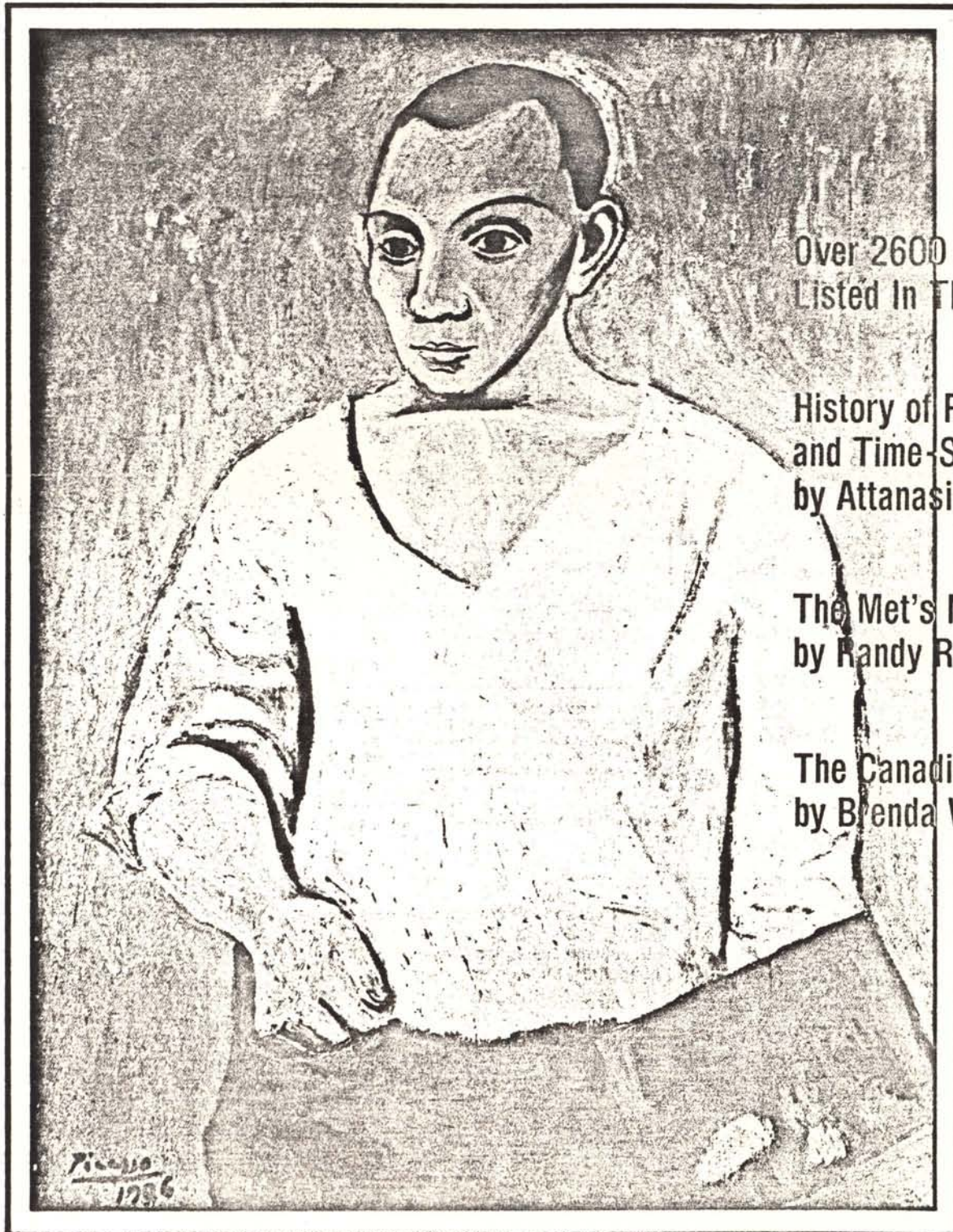


PICASSO:
The American Connection

JULY-AUGUST 1980

VOLUME II NUMBER 4

National Arts Guide



Over 2600 Exhibitions
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From Bernini to Beuys : Historical Sources of Performance and Time-Space Art

Attanasio Di Felice

The guests now streamed into the Sala del giuoco alla palla, which had been arranged for the representation of the Paradiso, by Leonardo da Vinci, the Court mechanician. Then a train of powder exploded, and crystalline globes, like planets, were seen disposed in a circle, filled with water, and illumined by a myriad of living fires sparkling with rainbow colours."¹

