white, white, white, Catholic, Catholic, Catholic). Over the summer prior to the festival, the Austrian government denied entry to 1000 Croatian refugees stuck in a train at the Austrian border. The reason they gave: the people did not want the refugees in their country. There was a public outcry against this policy, and the Croatians were admitted, that the Austrian government assumed that Austrians weren't interested in refugees tells you something about the mind-set in Austria. Although there are obvious racial problems in the U.S., perhaps it is better to have strife in a diverse culture than live in a pure and monochrome one.

As their final blow-out event, the Austrians chose to invite San Francisco's Survival Research Laboratories, lead by truly insane-person Mark Pauline. In a way, SRL's self- and mutually-destructive machines may be the perfect metaphor for America: constantly self-destructing in the fight with ourselves, and constantly reinventing a bigger, better, more expansive, and ultimately equally self-annihilating society.

— Steven Clagg

11 Minutes Max Saturdays, October 9-23, 1992 The Theatre Building, Chicago

It began at 11:11pm. Two people were admitted for \$11. Each performer was given 11 minutes to perform. Get it? *11 Minutes Max* reproduced a structure of performance art theme shows usually seen at Club Lower Links, the most dimly lit bar in Chicago. It was not held there, however, nor at one of the more notorious performance art joints. It was held at the Theatre Building.

Wall to wall carpeting and a formally decorated hotel-like lobby greeted the audience as they walked in. The theatre felt closed, as if we were privy to a party being held without the management's knowledge. Entering the theatre proper, all that is stripped away. The seats are bolted down, and your eyes train on the stage: minimal yet tastefully finished. Immediately I begin to wonder the cost of renting out this space.

As performance art is drawn out of more cloistered venues and incorporated into dramatic theatre, prime time TV, and feature films, its history is rewritten. No longer only the NEA's baby-faced radicals, or underground performers who still have a day job, performance artists are starting to



Paula Killen



Gurlene Hussey

settle into a more 90's form. Their work and the work of experimental theatre people has begun to blur. Performance art is being incorporated into university theatre departments, and a few art schools even offer degrees in it. The producers of *11 Minutes Max*, Cecile Keenan and Iris Moore, have picked up on this cross-pollination and created *11 Minutes Max*, a hybrid art form modelled closely after Seattle's *12 Minutes Max*. A sign of things to come?

Hostess Paula Killen tied the evening together much the way her tight leather biker jumpsuit and Barbarella boots held her body together on stage. Between acts, she offered a Lite Beer to anyone

who could answer her trivia questions on performance art. Her questioning became more aggressive as the night went on. The dead silence following also became more oppressive, only to be relieved by knowledgeable audience members shouting out the answer after some thought. It was not chic enough to just watch performance art, the audience would learn some history too. Killen also undermined the self-congratulative performer introductions by reading them verbatim as the artists had written them, parentheses and all.

I attended the October 9th show, where 7 of the 11 slated performers appeared. The performers were brought together from a variety of performance backgrounds. *Elactragic*, directed by Robin Stanton of the Organic Theatre, was the most rigidly acted piece. Actress Phila Broich recited her lines in the Stanislavsky monologue tradition. This reminded me of the Hollywood incarnation of performance artists ala Daryl Hannah in "Legal Eagles." It was fitting then, that the piece took a bird's eye view of the LA Riots. Broich played a typical white American, pinned to her TV, enraged by the tragedy, but powerless to act on her anger. Unfortunately, the informed point-of-view of Stanton and Lenny Melto, who recreated the events of the trial through fake newscasts, barely made it as real social commentary. What could have been agit-prop was lost in heavy metaphors of the evils of the electronic media.

Performance artist Matthew Owens' piece reminded me of a science fair project gone berserk. As he recited the average lumens of various buildings around the world, his own "thousand points of light" danced around his head. His helmet, made from such mundane things as rubber tubing and clear blinking Christmas lights, was beautiful in its simplicity. Like sculptor Jno Cook's *Scary Machines*, which utilize out-dated machines and technology, Owens' helmet was reclaimed from a simpler time, before Virtual Reality Goggles could simulate a cityscape.

