SEX, PERFORMANCE, AND THE 80'S

FRANKLIN FURNACE · THE FLUE · DOUBLE ISSUE

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Maria Callas singing, "VISSI D'ARTE, VISSI D'AMORE." —Ingrid Sischy

For me, the only moments that are worthwhile are the moments that are transcendent. There are only a few things that are transcendent. Fucking is number 1, writing is number 2. Skiing is also in there. As a preacher, I was trying to pursue a transcendent moment. It was absolutely like sex. It had a minimum of introspection, a minimum of thought, and a maximum of action. I'm just trying for some slack.

—THE REV. DAVID MEYER, D.D., B.B.J., POPN.Y.C.

I never talk about sex in public. That's about it, I guess.

—DAVIDSON GIGLIOTTI

I think of my work as explicitly erotic and I'm always surprised when other people don't see it that way. Apparently no one wants to think the worst. When I recently told a friend that my installation, DENMAN'S COL, was really all about sex, she said, "Gee, I thought it was just pretty pictures."

—MARY LUCIER

What about the sexuality of a conductor? Or the performance of the sex act on stage? Is theatre moving towards an androgenous persona? I saw a dance the other night done by women, but it could have been done by men. People are modulating toward a middle ground with extremes allowed on either end. Maybe the sex act will *have to be performed on stage because everyone will have V.D. in a few years. That will be the ultimate performance.*

—DR. B.C.

The only one I want is the one I can't have. The only one I want is the one that she's got. The only one I want is that one, and that one, and that one, and that one. All I want, all I really want is, all I want, all I really want is, love."

—BETH ANDERSON

Sssss Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh,.

—RHEA GAISNER

Explore the resonance of an infinite space with your voice.

—BILL FONTANA

Art could be basically seen as masturbation so you may as well get down and look directly at it. That's why I have done masturbation tapes. Is this art or is it masturbation?

—JON CHILD

There's a lot of hearsay about performance being given in Club 57 by John Sex. It's an elaborate strip-tease performance act. The cross-pollination of the art spaces with the clubs has furthered trends.

—JOE HANNAN

Without sex there is no performance.

—NED SUBLETTE

It is impossible to write about sex, performance and the 80's without calling attention to the individual words, their combination, and inter-recontexting. Naming these things does not bring them into existence, only into thought. Why are we thinking this way now?

—CHARLIE MORROW

Do I have to talk about that?

—RICHARD TEITELBAUM

"Performance Art"—the micro-cosmic way of being political in the macrocosm. Functioning in the males-only card-carrying Town and Country club, the women unit, produce themselves, and can not be silenced.

—TERRI HANLON/EVA TYPE

The 1980's could be a time of great flowering from the with-in to the with-out for all those souls who have come to lead the change of planetary consciousness. America is to play a great role in this, and artistic performances can serve to awaken and unify this consciousness among the many. The channeling of sexual energies is an important factor for this evolution; however, we must always keep in mind that all souls in the earth are at different stages of their evolution, and have their own understanding to work out in regards to handling sexual energies.

—P.W. SIMONDS

Beans carry self-labels and are marked by these as distinctly as a mouse by its special smell. Glycoproteins negotiate the intimate and essential attachment between the bean and the nitrogen fixing bacteria which live as part of the plant's flesh, embedded in root nodules. The lectin from one line of legume has a special affiity for the surface of the particular bacteria which colonize that line, but not from other types of bean. The system is designed for exclusive partnerships.

—ALISON KNOWLES

Sexuality is like a deck of wild cards.

—SIMONE B. RHINEHARDT

Sex, what is it? Are some people still doing it? Yech! —Rachel Rosenthal

Do it. Do it. Do it.—Pauline Oliveros

A lot of things that go on in real intense sexual or personal relationships for me read just like performances.

—ALYSON POU

Sex: The greatest, sharing muse, we debase to exploit one another. Performance: So you wanna be a rock 'n' roll star but you can't even play those three chords on guitar? Go into performance and be an "air" star. And the eighties:—fuck the eighties, let's worry about important years like 1694 and 3155. How About: The sanctification and transformation of life, encompassing the ecstasy of love, through art—especially live art.

—M. STAFF BRANDL

One of these will probably not be around for long. How will this affect the remaining two?

—PATRICIA PEITILIER

I forsee sex and performance not being terribly happily married to one another in the 1980's. I suppose sex and performance had their true honeymoon in the 1960's, and their true "ho-hum" in the 1970's. As most people are increasingly bored with sex and increasingly more interested in money, I believe money and performance art will no doubt do a bit of courting. In fact, I predict, a performance artist will be on the cover of FORBES by the end of this decade.

—CARMELA RAGO

Sometimes I think I should stop beating around the bush and just become a Las Vegas show girl.

—ANN MAVOR

Sex is a form of collaboration. Collaboration in performance art is becoming more important as a form of dialogue between 2 or more performers and between performers and audience. I'm interested in the idea of artists—man/woman; woman/woman; man/man, etc.—candidly dealing with sexuality and relationships in a performance as mating of life and art.

—MICHAEL MOLLETT

I'm afraid boys will be boys and continue to make masturbatory art. I envision women remaining in the forefront in addressing sexuality in performance art. Unlike the '70's where we examined how our sexuality was used to oppress us, in the '80's we'll explore how sexuality in relationships can empower us.

—LAUREL KLICK

It's time we all started realizing it's not any particular gender that has sexual problems. It's the culture at large. It's time we started working with men again. Men versus women—I just don't see it that way. We're all in it together.

—JOAN GIANNECCHINI

I don't have any comments about sex, performance and the 80's. *—JULIE WINTER*

Professor Aktin says: 'I see performance moving into life which of course often involves sex.'

—BONNIE SHERK

Cecil Taylor is gay and I never think about his sexual preference when he's playing the piano. I just listen to his music. The only time I think about sex in an art context is when it's being specifically treated as a subject.

—MARILYN CRISPELL

The 80's are clear, but sex gets in the way. Sex is clear, but performance gets in and . . . well, you know! Anything goes.

—J WOODY HAID

Performance Art, for me, is image making. I am a visual artist. Image making within the context of time. The old challenge is the same: i.e. the concerns of form, content, and value. The performance energy, LIVE, "being there" is the "new" challenge. The power of the moment.

—E.W. ROSS

I think that everyone's confused and sex in the 80's isn't any different than at any other point in history—it's just that everybody's always been confused and always will be confused about their sexual identity. But there's a certain way of coming to grips with that—if you recognize the confusion then it's O.K., you can deal with it.

—BETH BEROLZHEIMER

I have a hangover due to performing sexuality.

—Lucy Lippard

The History of Sex at Franklin Furnace
by Martha Wilson

Oops I meant performance. Performance art is really like sex anyway: Women like to perform in the dark, men in the light. The more you pay, the better it is. Performance is how wet, pink emotions become dry and crusty ideas. Other aphorisms about sex apply to performance. Everything is really about sex. According to Melanie Klein, art is a sublime form of reparation for destroying Mom and Dad in our childhood fantasies. I believe this idea. I also believe that the needs of the individual are forever opposed to the needs of society and that performance is the expression of this dichotomy. Sex produces offspring or pleasure or both; performance produces pleasure and images that spring off into the air.

So this essay is about the history of sex at Franklin Furnace as told by the performances presented here since 1976. During the first season, two artists per evening performed, usually one well-known and one unknown. Soon the natural competition between artists for the affections of the mother (the public) became too intense, and to remedy this situation we scheduled one performance on Tuesday, and one on Thursday of each week. These artists' readings were, um, multivarious and tended to be more ambitious every week until this reading series to allow visual artists to read their written work soon became a performance series. Here are the artists whose performances were about sex in 1976-77:

Oct. 5: Bernadette Mayer
(read works by Nancy Kitchel & Rosemary Mayer)
Oct. 12: Henry Korn & Richard Kostelanetz
Oct. 19: Judy Rifka
Oct. 26: Barbara Kruger & Athena Tacha
Nov. 2: Les Levine
Nov. 9: Lee Breuer & Carolee Schneemann
Nov. 16: Vito Acconci
Nov. 30: Ralston Farina
Dec. 7: Carl Andre
Dec. 14: Kathy Acker & Diego Cortez
Jan. 11: Lee Breuer & Mierle Ukeles Laderman
Jan. 18: Rita Meyers & Leonard Neufeld
Jan. 25: Martine Aballea & Jacki Apple
Feb. 1: Gioia Timpanelli
Feb. 8: Alice Aycock & Constance DeJong
Feb. 15: Jennifer Bartlett & William Wegman
Feb. 22: Barbara Baracks & Peter Frank
Mar. 1: Robin Winters
Mar. 8: Simone Forti & Peter Van Riper
Mar. 15: Barbara Bloom & Amy Taubin
Mar. 22: Ed Bowes & Ed Friedman
Mar. 29: George Griffin & Saul Ostrow
April 5: Jill Kroesen & Susan Russell
April 12: Bill Beckley & Richard Foreman
April 19: Lauren Ewing & Alan Sondheim
April 26: Julia Heyward & Robert Morris
May 3: Laurie Anderson & David Rattray
May 10: Richard Artschwager & Claire Moore
May 17: Victor Burgin
May 24: Jana Haimsohn & Clenda Hydler
May 31: Tom Johnson.

Continued . . .

There has been a lot of sex at Franklin Furnace since the first season. The performance I just saw by Mineo Yamaguchi seemed to be about growth, change, pain, rips, gaps, diving, waiting, meditating, shaping the world. It didn't have a "punch line" exactly, no words were spoken at all, but it surely told the story of this artist's interest in pristine form, the violation of form with the body, the ability of the artist to reshape the environment into another form, telling the story of interior consciousness through outside forms. First this artist meditates, symmetrically enshrined in a shallow, white space created with paper. Then he lunges at a brick placed in front of him, ripping the paper, exposing the floor, the red floor, diving into the mother's womb, opening her vagina, hurling himself against the walls of the womb.

Another thing I believe is that most of the time artists "don't know what they are doing." I don't mean this in a pejorative way. For example, when I was a baby artist, I didn't know what my performances were "about" until years later when in retrospect, they seemed to all be part of one grand idea. Maybe this means that if you've seen one performance, you've seen all one artist has to deliver, but I personally enjoy seeing an artist develop his or her performance idea over time, since this is the artform about the sequence of live events in time. Sam Hsieh for another example, spent one year punching a time clock every hour, day and night, never going out, and letting his hair grow all the while to feel for himself the infinitesimal passage of time. This performance was picked up as a news story by the Wall Street Journal, *of course because it was about work, but what a truly radical performance world to receive this massive publicity! This is body art in a big way. Sam Hsieh's other pieces are all of a piece; maybe that's why they're called "pieces"? This year he is spending his time entirely outdoors, as many bums do in New York City. Recently he was arrested as a bum, or his art was taken for reality. I love this kind of performance: Art which operates in the world. Following are the performances FF presented to the world in 1977-78:*

Sept. 13: Jenny Snider
Sept. 15: Robert Morgan
Sept. 20: Ray Johnson
Sept. 22: Al Schmidt
Sept. 27: Robert Wilson
Sept. 29: Stuart Sherman
Oct. 4: Phil Corner
Oct. 6: Edith Leonian
Oct. 11: Dick Higgins
Oct. 13: Eric Bogosian
Oct. 18: Richard Artschwager
Oct. 20: Terry O'Reilly
Oct. 25: Scott Johnson
Oct. 27: Poppy Johnson
Nov. 1: Robert Barry
Nov. 3: Michael Andre
Nov. 9: Pat Steir
Nov. 10: Janet Sternburg
Nov. 15: Larry Miller
Nov. 17: Carter Ratcliff
Nov. 22: Judy Rifka
Nov. 29: Anne Lauterbach
Dec. 1: Michael Harvey
Dec. 6: Pati Hill
Dec. 8: Jane Delynn
Dec. 13: Dan Graham
Dec. 15: Dale Worsley
Dec. 20: Alison Knowles
Dec. 22: Barbara Kruger
Dec. 27: John Andrews
Dec. 29: Bruce Barber
Jan. 3: Ilona Granet
Jan. 5: Bliem Kern
Jan. 10: John Cage
Jan. 12: Opal Nations
Jan. 17: Amy Taubin
Jan. 19: Martha Wilson
Jan. 24: Joan Jonas
Jan. 26: Jerry Mazza
Jan. 31: Jim Burton
Feb. 2: Barbara Buckner
Feb. 7: Dara Birnbaum & Suzanne Kuffler
Feb. 9: Agnes Denes
Feb. 14: Sharon Kulik
Feb. 16: Richard Nonas
Feb. 21: Christa Maiwald
Feb. 23: Connie Beckley
Feb. 28: Robert Longo
Mar. 2: Ursule Molinaro
Mar. 7: Patrick Ireland
Mar. 9: Geoff Hendricks
Mar. 14: Rhys Chatham
Mar. 16: Matt Mullican
Mar. 21: Ana Mendieta
Mar. 23: Jackson Maclow
Mar. 28: Garrett List
Mar. 30: Amy Taubin
April 4: Bill Beirne
April 6: Nikki Hayes
April 11: Hannah Weiner
April 13: Tania Mouraud
April 18: Robert Longo
April 20: Suzanne Harris
April 25: Jerry Jones
April 27: Michael Cooper
May 2: Martha Rosler
May 4: Bob Wilhite
May 9: Guy de Cointet
May 11: Bob George
May 21-27: Claire Fergusson & Arlene Schloss
June 1: Mimi Smith
June 6: Michael Smith
June 8: Karen Chase
June 13: David Dunlap
June 15: Paul Zelevansky.

The art-wide tendency for performance art (my own work in DISBAND included) is away from the world, and towards a traditional theater format with all the tricks and visual wows theater has to offer. But I believe this tendency does not mark a failure of performance art; rather, I believe this is because more people are going to performance as they would go to theater, and performance artists are now practicing their messages before an involved audience. At the Performing Garage, an experimental theater space in Soho, artists are mounting "runs" of their performances for several nights, allowing the wider audience more leisure in choosing a night. At Franklin Furnace, attendance and income have increased each year as a wider audience becomes aware of performance art as an important contemporary art medium.

To my mind, Vito Acconci started the contemporary performance art movement in the early 70s with his menacing performance works: following someone, biting his arm, masturbating under a floor, waiting at the bottom of the stairs with lead pipe in hand and blindfolded. All of these pieces were really of a piece, all in the posture of a guerrilla fighter in opposition to the art world and society. The public loved it. Being stomped on was part of sex! Here are the artists who stomped on the public in 1978-79:

Sept. 19: Jill Kroesen
Sept. 21: Henry Korn
Sept. 26: Claudia DeMonte
Sept. 28: Chandra Oppenheim
Oct. 3: Jim Hart
Oct. 5: Ed Bowes
Oct. 10: Sandra Meigs
Oct. 12: Tom Brady
Oct. 17: Charlie Moulton
Oct. 19: Joe Lewis
Oct. 24: Glenn Branca
Oct. 26: Linda Novak
Oct. 31: Tony Rickaby
Nov. 2: Augusto Concato & Vito Boggeri
Nov. 7: Dieter Froese
Nov. 9: Richard Newton
Nov. 14: Krzysztof Zarebski
Nov. 16: Rosemary Mayer
Nov. 21: Mary Jane Dougherty
Nov. 28: Michael Meyers
Nov. 30: John Malpede
Dec. 5: Barbara Smith
Dec. 7: Tim Yohn
Dec. 12: Klaus Kertiss
Dec. 14: Michael J. Berkowitz
Dec. 19: Michael Lytle
Dec. 21: David Antin
Jan. 2: John Holland American Soundgroup
Jan. 4: Ted Greenwald

Jan. 9: Carolee Schneemann
Jan. 11: Laurie Anderson
Jan. 16: Theodora Skipitares
Jan. 18: Stephen Piccolo
Jan. 23: Ellen Rothenberg
Jan. 25: Jerry Jones
Jan. 30: Taka Imura
Feb. 1: Jacki Apple
Feb. 8: Diane Torr
Feb. 22: Donna Henes
Mar. 1: Ann McMillan & Dieter Jung
Mar. 6: Annson Kenny
Mar. 13: Connie DeJong
Mar. 15: Jim Sutcliffe
Mar. 20: Harry Matthews
Mar. 22: Newton & Helen Harrison
Mar. 27: Lynne Tillman
Mar. 29: David Tipe
April 3: Barbara Schwartz
April 5: Peter Frank
April 10: Jeffrey Lohn
April 12: Karen Harper
April 17: Alan Sondheim
April 19: Robin Brentano
April 24: Disband
April 26: Ann Sargeant-Wooster
May 1: Ericka Beckman
May 3: Mask Transit
May 8: Sharon Mattlin
May 10: Mary Nell Hawk
May 15: Tom Rubnitz
May 17: Otis Brown
May 22: Richard Hayman
May 24: Judith Barry

One of these artists was Ilona Granet, who did a performance that would have put Vito Acconci to shame, had he been there. It was about rape. First, Ilona appeared on the street outside the storefront space FF occupies, herding in the audience with a billy club: "C'mon you assholes, move those butts inside!" Verbal abuse. Everyone sat down, Ilona sat on a stool slowly stripping off her "rapist" clothes, and hysterically told the audience how she was raped once, twice, three, four times. All the while a male voice coming from the mezzanine above interrupted her, heckled her: "Aah you women love it, you really wanted it!" More verbal abuse. Ilona entwines herself in a bedsheet, looking like she is rising out of her hospital bed.

Sex can be exhausting. By the 1979-80 season, although Franklin Furnace was still presenting two performances per week, it was clear to staff members that the artists didn't have enough time to set up in the space where they were to perform, nor could they leave their residue around for a day or so to be exhibited to the public. Here are the artists who were exhausted in 1979-80:

Sept. 20: Charlemagne Palestine
Sept. 25: Bill Gordh
Sept. 27: Sick Dick & The Volkswagons
Oct. 2: Els Rijper
Oct. 4: Vanalyne Green
Oct. 9: John Duncan
Oct. 11: Fernando Doty
Oct. 16: Tony Labat
Oct. 18: Linda Nishio
Oct. 23: Rita Myers
Nov. 1: Luisa Cividin/ Roberto Taroni
Nov. 6: Susan Britton
Nov. 8: Jill Scott
Nov. 13: Anne Hamburger
Nov. 15: Michael Meyers
Nov. 27: Pierre Jouvet
Nov. 29: Mark A. Scherman
Dec. 4: Bern Porter
Dec. 6: Nigel Rolfe
Dec. 11: Laura Hayes & Alan Sondheim
Dec. 13: Donald Purgy
Dec. 18: Peter Gordon
Jan. 8: Annea Lockwood
Jan. 10: John Dowell
Jan. 17: Walter Abish
Jan. 23: Douglas Davis
Jan. 29: Beth Anderson
Feb. 7: Betsy Damon
Feb. 12: Renate Bertlmann
Feb. 14: Barbara Hammer
Feb. 19: Twin Art
Mar. 11: Romaine Perin
Mar. 18: Lauren Ewing
Mar. 20: Sue Berkey
Mar. 25: Lucy R. Lippard
Mar. 27: Sam Schoenbaum
April 3: The Idiot Orchestra
April 8: The Social Climbers
April 15: Y Pants
April 17: Arlene Schloss
April 22: Louise Guay
April 29: John Giorno
May 8: Nina Wise
May 13: Glenda Hydler
May 15: Nancy Buchanan
May 20: Carla Liss
May 22: Larry Miller
May 29: David Antin.