—Dmitri Merezhkovskii
after the eyewitness
account of Bellincioni

That field of interdisciplinary artistic concerns known as performance art is supposedly a contemporary phenomenon. In fact, records show it to have flourished with the emergence of what remains our guiding concept of artistic individualism during the Italian Renaissance. An involvement with science and engineering went hand in hand with the emergence of that individualism which had its beginnings even in the Middle Ages. Was Giotto not an architect? Were the creators of systematic perspective not mathematicians? The revival of science and engineering in such fields as architecture, in which ancient writings were incorporated (Alberti's influential emulation of Vitruvius, for example), paralleled a strong interest on the part of powerful noble patrons in ancient philosophy, especially Neo-Platonism. Thus Neo-Platonic philosophy played a significant part in determining the type and nature of many a *committenza* (courtly commission) given an artist, and indeed in determining the patron's concept of the artist's role in society. Neo-Platonism helped artists to be regarded as creators rather than as artisans. An extraordinary example was the civic works program of the prince of Rimini, Sigismondo Malatesta, a Neo-Platonist, so passionate that he fought bloody battles

with the Turks in the Morea for the sole purpose of recovering the ashes of the philosopher Gemisthus Plethon. Malatesta commissioned Alberti to build the Tempio Malatestiano, chronologically the first example of what is considered Rinascimento or quattrocento architecture. Regarding this remarkable building Adrian Stokes concluded, "There have been investigators who thought they found . . . more than one hint of esoteric rite and symbolic manipulation staged in the Tempio."² As opposed to the Medici, who tended to use artists as political tools, while paying elaborate lip service to Neo-Platonic ideals, Malatesta tried to give artists such as Piero della Francesca free rein as creative entities.

In quattrocento Italy artists were manifesting work in every form possible in the technology of the day. From the design and execution of fountains to the creation of spectacles for the courts, the artists of the Rinascimento were encouraged in the pursuit of their pronounced multimedial concerns. A legion of such painters and sculptors (who were frequently also architects) spanned four centuries. Their normal activities included the creation of *trionfi* (triumphal processions), *cortei* (court pageants), *grotesche* (with bizarrely costumed participants), and *carri allegorici* (allegorical vehicles frequently used in jousts). Among these artists were Filarete (c. 1400-1469), Baldassare Peruzzi (1481-1536), Serlio (1475-1554), Buontalenti (1536-1608), Bernini (1598-1680), Stefano della Bella (1610-1664), Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709), and Servadoni (1695-1766). Many others such as Raphael, who painted sets for Ariosto's "Lena," collaborated with poets in the creation of theatrical works at courtly theatres.

The age of the Baroque saw the ultimate theatricalization of the plastic arts em-



Allegorical engraving from *Scienza nuova* (1744).

bodied in the works, sculptural and architectural, of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Bernini's basic preoccupation with theatrical effect is clearly represented by his many staged spectacles for which he wrote the scripts, designed the scenes and costumes, carved the sculptures, planned effects of lighting and sound, and undertook the complete direction and execution, including elaborate feats of engineering. The most brilliant example was probably his *L'inondazione* ("Inundation of the Tiber") of 1638 in which, to the audience's alarm, the flood scene featured real rushing waters and a substantially built house which collapsed.

The cupola of Saint Peter's in Rome remains partially melted as the result of Bernini's *Allestimento di una girandola* ("Fireworks installation") of 1659. It has been suggested that he found inspiration not only from nature but also from art — particularly from Peruzzi who, some years before, had been fond of flooding dining halls of villas and arranging for guests to eat in small boats. To draw a parallel between the Baroque phenomenon of spectacle informing plastic arts and the phenomena of our own time,

one may quote Gillo Dorfles, who said, "One of the more curious situations of our era, in the realm of the plastic arts (and not only the plastic arts, but also music), is an unequivocal tendency towards spectacality, towards theatricalization."³

Looming far above the rest in reputation is Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), who, as a formulator of highly impressive pageants and smaller scale spectacles full of novelty and surprise, was a legend in his own day. Leonardo frequently came into conflict with Church authority because of the controversial nature of the researches which he applied to both private and public multimedia projects. However, his present reputation is based on little actual knowledge of the details of his public work as a performance artist. Best known, perhaps, is his *Paradiso* (pageant of "Paradise") performed in the Castello Sforzesco in Milan in 1490. On this occasion of the marriage of Il Moro's nephew (as witnessed and described by Bernardo Bellincioni), Leonardo caused performers costumed as planets to revolve and recite verses proclaiming the return of the Golden Age. Vasari described a mechanical lion made by Leonardo on another occasion; the lion, after advancing a few steps, had lilies fall from its chest.