Lifer's Picnic, a straight theatre short written by Scott Sandoe and directed by Rick Carter, was the funniest act of the evening. It told the story of a family attending the annual picnic at a prison where the family patriarch lives out his life sentence. Replete with junk food and a pregnant teenager, it was a timely slap in the face to Dan Quayle's family values diatribe.

The Great Human Race, by Jill Wacholz, and *Working Dreams...From Behind the Iron Curtain*, by Jon Mozes, were the most predictable and elementary pieces that night. Both ranted neurotically about life in the last decade of the 20th Century. Wacholz had recently returned from L.A., where her new age search for holy men and gurus may

Morrison's new Holy Ghost, reinterpreted through Reeve's Jesus. Behind her move delicious technicolor images skimmed from porno flicks, drag shows, performance, and TV. All become lesbian erotica, alternately seducing and questioning the viewer.

Gurlene Hussey (aka Doug Stapleton), half of the drag duo Gurlene and Gurlette, performed solo the night I attended. *Never Liked Him Anyway* carried the theme of white trash angst to an extreme. Gurlene danced gracefully across the stage in a simple print skirt, and loose fitting blouse, relating details of life in the small town of Altoona, Pennsylvania, strangely sanguine as she talked about cutting up her man.

In sum, *11 Minutes Max* was a variety show where performance artists and dramatic actors and actresses intermingled. When artists from varied background are brought together, there is often an explosive potential, as works play off each other. This show, however, seemed more to be paying homage to the 80's decade of performance art's establishment in universities and the "legitimate" theatre. While I'd stop short of saying the two disciplines were inbreeding during *11 Minutes Max*, the gulf between them was closing, the boundaries getting fuzzy.

— Michelle Manes

Power Pipes
Spiderwoman Theater
(directed by Muriel Miquel)
September, 1992

The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Chicago

I didn't see *Power Pipes* when it was presented in workshop last September at Chameleon Productions to mixed reviews. But, a year later, it's been fine-tuned into a rich mixture of story-telling theatre, feminist Native American lore and spiritual energy. Spiderwoman Theater, taking its name from a Hopi goddess whose divine powers, knowledge and wisdom are unlimited (she also sees into the future and speaks all languages), is a collective of six Native American women whose raw energy and magnetic personalities bubble into their performance/stage personas. Their matter-of-fact non-posturing is like a breath of fresh air in a theatre and performance scene overloaded with over-

Quincentennial tale. Holding up folded newspaper boats, rocking them by hand (a stunning image of the flimsy weaponry of the indigenous weapons against the full force of the invaders,) they narrate "Five hundred years ago, Columbus sailed. Then the old boy got lost." Crumpling up and tossing them, they narrate "So much for Columbus." The disdain of his 'heroical' status couldn't be more poignant. You don't need pages of loaded oratory requesting we give up the myth of Columbus' 'discovery' of a continent already populated for centuries before this 'discovery'. Short, swift, and to the point, this is eloquence at its best—because it's authentic. The fact that it's also funny is what saves it from being sentimental or too true to bear. Spiderwoman Theater's whole ritual mix, in fact, becomes most effective because of this rare ability of humorous self-examination. She who laughs at herself as well as others truly understands human nature.

— Effie Mihopoulos

Sleepless and Without Nurture
TranceSister Productions
September 26, 1992
The Bop Shop, Chicago

After attending a compilation performance evening a few years ago with an old friend we got into a passionate argument. He believed that all such efforts were futile and represented a dangerous direction in curatorial practice. My own belief was that evenings of short performance pieces often created interesting juxtapositions that opened the door to unique ways of experiencing work. My argument was that such evenings could work brilliantly if a proper context was found when programming the evening.

Perhaps my friend could be convinced had he attended a TranceSister Productions' performance at the Bop Shop. These performances, which take place the last Saturday of each month, provide a forum for feminist artists working in the performance art tradition. TranceSister was founded in May of 1991 by performance artists Jennifer Fink and Julie Laffin, as a way of encouraging emerging feminist artists and allowing for a support structure that encouraged diverse strategies for combatting sexism and celebrating female subjectivity. If *Sleepless and Without Nurture* the evening of performances I attended on September 26, is any indication of the "quality" and diversity of the monthly presentations, TranceSister is quite good at fulfilling its mission.