In the 1980-81 season, Franklin Furnace was able to present a good deal of foreign sexual practice to the public through its De Appel program of six artists from The Netherlands, and its LA-London exchange of ten artists from Los Angeles, and ten artists from London. Here are the artists presented in 1980-81.

Sept. 25: Robert Peters
Oct. 23: Anne Bean & Paul Burwell
Oct. 28: Julien Blaine
Oct. 30: James Green
Nov. 21: Servie Janssen
Nov. 22: Harrie de Kroon
Dec. 5: Madelon Hooykaas
Dec. 5: Elsa Stansfield
Dec. 6: Moniek Toebosch
Dec. 13: Marja Samsom
Dec. 18: Claire Fergusson
Jan. 8: Gina Pane
Jan. 15: Beverly Feldmann
Jan. 22: Lance Richbourg
Jan. 29: Denise Green & Elizabeth Sacre
Feb. 5: Eric Bogosian
Feb. 12: Schuldt
Feb. 19: May Stevens
Feb. 26: Howardena Pindell
Mar. 6: Rose Finn-Kelcey
Mar. 6: Linda Montano
Mar. 7: Hannah O'Shea
Mar. 7: Linda Nishio
Mar. 12: Sonia Knox
Mar. 12: Martha Rosler
Mar. 13: Carlyle Reedy
Mar. 13: Cheri Gaulke
Mar. 14: Sally Potter
Mar. 14: Rose English
Mar. 20: The Feminist Art Workers
Mar. 20: Leslie Labowitz
April 16: Krzysztof Wodiczko
April 23: Candace Hill-Montgomery
May 5: Bill Hellermann
May 5: Mary Jane Leach
May 7: Marshall Reese
May 7: The Tinklers
May 12: Anne Tardos
May 12: Daniel Goode
May 14: Earl Howard
May 14: John Zorn
May 19: Borbetomagus
May 21: Relâche
June 4: Sandra McKee
June 11: Toby MacLennan
June 18: Sandy Moore
June 25: James Coleman

In 1982, sex is still a hot issue. Layne Redmond appeared naked with an alligator head on. Louise Udaykee fucked the floor. Hanne Tierney's prostitute puppet razzed the policeman puppet. Christians from Outer Space quarrelled over their domestic space. Jana Haimsohn shook and yelped. Dentures Art Club analyzed boy-girl relationships leading to marriage. Bruce and Norman Yonemoto's performance included a strip tease. Michael Smith told dirty jokes. So as you can see, sex is why performance artists are motivated to become exhibitionists, oops, I mean exhibit their ideas to the public. It's the burning issue of the last several million years.

Oct. 8: Layne Redmond
Oct. 15: Louise Udaykee
Oct. 29: Hanne Tierney
Nov. 5: Gruppo di Ricerca
Nov. 12: La Gorda Group
Nov. 19: Christians from Outer Space
Dec. 3: Jana Haimsohn
Dec. 10: Lynne Swanson
Dec. 17: Joshua Abbey
Feb. 11: Susan Mogul
Feb. 18: Bricolage
Feb. 25: Theatre for Your Mother
Mar. 4: Jan Fabre
Mar. 11: Dentures Art Club
Mar. 18: The Toykillers
Mar. 25: Spectre Woman
April 8: Ana Mendieta
April 15: Paul Burell
May 6: Norman Yonemoto
May 13: Mineo Yamaguchi
May 18: Ivkovic/Martinis
May 20: Keller
May 27: Michael Smith.

Interview with Carolee Schneemann
by Linda Montano

Linda Montano: *The street that leads to your loft is flower strewn, exotic and seems like an appropriate sensual environment and entrance to your world in N.Y.C.*
Carolee Schneemann: *Let me get you around the corner . . . I live on the fur street, 29th St. is where the furs begin. This loft formerly belonged to fur cutters. When I first got here in 1962 it was covered in a patina of fur which made it primitive, dark and mysterious. The street is also strewn with garbage and no matter how disoriented I am, I turn the corner and there will be something satisfying about the detritus, basic spillage and leakage that's all over the street . . . flowers, furs, piles of litter, and the Empire State building illuminated out my front window.*

Pictured are Dan Branick and Lois Young in DIRTY PICTURES, a performance by Carolee Schneemann.

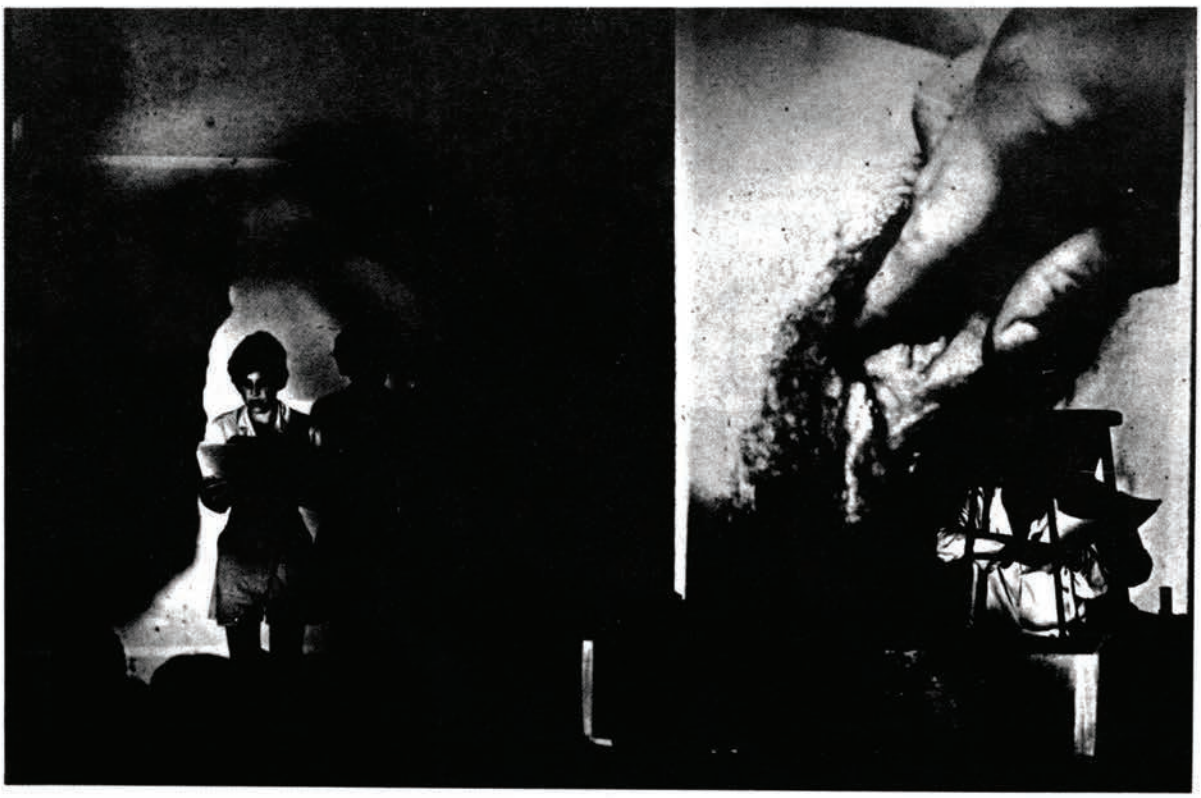


Photo: Ciurej-Lochman

How did you feel about sex as a child?

Drawing and masturbating were the first sacred experiences I remember. Both activities began when I was about 4 years old. Exquisite sensations produced in my body and images that I made on paper, tangled with language, religion, everything that I was taught. As a result I thought that the genital was where God lived. "He" took the form of a kind of Santa Claus and inhabited me. Santa Claus was the good version of Christ because something awful had happened to Christ, and I didn't want that to embody me. Having Santa Claus in my body gave me a sense of effulgence, gifts, mystery and renewal . . . down the chimney, into the house, up the chimney . . . Christianity and Christmas were two cards that led the pack and I felt that by choosing Santa Claus over Christ, I made the pleasurable choice and was therefore able to deflect the other possibility which was more painful, confusing.

Were your parents liberal in giving you sexual or bodily permission?

They weren't prohibiting. I remember their sexual pleasure with each other was all-persuasive and I was part of that. We'd all lie in bed on Sunday mornings, they would teach me to read comics. More than any other prohibition I remember the deep intimacy, sensuousness and delight. I built my own erotic fantasy life with various invisible animal and human lovers inhabiting my sheets, bed . . . influencing common objects.

By the time I was 5 or 6 I was playing kissing games and blind man's bluff in the fields with the Catholic boy across the road who was afraid when I grabbed him. Growing up in the country was very important. The animals were sexual creatures and I identified that part of my nature with them. Nudity was also clear and direct. We turned hay as adolescents, in the afternoons after working we would just take off our work clothes to swim naked in the river.

Your parents and environment supported your naturalness. Were there any other supports?

Yes, my father as a rural physician took care of the body . . . the living body, the dying body. People would come to the house with bloody limbs in their arms and we were trained to sit them down, put a towel around something that was bleeding and then run and get him. I also would peek through the keyhole of his office because it was on our side of the house. Sometimes I'd see a woman's foot sticking off the edge of the examining table and I'd crouch there listening to him say strange things. For example, he asked one woman when she had "menstruated," and she asked, "What's that?" and I heard him say, "bleed." I had Grey's Anatomy book to look at and it gave me a peculiar inside/out visual vocabulary.

Did that kind of relationship with naturalness and the body continue? Did you direct those experiences into art at a certain point?

I knew that I could locate that naturalness by making images and by loving. When I was young I was called a "mad pantheist" by older friends. I didn't know what that was about (hoped it was a female panther), but was told that a pantheist is a nature worshipper. I had elaborate ritual places to go and lie at certain times of the day or night. There were special trees that I had to be in contact with and I would hide in a well that my mother had filled in with flowers. I did this at dusk because I found the transition from day to night uncertain and painful. I would get dizzy listening to the birds, smelling night aromas . . . that was what I had to do.

You never lost that way of exploring and your work attests to that.

When sex negativity and the ordinary sexual abuse and depersonalization that females experience in our culture intruded, I tried to judge it, sort it out, not internalize it. I suppose that not internalizing prohibitions gave me some messianic sense that I was going to have to confront or go against erotic denial fragmentations.

When did you start using sexual themes in your work? What form did that take?

There are different strands. One theme emerged when I was 4 or 5 and I did visual dramas on prescription tablets. The tablets were thick and so I made a sequence of drawings, not just one on a page. It would take 15 pages for an image to emerge. These primitive drawings were filled with sexual implication.

You were making movies?

Yes, they were about making visual dramas (even before I had seen a movie). They were all projected, weird, erotic events between male and female figurations.

The second theme became clear in college. I posed for my boyfriend because we didn't have nude models at Bard. He would do studies of me but not include my head. So I thought that I would do him, only I would include his head and actually work from his head to his feet. There was great upset about his genitals appearing in the portrait. Then I did a self portrait and sat open legged—included my entire body and exposed genitals. The painting was glowing, red and dense. I got indirect reports that this was improper. The female was the constant preoccupation of the male imagination but when I wanted to examine it fully myself and have actual parts depicted, I was accused of breaking essential aesthetic boundaries. I remember feeling that I would have to keep my eye on that . . . that I was myself both an idealization and a center of intense taboo. I didn't want to feel that taboo projected onto me.

Continued . . .

I was later temporarily kicked out of Bard for moral "turpitude" because they had seen my boyfriend and me doing something obscene under a tree. They didn't kick him out for moral "turpitude."

Was your work a continuation of and a way of maintaining this freedom that you've always had?

No, not quite. In the mid-sixties, when I began my film "Fuses" and the performance "Meat Joy," I was thinking about "eroticizing my guilty culture." I saw a cultural task combined with a personal dilemma. My work was dependent on my sexuality—its satisfaction, integrity. I couldn't work without a coherent sexual relationship . . . that fueled my imagination, my energies. My mind works out of the knowledge of the body. An erotic sensibility is inevitably going to experience conflicting messages in a masculist culture that is basically divisive, sex-negative, that traditionally controls female expressiveness—our imaginative domain, our creative will, our desire.

Did you have any models in this work?

In the early 60's my personal relationships were sustaining (lovers, friends), as well as the writings of Wilhelm Reich, Simone de Beauvoir; researching the "lost" paintings and writings of women artists was very important (I did research in obscure books in Dutch, German, French, just to discover unacknowledged women as precedent).

You were a pioneer in a time when there wasn't that much support for what you were doing.

It was a lonely stroke-by-stroke position; I had to resist, analyze and reposition sexual/cultural attitudes.

Did you ever suffer from sexual guilt yourself?

I might feel guilty if too many sexual events pile up close to each other. It's worse for me to judge or deny sexual feeling or experience. I've only really regretted the times when I felt that I wanted to be with someone and there was something socially or interpersonally uncertain about the situation and I said "no."

You had guilt in reverse?

There are levels of reversal here.

Have you ever thought of writing a handbook for the sexually guilty?

I wrote one in 1970 for the sexually curious: "The Sexual Parameters Survey." It's in the form of a chart collating all aspects of love-making. I was alone after having been in an equitable, loving relationship for more than ten years. I began to encounter areas of sex-negativity in relationships I assumed would be spontaneous, whole, passionate—even temporary. At times my body seemed a battle ground of projected taboos, contradictions. So I posited a range of analysis—the sexual parameters to which three other women friends contributed their personal "data." it was exhibited as a five foot long chart in a London gallery, and was printed in my book "Parts Of A Body House" [Beau Geste Press, 1971].

Has the message of your performances changed over the years?

Two recent performances, DIRTY PICTURES and FRESH BLOOD develop movement and slide imagery from texts which unravel specific erotic information as metaphor.

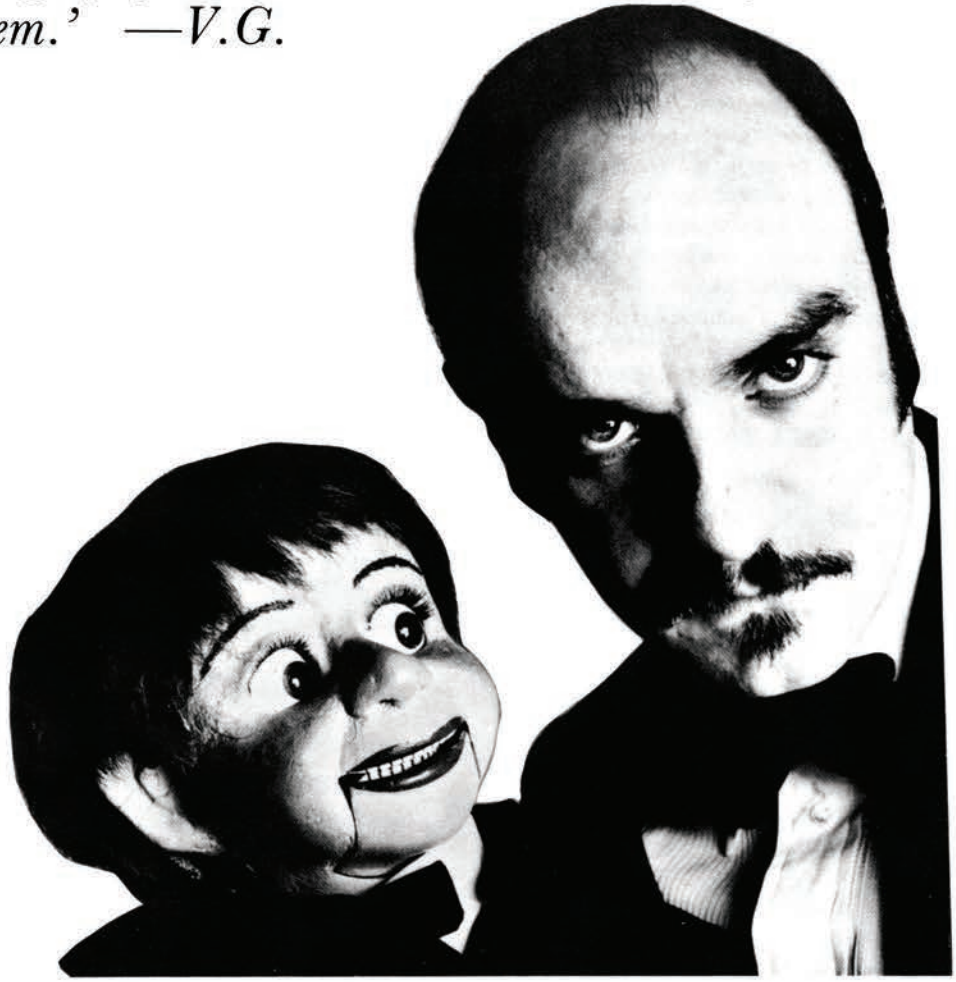
> *DIRTY PICTURES . . . erotic close-up images of body parts of myself and my lover . . . contrasted with body images that register ambiguities between sensuality, eroticism, pornography . . . images from anatomy books, mutilated bodies, x-rays, baby shit . . . the texts structure a series of "interrogations" about actual sexual experiences . . . the interrogator and the interrogated share the same secret knowledge . . . answers evaded, diverted, then stated. This knowledge centers a female basis of sexuality. The performers' physical actions concretize aspects of the surrounding slide images—these juxtapositions are often comic, releasing tensions between image and text, between the public and private knowledge.*
>
> *FRESH BLOOD . . . the visual analysis and association of two simple dream objects (an umbrella and a bouquet of dried flowers) produces a matrix embracing elements of architecture, chemistry, cystal physics, alchemy, goddess worship, entymology. This morphology re-enters its source in the dreamer's body.*

Your work has been celebratory and didactic. It's been for others in that sense, how has it helped you?

It's made me concentrate on formal structures. My work presents particular difficulties because its source and its forms examine eroticism; but that can also be used against it. The content can be used to trivialize the formal complexity. Recent audiences and critics are doing somewhat better. It seems that feminist analysis has deepened perceptions for the process of the work.

Interview with Charles Ludlam
by Vanalyne Green

Portions of the interview refer to Ludlam's play, "The Secret Lives of the Sexists". The play is the story of a feminist (Nadine) who writes an article denouncing a stripper, not knowing the stripper is her mother. Ludlam has said his goal is to write a screenplay so farcical and tangled that it would be impossible to give a brief synopsis, which I found to be true. For the sake of the interview, however, keep in mind that Nadine goes to a feminist meeting of "Women Against Stenography," at which she makes a case for the 'one-sex system.' —V.G.



Charles Ludlam in "The Ventriloquist's Wife".

Continued . . .

CL. Fire away.

VG. Do you think people have to be acquainted with theories about theatre to 'get' your work?

CL: I think my plays have very little in common with other plays, in the sense that all the veneer of whatever you call it—proper commercial practice—is not being followed. So, as a result, I am able to create original aesthetic effects. I think that one can choose the conventions you adhere to. Then it's like morality. I mean, if you work out your morality it's different than just believing something is right or wrong because somebody told you and you learned it by rote. So what happens is that you have original theatre being created that exists in the present; it's always contemporary, and it isn't following those strictures, codes, unconscious fashions of the theatre. There are fashions in acting, just as there are in music, pictures, painting. And experts can tell the difference between a fraudulent . . . who's the one in 'American Buffalo' right now?

VG: Al Pacino.