In an unusually diary-like note to be found at Windsor, dated April 23rd, 1491, Leonardo mentions that he had been at the house of Galeazzo da San-

severino to organize a spectacle for a joust which included servants costumed as wild men. Cecil Gould states, in reference to the variegated material to be found in Leonardo's notebooks: "Another idiosyncrasy of his mind was a fondness for parable or allegory. Some of his allegorical drawings may . . . have been made . . . as designs for a pageant."⁴ A consideration of allegory, the symbolic representation of concepts and ideas in pageants (conforming to Neo-Platonic practice), is important to the understanding of artists' performance in Leonardo's day and in the present.

A significant part of Leonardo's artistic concerns was with music and sound. Many of his short compositions survive. By all accounts he was a highly accomplished musician and renowned improviser on the lyre. He designed and built ingenious mechanical drums and other instruments of great refinement. His designs included those of original wind instruments based on his studies of human anatomy. In what many have seen fit to regard as purely scientific researches, Leonardo conducted experiments to further his understanding not only of the mechanics of light and sound waves, but also of the human senses, the relationships among them, and the phenomena which stimulate them. Thus Emanuel Winternitz gleaned the following concerning one of the observations recorded in the notebooks: "When he struck a table with a

hammer, small heaps of dust formed on its surface. Leonardo's discovery must have had a special significance for him, since it constituted an easily observable correspondence between the visual and the auditory realms."⁵

Leonardo was not only an incredibly acute observer of natural phenomena, as we know from innumerable notebook entries, but also a keen observer of the effects of phenomena on the human senses, and thereby on the emotions. At one point he wrote: "Observe how much grace and sweetness are to be seen in the faces of men and women on the streets, with the approach of evening in bad weather."⁶ (He thus anticipated what would be discerned centuries later concerning changes in atmospheric ozone levels and their effect on mood.) Leonardo applied his scientific and engineering knowledge to performance, and he applied it, if I may beg the question for a moment, with a subtle understanding of the human heart, to move his audience as he would.

The growing tendency of specialization in the 1500s and the tendency of portrait painting, church decoration, mosaic work, sculpture, costume design, and architecture to segregate themselves into mutually exclusive professions, reached an extreme which firmly established itself by the 1700s. By then there was nary a painter or sculptor to be found who was active in performance. What had fully emerged were set designers, costume designers, and so on, who were considered artisans as such. Contributing heavily to these changes in artistic concerns were the steady secularization of philosophy, the attendant decrease in significance of court ritual and pageantry, and the growth of public forms of theatre.

"Ouranos ano ouranos kato."
(As above, so below.)

Tabula Smaragdina
(Hermes Trismegistus)

Leonardo said: "The painter contends with and rivals nature."⁷ In the realm of performance the artists of the Renaissance created works which frequently combined a matrix of Neo-Platonic symbolism (seeking to reflect the perfect forms of the Empyreum) and a love of display and effect for its own sake. However, the inevitable changes in social structure and resulting gradual loss of interest in Neo-Platonism on the part of princely and noble patrons altered the combination



Bernardo Buontalenti, *Naval Battle in the Courtyard of the Palazzo Pitti*.

of factors which had facilitated the creation of performances by artists who "contend with and rival nature" (as opposed to those who merely seek to reproduce it). There were also instances of actual repression of Neo-Platonic ideals, as when Botticelli's work was burned by Savonarola, and when Malatesta was ordered burned in effigy in St. Peter's Square (on being informed of this, Malatesta commissioned Giulio Romano to create a suitable effigy). Artists were being persuaded to descend once more from the heroic heights of "poetic" creation (from the Greek *poietes*, maker), heights from which they had been able to conduct rituals in which they, as signifiers, imparted original knowledge. Instead, more and more they found themselves devoted to the recording of mundane visual experience.

Just as the ongoing social revolution tokened a withering of interest in court ritual and precipitated a proportionate decrease in performance art, so it follows that a key element in the notation of artists' performance must reside in an understanding of the significance of ritual in society. The greatest authority in this regard remains Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who, in his book *La Scienza Nuova* (*The New Science*) (1744), demonstrates how natural it is that these changes should take place, as they ceaselessly do, in the cyclical pattern of *corsi e ricorsi* (occurrences and recurrences). As a pioneer in the delineation of the concept of struggle between socioeconomic classes, Vico traced the processes whereby social change affected the uses of language (in its total sense of communication). He discerned that such social change also imbued certain people (whom he called "heroes" after the original prototypes) who constantly reappear in history with the power to determine and demonstrate the meaning of certain words and actions. In practice as well as outlook, Vico is one of the progenitors of semiotics; indeed, he even provides etymological proofs for his premises. He formulated the concept of *Verum-Factum* (the True is that which is Done) which allows for the creative principle in the "heroic" nature. By this he shows that the artist is not an expositor but rather a maker (*poietes*) of something original.