The first half of the evening consisted of three highly visual "solo" pieces by Jeannie Harithas Scanlan, Katherine Boyd and Julie Laffin. Each of these artists attempted to create a strong central image that served as a metaphor or metonym for the ideological/emotional content of their piece. Interestingly, the three solo pieces were thematically linked by a desire to confront the containment, marginalization and silencing of women in our society.

A Hole is to Dig started with a haunting image as Jeannie Scanlan's limp body was carried center stage and placed onto a strangely decorated "altar". Scanlan quickly animated herself and proceeded to transform the "altar" into a "costume" as she climbed inside making it the bottom of her dress. She experienced difficulty and had to call on the audience to help her get into her beautiful "trap". The moment when a young man in the audience rushed onto stage and helped Scanlan into the costume became a haunting reminder of the way "we" (society) conspire to put and keep women in their place(s).

The remainder of Scanlan's performance was a shrewd deconstruction of the initial image. She proceeded to lift up her skirts to reveal a dresser underneath, which was disassembled, rebuilt and finally inhabited by Scanlan who disappeared into the closed dresser. throughout the deconstruction process Scanlan spoke to us in a casual manner basically explaining what she was doing. The piece ended with Scanlan climbing out of the bottom drawer, in her undergarments and exiting through the audience.

Scanlan's piece was followed by Katherine Boyd's surreal work-in-progress *We're Glad You're Back*. Boyd began the performance hidden from view under a large fragment of brown two-tone carpeting. We could only see her eyes gazing at us through two holes. As Boyd frantically glared at us



Photo: Tim Schneider

have made sense, but here it seemed hollow as she chanted to the rhythm of banging sticks while wearing a tasteful ensemble from the GAP. *Working Dreams* was similarly safe, and Mozes' reference to the Iron Curtain somewhat overblown, as it seemed to refer only to an imaginary wall between the scholar and his slightly dysfunctional family. Mozes, a recent graduate of Northwestern's Performance Studies department, was hard to take seriously in his Speedo bathing suit and goggles.

Suzie Silver's video, *A Spy in the House of Love*, was a celebration of psychedelia. Highly produced, and slickly edited, it flashes before the eyes in MTV fashion. In it, performer Hester Reeves lip synches righteously with the Doors. She appears as

indulgence. And, for a change, it's good to see the 'real thing,' too often we get the 'Indian' point of view from WASP voices: writers, directors, actors, etc., anyone, essentially, who wants to throw their two cents into the fray of genocidal guilt this country is founded on.

Not since Bread & Puppet Theatre have I seen a company make so much beauty out of so little. For a picnic scene, they transform mundane shopping bags into works of art with feathers, greeting cards, glitter and hand-painted ornamentation, a reference to how Native Americans historically have fashioned everyday houseware for aesthetics as well as function.

The stories the women tell are often short and to the point, but loaded with implication, as in their



Rennie Sparks

a recording began to play. This tape was a strange juxtaposition of a self-hypnosis instructional tape and Boyd's calm voice, almost sensually musing on the joys of "stain proof, fingernail proof, rug burn proof, ultra shag plush..." carpeting.

After an indeterminate amount of time Boyd crawled out from under her carpet/blanket/net/grave and in a bizarre catatonic state began engaging with the audience by squeezing her brown polyester dress until a fluid started oozing out of the hemline. Boyd proceeded to pour this strange brew into coffee cups and give it to members of the audience.

Boyd's performance was powerfully strange and evocative; the carpet, for example, alternately suggested a middle class rec room and an earthen grave. It was out of this surreal trance that Julie Laffin made her dramatic entrance wrapped in a giant cellophane bag and clinging a three foot long dead fish to the tight black dress that clung to her body.

Laffin has in the last few years made a conscious effort to "return to an imagistic form of performance". She certainly accomplished the creation of a powerful integration of image/action/text in *Dear Neth*. Her costume was not simply a "wacky" performance art stunt, but a rigorously worked-through stage image. As the performance progressed I began to notice more details in the image. For example, the dress had been taped tightly to Laffin's body with what appeared to be surgical or masking tape. This restricted her ability to walk naturally. Closer inspection also revealed that she was covered with a peculiar black sludge that suggested industrial waste and/or river bed silt.