CL: Yeah, like a fraudulent Al Pacino would be like a forgery, (laughter) there would be a certain number of forgeries. Now, if it were a painter, arrests would be made. But in acting, there can be forger performances and no one is taken to court. People pay for it and don't feel ripped off a bit. In fact, they become more comfortable with the imitations, with the forgeries. So if you see a stunning new kind of acting that bristles with originality, every moment might have a terrible awkwardness or the rawness that you see in a newborn baby, a kind of sliminess. The slimy rawness on the head of the acting. There's no way out of it. Most actors are trying to be employed by somebody else. So it's a career that's slightly close to modeling, and there are fashions and types. I don't look like a particular type. To an actor with an expanded sense of what's possible, that is to say a self-employed actor, one who's not trying to get approved of, but who will do it, a come hell or high water, whether anybody likes it or not, type actor, then you're dealing with the possibility that thing's won't be the way they always were. This means original and therefore awkward, not as honed. For instance, the concept of slickness. I think a lot of people like slickness, because in slickness the effort has been edited out, you see. However, it becomes a tricky thing to edit out the effort, when in many cases the effort is part of the excitement.

VG: I got the impression that you're more interested in reaching a theatre and art world audience than the general public. Is that so?

CL: No, I think I'm trying to pass off something that isn't *commercial* as *commercial, basically. I'm trying to foist it off on the unsuspecting public as commercial theater when it's really something else that's too hard to explain in advertising space that you're paying for yourself (laughter). But why do we want to reach more people? It could be a form of vanity—who are the most people and what do we want from them?*

VG: Well, I was thinking more in terms of who are the people and what should we be offering them.

CL: I know. I think maybe I haven't thought of that. I try to make my mind a blank when I create a work. I do it by grubbing around for useful material that seems to me to give rise to possibilities. I think that the work of art, the saving grace of the theaters, is that there is control on what you create in that what you create is a pretense. That is the moral guidepost of it. The theatre is not that different from a courtroom, really. There's a case being tried and you have a jury and a judge and witness. In the same sense that in a court anything can be brought up, a murder for example—that's what a court is for. We don't say: "Oh, we can't have murders in court, it's too horrible"; the point is to deal with the big issues.

VG: Speaking of which, we have to talk about performance and sex.

CL: That's great because we're talking about morals and that leads to sex every time.

VG: Were you concerned at all about how people would react to "Women Against Stenography"?

CL: Well I thought it was better than Women Against Pornography, which I was going to do, but Bill Vehr suggested not to. I think in a play that the characters should be taken over the bumps a little bit. That's the idea, that the characters are going to behave worse than people actually behave in real life. Let's talk about sex as the subject. Since the play is about it we might as well forget all these theories and talk about the play itself.

I felt that in certain movements the greatest heroes, who aren't of the movement but exemplify what the movement represents, are often neglected because they don't fit into dialectical patterns. I had seen a television show with Susan Brownmiller versus a 42nd Street stripper. Brownmiller is the head of Women Against Pornography. They were arguing. The stripper was a black exotic dancer, as she termed herself. It's a very nice profession, to be an exotic dancer. She had a great integrity, I thought. But they weren't speaking the same language. I felt the greatest sympathy for the heroism of the stripper. She had a child, had been raped by her father. And when Brownmiller asked her about her past, the stripper was able to find the details about why she ended up in the lifestyle she did. Brownmiller asked, "Why are you a stripper?, and the stripper said, "I sometimes hit men with a whip in my dance if they want it." Brownmiller said, "Oh, so you're into this and you do

that and you're dancing for degenerates." And the dancer said "I do not ever have degenerates as clients. That's one thing I do not put up with."

VG: That's crazy.

CL: The dancer said "I'll flog them and put up with them, but no degenerates." It was insane, it was so great. As part of the act there is a whip dance, like a 42nd Street dancer.

VG: I don't know. I tried to get into Melody Burlesque on 42nd Street, but they wouldn't let me in . . . no women allowed.

CL: I thought they did let women in . . . Anyway, each of the two women had their own sense of what I would call decency. But one was more accepting than the other. I wanted to show that the person who claims the high moral isn't necessarily the moral one. Just because a person advertises themselves as moral or claims to be in the majority, I mean moral and majority sound great, but . . .

VG: This false sense of morality, do you see that as characteristic of the feminist movement per se, or just Women Against Pornography?

CL: I don't think they should be linked together. Incidentally I haven't researched it one bit. I'm a comedian, and the blows fall where they may. But I think given the extra-intellectual activities of farce and comedy, it gets much better when it's something you care about. And I took my hero or my heroine as a person who is like a carnie, and I tried to elevate it to the level of myth by having her claim she was descended from a line of prostitutes. That this was something transferred—almost like being a shoemaker in the family. Like an old trade.

I think we have to say something about pornography. There are two sides of pornography in this way. There's a commercial side which is hideous and probably, as with money, involves violence. It's a form of violence over people's lives. I'm sure people are at times coerced into doing it and they realize the full commercial potential of what they're doing. They probably don't get paid enough, nor do they retain rights. Okay, this happens. However, I think the other side of it is that it's a folk art form for which there is an audience. And there will always be unless there's some kind of competitive, wholesome form of pornography, or maybe just so much of it around that the market is glutted and it looses its power commercially.

VG: How do you see burlesque and stripping as folk art?

CL: It's a native art with a bad reputation. It's like three card monte is also an art form. It's a magic trick, it's an illusion that's being done with a sleight of hand. Three card monte, which you get arrested for on the street corner, requires hundreds of times more skill than many of the great stage illusions which are just really operating cabinets, or doing a lot of tricks which seem to be sleight of hand, but really involve apparatus. Three card monte is in fact *the fingers fooling the eyes. Absolutely the most pure kind of sleight. It's a high art.*

Perhaps I was stacking the deck against my feminist character. But I think she is basically us, why should we go easy on ourselves? Nadine represents what we college-educate people got involved in— liberal causes; registered Democrats, (which at this point is like being left-wing). So I thought if I was going to have sexism, you expect something really horrible and a monster to come out. I wanted it to be sexism as it is commonly practiced unconsciously by everybody.

VG: That's interesting, because I remember I went the first time out of curiosity to see how you would represent male sexism. I wasn't prepared for the diatribes against white middle class female prejudices. So, do you see the more important issue to be sexual repression rather than sexual oppression?

CL: I think you can be unoppressed by somebody very easily. I think it's a question of personal power, having power. We should see powerful women.

VG: Who do you consider to be a powerful woman?

CL: A woman who is not an employee. That slipped out, but you know that's what I think. Somebody who can't be oppressed on the job.

VG: How does your own sexuality enter into what you create?

CL: I think it gives me a slant on it. I think you see things differently than other people. A homosexual orientation is to have things be true for you that aren't true for other people, and things that are true for other people that aren't true for you. It's just an inversion, really. You can't translate it.

VG: One of the things I love about your plays is the humorous compassion for people that have been victimized.

There is at least compassion. But I think also the characters we bat around in a play, that we create, are in fact conventions for a reason. The constructions of pure human characteristics that we try to embody in a person. I was also trying to show that the heroic element of women was something that was inalienably woman, no matter what frame of mind or thought process. Now this might be very idealistic. And if you get very idealistic about women thay say you're a misogynist. They think if you're idealizing them you're covering up. So you have to be a little vicious to them, otherwise they'll say you're covering up your misogyny. So what do I think? Let's play the tape back and find out.

VG: Do you really want to?

CL: Yes.

LIVE SEX ACT
A Human Sexual Response to the Performances of Barbara Smith and Paul McCarthy
by Linda Burnham

I.

The roar of a 750cc bike fills the alley behind the gallery. The bike penetrates the outdoor performance space. Kilgroe is jamming on the gas, Barbara is sitting on the handlebars, glittering in the strobe light like an acid queen. She slides off the bars and the bike screams to a halt. Kilgroe comes up behind her and starts to fondle her, whisper to her. The night flashes like a knife, like black glass. Their bodies attract each other, they fuse together at the erogenous hotspots. She is the shadow of the Sixties' eros aesthetic, she's Jackie, she's Marilyn, she's Brando. The light is mesmerizing, they grind together against each other's genitals, fully clothed. It's nights in the front seat of a Ford, the steering wheel inflexible behind your back, his hand in your pants, the Ten Commandments on your mind, splitting your soul from your body, Daddy standing in the shadows with malice in his heart, you can hear the crickets, you feel the wetness in the night air, slow black music on the radio, thumping up against you, your pants are wet, you're seventeen and sex is a dynamo, sex is thrusting its way into your consciousness from down below. Barbara Smith is that moment at this moment and the audience pulses up to it, coming on in the dark lightning of a summer night.

Continued

Pictured is Barbara Smith in PIERCING THE CORPORATE VEIL, 1980
Photo: Jan McCambridge

II.

The room is a tall triangle, a delta. It is stripped bare to the bricks on the wall. Paul McCarthy is lying on the stage covered with black makeup and ketchup. He wears a black mask over his head, bearing the features of a monkey. He is an animal, making love to a female dummy. He whispers sweet nothings to her, strokes her, manipulates her. He strips himself and takes her to a loft above our heads. The makeup is smeared over his thighs and ass and prick. He regards us from above, growls and howls, he poses on the ladder, his musculature all male, all animal. His sexuality is deep within the violence and fluidity of orgasm, beyond a sex act, far down into the root of pain and force. He is male energy, both powerful and helpless, animal quick and trancelike, erect with greedy desire, limp with impotent vulnerability. He poses again and again, showing us his body: display, invitation, confession. The woman, the audience, is his, is him. The room sweats, the audience gulps air. The brain goes numb and the animal opens itself.

III.

She and Henderson sit yoga-style, separate from the audience in a side gallery. She is on his lap, he is penetrating her. Above their heads, a videotape of the same action shows how far they will go: all the way, for hours. They touch discreetly, tenderly. They are surrounded by lovely things to eat and drink. Six women sit around them in a circle, chanting. She has said it is a healing ritual, a new way for men and women to meet, healing the mind/body split. A tantric ritual, withholding orgasm and bringing the sexual response up into the heart level, fostering a new kind of opening. You are still pulsating from the motorcycle portion of the piece. The top of your head feels ringed by an electric band, your heart is pounding. You are emanating light and power. The man next to you, your lover, seems irresistible. You are both experiencing a thumping in the chest, a prickling of the extremities. You leave. An hour later you feel something happening to your head. It feels exactly like there is a third eye in the middle of your brow and it opens, it blinks once. It stays open. You look at him and there is a light emanating from him, filling the room with gold. His left eye is the center of this light. You feel energy coursing up your spine and out the top of your head. It feels like you are on the edge of screaming. You are going crazy with a new mixture of longing and satisfaction. It persists into the next day.

IV.

He is standing on a table dressed as a sea captain. He is naked from the waist down, covered again in smears of ketchup and mayonnaise and dog food. The audience is sitting around him in the outline of a ship. He has said he is the captain and that the ship is adrift. Another man sits on the floor naked, aft, holding his penis in his hand, looking everybody in the eyes one at a time. The captain has been spending his time with a selection of dolls and toys, smearing them with blood-ketchup, introducing them to his genitals. The experience is long. He strikes a pose on the table and stands there, smeared, wrecked, insane, transfixed. He stands there for half an hour. Not a sound. The audience is trapped in meditation with a madman. The captain character is adrift on a sea of macho melancholy. He has begged us to bear witness to his solitude and humiliation, his utter nakedness. You feel your throat tighten as the smell of dog food and ketchup presses further and further into the room. You have been with him before. There is an agony of sensation, a mortal pain that drags on and on and on. You find yourself meditating on your father, whose penis you have never seen, whose vulnerability is all too apparent. You feel the back of your head tighten and a buzzing start between your eyes. You feel your back stiffen and the juices of your body flow faster. You lose track of time. It could go on forever.

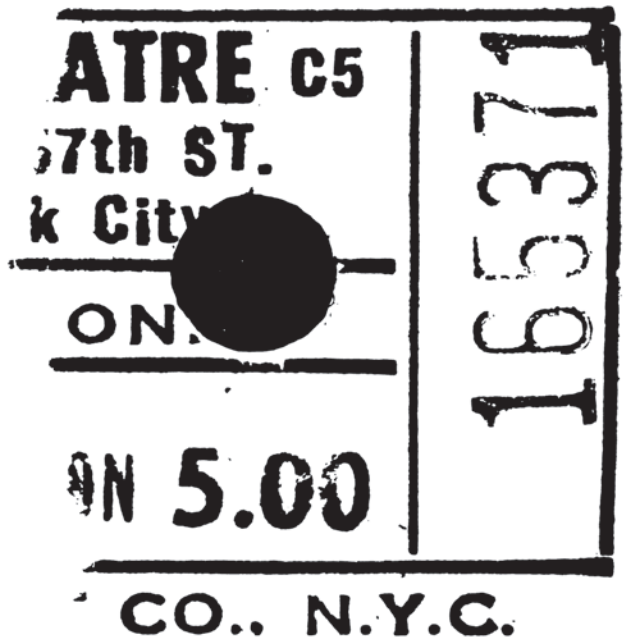
She: I now feel totally expanded all of the time, expanded and open, and it's a terrible psychic strain and tension.

He: It's a body response. It's like trying to dig in, trying to *dig it out*. Like trying to get my hands somewhere between my dick and my anus. I don't even know whether it's sexual.

Barbara Smith and Paul McCarthy are Los Angeles-based artists who have been working in performance art since the 1960s. The performances referred to are Smith's Birthdaze *(1981) in sections I and III; and McCarthy's* Monkey Man *(1980), section II, and* Death Ship *(1981), section IV. The quotations at the end are from HIGH PERFORMANCE #11/12, 1980, (she), an interview with the author, 1982, (he). Linda Frye Burnham is the editor of HIGH PERFORMANCE magazine.*

On and Behind the Screen:
Notes in Progress on Visual Pleasure in Performance and Film
by Micki McGee

Most people I know would rather go to a movie—any movie at all—than to an art performance. *The movies are a better risk and a better bargain. In a city like San Diego where you can see any recent feature film for 99¢ all day Monday and a performance is likely to cost you four dollars it's easy to see that performance is no entertainment bargain. But to suggest that economics alone is the reason for opting for a movie over a performance seems as crudely mechanistic as attributing Dickens' protracted style to the fact that he was paid by the word. Behind the reluctance to part with four dollars for a performance lies something more complex than apparent parsimony. That something, I suspect, is that a great many performance artists are trying to do what movies do better: produce the visual pleasure of the voyeuristic gaze.*



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A whole body of film theory[1] has been constructed around the psychoanalytic reading of filmic signifiers and recently some feminist performance critics, notably Judith Barry, have attempted to apply this discourse to readings of performance art.[2] But amidst this discussion I can't recall any serious consideration of exhibitionism, which seems to be a requisite for much performance work which operates with the audience as isolated consumer/spectator and the artist as performer. (Since performance is such a catchall term applied to a whole range of activities, there are a whole group of performance modes which completely sidestep the issues of exhibitionism: participatory events such as Allan Kaprow's investigations for pairs, Suzanne Lacy's dinner parties and Martha Rosler's "Garage Sale" avoid isolating the artist performer as exhibitionist.) The lack of discussion of this phenomenon may be due to an understandable reticence to belabor the obvious; perhaps it goes without saying the performers are exhibitionistic. But within an analysis of the voyeur/exhibitionist relationship many of the problems of maintaining audience interest can be uncovered.

The voyeur and the exhibitionist's pleasures are at odds since the ultimate pleasure for the voyeur is the chance to spy on the other without the object's knowledge. In most performance art the surreptitious gaze is an impossibility—the performer standing in front of an audience is well aware of their presence. Hence the voyeur's pleasure of watching an unknowing object is short circuited by the exhibitionist's pleasure of being observed. Of course there can be scopophilic pleasure[3] in observing an exhibitionist in action; burlesque is a classic example. But the heightened pleasure of violation by sight—intrusion on the unknowing object—is spoiled by the complicity of the exhibitionist/performer.

In contrast to performance art, traditional narrative cinema allows viewers to imagine themselves gazing through a window at unknowing characters. Film's capacity to depict these characters from hundreds of different angles and at variable distances with no effort on the part of the viewer offers the voyeur the ultimate pleasure of being able to passively observe from hundreds of vantages. Whether this scopophilic pleasure is inevitably at the expense of women, as some critics suggest, is a matter of debate.[4] But what is unquestionable is that the least aesthetically gratifying traditional film allows the viewer more visual pleasure than the average performance. And, interestingly enough, when an extremely elaborate performance attempts to create the kind of visual spectacle that is difficult to avoid in cinema, the performance seems to be unable to maintain a narrative thread that lends itself so easily to the filmic spectacle.

A look at composer and multimedia artist Richard Zvonar's "Sigma (Soul Murder Part I) recently performed at the University of California at San Diego, and Blake Edwards' "Victor, Victoria" illustrates the point. Despite the differences in media the similarities between the two productions are striking. Both deal with gender dysphoria and fear of homosexuality and both provide enormous voyeuristic pleasure. Yet "Victor, Victoria" is able to simultaneously deliver a story and visual gratification, while Zvonar's performance abandons any sense of narrative in the pursuit of high tech visual spectacle.

Drawing from a Freudian case study (an unfortunately fashionable art world strategy to assure the audience of your seriousness), Zvonar assembles an elaborate display of projected images, computer processed sound and movement based on the case history of Dr. Schreber, a German public official whom Freud treated for paranoid delusions. Schreber was unusual in that he wrote a book describing his illness and outlining his delusion system, which revolved around a central theme of emasculation. In November 1895 Schreber wrote, "I became aware that the Order of Things imperatively demanded my emasculation, whether I personally liked it or no, and that no reasonable course lay open to me but to reconcile myself to the thought of being transformed into a woman. The further consequence of my emasculation could, of course, only be my impregnation by divine rays to the end that a new race of men might be created."[5] His classic messianic delusions, repressed homosexuality and preoccupation with "soul murder" (a mysterious phrase which Freud conjectured refers to a Faustian bartering of the soul and/or incestuous brother-sister relations) has made the Schreber case the focus of extensive analysis and a rich source of densely layered narrative material. But unfortunately you wouldn't have learned much of anything about Schreber's psychosis from seeing Zvonar's performance, which thoroughly obscured the story in the pursuit of visual and audio pleasure.

Like classical opera or ballet, to be intelligible "Sigma (Soul Murder Part I)" required a previous knowledge of the plot—knowledge which is rather uncommon outside psychoanalytic circles. Such information could have been conveyed to the audience

with something as simple as a program note describing the Schreber case. But clearly Zvonar was much less interested in being intelligible than in being spectacular. Nearly all the texts extracted from Schreber and Freud's writings were reduced to the level of pattern. Audiotaped passages were processed and reverbed to become sound rather than language while projected visual texts were flashed rapidly or blurred, becoming patterns of black and white. Perhaps this deliberate obstruction of meaning was essential to the end of creating the voyeur's pleasure: the absence of linguistic meaning in the performance seems to parallel Jacques Lacan's description of the scopic drive:

> *. . . what is the subject trying to see? What he is trying to see, make no mistake, is the object as absence. What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence, the most graceful of girls, for example, even if on the other side is only a hairy athlete. What he is looking for is not, as one says, the phallus—but precisely its absence. . . ."*(6)

The absence of meaning (or rather, concealment) in Zvonar's performance may have functioned as seduction: the audience is intellectually titillated by the apparent presence of a story to which they are denied access. Along with obscuring the story, Zvonar's visual images are a combination of the classic voyeur tactics with icons of castration anxiety: the "now you see it, now you don't" image of hands reaching out from behind a screen with snipping scissors and figures silhouetted behind a screen performing some ominous looking operation. "Sigma (Soul Murder Part I)" functions at the level of absence, creating voyeuristic pleasure by the intermittent concealment of figures and denial of linguistic meaning.