In Vico's sense, the nature of the performance artist can be termed an heroic nature, one which puts those attending a performance in the position of the first

nations (primitive people) receiving poetic wisdom. Of course, in the use of the term "poet," we properly return to its original Greek meaning of "maker." Thus we may call performance artists poets, heroic creators of "language" and conveyors of poetic (original) wisdom. As for the actual process (praxis), we may gain considerable insight from Vico's *Orations*, in which he states in mathematical terms:



Luigi Ontani

When man starts inquiring into the nature of things, he becomes aware that it is utterly impossible for him to attain it. This impossibility is due to the fact that he does not possess in his mind the elements of which things are made, and furthermore, to the fact that the powers of his intellect are limited. The totality of objects is external to his senses. Nevertheless, man succeeds in turning a shortcoming of his mind into an advantage. By means of that operation which goes by the name of abstraction he fashions two terms: the point, which can be notated, and the unit, which is susceptible of multiplication. Both are fictitious entities, figments. If you note down the point it is no longer a point, if you multiply the unit it is no longer a unit. Furthermore, man took it upon himself to proceed from these two principles ad infinitum, so as to prolong the line unlimitedly and so as to repeat the unit innumerable times. And in this fashion (hoc pacto) he was able to construct a certain world of his own, such a world as he was able to contain, in its entirety, within himself. Thus, by prolonging, shortening, or combining lines, by adding up or subtracting or calculating numbers, man was able to accomplish countless operations. It is evident that he had cognizance, within himself, of infinite truths.⁸

To this three-dimensional model we may mentally add a fourth dimension.

Thus Vico shows the process by which "false" actions may have a true, original significance. This is just the opposite of the structuring of a false or "ornamental" metaphor, for example, or of the creation of coded or patterned distortion of visual experience in painting (as in analytical Cubism). It is a question which gives itself to both semiotic and phenomenological consideration. We may further take into account, in anticipation of the next section, a statement by Remy de Gourmont, the great critic of Symbolist poetry: "A history of Symbolism would be the history of man himself, since man can assimilate ideas only in symbolized forms."⁹ Although the statement employs different terms, it indicates a link between Vico and Symbolist theory.

A re-emergence of performance art after the Renaissance naturally coincided with the re-emphasis of symbols in painting and in literature, in effect a kind of "idea art." The contemporary view of this change can be drawn from the preface to *Le livre des masques* (1896) wherein de Gourmont wrote: "Whence comes the illusion that the symbolization of the idea is a novelty? From this: We have had, in recent years, a very serious attempt to establish a literature based on contempt for the idea and a disdain for the symbol."¹⁰ This was written in the period when the phrase "dumb like a painter" was still in common parlance.

At present there is a growing body of art historians and critics who agree with Gillo Dorfles when he says,

If we have witnessed a mixture and confluence of those forms of art which in days of yore were defined as primary [painting, music, sculpture, poetry, and so on], more so are we today—and will continue to be tomorrow—the witnesses of the confluence of the diverse arts carried out by the mass media, which constitute a key avenue of communication and expression in our time.¹¹

Thus there is an increasing preoccupation with developments which originate in one art form and which subsequently influence or find their parallels in another. As a case in point, much has been made of connections between Symbolist plays, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, and the full-blown re-emergence of "live art" with the Futurist movement. RoseLee Goldberg takes care to note in her recent book *Performance* that the young F. T. Marinetti, who was to found the Futurist

movement, was living in Paris from 1893 to 1896, and that "the seventeen-year-old Marinetti was soon drawn into the circle around the literary magazine *La Plume* —Leon Deschamps, Remy de Gourmont, Alfred Jarry and others."¹²

Specific indications of the relationship between the Symbolist poets' theater and visual art of the same period have been pointed out by František Deák: "Symbolist stage design became known as 'synthetic' decor. The use of the term 'synthetic' in painting is associated with Gauguin and the Nabis group of painters. Paul Sérusier spent the summer of 1888 at Pont Avon, where he discussed with Gauguin synthetic and symbolist theories. Strongly influenced by Gauguin, he began to disseminate these theories among his friends in Paris and, through his work in the theater, brought them into stage design."¹³ Deák then quotes R. H. Wilenski, who in *Modern French Painters* explained:

When he first exhibited his pictures of 1881-1887 in the Café Volpini exhibition, Gauguin described his work as "synthetist-symbolic." This cacophonous label was intended to describe two aspects of his attitude which characterized his painting from 1887 for some years. By "synthesis" Gauguin meant simply the recording of form in symbolic line and colour as distinguished from the imitative procedures prescribed in Realist and Impressionist doctrines . . . Gauguin meant symbolist in the sense that the word was used at that time and for some time later by the French Symbolist writers and poets. He used the term . . . to indicate that certain characters in his pictures were intended to record mental images and ideas as distinguished from visual experience.¹⁴

In the Symbolist theory of de Gourmont can be found links not only with the postulates of Vico (and later phenomenologists and semiologists) but also, in concrete terms, with the subsequent behavior of the Italian Futurists: "Heroes, or men (for each man is a hero in his own sphere), are merely outlined by life. It is art which completes them by giving them, in exchange for their poor sick souls, the treasure of an immortal idea, and the humblest man may be called to participate, if he is chosen by a great poet."¹⁵

While painters and sculptors who subscribed to Realism, Impressionism, Fauvism and Cubism continued to explore new ways in which to record their visual

experiences, there developed a contrasting lineage of artists, including Symbolists and Futurists, whose clear intent it was to use the same media as a means to "record mental images and ideas." The Symbolist visual artists found themselves influencing the way in which Symbolist theatre — a theatre of imagistic ideas and allegories — was being pre-



Giannina Censi in one of the dances she created with Marinetti from his 'aeropoésie' of the 1930s.

sented. On the other hand, the Futurist painters themselves, from the inception of their movement in 1909, expanded almost immediately into the framework of performance. Since their basic interest was in idea rather than image, many different media, some recently developed, naturally lent themselves to, and indeed seemed to stimulate, the artistic concerns of the Futurists.

The aggressive first manifesto, written by poet-playwright-artist Marinetti, appeared in *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. A cartoon published the same year portrays a Futurist parade in which bold audience interaction is evident. Multimedia events called *serate* (Futurist "evenings") were first held in theatres in 1910, before the *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting* was even published (in April of that year).

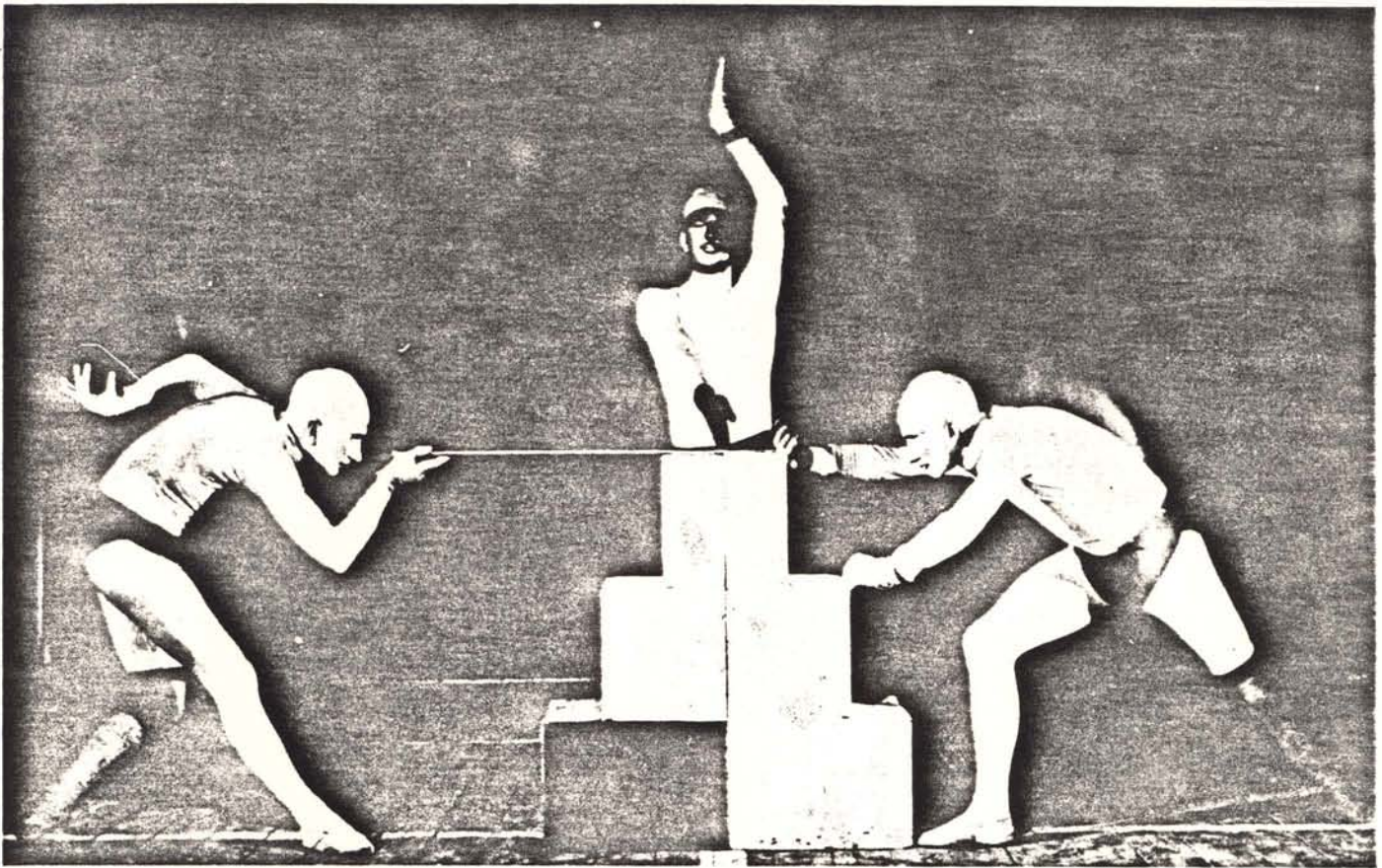
I wrote the following in a 1976 catalog, *Futurist Synthetic Theatre*:

Through their activities and inventions, the Futurists defined certain areas of modern art which have proved to be perhaps the most important genres in which contemporary work might be said to exist. These genres are in even greater "evidence" today largely due to the more recent developments in documentation techniques, which greatly facilitate the recording of "real-

time" art. I say this particularly because any investigation of Italian Futurism leads one to conclude that there is a remarkable dearth of documentation of the movement as a whole. The fact is that our view of what largely remains, namely painting and sculpture drastically distorts our sense of Futurist concerns, especially as performance formed the greater part of what constitutes Italian Futurism. In the lopsided image of Futurism which has come down to us, the "failure" of the Futurists to consistently produce "masterpieces" of painting and sculpture is one of the strongest reasons why the movement is often held in low esteem today on a fairly widespread basis. However, the Futurist movement's intent frequently was not so much to produce a product as to reveal an idea.¹⁶

From the beginning, the favorite form of Futurist propaganda was the manifesto, a mode of address at which the Futurists so excelled that Tristan Tzara, for example, wrote Dadaist manifestoes that are obvious parodies of their Futurist predecessors. The Futurist manifestoes were actually conceived as performance pieces themselves, in the sense that they were to be "declaimed," which Marinetti did with particular vigor and audacity in public theatres all over Italy and abroad as far as Moscow. Beginning with manifestoes, provocative declamations, parades and public demonstrations, frequently all combined in Futurist "evenings," Futurist performance branched out in many directions, continuing to stake out, help establish, or extend various forms and combinations of artists' theatre, music, cinema and dance, to the 1930s. Apparently, the last significant innovation of Italian Futurism took place when Marinetti and others began to broadcast sound compositions, verbal and otherwise, on radio (per the Futurist Radiophonic Theater manifesto of 1933).

In 1911 the Manifesto of the Futurist Playwrights appeared, followed by the Variety Theater manifesto of 1913, continuing the definition of Futurist performance concerns; that same year Giacomo Balla published his manifesto on men's clothing. It became increasingly evident that the Futurists were intent on creating an art movement which was not only very visible to the general public, but was actually intent on converting that public to a prescribed lifestyle and provoking them to participate in the construction of a Futurist society.



In Oskar Schlemmer's absurd theatrical experiment *Game With Building Blocks* performed at the Bauhaus in 1926, three figures dismantled a wall, rhythmically rebuilt it, then danced around it (Photo © 1979 Harry N. Abrams, Inc.; from *PERFORMANCE: Live Art from 1909 to the Present* by RoseLee Goldberg).

"Concrete" music — a music of common, not necessarily pitched sounds — is described in Luigi Russolo's *Art of Noise* manifesto and was realized in actual performance the same landmark year of 1913. Concerts were given in Milan and London in 1913 and 1914, respectively, employing Russolo's mechanical devices called *intonarumori* (noise intoners), for which he developed a special enharmonic notation. *Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation* made its appearance in 1914, composed of the often loud recitation of unsyntactical texts, accompanied by various body movements and the use of such sound effects as the striking of tables with hammers and the playing of noise-producing instruments.