Laffin's images and the actions and text accompanying them actively work to rupture and open up meaning rather than to provide authoritative interpretations of meaning. The fish, as used by Laffin in the piece, is a perfect illustration of this. *It stands for a literal dead fish*, an illustration of the cliché "fish out of water", a stand in for the lover who tried to control this woman's life, Christian religious symbolism, an illustration of misogyny, and another example of suffocating (the fish suffocates being out of water, Laffin almost suffocates herself in the plastic bag).

Laffin begins speaking by singing "Can't help Loving Dat Man" ("Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly, I'm gonna love one man 'til I die...") from the musical *Showboat*. Anyone familiar with the musical will realize that the song is sung by Julie, a "tragic mulatto" character who is singing about a man who will eventually abuse and betray her. Julie sings "Julie's" song about infatuation while she tells us about working out of a tendency to enter into destructive relationships. Here again Laffin seems to be playing with a potentially endless series of rich associations: our relationship to the Broadway musical *Showboat*, possibly our relationship to Edna Ferber's novel (which was adapted and "de-feminized" to conform to Broadway standards), the use of river imagery in both the musical and the novel (which become ole "man" river in the musical), and male constructed stereotypes of woman as victim and/or *femme fatale*. Laffin seems to shift back and forth amongst these associations. One minute she is engaging in a desperate act of self destruction, the next minute she is telling us she is free "like the wind." In an act which seeks to synthesize the various strategies used during the piece Laffin rewrites the words of the Broadway song and sings to us "Fish gotta swim and birds gotta fly! Do I have



Photo: John Scanlan

Julie Laffin

to love psychopaths till I die? I don't think so!" At this point Laffin rips the wig off of her head and discards it offstage. This final bricolage of text/image/action suggests that the first step towards liberation lies in the ability to unshackle oneself from disempowering gender boundaries.

After the intermission, Rennie Sparks presented a thirty minute short story in monologue form. Sparks, a published short story writer, uses storytelling to "stretch the boundaries of feminine roles." Sparks subtle boundary stretching is evident in her wonderful story "Dirtbags." The story takes the form of a memory piece, as the storyteller Rosalie reminisces about her childhood friend Debbie. The memories are full of vivid and humorous details; finding a bottle of vodka under a parked car, a first kiss between the two friends, Debbie's incarceration at the hands of her parents, and finally Debbie's conversion to a born again Holy Roller later in life. All of these interludes combine creating a compelling meditation on friendship, desire, loss and alienation.

After Spark's story we were treated to a ram-bunctious clown show courtesy of Anna Brown and Rob Van Tuyle. The artists use the clown style to dissect middle class yuppie "family values." The openly didactic piece explored the alienation of Mr. and Mrs. Bourgeois Savant as they struggled to make sense of the modern world. The piece included several wonderful bits including a disrobing of Van Tuyle that revealed layer upon layer of sewn together shirts that had to be peeled off his body. The couple also engaged in an argument using everything from money to comfort to sex in order to defeat their partner. The most poignant illustration of the couples distance from social reality was demonstrated when the two clowns burst into a very "white" rap about modern life. The number humorously pointed out the middle class liberal's reluctant to embrace social justice when it interferes with material pleasures.

Sleepless and Without Nurture was a powerful refutation of the notion that a feminist artistic agenda is a rigid monolithic path. The individual artists who worked on this evening represent a polyphony of aesthetic, ideological and social viewpoints. This seems the overall message of an enterprise like TranceSister Productions: unique voices collectively supporting other unique voices in an attempt to expand democratic cultural practice.

—Craig Harshaw

The Woman Who Kept Getting Stuck

Laurie Macklin

November 6-14, 1992

Wooden Gallery, Chicago

Small moments of Michael Meyers' writing appear like little gems amid the rather plain landscape of Laurie Macklin's latest work, *The Woman Who Kept Getting Stuck*. Meyers' writing is so compelling, so engrossing within the utterance of the first few words, that it is hardly surprising that Macklin's choreography could not keep pace. Meyers has a way of inserting an unsuspected adjective in just the right place that twists the meaning around, creating a slightly skewed universe for his characters to inhabit, and leaving the listener anxious for the next sentence. Macklin's choreography and concept for the work had no such effect.