Zvonar's ability to produce a performance that's such a voyeur's delight lies precisely in the fact that, unlike many performance artists working with gender issues (Paul Best, Richard Newton and Paul McCarthy come to mind), Zvonar's not an exhibitionist. More a conductor than a performer, he appeared in the performance only to operate the sound board which controlled the elaborate audio score. His success at producing the visual pleasure usually experienced only at the movies was evidenced by an audience member who was overheard to comment:

Richard Svonar's SIGMA (SOUL MURDER, PART 1).

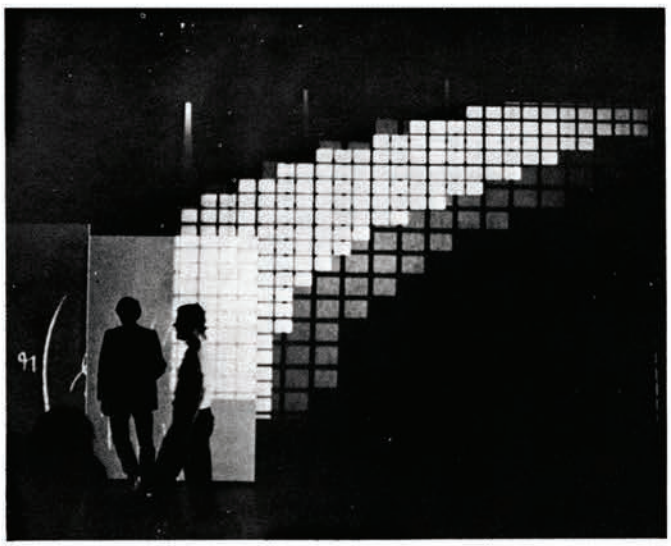

Photo: Erika Suderburg

Continued . . .

"That was as good as going to the movies." Perhaps the performance was as "good" or as pleasurable as going to the movies, but it's certainly not the same.

Movies have no need to obscure the narrative line in the quest for visual pleasure. A straightforward narrative like "Victor, Victoria" is the quintessential voyeur's film. While King (James Garner)—desperate to discover if Victor (Julie Andrews) is really Victoria—spies on Victor from an adjacent hotel window, the audience spies on him. When Victor performs on opening night we observe not only the exhibitionism of the cabaret act, but also surveil the audience of onlookers. And, when Victoria, faint with hunger, stops outside a restaurant to watch a fat man eating a pastry, the audience simultaneously watches Victoria and shares her gaze. After a shot of the man stuffing himself, we see her staring at him. Then with a shot reverse we share her gaze, eyeing him as he is squishing the pastry into his mouth. Another cut shows her growing fainter, then we see an even closer shot of him, whipped cream on his face. In a final reverse, we expect to see her staring in the window, but she's absent, having fainted beneath the window pane. Only cinema could produce such a situation of multi-valent voyeurism: we are watching her watching him and he is as unaware of her as she appears to be of us. The power of being omnipresent is afforded us as spectators to a series of voyeur/exhibitionist scenarios.

By virtue of its cinematic production "Victor, Victoria" allows the audience immense visual pleasure concurrent with an unobscured plot built on sexual difference, homosexuality and transvestism. In brief the story revolves around Victoria, an out of work coloratura, who unsuccessfully auditions at a Paris cabaret. Then she meets Toddy, an aging homosexual cabaret singer who develops a scheme: Victoria will dress as a man and perform as a female impersonator. Victor—a woman impersonating a man impersonating a woman—becomes an overnight success when the macho character King falls in love with Victor and sets out to prove he's still a Man by proving Victor's a woman. Such a plot allows for numerous playful challenges to conventions of masculinity and femininity.

Despite the differences in tenor and media, both "Victor, Victoria" and "Sigma (Soul Murder, Part I)" survey a similar terrain of sex roles, with fundamentally different outcomes. While "Victor, Victoria" relies on the passive voyeuristic audience, the film tries and succeeds at the level of the plot to intervene in our expectations about masculinity and femininity. On the other hand, "Sigma (Soul Murder, Part I)" goes to great lengths to produce voyeuristic pleasure, and in the process completely abandons meaning, narrative or otherwise. The subordination of meaning to visual pleasure in Zvonar's performance—his complete avoidance of the implication of the subject matter on which he based his performance—makes the visual pleasure of his performance infinitely more reactionary and more dangerous than the passivity produced in the audience by the narrative film. Zvonar obscures all meaning in his spectacle: homosexuality is as repressed in Zvonar's performance as it was in Schreber's conscious.

For the performance audience and for performance artists the pleasure produced by the substitution of visual spectacle for any discernible meaning raises a serious question. Must performance art attempt to be as visually gratifying as cinema to maintain audience interest? The pleasure so well suited to performance art seems to be participatory pleasure: audience interaction and dialogue rather than the passive role of spectator. Unlike narrative cinema, performance has not been saddled with the baggage of a voyeuristic audience relationship. Indeed one has to go to great lengths, as Zvonar's work shows, to achieve voyeuristic passivity on the part of the performance audience. Attempts to produce a filmic spectacle in performance seem misdirected when performance is fundamentally ill-equipped to compete with cinema on the level of scopic pleasure and yet incomparably better suited to interaction. Performance artists may be wise to work to develop the pleasures particular to their medium and abandon the desire to fuulfill the voyeuristic gaze.

Notes

1. *See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,"* Screen, *Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1975) pp. 8-18.*
2. *Barry, Judith; "Women, Representation and Performance Art: Northern California," in* Performance Anthology, *Carl E. Loeffler (ed.) (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press) 1980, pp. 439-462.*
3. *Scopophilia is the term for sexual pleasure secured by visual impression and the use of the eyes as described in Freud's "Instincts and their Vicissitudes" (1915).*
4. *Laura Mulvey suggests that the scopophilic pleasure of narrative cinema results from the spectator's indentification with the male protagonist. The role of woman in the narrative is as "absence" (of the phallus) which inspires the male hero to action, usually investigating, punishing or saving her. The other course of action the male filmmaker can pursue to disarm the threat of castration which woman represents is to elevate woman to the level of star, a fetished and hence unthreatening object. Such a theory, based on the Lacanian equation woman = absence, man = presence, goes far to explain the implicitly sexist representations of women in film, but remains suspiciously dependent on the primacy of the phallus.*
5. *Schreber quoted in "Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (1911)" in* Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, *vol. 12, James Strachey (ed.), (London: Hogarth Press, 1958, pp. 20-21).*
6. *Jacques Lacan, "The Partial Drive and Its Circuit," in* The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, *Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), (New York: Norton) 1978, p. 182.*

Micki McGee is a writer and artist in her last year of graduate school at University of California, San Diego. Her articles have appeared in Heresies and After Image.

James Garner, Robert Preston and Julie Andrews star in MGM's presentation of Blake Edwards' "Victor/Victoria," a romantic comedy of mistaken identity set in 1930's Paris. "Victor/Victoria" stars Julie Andrews, James Garner, Robert Preston, Lesley Ann Warren and Alex Karras. Produced by Blake Edwards and Tony Adams and directed by Blake Edwards from his own screenplay. Original music by Henry Mancini with lyrics by Leslie Bricusse. For release in the United States and Canada by MGM/United Artists Marketing and Distribution.

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Within gay activist circles, probably no "cause" is more controversial, or more divisive, than "man-boy love."

The presence of NAMBLA (North American Man/Boy Love Association) in gay coalitions is frequently crippling, diverting energy into internal debate and away from the ostensible issues. Such debate continually rages in letters to* Gay Community News, *the indispensible national weekly from Boston. Most vociferously opposed to NAMBLA seem to be feminists in organizations like "Take Back the Night" and "Women Against Violence Against Women." Generally, they claim this is one more case of self-interested men abusing their unwarranted privileges. Opposition also comes from activists in electoral politics, and civil liberties struggles. They, quite rightly, point out that any media portrayal of gay men as organized "chicken hawks" is hardly likely to win the hearts and minds of America's legislators, or their constituencies.

NAMBLA, on the other hand, insists that the core of any broad-based movement must be heterogeneity—respect and support for cultural, sexual, political diversity. They're sticking their necks way out on the chopping block—and they don't expect their fellow queers to be the Puritans wielding the axes. They also argue that if NAMBLA leaders are rounded up and imprisoned (which happens with depressing regularity) without active resistance, the rest of us aberrants can't be far behind.

In 1981, I decided to do a performance about youth-lust (mine, and practically every other gay male's), partly to address my own confusion. True, I was finding myself increasingly attracted to younger men, with their raw, unsocialized energy. But that hardly seemed anything to join an association about. Obviously children (at least teen-agers) have sexual needs. Men might possibly be helpful, or they might be coercive pigs. Although I'm not interested in electoral politics—or trying to convince minorities to buy into the American Dream—winning basic civil rights does *seem prerequisite for a decent, non-harassed lifestyle, (and probably for a sense of ourselves as an actual power bloc).*

Besides, converting the masses of gays to socialism, while desirable, appears hopeless. And with good reason: homosexual oppression in socialist countries is too well publicized. Explanations appealing to the delicate distinction between theory and practice are useless. Only a few years ago, the not so subtle distinction between National Socialism and the other kind seemed too difficult for some San Diego gays to grasp: The night before the 1977 Gay Pride March, a large portion of the organizing committee leafleted the bars, calling for a boycott. Their leaflet—allegedly signed by many of the bar and bath owners, and officials of the Metropolitan Community Church and Imperial Court— stated the March was controlled by "Socialists and Nazis" (an oft-repeated pairing) whose interests were antithetical to gays.

This attack, mainly on the women in the March coalition, was spearheaded by Nicole Murray, then Empress de *San Diego (emphasis ours). An excellent fundraiser, Nicole is a drag queen and downtown hustler who once organized the Teddy Roosevelt Young Republican Club. For years, Nicole's led an outspoken attack on police harassment and brutality. Since '77, in the hands of her organization, the March has anually grown slicker. Led by the L.A. Gay Men's Chorus booming out patriotic and pop favorites, 1981 was replete with contingents and banners, cowboys and haystack floats. This media event, Nicole makes clear, is in direct response to Police Chief Kollender's remark that harassment won't end here until gays get some "clout" like in San Francisco.*

Who would my performance be for? Nicole and the gang?—certainly a significant force in San Diego gay politics. Only for the more "enlightened" queers? In this case, my intended audience—the broadest possible spectrum *of both the gay community and the arts audiences—went quite far in determining the content of the piece. Obviously, methods of approaching "man-boy love" in San Diego would differ than for, say a politically sophisticated gay audience in Boston or New York. For them, the issue would already be overloaded, positions tightly drawn. My own lack of ideological (and moral) clarity would seem particularly reprehensible. In San Diego, the subject was barely topical. I doubted that gays would be well informed*

either about NAMBLA, or the existence of "performance art." In fact, although tensions had eased considerably since Nicole's infamous vendetta, inter-factional dialog was still minimal.

To a New York art world audience, I suspected the subject would either be irrelevant or passé (or both): Semiotext(e), *for example, had come out a year earlier with its chic "Loving Boys" issue. I doubted if many in the art audiences here , though (poetry, performance, music and visual) were cognizant of the details of the "Man-Boy-Love" controversy.*

Since becoming involved in performance in the mid 70's, audience *has always been my primary consideration. Before that, I'd been writing experimental fiction, for a largely amorphous and idealized reader (i.e. "posterity"). Since 1974, I've also been publishing CRAWL OUT YOUR WINDOW, a magazine designed to increase the visibility, both locally and nationally, of new San Diego literary and visual work; to make its readership more palpable and the writers' solution less so.*

But live multi-media work seemed a means of affecting a much wider variety of people, many generally immune to art. Eight years ago, neither a solid performance nor experimental theater audience existed in San Diego (and barely does now). Here was a unique opportunity to create them. And to create work whose boundaries were not delimited by critically accepted conventions (either to be utilized or defied). Partly, this has involved sustained collaborative efforts to maintain downtown performance spaces to show the work. Such activity seems political to me in a most basic sense: the performance is conceived to make a difference in the lives of people in the community where it's produced. Often this means the piece is about *its context, significant aspects of life here in lotus land.*

While context-specific work may have a dynamic impact on its environment, it brings with it particular problems in translation for other arenas. Of course, this is a central dilemma of all careerist artists who live outside of New York. Unfortunately, the traditional solution has simply been to define your community (and the matrix of your artistic concerns) as chiefly the New York art world. I think this attitude is changing, though. It does seem possible to have your cake and eat it too: to translate some *works produced in (and concerning) San Diego to New York and other cities.*

Several San Diego artists seem particularly successful at this. R.A. Robboy led a comic and highly informative tour guide of San Diego—presented here in a series which included tours of individual zip codes—in a megaphone-amplified slide show at The Kitchen. Eleanor Antin's King performances (done extensively in New York, San Francisco and Europe) reveal her identity as King of Solana Beach. A quite specific beach/college town-cum-high class San Diego suburb, and a very far cry from most familiar kingdoms.

At first I was intending to modify my performance to take it on the road. But as I worked on it, the more improbable this seemed. Even the title—THE SUMMER OF THE BOY—so-named to be provocative to nearly everybody in San Diego, would probably sound mildly parodic, at best, elsewhere. The piece became increasingly designed for this environment, and I gave up ideas of traveling with it.

I booked THE SUMMER OF THE BOY "uptown," in "The What's Cooking" series of The Center for Music Experiment at UCSD in La Jolla, and also at Sushi, the downtown performance space. I mailed extensive publicity releases, with glossies of myself and George Davis (the handsome blond Boy—actually 20 years old—whom I pursue in the video sequences), to gay and straight media. Publicity—from the San Diego Union *to the newspaper/advertising freebies in the bars and baths—was excellent. So was attendance both nights.*

To reflect the expected splits in the audience, I placed SUMMER on a double bill with an earlier performance work, which was its diametric opposite—as arty as SUMMER was sleazy. THE SECRET WORLD FROM WHICH THERE IS NO RETURN, an uplifting musical rendition of a very romantic chapter of my first novel, was concocted and performed by R.A. Robboy, Linda Montano and myself. Basically, I expected the gay men to appreciate the bawdiness of SUMMER and to meet THE SECRET WORLD with blank non-comprehension. The art audience, and the lesbians, I thought, would prefer THE SECRET WORLD, particularly admiring the virtuoso performances of Robboy and Montano. I imagined them greeting SUMMER with repulsion, or worse, liberal indulgence.

Continued . .

Generally my expectations were met. Below is a chart summarizing the two pieces, and the audience responses as I remember them:

THE SUMMER OF THE BOY

Set Up: *Prolonged video opening. Quick changes of scene, live & video: jogging; sports; disco; suburbs. Dressing for the bar, I record my triumphs with young men. Rae Armantrout plays The Jock-Boy, object of my sloppy and unexamined lust.*

Rae transforms into talk show Interviewer. Our conversation becomes personal and open, about our sexual developments. She begins asking pointed questions about the implications of my lust—not from a particular political bias, but as a thoughtful observer. I justify myself with images of gay oppression. When Rae begins questioning the structure of the performance itself (and my evasions), I throw temper tantrum. END.

THE SUMMER

Media Color video & slides:
"beefcake"; me growing up; San Diego ambience.

Audiotapes: *disco music & ambience; Dr. David Reuben on evils of homosexuality.*

Strobe & colored lights.

Approaches *Broad gestures; cheap shots. Obvious alienation techniques: Rae as The Boy underscores the ridiculous quality of obsession, the self-mockery behind the performance. The classically beautiful young man (George Davis) plays The Boy in video sequences* only, *emphasizing his inaccessibility and icon quality. Heavy saturation of video, disco music and dancing, amyl smells, strobe, mirrors, slick media images of young men, to recapitulate gay sub-culture.*

THE SECRET WORLD FROM WHICH THERE IS NO RETURN

One scene: Ron, Linda and I take turns reading text. Ron—dressed in blue checked polyester leisure suit—reads in stentorian, media announcer voice. Linda—in all black, jewels, wig, like a fashionable opera star—articulates text in phony operatic 12 tone declamation. I'm dressed casually, as the sports-coated poet; read in sincere and starry-eyed voice.

Ron on viola, Linda on organ and gong, announce, in an overture, and accompany the reading. END is 3 of us in prolonged bell-clanging, and formal bows.

THE SECRET WORLD

All live: reading and music.

Static performance. Emphasis on nuance, abrupt mood changes. Text is about the child's world of the imagination, which the artist must sustain. Extremely utopian and sentimental tone of text pushed to the point of nausea (and back again). Music vacillates rather wildly. Kitsch melody ("You Are My Sunshine"); atonal parody; pseudo Buddhist chant (the 3 of us together) all co-exist. The mood shifts wildly with stylistic changes.

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AUDIENCE

SUSHI (A DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO SPACE)

Composition *Many middle-aged men; few younger men. Friends, gay and straight. Some downtown art scene types.*

I knew most of the lesbians, many from political work. Knew fewer of the gay men; some, I was aware, were from The Gay Academic Union.

Responses—*SUMMER*
Laughter throughout. Enthusiasm, particularly for videotape with me lusting after scantily-clad, jogging boy.

SECRET WORLD
Silence; blank and polite stares. Embarrassment. Laughter only when I read about stealing muscle magazines from corner candy store when I was a kid. Relieved clapping in the middle—they thought it was over. I had to shake my head "no" to get them to stop.

Quite a strain to perform in.

C.M.E. (A UNIVERSITY SPACE)

University people, most affiliated with art, music and literature departments. Some younger gay men and "disco queens" (mostly unknown to me).

Silence, particularly during video sequences. Laughter mainly during Dr. David Reuben tape on disgusting practices of homosexuals, while I barfed into slide of toilet.

Discomfort when I showed slides of naked, well-hung men, which I loved *doing—revenge for having once been a graduate student at UCSD.*

Animated response throughout. Immediate acceptance of conventions, appreciation of personae and quality of performance. Close attention to edges: mood juxtapositions in music and voice. Hearty applause at end.

A pleasure to perform in.

I can't really say I clarified my own thinking (or anyone else's) on "man-boy love." In fact, the piece quickly became about *my avoiding the issues to indulge my lust. Although some of the interview dialog was from* Semiotext(e), *the political controversy did not emerge as such. When the Interviewer's insistence on my evasions became too pointed, I simply ended the performance. I guess I* was *forced to see how I avoid a real analysis of my sexual politics. Also, how easy that is, in the absence of a clear context of artists/activists in San Diego (let alone gay ones).*

What I did *learn from these performances is sharper promotion skills: how to target audiences more precisely. Also, how to manipulate them—with easy parody and fine sentiment. A side benefit was that Nicole—who saw the publicity, but not the performance—decided I was a fellow "radical," as she told Danny, a mutual friend who worked at the baths (one of Nicole's headquarters). Through Danny, I conveyed to Nicole—for whatever it was worth—a fair amount of criticism of her strategies and insensitivity to lesbians.*

One final note on audience response. Over the years I've learned that after I do a reading or performance, I never *pick up anybody and I should just stop expecting to. Still, when this handsome guy in leather jacket and tight jeans kept hanging around CME . . . He introducted himself; he'd read about the show in the gay paper. He was interested right away, he said, because he was a boy lover.* A real one! *I thought, with something approaching shock.*

Steve turned out to quite authentic. We went to my house, where I quickly eschewed any remaining thoughts of sex, as he told me stories about being an elementary school teacher in Philadelphia. His young boyfriends were all from shitty, abusive homes. He offered them affection and stability, along with occasional sex. He seemed very sweet, and I was inclined to believe him.