The Futurist Synthetic Theatre manifesto of 1915 set forth the concept of the *sintesi* (theatrical synthesis), a theatrical form marked by its brevity and lack of plot structure. The first collection of *sintesi* by Ball, Boccioni, Marinetti and others was published in 1915, and several theatrical companies began touring Italian cities. By 1921 Futurist synthetic theatre had been performed as far away as Brazil. The *sintesi* demonstrated a willful effort to erect parallel realities, often accomplished through an autonomous

use of language, the abstract interplay of sound and movement, and the task-like repetition of action. The phenomenological research of Gaston Bachelard can be applied here in an effort to gain some insight into the mechanisms with which the Futurists approached performance: "The minute we apply a glimmer of consciousness to a mechanical gesture, or practice phenomenology while polishing a piece of old furniture, we sense new impressions come into being beneath this familiar domestic duty. For consciousness rejuvenates everything, giving a quality of beginning to the most everyday actions. How wonderful it is to really become once more the inventor of a mechanical action!"¹⁷

The year 1916 saw the most important Futurist involvement in cinema, the production of the film *La Vita Futurista* (*Futurist Life*). This film, apparently lost, repeated and extended many of the features already present in "synthetic theater". Presentation of Futurist dance and ballets began in the teens and continued through the 1930s.¹⁸ Another Futurist endeavor was Aerial Theatre, which debuted in 1918, executed with airplanes

painted in vivid Futurist patterns and mechanically altered by Russolo to become instruments emitting noise compositions in their choreographed flights. Fedele Azari's manifesto (1919) stated that the Aerial Theatre constituted "a true theatre of the masses since it will be offered free to millions of spectators"—an obvious example of the Futurists' populist ideology in which artists were obliged to utilize media and phenomena affecting society as a whole. This logically brought artists to concern themselves with all the senses. Marinetti crystallized his thoughts on the sense of touch and, as described in *Tactilism* (1924), constructed "tactile tables," compositions specifically created for that sense. The manifesto of *Futurist Cooking* (1930) reminds us clearly of the premise that artists were to remake the world, and that everyone in the world was to participate in the artistic process through everyday activities.

By the time Futurism had established itself performance activity was being undertaken by art groups in many countries, though largely centered in Europe, until that continent was disrupted by World War II. Those prewar artists whose work as performers is best known to us include the Russian Futurists and

Suprematists, including artists such as the Burliuk brothers and Kasimir Malevich, and poets such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Alexei Kruchenykh and Velimir Chlebnikov, circa 1912 and after. The Futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun* premiered in St. Petersburg in December of that year. A collaborative effort with music by Victor Mityushin and sets by Malevich, *Victory Over the Sun* had as a libretto an often if not entirely "nonsense" text rendered in the Futurists' invented *zoum* speech.¹⁹

The Russian Futurist film *Drama in Cabaret No. 13* (c. 1913) was an incipient example of the genre known today as "artists' films." Artists' films were produced with steady frequency from then onwards. We might cite *La Vita Futurista* and Enrico Prampolini's collaboration in *Thais* (both of 1916), the collaboration of Francis Picabia with René Clair on *Entr'acte* (1924) and that of Salvador Dalí with Luis Buñuel on *Un chien andalou* (1928) and *L'age d'or* (starring Max Ernst), and the films of Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Man Ray, Fernand Léger, and Marcel Duchamp. The film medium served the performance concerns of many artists, their cinematic concepts paralleling, and sometimes extending, developments in their painting, theatre and music. Thus Léger wrote two years after his *Ballet mécanique* of 1923: "The future of cinema, like that of painting, depends on the attention which is given to objects and to fragments of these objects, or to purely fantastic and imaginative inventions. The error of painting is the model, the error of cinema is the subject."²⁰ In more recent years artists who have made films include, among innumerable others, Joseph Beuys, Terry Fox, Gordon Matta-Clark, Luigi Ontani, Dennis Oppenheim and Andy Warhol.

The Dadaist movement got its start in the tumultuous activities of Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Marcel Janco and others at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1915 and 1916. The Dadaists later shifted to Paris and continued to produce performances. Their successors, the Surrealists, de-emphasized live action, but maintained the sense of dramatic spontaneity in their emphasis on automatic writing and painting and in their delight in creating ominous and theatrical tableaux and environments. Performance was also a part of the program of the Bauhaus in Germany, most significantly in the work of Oskar Schlemmer and Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack, both of whom

produced dance-related performances there throughout the 1920s. Even Cubists other than Léger ventured cautiously into this field, as when Pablo Picasso designed costumes and stage sets for the ballet *Parade* in 1917. In other words, performance developed into a very fruitful area of artistic endeavor in the twentieth century.