Performed in the unusual environment of the Wooden Gallery, Macklin's piece happens in and around several large wooden painting-like sculptures and a trio of seated wooden women. A large abstractly-painted backdrop covers one wall, while off to the left, in another room of the gallery, other large sculptures loom in the semi-darkness. Some of the audience was seated on bales of hay, and a horsey decaying smell filled the room. Macklin's movement was sure-footed and precise, a combination of quirky personal pedestrian-type movement mixed with larger and more technically demanding modern dance-based movements.

While her ease of movement and surefootedness was a pleasure to watch, Macklin unfortunately retreated to the choreographic safe ground for this piece. She seems to be afflicted with the same disease that many modern dance choreographers contract when confronted with text in a performance: they follow it (ie, the character in the story is nervous, so the performer moves nervously). BORING. Not only is this boring, but it's the easy solution to a complex and interesting dilemma for choreographers and performance artists. In the sixties, Yvonne Rainer demonstrated in *Trio A* that a far more interesting solution to the text/movement dilemma is to have the text and the movement not obviously related at all. This adds a layer of complexity to the performance, rather than a layer of simplicity.

In the universe of the piece, The Woman thinks she is alone. She is afflicted with a kind of reverse-epilepsy. When conditions become too unbearable, she freezes up. Literally. Macklin gets stranded on stage in some extremely uncomfortable looking poses. To her aid periodically comes Caryn Weglarz, a sort of alter-ego/shadow of Macklin (they even look alike). The shadow-woman has a super ego-esque relationship to Macklin's character, sometimes becoming stuck with her, sometimes outlining Macklin's body in chalk, occasionally taking over the narration. Macklin's mouth is the one thing that doesn't get stuck during these attacks, and she proceeds to explain in detail what *these attacks are like during each episode*. Between these attacks, the causes of them are alluded to. Pieces of text begin to suggest that in our society it's a woman's place to be stuck: a chilling story is told about a woman who carries a dead child for three months before the still birth; Macklin obsessively vacuums the same corner of the room over and over; the image is told of men sitting at one end of a conference table while the women at the other end cling to the edge, barely able to hang on (echoes of Anita Hill). These are powerful moments and images that begin to develop an



Photo: Mark Krastof

idea of "stuck" that is outside of the normal understanding and the obvious physical demonstration of the word.

About two-thirds through the piece enters 8 year-old Thiago Lima, Macklin's son. Although forced to deliver dreadful lines like "I am Hope. I am her hope," and perform some contrived-looking choreography, he also gets to run around stage with a plastic sword pretending to kill things. He was great at this. He was so great at this (and by *this* I mean acting like a real person, a real kid) that he almost completely undermined the entire evening. Forty minutes of well-performed choreography was almost undone by Lima acting like himself. It was great, but I'm not sure if it's exactly what Macklin wanted. Because far from taking me further into the work, Lima's performance took me completely out of it, even made the rest of the piece seem arty and pretentious in comparison to his honesty. In the end, I had to disregard the reality of an 8 year-old boy on stage because I really wanted to find out about this "stuck" thing.

Which I never really got to do. During the playful ending to the work, Macklin seems to suggest that these stuck attacks, so painful and mysterious at the top of the piece, are just our way of testing ourselves. In other words, they're self-inflicted. This ending rang a false note of happiness and simplistic good cheer to a piece that was otherwise moody, introspective, and physically tense. Moreover, it seemed to imply that women, who were the focus of the work, were somehow bringing this on themselves. Given the problems faced by women not only in our society but around the globe as well, Macklin's trite and easy feel-good ending seems a bit hollow, and somewhat irresponsible.

—Ken Thompson

Reno Once Removed

Reno

September 10-27, 1992

The Goodman Studio Theatre, Chicago

"...the bodily element is deeply positive...the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character...all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated and renewed..."

—Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

At the beginning of her performance, Reno warns the audience: "You should never call yourself an asshole, because if your psyche hears it you may become one." The audience members nod in recognition and laugh who have suffered their own instances of self-flagellation. But the audience is not allowed to reflect long, because Reno has already moved on to her next topic.