About 2 in the morning, I walked Steve out to his car. A bunch of the local guys were hanging out. Mostly teen-age Chicanos, except for this blond porker (late 20's around Steve's age). The word on this guy was he's written a hit single for "REO SPEEDWAGON" and used the money to buy into a blond entrepreneur computer software company. He started getting into some heavy fag-baiting. Yelling, "Know what I think of you?" then farting loudly. "Hey, how do you guys do it? Do you use vaseline? I just wanna know if you use vaseline?" The teens were giggling appreciatively, but not otherwise participating. What was so strange was the timing: this had never happened to me around home, either before or since. I live in a fairly drugged out, heavily mixed neighborhood, ethnically and otherwise. Of the 4 bars on the block, 2 are gay, 2 straight.

Steve panicked right away and said we'd better get inside. But these were neighborhood guys—they wouldn't get violent, and running away would be the worst thing I could do. I started yelling, "What's your problem, asshole?" and repeated it until he mumbled something about being loaded. I told him to take it out on his car. I said it was a big enough drag living near a jerk like him anyway, and what was he trying to do—start a neighborhood war?

The gang finally dissolved. As Steve was leaving, he told me how scared he'd been, that he's never encountered anything like that. I was brave, Steve insisted. I said that's what I thought of him—for acting on his desires. I'd be terrified *to do that, especially if I were a school teacher! Steve said he'd return, to tell me more stories about boys.*

Melvin Freilicher, a San Diego author, editor of Crawl Out Your window, has been teaching in the Literature Department at University of California, San Diego and San Diego State.

Even now, ruined by summer, you may recall that first warm spring weekend of the year. With thousands of others I spent that Sunday at Jones Beach, driving back through the late-afternoon haze over the crowded Belt Parkway. It was an American ritual, soothing as a hamburger, and with an arm around my lover I drove with a meditative gaze on the road ahead. In the back seat two friends, propped up against each other, were asleep.

And look what edged up alongside: a car loaded with four bouncing teenage boys. Their delicate sensibilities immediately aroused by our disgusting female spectacle, they called out unimaginative insults, and when we laughed, they began spitting at us. And when the spit flew back in their own faces they slowed down, edged into the lane behind us, and rammed my car.

Which is why my lover, Robin Epstein, was almost late to her evening's performance in a play she co-produced and co-directed with Dorothy Cantwell, called Junk Love. *"My lover?" you say. "What is this, some kind of shameless plug?" Critics don't write about their lovers unless they want to drag the already bedraggled name of criticism into the dust, and get their columns taken away from them.*

Continued . . .

Pictured is the cast of More Fire! productions of JUNK LOVE.
Photo: John McCabe

But not soon after this incident, Vanalyne Green, co-editor of this Flue, *called me up, said, "The issue's going to be about sex and performance in the '80s."*

"Oh, like the New York Post," *I said.*

(Pause.) "Uh, maybe. Anyway, I saw this play you might want to review, called Junk Love."

It proves that the New York performance world, like my brother's upcoming wedding, plays its baroque variations with a familiar cast. After I let Green in on the joke we agreed that, of course, considering my personal connection to the play, I couldn't possibly write about it. But a few miles further down the road of our telephone conversation, I reconsidered out loud. Why not? As long as I'm clear about my role in the nature of things, I have something to say here about affection and perception.

No matter how stiff-necked I can try to be in separating my personal life from who and what I write about, like most critics I need *friendships with artists in order to want to write about art—any art—at all. Critics do not live by esthetics alone. In this light, my relationship to Robin and to More Fire! Productions—the cast putting on* Junk Love—*is nothing more (or less) than a highly exaggerated version of the usual tangled alliances.*

Made funnier because Junk Love—*written by its five performers—is a comedy about the stupifying effects of falling in love. Congreve would approve. They posit that romantic love, like fast food, is largely junk, publicly purveyed and privately consumed as a sick, slick national addiction. In the play, Cantwell and Epstein, driven to desperate measures by their respective boyfriends and girlfriends, wander, in the depths of a Maalox-lined depravity, into a kind of revival meeting led by Dorothy Parker, played by Stephanie Doba. There they learn the name for their affliction . . . they are loveaholics. "If I had a little gun/I would have a world of fun/Speeding bullets through the brains/Of the ones who gave me pains," Parker* alias *Doba advises the members of Loveaholics. Guest performers, positioned in the audience, stagger forward to give their own pathetic testimonials. "Get a dog!" Stephanie Skura in her double-knit suit advised the audience one night. Indeed, why* not *hate the army of lovers which has marched over your heart? And, to take this liberation further, you could say that if hate is the theory, revenge is the practice.*

But such purity of motive is hard to sustain. Their arsenal of pills, secret handclasps (a sort of handshake interruptus, *accompanied by a gloating "Ha, ha, who cares?!"), and buddy system just doesn't work.*

Even the Love Object lesson of Jerry Turner's quick-change characterizations of three boyfriends—as he and Cantwell play a macabre version of "The Dating Game" called "The Bargain Basement of Boyfriends"—doesn't deter the love addicts. Cantwell and Epstein go on a binge, cruising Second Avenue in search of self-abasement. It's a buyers' market. In no time at all Epstein is grovelling before a chic-*bi movement therapist (played by Doba), while Cantwell hangs on the oleaginous lips of a poet played by Paul Walker.*

Yes, revenge is sweet. But sickness is irresistible. In ramming my car on the Beltway, those boys were doing it to their own car as well. Why? Out of unrequited love for Clint Eastwood?

In mid-play a bit of dialogue goes:
Epstein: So there is life after loveaholia?
Doba: Oh, dear, yes. Our graduates have gone on to distinguished careers, for example, in stage, screen, and television—as critics, of course.

Oh, really? Before I knew Epstein as more than just another fresh face at the WOW Festival, I wrote a few lines about Junk Love *in the* Village Voice. *At the time I was busy falling in love with someone else, who eventually decided not to return the favor. I'd had an acute case, and my withdrawal symptoms were extreme. At that point I wasn't interested in getting too friendly with Epstein or any other of those goddamn performance types. Who needs a love/hate push/pull relationship with someone who thinks of you as, gag, a critic? Who's turning whom into an object? I could fantasize some Steinberg cartoon of a painting and a* New Yorker *monacle lying side-by-side in bed, casting each other speculative little dotted lines and arrows. Can their surfaces ever meet in the middle?*

Last fall, suitably disengaged from Junk Love, *it was easier to write about the play. Looking over my description written here, I see it's carefully denuded of judgmental adjectives. I know all the performers now, and I know that, understandably, they haven't been too thrilled that I haven't been able to run around getting the play more press. I just wouldn't have felt comfortable. But there is, I find, something I can say from my subjectivity,* about *subjectivity.*

Junk Love *is about people mocking their own naivete, with performers grabbing material from their own lives, Dorothy Parker's life, Jean Harris'—anyone who's gotten a little public mileage out of their private suffering. And then there's the other side they make fun of, the legion of psychotherapists, lovers, packages of Yodels and boxes of Bartons chocolates—*

Continued . . .

who all promise more than they can deliver. In the old Yiddish theater, members of the audience, carried away, would stand, point, and shriek to performers: "Watch out, he's got a knife!" Junk Love*'s performers do the pointing for you: yes, here's a recognizable bar, performance-space rhetoric, a failed pick-up at Union Square, any number of apostrophes addressed to silent telephones. It's as if the performers were about to turn to the audience: "Watch out, they've all got knives!"*

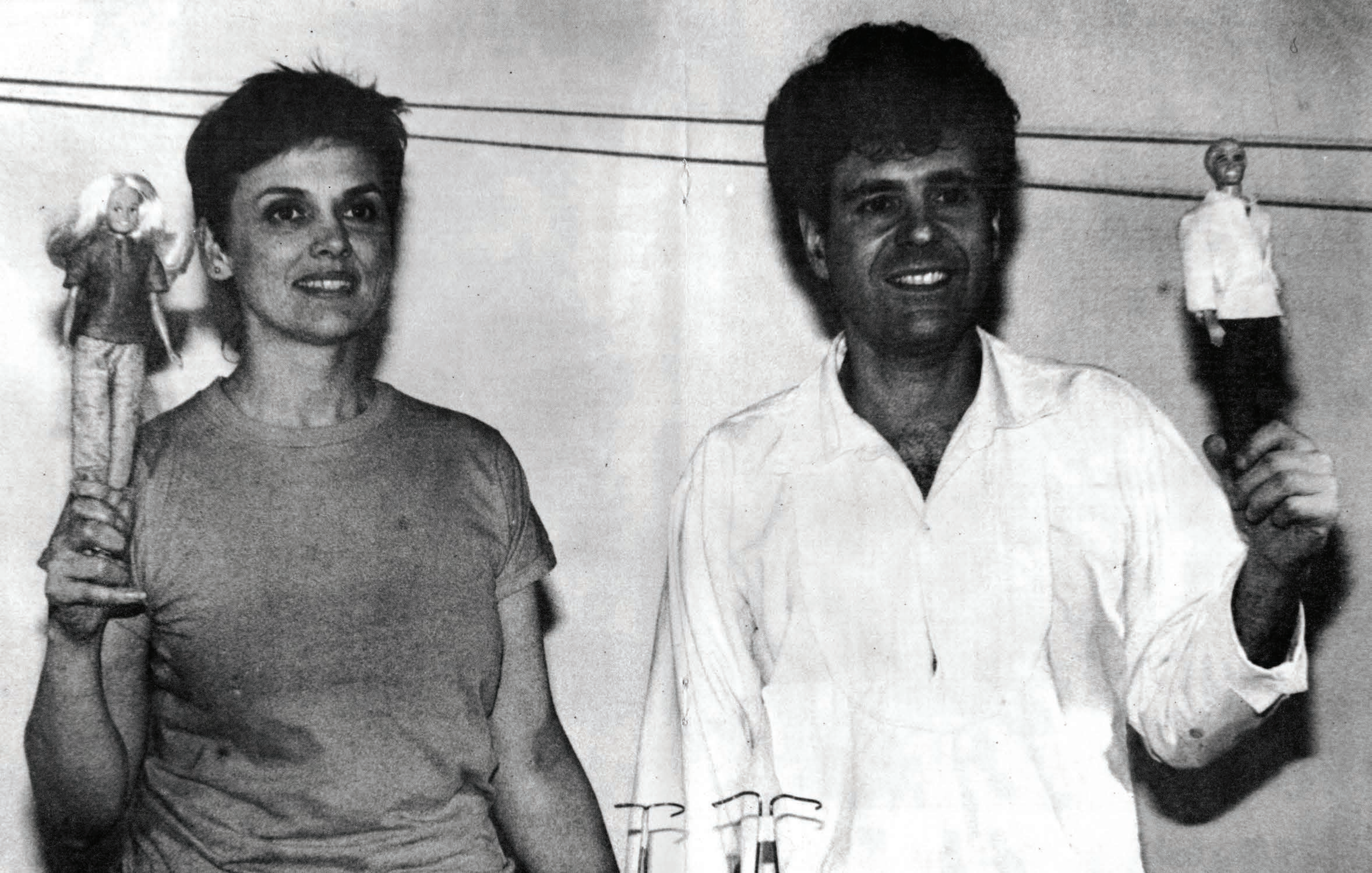
And the audience, laughing—because the business is fast and funny, ferociously local, and the ten scenes are spliced together with the narrative élan of a home movie of Junior's first tooth—the audience, laughing, doesn't believe this warning a bit. Why should we? Looking from the outside, it all looks like "fun," like Moe poking Curly Joe in the eye.

On the springy rebound, us loveaholics believe that this, at last, *is different. The torment of a few months (or minutes) earlier belonged to a much younger person. Right? When Robin and I became lovers, we attempted to maintain some cynicism. Meanwhile, More Fire! Productions was restaging* Junk Love, *and my quote on their poster looked compromising. Comingling with the artists? Fraternizing* (sic) *with the enemy!*

And what do I think of the play now? It's not an answerable question. What do you think of your *lover's (or spouse's) work? It's hard to know for yourself. And even more difficult to say to someone else—whether on the printed page or in intimate conversation—what you really think of it. It's too close. If a relationship ends badly, do you turn around and say, "I always thought your work stunk"? Did anyone do that to you? Or was the art really a whole lot better than the personality ever was? And now-and-then can our obsession with prestige and privacy, being driven and being considerate—all the cogs and the warm human flesh—find a way to work? And it doesn't even have to make you stupid?*

Barbara Barack's work has appeared in the Soho News, *the* Village Voice *and most recently the June issue of* Ms. *Magazine. She resides in New York City.*

Following are photos of performances that took place at Franklin Furnace during the 1981-1982 season: Dentures Art Club, Susan Mogul, George Sand, and artists' pages.



THE LAST STRIPJOINT IN NEW YORK

May 31, 1982
New York City

Dear Mr. Minsky,

Your letter to the Editor of the N.Y. TIMES came to mind when I was recently asked for my views on a similar theme. LaGuardia and the phony ethics of his era have passed...the Supreme Court and silicone Carol Doda of San Francisco brought stage nudity back to the U.S.A. in the early sixties...yet, New York lacks a revived legit burlesque show. Where are the new Minsky's?

For those in the know, of course, there is the Melody Burlesk in Times Square, the last "wholesome" stripjoint. The place is tame by today's standards - they still put on a stage show. The Melody is the last showcase for striptease. The audience is left alone in the seats and not asked to buy booze, peep shows, magazines or a hooker out back. It's the last place to actually feature a "star" each week and place her name up on a Broadway marquee. It's the place where the tourist, the young boy, the sailor still go...but the Melody, for all its quaintness, has no baggy pants comic, no second banana, no m.c., no live band, no chorus of blondes. The box office will not admit women. The Melody is a faint reminder of things past. It lacks the theatrical flair, the "class", if you will, that was your family trademark.

Can't anyone else imagine a new burlesque theatre, one with its consciousness raised? I can. Why isn't there a place where both men and women, hetero and homosexuals strip? Why can't they all tell jokes and wear the oversized pants that let a comic refer down to his or her crotch? I can imagine a contemporary tits & ass & cock & cunt show where the jokes puncture all pretense, including the most erect of male egos. Why not insist on a performance wild and wonderful enough to include a novelty hermaphrodite act? Why don't we challenge and entertain our fantasies as much as your theatre did in your time?

We need you back, Mr. Minsky. Yes, we pay lip-service to the ideals of educated and liberated mores (I speak now of Manhattan); we have somewhat challenged the double standards aimed against women and gays; but with our militant new moralism, we sometimes purge the difficult aspects of our culture we should adapt and embrace. We sometimes mistake sexuality for sexism and inadvertently force what cannot, and what should not be supressed into the control of the sleaziest and criminal worlds.

Sex on stage is too good for that fate - Aristophanes knew that as well as do you. Nudity is a powerful theatrical device - it need not exploit its performers. It can create an astonishing audience rapport. A true burlesque uses sex to open the doors and create a forum for ideas of all kinds. Perhaps LaGuardia banned burlesque because at heart it's subversive, dionysian, not pornographic. Perhaps we're afraid to restore the power of burlesque, Mr. Minsky. Perhaps it would help to have the aid of an old veteran to show us the way.

Best Wishes,

Dick D. Zigun

Dick D. Zigun

The Day La Guardia Killed Burlesque

To the Editor:

Your Dec. 12 news feature on the centennial of Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia's birth interested me. I wish, though, that you had given more space to the Mayor's behavior, which was oddly anti-democratic at times. Let me cite my experience as the sole surviver of the four Minsky Brothers of burlesque fame.

My three brothers (Abe, Billy, Herbert) and I were operating six theaters in Metropolitan New York, plus others throughout the country, when, on April 30, 1937, we were put out of business for corrupting the morals of the city.

La Guardia accomplished this by denying the renewal of burlesque theater licenses. We were then featuring Phil Silvers, Abbott and Costello, Red Buttons, Joey Faye, Jack Albertson, Gypsy Rose Lee and others of great talent in our burlesque extravaganzas, in competition with Ziegfeld, White, Rose and the Shuberts. We were known as the "Poor Man's Ziegfeld."

Brooks Atkinson, Robert Garland, A. J. Liebling and other outstanding critics of the theater sang the praises of Minsky shows at every opportunity. They had genuine fun at Minsky's and expressed it in a variety of literary forms.

While you are lauding La Guardia's virtues, I think you should remember his lack of foresight in closing the Minsky Theaters. He used autocratic power to effect the closing. The burlesque industry lacked funds to fight for its constitutional rights.

The word "burlesque" and the name "Minsky" were banned. Liberals of that day felt that the censorship groups were too powerful to oppose. It was a complete surrender! La Guardia had eliminated an original source in the development of today's theater. My opinion is that he did this not because of any ethical standards but to gain votes for re-election through a sensational tactic.

MORTON MINSKY
New York, Dec. 15...

What is poetry to you?

Still and interview from the documentary film by Cecilia Vicuña. (Bogota, Colombia, 1980)
In the house of prostitution:

We arrive early one afternoon to interview the girls. At first they rejected the idea of taking part in the film, didn't want to be seen in it. Many were housewives and mothers and had to conceal the kind of work they did. Nevertheless, when we explained that the film was about poetry, not prostitution, and that all sorts of people—scientists, workers, students—were interviewed too, they agreed to a taped interview, as long as we didn't photograph their faces or talk about their profession.

(Excerpt from interview with a prostitute.)

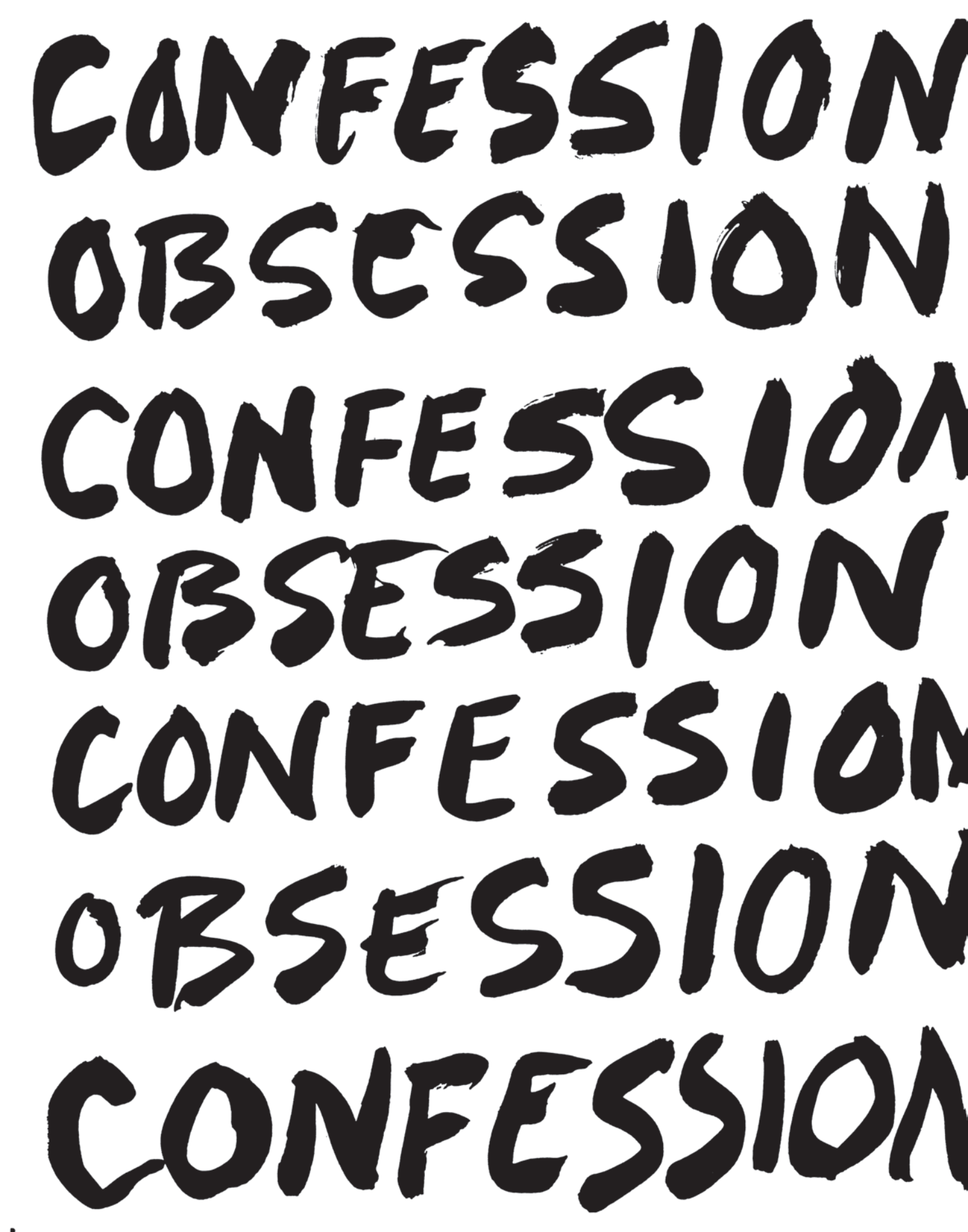
Q—What is poetry to you?
A—I think that poetry is what each one of us feels inside herself, that lovely thing you have inside, for me, that's poetry.