Reno's monologues run the gambit from reflections on everyday life tribulations and her family dynamics, to her political attacks on the right. Her monologues often seem to be guided by her physical gestures. She moves throughout the stage like a puppet being guided around by invisible strings. She jerks, flails, spins, dances, tumbles, sings and speaks as pieces of her wild, blond curly hair fall to the ground. Reno's body transforms into the visual metaphors that she shares in her monologues. Squatting, groaning and pushing she becomes a constipated fax machine, her quintessential image of the lack of productivity of the America of the 90's.

One of the most powerful segments of her performance is when she embodies her suffocating mother, as she creates a claustrophobic environment bereft of light, air and space. "...could you just

lower the ceiling a little bit, could you raise the floor just a little...could someone suck in some of the air" says Reno inhaling and elevating her vocal pitch. Reno has mastered the timing and manipulation of her voice to fully personify her mother. As she characterizes her mother depleting the room of its light, the stage light closes in on Reno, underlining the ambiance. It is one of a few points during the performance, where there is creativity



Photo courtesy of Reno

in the lighting. Expressive use of lighting and sound could be incorporated throughout *Reno Once Removed* to add resonance to Reno's incisive visions.

Reno's entire performance moves at a quick-fire pace. She moves from personal reflections, to her more political and general reflections, i.e., the state of the economy. Her political visions are those of a liberal democrat; much of her humor focuses on subjects including the savings and loan scandals, Reagan, Bush and Trump that have been addressed by comedians such as Jay Leno. Some of these political diatribes, such as her attack on Bush and Trump are simply a rehashing of main-

stream comedy material. However, it is when Reno pushes her visions *beyond* the mainstream, that her humor hits hardest. Her challenge to Jesse Helms' attack on Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs is particularly cogent. She refers to a Mapplethorpe photo of a man whose testicles are being clenched in a mousetrap, questioning the consequences of the public's exposure to this image. "Are they afraid there would be a run on the mousetraps in the hardware store?" asks Reno with trenchant irony. She goes on to describe conservatives who walk down the street in terror "of dicks being rammed up their assholes."

Reno's satirical attacks are not limited to conservatives. She mocks obsessive animal rights activists who reprimand her for leaving her dog outside of the health food store, claiming "her dog could be stolen and be utilized for mascara experiments." She reflects on a contemporary American culture that is filled with contradictions, bringing out the point that even those parents who make the "politically correct choice" of opting for a diaper service (as opposed to buying disposable diapers), are contributing to pollution, because of the exhaust emitted from the diaper service trucks. Her answer to this problem is a "bicycle diaper service."

Reno constantly reminds the audience of our own contradictory behaviors. Central to her humor is the message that "Life is not black and white." "There's a schmuck in me," she states. She reminds us that we all need to be aware when the schmuck inside of us raises its ugly head.

Toward the end of her performance, Reno did a wrenching demonstration of her breasts being "made into blintzes" at her mammogram check-up. Perhaps the best testimony to the strength of Reno's work is her affect on my friends and I after we left the Goodman Theater, uplifted, and laughing. We walked down Michigan Avenue demonstrating our own tortuous mammography exams for each other and all of Michigan Avenue.

—Audrey Colby



SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

In P-Form #26, Jimi Jihad was inadvertently identified as Michael Zerang. P-Form regrets the error.



Photo: Debra E. Levie.

This is Jimi Jihad.



This is Michael Zerang.