. . . there can be poetry in everything, even in the feeling, more than anything, and in every act we commit, carry out, think and desire, can't there? and even in sex there can be poetry, too, yes. mmmm.
Q—How do you mean?
A—For example, I'm doing it, making love with a man, I can be inspired and get a poem out of it, out of what I did, in that moment, of course . . . I've said . . .
Q—You mean when you like it.
A—Well, no, when I like it and when I don't.
Q—Even when you don't like it?
A—Of course, it can be a feeling, something deeper. I say that because I feel it, you know? I've felt it and I've experienced it . . .
Q—Then you have the power, each time you make love . . .
A—. . . it can become sublime and beautiful, because, besides, you're making a sacrifice, that sacrifice can inspire you, you can be inspired by anything, by a sacrifice, by an emotion, a moment of happiness, everything, whether you like it or not.
Q—Does that happen often?
A—not always, it's something very special.
Q—But do you try to make it happen?
A—No, I don't try. It just comes alive inside me and it happens.
Q—But, by trying, you can make it happen.
A—But, by trying for it, every human being, we all have the capacity to make what we want happen, don't we?

What happens is that we don't really set out to do it, because all us human beings have the mental, spiritual, and moral capacity to be, if we want, for example, if you want to be a great artist, a great actor, or writer, if you set out to do it, you're sure to do it, because if you feel it with that mental capacity, you'll do it. Pain and suffering are the most beautiful experience a human being could want, experience costs so-o-o much, doesn't it? so the person who hasn't suffered or felt pain, I think, doesn't have the same inspiration as someone who's suffered.

Translation by Anne Twitty


REFUSE
TOGETHER
ALONE


CONFESSION
OBSESSION
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CONFESSION

TOTAL ORGASM by D. Rosenberg, Random House, $5.95. Are you impotent? Frigid? Unable to respond sexually with the partner you love and have lived with for the past seven years? Is your tongue tied? Do you clam up and refuse to say, "Please touch me here, like this, honey."? Are you unable to French kiss for hours? Have you stopped touching yourself erotically? Too lazy to masturbate? You have tried hypnosis, LSD, psychic healing and EST seminars, haven't you??? And they have all failed, right? Well this book is just as ineffective as everything else you've tried. The answer is within and you must *find it on your own. Write your own book.* **Review by Sharon Golden**

DRESSING OUR WOUNDS IN WARM CLOTHES by Donna Henes, photographs by Sarah Jenkins. Donna Henes' Dressing Our Wounds in Warm Clothes *is a documentary project carried out on Ward's Island in 1980. Done in conjunction with, and on the grounds of, the Manhattan Psychiatric Center, this "energy trance mission" was actually a participatory sculpture project designed to pool the creative energies of the 4,159 patients, staff members and visitors on the island. Henes and the participants collected beloved old clothes, tore them into strips and tied them onto trees to create an environmental sculpture-in-motion, and the book is composed of her working notes and photographs (black-and-white and color, straight-forward documents and stunning repetitious montages) taken by Sarah Jenkins.* Dressing *is full of stories about the people of Ward's Island, and musings about the exchanges of energy and goodwill that united them and the artist during this collaborative undertaking. More than an aesthetic treatise, Henes' insightful book is a celebration of positive and supportive human interactions—a documentary testament to the healing magic implicit in human warmth and spiritual resources.*

Astro Artz (240 S. Broadway, Fifth floor, Los Angeles, Ca. 90012) 72 pp./$12.00 (sb)

Review by Shelley Rice

THOUGHT TO BE RETARDED by Lerner and Turner. Danny Lerner and Darryl Turner are two artists working as a conceptual art team in Chicago. On February 24–March 2, 1980, they performed an activity consisting of "writing a story in seven days" on the window of Bookspace, a book/art center in Chicago.

Thought To Be Retarded *is the result of that performance. Published this year, it is organized around the story of Ginnie and Gracie Kennedy, twins who were thought to have created their own language. First of all, it's a beautiful book. Thoughtful in its use of materials, it is about 4" by 6", with spiral binding and cardboard cover, under a bright red book jacket. It is offset in two colors (there is no yellow in the book). This lends the book a feeling of blueprint and notation which complements the intention of the work. The text consists of an interweaving of writings from such disparate sources as Djuna Barnes and* Scientific Police Investigation. *The book reflects visually its verbal obscurity. Its photographs are small, dark, shady; frequently, the clearest item in a photo will be writing. A handwritten text runs lightly alongside typeset words, like a palimpsest, or memory the legible writing has forgotten. The typography is itself a joy. One can sense the pleasure the artists took in varying the thickness of a line, or laying out a page in the tiniest of print; and, of course, it is this pleasure which makes this such an exceptional book.*

BOB AND BOB by Linda Frye Burnham. In producing Bob and Bob, The First Five Years, *author and publisher Linda Frye Burnham was presented with several dilemmas: how does one produce a book which will be provocative, yet widely read; how does one design a book for this 'art/comedy' duo, who know so sophisticatedly how to package themselves; how is one to be as witty and pointedly banal as they; and, of course, how is one to describe in words events which happened in time, over many years, in both public and private places?*

Bob and Bob *is the result of these and other such considerations. In many ways, it succeeds admirably. It definitively chronicles Bob and Bob's work thus far, work which spans drawing and film to performance and the staging of events. Bob and Bob, Francis Shisham and Paul Velick, are documented from their first meeting in San Francisco in 1975 to the present. This book is best when Bob and Bob's own 'voice' most clearly speaks for itself, for at times Burnham's prose is a little too literal and, thus, heavyhanded. These two guys are funny. If only by reading the titles of their work, the reader can sense sheer, unadulterated anarchy. Even though the book is clear and well designed, I was left feeling somehow cheated—perhaps it was all made too neat and too clear. Anyway, I was left with the nagging suspicion that Bob and Bob were elsewhere, having fun, while I was left with the book.*

BODY IN REVOLT by Donna Rini spins many images from an unprepossessing format. It is a small book, 5" by 5", printed in black and white, and although it's offset on a good grade of paper, its original imagery looks as if it were crudely xeroxed. This contradiction parallels the affect of the book; for just as the images are non-pretty, yet strangely seductive, so the book feels both sensuous and austere.

The book is divided into words and pictures; upon opening, the written text runs on the left side, with the visual text on the right. The images expand in meaning in conjunction with the words. Across from a page reading "to words/" , Rini places a picture of a reflection (hers?) in water. This image of water, as flux and reflection reappears throughout the book, especially in reference to language. Other natural images reoccur also, and in the hazy xerox, often become indistinguishable from one another. Clouds, bricks, pebbles, paths, waves; all begin to echo each other. The text, too, begins a similar amplification as its litany of words coalesces in meaning. The few words on each page read as both continuous prose or as stark emblems. Graphically, they look like wounds. The meaning of the words, of the words and images together, and the sequencing of images alone form a deep strata of meaning. As Rini finds connection in crumpled paper and wrinkled skin, or grids on a sidewalk and grids on a gun's sight, she is embarking on an excavation, an excavation of female sexuality.

Reviews by Anne Edgar

THEMES AND VARIATIONS by John Cage is another production from Station Hill Press, bar none the best small publisher around for high quality printing. The book is 23 x 28 cm with a three-color cover, type set in 11 pt. Bembo, the face of the original Finnegan's Wake. *In this case the poetry is an hommage collage to various men whom Cage feels as influences; the form is mysostics, words suspended to left and right from an imaginary center string hanging from the top. The Mahon photos, disappointingly displayed at the Whitney Museum, come alive and face to face in this edition designed by Susan Quasha. An example of the printing quality is the half-tone dot used to make the grays in the frontismatter type, rather than gray ink which would have been adequate. The screened letter shows the beauty of the paper. 23 x 28 cm (9 x 11 inches) 51 pages.*

FLUXUS ETC., a catalogue from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman collection, prepared by Jon Hendricks, is the finest chronology of Fluxus yet to appear. The spirit is Fluxlike and the information is correct. Jon worked a year and a half to make this work based on the objects and editions in Silverman's collection which focuses exclusively on the years of Fluxus when George Maciunas was alive. Selections of who is Fluxus were made by Hendricks on the basis of George's editions that he made or planned to make. The catalogue is modeled after the Sohm Catalogue on the same subject, and the Karpel Painters and Poets. *This valuable catalogue was underproduced; it is already out of print, but can be studied at* Backworks, *325 Spring St. 23 x 25 cm (9 x 10 inches), 410 pages.*

Reviews by Alison Knowles

FUEL by Barbara Quinn

Last year I received a letter from the Congressional Arts Caucus Education Program located at 2441 California St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, (202) 225-0308, which announced how much money the national governments of several developed countries contribute to the arts on a per-person basis per year. Notice where the United States stands.

Austria	*$100.00*
Denmark	*$ 28.23*
France	*$ 11.88*
Canada	*$ 6.07*
Great Britain	*$ 3.60*
United States of America	*$ .70*

Please write to your Congressman and Senator to let him (or her) know how you feel about what the U.S.A. spends on the arts. .0002 is the portion of the Federal budget devoted to the arts.

On an up note, the NEA, Inter-Arts Program, sent me a memo announcing that if you are an ARTIST working collaboratively with a choreographer, composer, visual artist, or performance artist, you may be eligible for a grant to create an original work. This is an interdisciplinary arts projects category that "supports and encourages the experimental project: the no-readily-labeled venture; the crossing over. Non-profit organizations may apply on behalf of artists working collaboratively or singly in inter-media formats." Contact: Lawrence Neeck, Inter-Arts Program, National Endowment for the Arts, 2401 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20506, (202) 634-6020.

Attention: Book Artists!!!! *The Tyler Offset Workshop is reviewing artists' books for possible publication. All books submitted should be in full dummy form with complete specifications indicated. They are primarily interested in original books with an emphasis on experimentation, sequencing, and visual book concepts. Several books will be selected for publication. (A $10.00 fee will be charged to cover handling and return postage). Send submissions or inquiries to: Michael Becotte, Tyler Offset Workshop, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Beech and Penrose Avenues, Philadelphia, PA 19126. . . . . Each year LINE gives out approximately ten $1,000 grants to Book Artsts. For more information contact LINE at Box 570, Canal St. Station, New York, N.Y. 10013.*

If you have any information that would be helpful to artists, please send that information to me along with your name, address, phone number, and I may publish it. If you do not want your name mentioned, indicate so in your letter. I look forward to publishing your helpful news. Write to: Barbara Quinn, c/o Franklin Furnace, 112 Franklin St., NYC 10013.

Editorial

Statement I

My worry:

What is sex? Is it a necessary topic? Is it appropriate? Worth dwelling on? As editors did we cover issues that are relevant to readers struggling with spiritual/physical survival and nuclear threats?

Possible Solution:

Maybe if we look intently at the four powers that drive us: 1. Food 2. Sex 3. Money 4. Death—then we will have made some peace with those issues before we're through.

Statement II

Dream:

A few weeks ago I dreamt that someone said, "Playing the piano is not about making music. It's about exercising your fingers."

Analogy:

Coming into the city from the mountains to co-edit the Flue has not been about gathering information, making decisions and pasting up a magazine. It's been about working together and eating lunches at Vanalyne's house.

—Linda Montano

Having performed pieces with sexual themes, I believe the topic of sex is so charged with feelings and attitudes that some artists receive unfair responses to their work. Audiences project onto the art their own moralities, personal issues and political agendas. For example, in Carolee Schneemann's interview she mentions her painting of a nude man and the controversy it created because it broke "essential aesthetic boundaries." How does an artist separate what's 'true' about a work from prejudicial attitudes and feelings of discomfort when taboos are violated? We hope this issue further clarifies a topic, that while written about extensively, continues to create a thicket of problems for artists addressing sex, gender and politics in performance art.

—Vanalyne Green

What kind of god made a man and a woman?
—Times Square Streetcorner Preacher

1. There is, and will be a lot more of, a lot of "crossing-over" between the hard-core sexual entertainment industry and the "art world." Performers will do sex to advance their careers, not just "as art." Film-makers will edit porn loops, as they do now, and otherwise involve themselves in the porn industry. Porn will be like commercials: something "serious artists" do for money.

2. But this involvement will have, is having, aesthetic consequences. What's wrong with sex, as such, as entertainment? How can it be made more entertaining? I'm not talking about fancy sex à la most Performance Art, but ordinary sex, the hard-core sex of the people.

3. Women artists will split into camps regarding sexual entertainment. It's like Zionism and the Jews. Is sexual entertainment exploitative of women (and young people, young boys especially)? What's the difference between "sex" and "eroticism"? How is sex different than food? I mean do questions of taste, gluttony, style, and presentation dominate some people's consciousness, while questions of nutrition, usefulness, need, and allocation dominate others?

4. Male sexuality, the hard-on, is not possible to fake physically. So what you see is what you've got, physically. I know of a couple on Times Square who fuck 36 times a week for money in a sex show. They practiced a lot of different positions for their audition. They don't do sex much at home: ruined because of the work-ethic: who wants to work at home? He gets it up all those times, but he must always use fantasy as his motor. As for her, sometimes she's into it, sometimes not. A female advantage, theatrically speaking.

5. There is a difference, a deep difference, though it is not easy to specify, between "erotic art" such as the sculptings of Khajaraho in India and Times Square porn. Yes, K is religious; but in late capitalist society "productivity of consumer entertainment" is religious too. The difference is, today, few people visit K and actually get excited. Not so with the jerk-off booths at Times Square. I am convinced that high art is always based, if you look deep enough, on popular practice. So look to the Square for the next phases of sexual art.

—RICHARD SCHECHNER

Times Square at Night

exclude some people, on theoretical grounds, from the ranks of the privileged. Let's realize there is always something to be gained from this kind of distinction—power, privilege, the right to dominate, and the right to exclude.

S.L.: There is a difference between art that is expressive of feminist politics, and art that is made by a woman who considers herself a feminist, and that's about the last statement which I can make with certainty. As to what those differences are, I don't have a definite answer, and I don't want to get into the position of sounding like what I'm about to say is dogma, is the only way to do feminist art. (I don't think all feminists need necessarily make political, or feminist art, for their work to be beautiful, inspiring, or uplifting—in short, to be good art). But I will offer some speculations on the subject of what is feminist art, if they can be taken as just that—points of departure for a dialogue. The definition of feminist art is as varied as the definitions of feminism (and is, in fact, very dependent upon one's definition of it). I think that feminist art must first be political, by which I mean that it address social issues that affect large numbers of people's lives. Good political art in general sheds light on important issues, changes attitudes about them, and shows its audience a way to act to change society in accord with new insights. So, feminist art should have an active component in it, and will probably make an attempt to reach people outside the normal audience for art. Such art holds no forms or content sacred, but constantly strives to create the shape of an indefinable vision for the future. Since its materials and concerns are not those of traditional art it may indeed not look like "art" but its frame of reference remains embedded in creativity, art history, and the potential of visual imagery to cause change in our lives.

At this point, feminist art is served as well by judicious criticism as by advocacy. With this in mind, could you make a list of words, terms, nouns, adjectives, expressions, concepts, ideas, etc. that you feel would be beneficial to the development of a formal, critical language?

S.H: I'm interested in work that speaks the language of art skillfully enough to subvert them; strong, beautiful, highly intelligent work, work that exists against the current and in the margin; extreme statements; risk; work that shatters ideological "givens" into fragments or makes connections where none ever existed before. I believe art can function as a critique of existing culture and as a locus where features not otherwise possible can begin to shape themselves. My own critical sense refuses to hive off "feminist" from any other sort of art, or art from any other expressive practices. Consequently, to line up some appropriate words or ideas seems like special pleading, or else part of the attempt I outlined above to create a privileged territory. I see no reason at all to be protective about work that succeeds in giving voice to what remains unsatisfied, hidden, new, eccentric, disturbing to the status quo. When it works, it shatters the viewer's expectations so that new critical criteria are inevitable.

S.L.: I think in my description of feminist art there are some beginnings of a critical language implied. Feminist criticism—support, feedback, and evaluation—is the cornerstone of feminist art. Feminism's second major contribution to art, after putting personal experience back into the arena, was to describe each work as part of an entire system, which includes the artwork itself, its audience, where it is seen, and the social milieu in which it is created and to which it inevitably responds. There was no critical language for what we were doing, and it was clear from the beginning that the burden of explication for our uniquely female art lay in the artist herself. Criticism was built into our art, and we developed distinctly different criteria for what we felt was good art. These criteria came as much from political strategies and social sciences as they did from aesthetics. Let me phrase some of the parameters of this developing critical framework as a series of questions I might ask of an artwork I was evaluating (keep in mind that I would only ask these of art which either purports to be political, or, by addressing social issues by using public forms, become political, despite the artist's intention).

First, what is the intention of the artist? What does she say she is trying to do? I think this is a first step in demythologizing art to the artist herself. I am struck by how often artists say that their work is "about" something or other, or is having some effect on its audience when it is quite apparent it is not. I would have artists begin to move out of the realm of fantasy when they evaluate the actual or intended impact of their work.

Second, who is the audience for the work? The audience for the work should be appropriate to the content and the intention of the work. I make different works for different audiences, because people communicate and understand differently.

Third, how does it relate to similar imagery, ideas, and issues in popular culture? That is, what is the social context for the work and how does that influence how the viewer will perceive it?

What is the effect of the work on its audience? What visions and dreams does it evoke, and what is the model of human nature, human relationships, and our collective future suggested by the art? What does it do to the audiences' attitudes on a topic, and what kind of action does it propel them toward?

How can we measure the effect of the work? Adopting the language of political activism and social sciences to answer this one, how do we know if the work is in fact fulfilling our intentions?

The last question is how will the work, and the effects of the work, maintain themselves over time? Or will they? Will they create temporary change, an instant vision, or will they contribute to a larger ongoing movement of social change?

These questions are as much for the artist in the process of developing her own work, as they are for the critic who evaluates the work. I don't think there are easy answers, or even any correct answers. The questions I have laid out here are merely an attempt to introduce another way of thinking into the production and evaluation of feminist, and indeed all political art.