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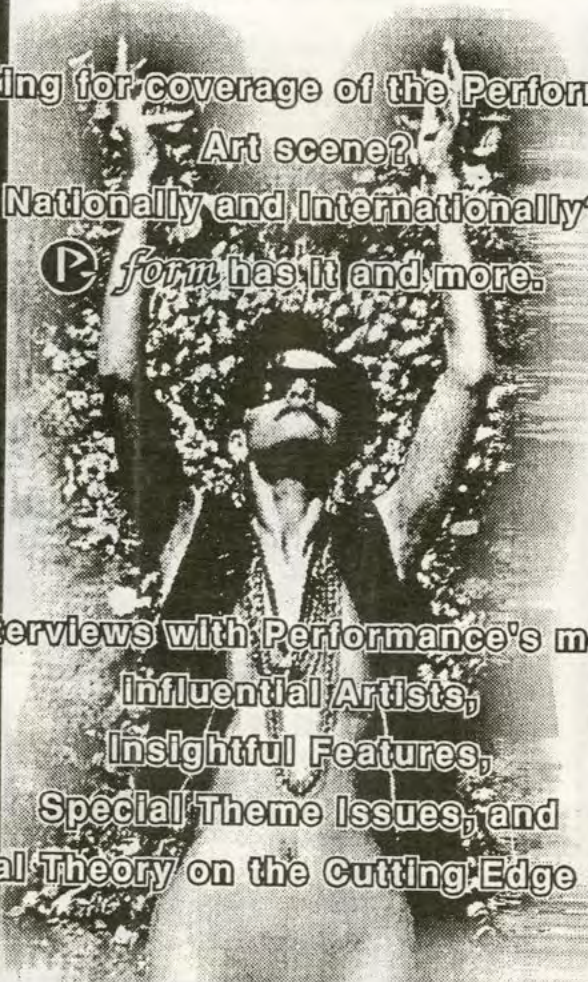
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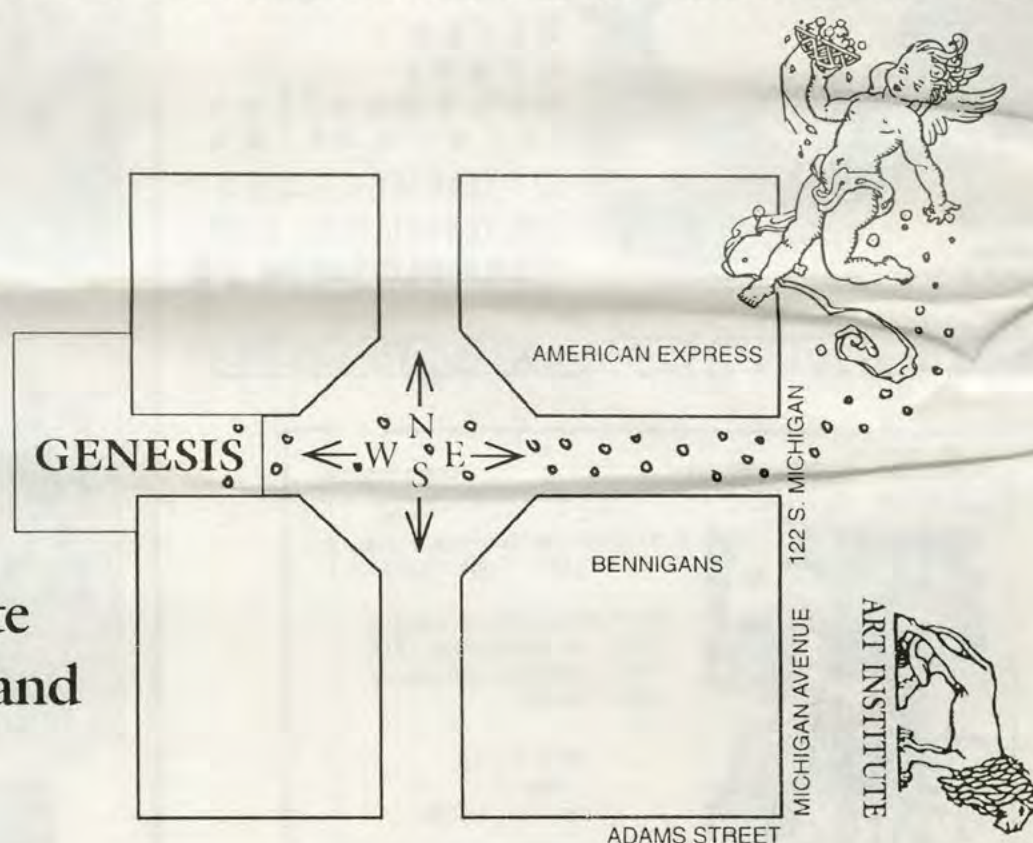


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