Editor's note: Lisa Liebmann and Tony Whitfield's review of the L.A./London performances and videotapes can be read in FUSE Magazine, November/December 1981, Toronto, Canada.

good reasons why a group mode doesn't always work for art practice, and why some of the most effective work we saw in New York was made by artists who follow individualistic paths.

What has emerged in both communities, clearly, has been a recognition of the need for active, supporting social structures. What has also emerged is a clear understanding of the degree to which institutional contradictions must be exposed in order to obliterate the lie of art's autonomy, its 'freedom' from social, political, and economic issues.

In Britain, we have 'socialist" institutions that are as repressive as capitalist ones; we have "socialist" art bureaucrats representing all known left-wing factions who are as misogynist as their predecessors, though more skilled at packaging their bias; we have "socialist" artists whose work hangs in the Tate Gallery; we have "socialist" critics, male and female, who are as authoritarian and hierarchical as any other critic's writing for vested interests. Basically we have "socialism" used as a justification for self-interest at all levels, which leads me to the conclusion that it is premature to read "socialist concept" into the presentation of anybody's work—this is where we must always be specific, and not resort to easy answers.

S.L: California is not, in general, political in the conventional sense of the word. People don't read the newspapers as avidly or have the intense debates they do in the East. The climate of the area, and I mean that literally, does not seem to foster political debate and the development of ideologies. In my brief experience in London last fall, artists seemed to be much more conversant with a range of socialist political ideas than artists in California. As far as I know only Vanalyne Green of the Feminist Art Workers, and Martha Rosler would say about their work that they are trying to express socialist ideas. Others do work that fits within a marxist analysis, but they don't label it as such. Leslie Labowitz's work, **Sprouttime,** for example, is an art and life activity intended to free people from dependence on the agribusiness complex by "taking over the means of production" of food. The collaboration in the Feminist Art Workers' performances reveals a deep level of cooperation that seems to me to be, if not an expressed political ideology of socialism, certainly one of its fundamental feelings. I think, however, that much of the more obviously public and issue-oriented work is feminist socialism in practice.

Would you comment on the concerns that became apparent through the work and discussions of the group of artists included in the Franklin furnace series you did not select? (Please feel free to express any criticisms you may have had.)

S.L: It was quite obvious to me that the women in the British half of the series were real veterans, that they had been performing for a long time. I was personally impressed with the seriousness and the professionalism of their work . . . and the humor. It's hard for me to make connections and generalizations with such a brief encounter and without a genuine understanding of their context. Their improvisational work was quite successful, something I don't see much in California.

How have regional identities (linguistic heritages, political/historical and social traditions) informed the critical and creative dialogues that you have had?

S.H: The London-based work has assimilated much theoretical material coming out of Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics—as well as the conventions of say, local music hall (vaudeville), folklore, movies, TV . . . Where these concerns overlap for us seems to be in the area of language. So, first, women's alienation from male-dominated ("man made") linguistic codes, and, by extension, from male behavioral conventions, is the underlying theme of much of the work. Second, the significance of class is understood by everyone here, whereas it is heavily masked in North American ideology. Our premises and assumptions are thus politicized to begin with: we could not make art unless we had analyzed the implications of being female and seizing the 'privilege' of speech. We could not live in Britain without being aware of the way class forms motives and meanings.

And third, these insights contribute to the blatant transparency of any notion of the unified "culture" that relates to all regions, all classes, and both sexes in the U.S. We are particularly sensitive to issues of so-called "cultural imperialism" whether emanating from our own centralized bureaucracy or from abroad: it's not easy to continue to insist on the validity of differences and the necessity for different 'languages' in the face of both left and right-wing pressure to enforce acceptable dominant codes. Surely it's no coincidence that issues of regional autonomy in Europe inevitably revolve around language.

S.L: One has to understand California art in its separation from New York. That's something that the London women didn't seem aware of when we first began—that we were in many ways alien to New York as they were. Los Angeles artists are in the distinct position of being part of a very large and vital art scene which is somewhat isolated from what has been considered the "center" of the art world (at least by New Yorkers). It's not so much that California artists were isolated from major art ideas, but that they did not feel the tremendous pressure to conform to them. This accounts not only for the variety of California art in general but for the development of some distinctly new and different political and social approaches to performance.

There is a parallel in the development of feminist performance. Not only were we part of the general California isolation, but we managed to form a separate entity within the Los Angeles art scene. Since there was not a terribly active arts market, and not a lot of prestigious local publicity to vie for, there was not a tremendous and omnipresent hierarchy of art styles, forms, etc., as in New York, and artists grouped themselves into several interacting enclaves—the political artists, painters, performance artists, feminists, etc. This was part of the environmental circumstances that allowed us to develop a strong feminist art aesthetic and nurture women artists as significant contributors to the performance scene.

At this point in time, what do you consider to be the significant distinction between feminist art and art whose manifest content does not deal specifically with feminist issues but is made by a feminist?

S.H: In my own work I consider it to be more subversive to speak, as a woman, on a wide range of subjects than to limit my scrutiny to women's subjects, whether traditionally defined or defined as acceptable by various interest groups. Really, all these debates about definition, about art "isms," are just ways of hiving off territory and giving some folks jurisdiction, the power to say "Yes, you are making feminist art" or "No, you are not making feminist art." It's a shame for women to fall victim to this kind of divisiveness that mirrors the categorizing that goes on in The Establishment, and that is always used to

Interview with Suzanne Lacy and Susan Hiller

by Tony Whitfield and Lisa Liebmann

What follows are edited answers to a list of written questions which we mailed to Susan Hiller and Suzanne Lacy at the series end. Our intention was to elicit responses which would elaborate upon, or demonstrate those elements that were difficult to reconcile, as well as to express two perspectives on the value of the New York meeting. —Tony Whitfield and Lisa Liebmann

What were the criteria you used in choosing artists for the L.A./London series at the Franklin Furnace?

Susan Hiller: I selected work of high quality by artists who are aware of the power of art to make connections denied or masked by ideology and who have, over the years, made an intervention into public life by examining the implications of their ambiguous placement as women within 'language' and 'culture.'

These artists have made the connections that transform negative internalizations into positive expression. Most of them have been politically active, but none has, to my way of thinking, made the mistake of substituting rhetoric for art. They share an awareness that locates their work socially, politically, and sexually, while representing a number of strands within the women's movement rather than a single theoretical position. I had this in mind from the start, tending to show the rich variety of content-oriented work being done by women artists in Britain, work virtually unknown in the U.S. As a result, though not intentionally, the selection can be seen as a kind of survey of first-generation British feminist performance art, or as an introduction to "third-area" work coming out of several different, politicized, collective working situations.

Suzanne Lacy: Variety was probably the main criterion (in choosing the artists). I chose artists who differed in age, length of time performing, and degrees of involvement with feminism and the feminist art community in Los Angeles. Each artist was chosen to highlight a different aspect of California performance, whether it be participation in an on-going collaborative group commitment to feminist or Marxist politics, exploration of technology, human survival, religion or oppression. Almost all had in common the revelation of the artist's personal history in the performance itself, and most were concerned with relationships—between women, men and women, children and parents, and performer and audience. All saw the exchange as an opportunity to explore their relationship with each other. and with the British women, something they hoped might influence their future work.

The choice of critic was easy. Moira Roth has been the single strongest advocate for California performance art in the country. She was intrigued by the opportunity of finding out more about British women's performance, and the whole idea between women of two nationalities won her over.

One final criterion Martha Wilson and I agreed on was to choose women who had not had a lot of exposure in New York. That left out people like Eleanor Antin and some of the other more established performers. Sometimes my rationale for selection broke down. Martha Rosler, for example, moved to New York in the middle of the planning, so she was no longer a Southern California artist. But she represented a strong feminist Marxist viewpoint in her work, and I wanted that perspective in the series.

With hindsight, would those criteria be somewhat different if you had to choose again?

S.H: Perhaps at this point I would think of adding one or two additional artists to round out the notion of a first-generation survey. I was pleased that so much diversity could be encompased under the heading we chose ("London-based artists" rather than "English artists"). We had English, Irish, American, Welsh, and Scots voices, and this came about as a result of my initial criteria rather than as an end in itself.

S.L: Now that I've seen that particular constellation, I'd like to see a different one—not that I was dissatisfied. There are many themes I could have chosen that might have made a more coherent picture—narrative, public actions, punk, ecology, art of the Woman's Building, etc. but any of these would give lie to the real diversity we have.

I was committed to showing that diversity from the beginning, but some of the other criteria developed rather haphazardly, a function of artists' availability. Originally I had hopes that we would be able to do a large collaborative project with the British women, so I chose women who either had experience in collaboration or who had addressed the theme of woman-to-woman communication in their work. When distance made it impossible for us to get together before the event, those criteria became less important, so when two women couldn't come I replaced them with others for reasons that mostly related, once again, to keeping a balance of styles and content.

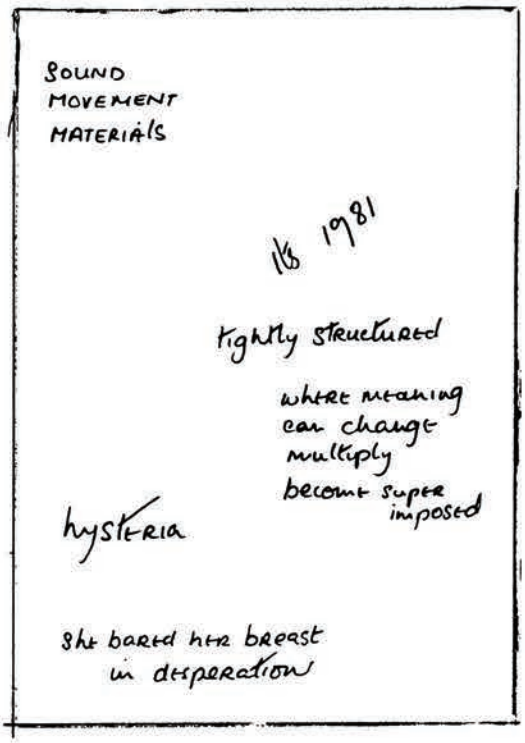
How does it appear to you that the socialist concept in British life and American thought has informed the presentation of much of the work that we saw? (Please be as specific as you can.)

S.H: Perhaps it is fruitful to link all this to some specific 'social concept,' but I think it is more important to understand the radical implications of a contemporary art practice that draws strength and meaning from an explicit recognition of its origins in collective experience.

I've often said that women have a privileged access to certain subversive insights. Women do not begin to make art unless they have something to say; because this something has not been said, it is potentially explosive as far as the dominant interests are concerned. Whether the work attacks, head-on, issues like male violence against women, or whether it subtly undermines the "obvious" in detecting class or gender bias, it always closes the gap between "experience" (ours) and "reality" (theirs). This sense of seeing how our work affects the world in which we live; this sense of learning along with others from its effect; this sense of seeing one's own subjectivity as part of a larger socio-historical complexity, connects the practice of all the artists who were at Franklin Furnace.

Working collaboratively may be an approach to the reform of art practice (or it may not be—this point is often asserted but rarely dissected), and certainly members of both communities of artists have long experience of this. I could cite the work coming out of years of collaboration in the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union (London) or The Womens'Building (L.A.) as examples. Yet I certainly would not want to see this remarkable tradition used to denigrate the contribution, courage, skill, and talent of individual artists. There are

'BIRD OF PARADISE' FRANKLIN FURNACE GALLERY, NEW YORK, MARCH 1981



"My main aim was to confront my own fear, violence and aggression and allow the audience to confront it too- be on guard against it, protect themselves against it, and perhaps even find a secret joy in doing that."

The gallery was in darkness. The artist stood aggressively in a spotlight near the entrance, one hand was encased in a black sequined evening glove. She physically stopped anyone who attempted to get by her through the gallery.

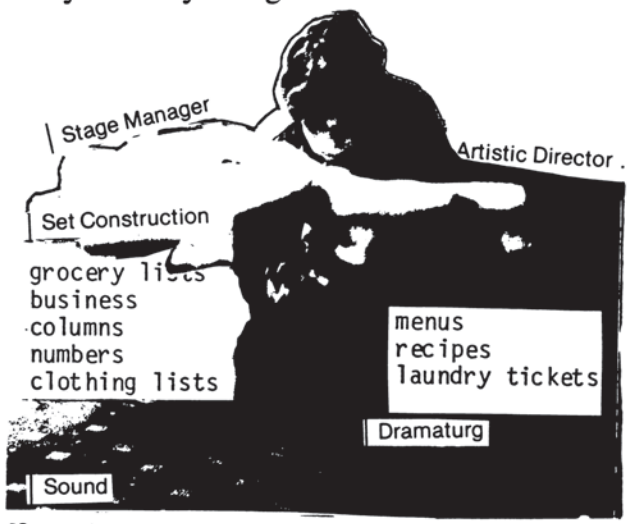
A tape was playing, juxatposing and superimposing sounds, singing, music and words transformed by using the voice in different ways. This drew the audience into some of the clichéd and taboo ways in which one normally sees ritual, sacrifice, martyrdom, pornography and gangster stories.

After ten minutes in darkness the lights went up in the gallery. The audience was led into the main space, the tape was still playing. The artist put a black sequined boxing glove on the other hand and walked amongst the audience keeping physical control through eye contact, focusing the eyes different parts of the people's body (similar to camera movements). This drew out a number of different responses, by using the sensuality of the gaze according to whether it was returned, used, ignored or played with, these responses set in motion a series of challenges and a certain power between the artist and the audience.

At times control was no longer necessary, then there could be time to stand still, do headstands, make small rituals with the Bird of Paradise, move in and out of the audience humming and whistling, trying to understand the different sides of her body, one aggressive (the boxing glove) and one seductive (the evening glove). The tape was still playing. —Sonia Knox 1981

REEDY

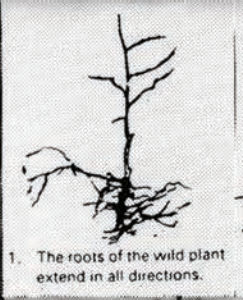
13 8 pm Performances, Carlyle Reedy "Yoga with Interference . . ."



inventories
time to pack up
its mother
does the cups
the plate stack how many
the up up
dust lists
cloths down
what do you want to buy:

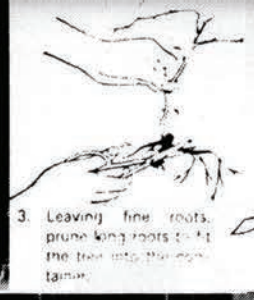
inventory of furniture, laundry contents and mix

Carlyle Reedy will work in a room to be specially built inside Franklin Furnace during the week preceding the exhibition, and will create an environment in which the performance will take place.

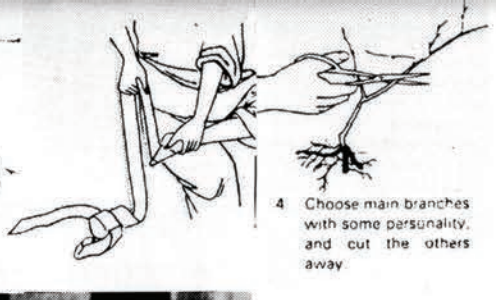


1. The roots of the wild plant extend in all directions.

2. First, cut the taproot



3. Leaving fine roots, prune long roots to fit the tree into the pot container.



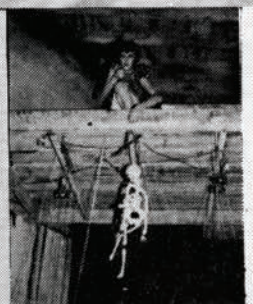
4 Choose main branches with some personality, and cut the others away.

Mountain Flowering Cherry, 25 years old, 3 inches high, from seedling.

c

Cheri Gaulke - "Broken Shoes"

Cherry Blossom, 25 years old, 3 inches long, from age 5.



G

5. The pruned tree looks desolate, but it will make a good bonsai in a few years.

Thriller by Sally Potter

"In **Thriller** (1979), a 16mm black and white film by English artist Sally Potter, a chapter in the psycho-socio-economic history of women is interpreted in the dusty atmosphere of a bare attic. Marxist feminism here is funneled through a dramatic construct . . . On the one hand one sees the death scene of Mimi, the seamstress/heroine/victim of Giacomo Puccini's opera, **La Boheme,** filmed at the highpoints of its theatrical splendor; on the other one is privy to the cogitations of Potter's modern heroine, herself the victim—or the witness—of a murder. The two tales are visually intercut. Intellectually, they are linked by a Marxist subtext.

. . . While **Thriller** incorporates a discursive approach to biography that is a familiar component in women's performance, the tradition it attempts to extend is not primarily the oral historian's but the cinematographer's. It outlines a set of Potter's ambitions as a feminist filmmaker concerned with restructuring the narrative format. The irresolutions of its evident goals makes **Thriller** feel strangely like a transitional piece that precurses major work."

—Lisa Liebmann

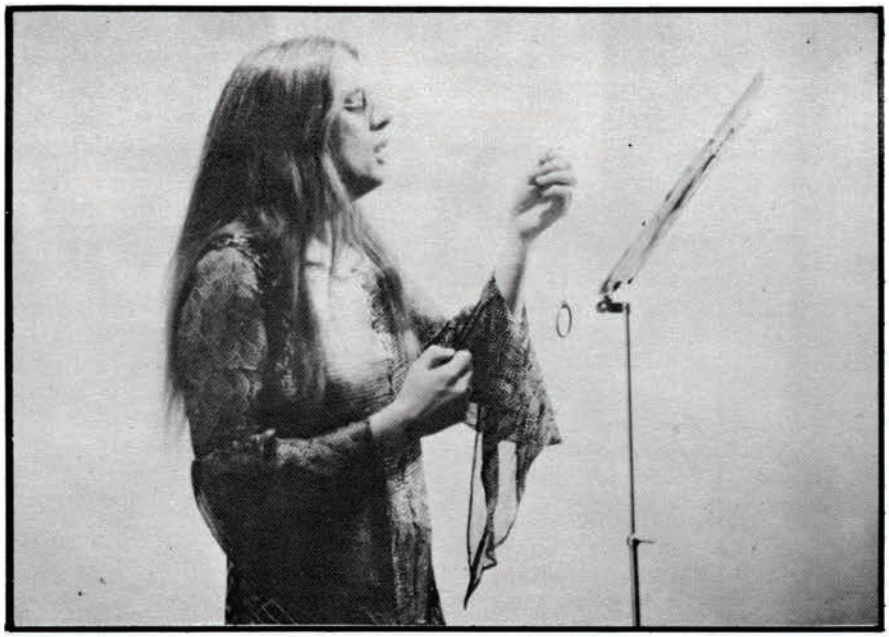
First appeared in FUSE Magazine, November/December 1981, Toronto, Canada

VIDEO TOTEM CUBIST CONSTRUCTION
by Nina Sobel

custom made special effects generator and motor controller which adjusts speed and position of cameras by John C. Gord

The forces in the city pushing pulling sideways downwards upwards are recorded in a cubist manner. The elements of the foreground figures are integrated with the background space, background and foreground are mixed horizontally and vertically. As people walk towards each other on the sidewalk, their images displayed on the split screen monitor converge into one. The top vertical pair of cameras are alternately rotating from the sky and the world trade towers to the earth. The middle horizontal pair are also auto panning 180 degrees as they converge the cars, people and buildings across the street. The image is thus seen simultaneously from several viewpoints being transformed into a synchronistically moving pattern; the constructed image of uniform parts is analogous as a whole to the Totem pole.

HANNAH O' SHEA.



A LITANY FOR WOMEN ARTISTS

The corner of the room was subtly lit, to emphasize the chrome music stand, placed inside a silver linked chain, formed in a circle on the floor.

The artist entered, carrying a silver melinex book, ceremonially dressed in a flowing gown, over which was placed a very fine black lace and silver metal top.

Stepping into the circle enscribed on the floor, the artist took from the music stand a tuning fork and a small silver chain, at the end of which was a small metal circle. Striking the circle with the tuning fork, Hannah O'Shea commenced her performance in a loud clear voice.

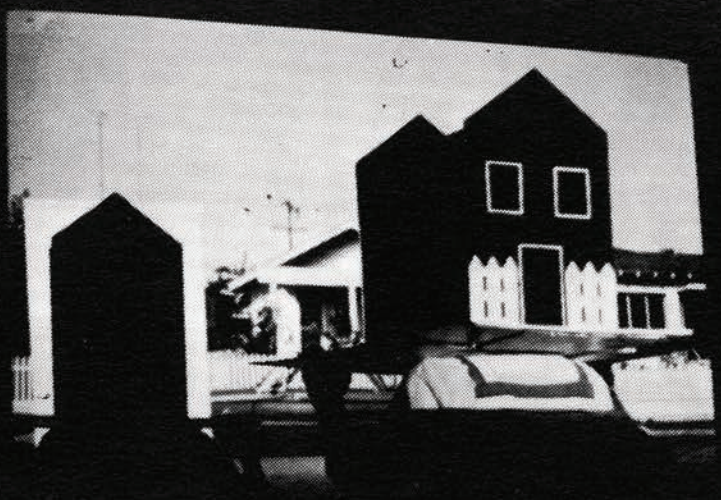
The 'Litany for Women Artists' was chosen as a means of celebrating and remembering the lives and work of women artists of the past, to bring into focus the names of individuals, to place them alongside each other in a meaningful context to encourage solidarity and strength of purpose--by providing 'role-models' for practicing women artists of today.

The sheer volume of names (over 600) which the 'Litany for Women Artists' contains, illustrates an 'historical' denial of the existence and the contributions which women artists have made within the visual arts.

The traditional form of the Liturgical chant is subversively used to highlight this 'historical' invisibility--while at the same time, the distinctly aural tradition of the form provides a concentrated and accessible form of incorporating our 'herstory' into our collective memory.

"...Her classic - 'A Litany for Women Artists' is a moving and mesmerising reminder of the invisible sister's lined up behind each woman making art. It also dispels the myth of the lonely genius in it's own very feminist way...."

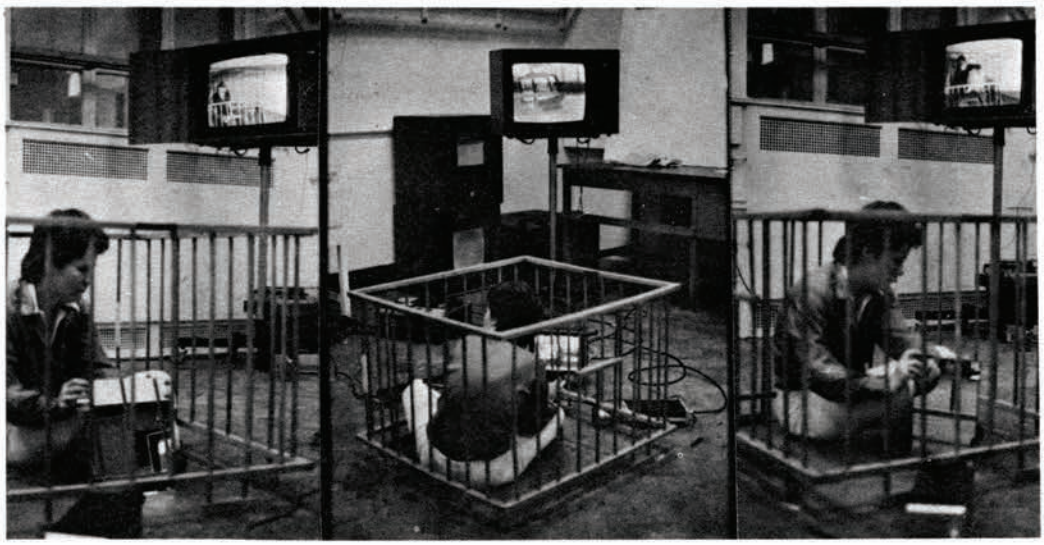
--Lucy Lippard
Village Voice, March,1981



Encased in a miniature house headdress, Linda Nishio, as the ***Ghost In The Machine,*** *finds herself caught in freeze frame on the streets of L.A., mindlessly cruising through chic-chic bourgeois living quarters and then inquisitively gliding into cerebral interior landscapes in her exploratory journey through dislocated realities.*

Tina Keane

The strategy of juxtaposition of two seperate elements, one a specific focus, the other a continuum, is a familiar feature of Tina Keane's work. In 'Shadow Woman' a recitation of the events of life for the immanent female was juxtaposed with a small girl who played through the sequences of hop-scotch as we watched. This game is as old as recorded history so as many generations of girls have played this game as women have passed through the shadowy life of the recital. Gradually the real child lost her identity and was transformed from an individual at the beginning of her life-adventure to an anonimous unit of repetitive history.
In 'Playpen', a pre-recorded video of females aged from 6 months to 80 years was juxtaposed with Tina Keane herself sitting in the playpen with a camera placed

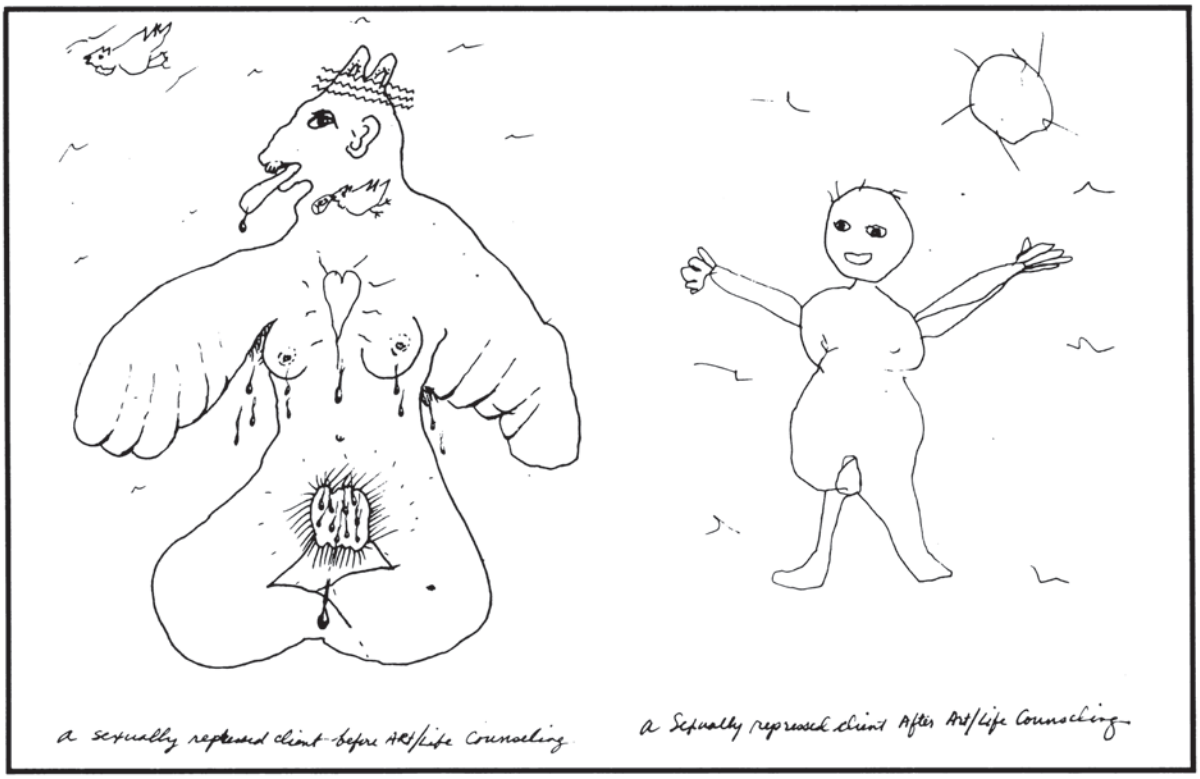


so as to pick up this scene for relay on a second monitor. By manipulating a mirror she was able to interfere with the camera's angle of vision and feed into the monitor the reflections she picked up with the mirror. The reflections were of course of ourselves and we became both observer and observed. (I was reminded of the last scene of Virginia Woolf's 'Between the Acts', where mirrors were used to make the audience see themselves as part of the pageant of history. In fact, there seems to me to be much in common between these two women artists: Woolf also typically sets minute fragments of real lives against a continuum: e.g. 'The Waves', 'To the Lighthouse' etc.)

The full significance of Tina Keane's work does not lie in any of the seperate elements but in the resonance of the juxtapositions she contrives. And I use the word 'contrive' deliberately, for there is nothing random about the formal devices she deploys to effect her fusions. But these are not immediately obvious. They are there, but fastidiously understated. The burden is on us to pick up the clues and mentally and imaginatively effect the significant combinations. It is what happens within our minds which is important. Her work is a sum of magnitude which greatly exceeds the unassuming parts she puts together.

tam giles

Linda Montano: Art Life Counseling



Rose English: Adventure or Revenge

Photo: Vanalyne Green

"In dismantling the theatrical conventions of the Music Hall with all the skill of a double agent, English inadvertently exposes the formal devices of her L.A. counterpart's comedic style. Among other things, the framework of her performance took the form of an eccentric improvised lecture on technique, baring the underpinnings of theatrical illusion—the tricks of the trade according to the **Actor's Handbook.** From a harshly-lit platform, dressed in a conglomeration of Elizabethan-ish men's garb, a bearded English expounded on how to do it well when one is on the road—or making the most of travel and adventure. Along her route she also managed more than a few well aimed shots at England, the art world and men. At the outset the personae she has assumed is under suspicion. As the pompous patriarch/veteran actor/man of the world she frequently refers to herself as a "non-sexist man." At one point she wonders aloud, "As a man, I am interested to know why women feel they have to dress in drag." Little by little, she abandons her drag image, rummages through a prop box, settling now and then on an item, demonstrating nonchalantly its many possible but unlikely usages on the stage—horsetail as phallus, diaphram as hat, beard as bracelet or victim of her knifing, her revenge. Through all of this English's humor remained mad and unexpected, the detours in her discourse heterogeneous, and her awareness of her audience unerring.

Like Montano in **Learning to Talk,** English's relationship to character portrayal was fundamentally at odds with that of an ordinary actor. Her presence as the creator of persona was never subsumed by the persona she had created. Character remained invention and the users and sources of that invention were, in fact, under her feminist scrutiny. Her ironic reversal of the misogynist currents in traditional drag served to under-score a subversive, dialectical discourse on gender and public/personal image/action. When English abruptly disappeared from her, by that point, all but ransacked stage, an incredibly clever theatrical machine had brought into being a vision of the world quite unlike anything else to be found in the **L.A./London Lab.** A performance marked by false starts, strangely paced changes in focus, odd mixtures and manipulations of emotion and intellect, protean shifts in character, voice and sex left behind a dumbstruck audience thrown to the edge of some complex insight."

—Lisa Liebmann

First appeared in FUSE Magazine, November/December 1981, Toronto, Canada

Los Angeles. December 1978. Fifth anniversary of the Woman's Building. As brides, Laurel, Cheri, and Nancy celebrate women collaborating, sharing a vision, and making a commitment both to one another and the women's movement. Vanalyne is in the hospital having an infected ovary removed. Her struggle is lonely. Laurel, Cheri, and Nancy resent her absence. They're overworked and missing her creative input. New York. March 1981. Three years later, wounds have healed. Personal crises are now attended to along with artmaking. Laurel, Cheri, and Nancy don hospital gowns and Vanalyne becomes the bride.

Feminist Art Workers (Nancy Angelo, Cheri Gaulke, Vanalyne Green, Laurel Klick) synthesizes these elements:

- Collaboration as an affirmation of female bonding and as a political alternative to individualism.
- The integration of feminist education with the artmaking process.
- Artmaking designed strategically to reach specific audiences.
- And, the valuing of leisure, humor, coziness, and individual needs as essential parts of the political struggle

– excerpted from performance text

Feminist Art Workers – "Heartbeats"

'MIND THE GAP'

ROSE FINN-KELCEY

Entering the darkened gallery, the spectators sat either side of a narrowing corridor marked out on the floor with white tape. At the broad end, two white plinths supported the lower edges of a rectangualr block of ice, glowing in a chaste blue light. At the thin end, a treadmill machine was dimly perceptible through the open doorway to the adjacent gallery. Stripped down and ready for action, its chrome parts were picked out by a concealed ultra-violet light. Spotlit in an adjoining corner, a maroon Marconi wireless stared blankly from its plinth at a microphone placed before it. Halfway down the corridor, a truncated silver standard-lamp stem supported a mechanically flickering tongue of electric flame. Each item commanded its own space with the economical authority and austere precision of the terminal points in a logic circuit.

In time, tape-recorded sound gradually swaddled the gallery with highly accomplished muzak: an ironic prelude to activity. And just as the objects were specific in their bare singularity but puzzling and plural in their connotative range, so this music disengenuously presented itself as a generalized instance, assuming a recognizable face without betraying its features. One blithe tune matched another, and still there was no action; until a female voice-over formally announced Rose Finn-Kelcey's apologies for failing to appear, and explained that *"finally, she didn't know what she wanted to say."*

The muzak reasserted itself, and the performance was poised hesitantly for want of a performer. The spectators, confident that some bluff was afoot, remained to outface the absent artist. With only the muzak to endure, and the four objects for reflection, attentiveness nonetheless remained centred on the staging, particularly the orange flame which flickered at the eyelevel of the seated audience. The muzak was again augmented by the woman's voice, regretfully describing Rose's abandoned attempt to prepare herself for the occasion. And then, intermittently, the voice read a selection of working notes and projects towards the unfulfilled event. Usually brief, sometimes gently humorous, they contributed to a growing sense of what the performance might have been like and, by their variety, hinted at the sheer diversity of material co-opted into the preparatory stages of the work.

Suddenly, almost affronting the intimacy between listeners and speaker, a woman appeared from the gloom surrounding the treadmill. Casually dressed in light clothes, she carried two small silver dumb-bells connected by a fine wire thread. Walking briskly down the left-hand side of the corridor, she deftly placed the wire across the ice block and let the two weights hang in the gap between the plinths. She returned using the other lane, and disappeared from view.

Again the muzak was supplemented by taped readings, and piece by piece the unrepresented richness of sources came together, drawing painful attention to the gap between intention and realisation. Sadness, quiet desperation, unaffected curiosity and occasional moments of gaiety: all undertaken alone, and all defeating attempts at synthesis or patterning. The matter-of-fact tone precluded any exasperated accusations of coy artistic malingering.

"She turned to Chapter Five of 'Frankenstein'" introduced a man's voice, reading that passage from the novel which describes how at the point of terminal exhaustion, the inventor witnesses a compensatory spark of life animate the lumpish mass. Delivered with the measured emphasis of the radio short story, the episode cast the performance in a more public mode, and the woman reappeared, turned on the treadmill and mounted it.

Featureless in the ultra-violet light, she fell into a steady jog, a pace which disdains winning over a short course, but which requires physical tenacity; unglamorous in competitive terms, necessary to the race where the finishing post recedes with each step taken towards it. The gallery was silent, responsive only to the hum of the machine and the remorseless pacing of the runner. At times the counter-motion caused her to drift from her spot, but each time she would regain it with a fractional increase in effort. Running only against her own stamina, she slowly reached her limit, disengaged from the belt, and switched off the power.

The muzak returned and her voice with it. *"She noted downs words like crevice, ravine, gorge, breach, interval, crack, chink, rift, fissure, chasm, slit, incision, omission, opening, hole, space, interim, pause, interstice, cavity, orifice, ha-ha, gorge, gully, canyon, furrow, abyss, gulf, haitus, lacunae, aperture."*

As she appeared, to walk down the corridor and take her marks before the ice, a gigantic sound rift followed her progress, aurally rending the gallery from corner to corner. Crouching, prepared to start, a siren sounded the rising tones of the 'all-clear', and so she remained until the audience had dispersed.

— Harry Walton.

Introduction by Martha Wilson

Three years ago, Franklin Furnace applied for funds to present ten performance artists from London, and ten from Los Angeles in New York. Now in the spring of 1982 I can recall clearly why these two groups of artists seemed fascinating in their similarities and differences, and why it seemed to me that Franklin Furnace should bring them together: Feminism shook the 70s so thoroughly that the future for women, in spite of Reaganosophy, will be forever different. In the 60s, divorce, living alone, lesbianism, and lots of other sexually-based social practice was unthinkable to our parents, and to some of us, too. But a few years later, the political gains of the 60s in the law books, it was time for women to draw their own sexual outlines. I felt Feminism was the most important issue of the 70s, and it was high time to see how women artists from different sexual environments presented their work, and how they dealt with their local conditions. As it turns out, I felt the London-based artists must still labor under the weight of a male-oriented society because their performance work seemed to me for the most part to be "serious" in tone, and didactic in intent. The LA artists were less invested in individualism it seemed to me; they sat in each other's laps to discuss their pieces, and always practiced Women's Building networking etiquette by always checking out the ramifications of their decisions with everyone else invovled. Most of their performances were funny, while being totally concerned as well with the mundane: making money, the price of food, and wearing shoes. These generalizations are too broad, so let me describe two performances in detail: Rose English performed in the guise of William Shakespeare, all dressed up in those velvet pantaloons and waistjacket everyone associates with his figure. The performance was about theater, or the creation of an illusion by performance. Now I can't remember exactly what she said, but suffice it to say she used everything in her grasp. "Sometimes the audience doesn't cooperate and laughs uncontrollably through your lines", she said. Meanwhile, Ted Castle really was laughing uncontrollably through her lines. This performance as you can see was like sculpture, in that its form was its subject. The artist used strong spotlights and a theater trunk full of ridiculous props to aid her monologue, which carried the weight of meaning through the performance.

Leslie Labowitz's performance began with darkness, in which an audiotape of Leslie's voice explained that her mother had been incarcerated in Auschwitz during World War II. In the darkness, Leslie is lying naked on a bed of earth, on the floor. When the lights come up, the audience sees Leslie now clothed and smiling, standing in front of racks of beansprouts of every kind: Alfalfa, Mung, Lentil, Wheatgrass, etc. Leslie explained that since death was a palpable force in her life and that even art seemed to be about death, she wanted to pursue some activity that would be life-affirming and be a means of support as well. Bean sprouts were it; their live protein produced vigor and health, she could sell bean sprouts to local markets to make her living, and she could even make art out of this live material. Then she proceeded to sell her beansprout business, including counseling and hardware, for $500 to a member of the audience.

I enjoyed all the performances in this series immensely. Both of the performances I just described were amusing, well-crafted, and meaningful, but what different performances overall! Rose English sustained a theatrical illusion throughout some preposterous self-inflicted predicament, while Leslie Labowitz ditched the dramatic evocation of death for a brightly lit sales meeting, complete with Sprout Man playing recruiting ditties on the organ.

Well, enough comparisons. Bringing together these talented artists from London and LA was probably the best thing Franklin Furnace ever did, for itself and for quite a few of the artists who have kept up the connections made during this meet.

Pictured is Martha Wilson, founder of Franklin Furnace and member of DISBAND, an all girl performance art band.

photo credit: Daile Kaplan

The following pages were created by the artists especially for this catalog.

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L.A. London Catalog