Performance art in America was given impetus through contact between American artists and avant-garde European figures in American exile (either self-imposed, like Duchamp's, or forced, such as with the flocks fleeing the Nazi onslaught). One such figure was Edgar Varèse, himself a one-time assistant to Luigi Russolo, who transmitted both encouragement and a specific body of theory ("music is organized sound") to a small but active coterie of American experimental composers. In the United States by the 1950s composer-theorist John Cage, dancer Merce Cunningham, painter Robert Rauschenberg and others were already quite active as performers. In 1959 Allan Kaprow presented *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* in New York, giving the name to the first postwar performance artform.

At that time Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni were active in Paris and Milan, respectively. Klein's painterly and conceptual gestures were the most radical realized by *les nouvelles réalistes*. For his part, Manzoni, stating his intent to express the concept of the artist's individual

mythology, re-sparked an interest in performance in the first post-Futurist generation in Italy with his living sculptures (models signed by him), artist's breath (captured in balloons), *merda d'artista* (canned) and other gestures. Contemporaries such as Paolo Buggiana and Mario Schifano turned from painting to environments, body art, and film in the mid-1960s. (In fact Schifano is literally an art work of Manzoni's, having been signed by him as a living sculpture in 1961. Much has been made of artists whose art and life are as one, but an artist who is the art of another must certainly be counted as a rarity.)

During the first two decades after World War II it became apparent that the era of the great art movements had passed. These movements had provided a support structure for the presentation of performance art since the beginning of the century. The persistence of performance by independent artists after the war was an indication that performance was at base a valid area of concern to a variety of artists, and not merely a spectacular and easily publicized form for art movement entrepreneurs (Marinetti, Tzara, Breton and others) to encourage and exploit.

No longer were groups of artists brandishing their movements' titles and slogans, subscribing to rhetorical manifestoes defining the scope of their activities. Briefly in the early sixties the international Fluxus group, spurred by its founder Georges Maciunas, seemed to revive the



Min Tanaka at Le Palace, Paris, June 1979 (Photo:Jocelyne Clareboudt).

sense of a movement, organizing festivals and publishing manifestoes. In 1963 Joseph Beuys organized a Fluxus festival at the Dusseldorf Academy, where he taught, and attracted the participation of many Fluxus artists from Europe and America. Participants in the Fluxus "movement" at one time or other have included Eric Anderson, Ay-o, Beuys, George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Ken Friedman, Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Maciunias, Nam June Paik, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell and La Monte Young, among others. Other groups existed, such as the *Gruppe Zero* in Germany and the loose association called *Once* at the University of Michigan, to which artists claimed membership (as opposed to the assignment of artists by critics to various "tendencies").

However, in retrospect, the sixties seem like a gestation period for the incredibly prolific performance activity of the seventies. The artists engaged in performance over the past fifteen years or so are so numerous as to barely allow the mention of a few here, let alone to describe their successive variations in concepts and techniques.

Cocteau said that "Art must satisfy the nine muses."²¹ This maxim has never been better served than in artists' performance. A great emphasis on an almost writerly self-preoccupation was evident in much of the performance of the seventies, while now the involvement of artists in music is gaining much attention. I say "writerly" in the sense that writers first became known for that heightened degree of involvement with themselves which is found in much performance, and which causes us, as Alfred Kazin says, "to identify the power of art with the uniqueness of personality." And more specifically, "A writer can never be sure that his habits, his childhood, his loves, and enmities, are not crucial to his work. So it is the writer's sense that he inhabits some mysterious power over his life, that his gift and his life are really versions for each other."²²

Vito Acconci became a performance artist when, as a poet, he began presenting his ideas through the medium of his own body rather than through the written word. Although most performance did not come from such clearly literary origins as did Acconci's, artists would, for example, perform utilizing themes out of

their own lives as part of a universal system, creating their own personal archetypes. Others, such as Luigi Ontani, would resort to informing and manipulating established "art" images. By necessity much of the information remains obscure, as it is not revealed directly in the work; however, some artists have indicated certain details in writings or interviews. A simple statement in a letter by Willy Heeks tells a great deal not only of his own work, but can be applied generally to that of many others:

"My work is primarily visual art, making connections to painting and sculpture. The work evolves out of personal experience, and is structured from drawings and notes, and more recently my paintings. There are conceptual and minimal aspects inherent in the work; however, these are not overly exposed as a major interest. I feel that I need to suspend, with the work, a spiritualism, as color or as warmth, utilizing the personal as a thematic course. The pieces are made, and I always try to find the edge of seeing them and understanding them."

Heeks also elucidates on specific works, such as *Temper-aper-ture*:



Colette with the "Victorian Punks" presenting the "Deadly Feminine" line of clothes designed for Fiorucci and modeled as part of a fashion show at Mudd Club (Photo: © 1979 Colette).

"A dance, a chant, with a painted panel on my back, and my speaker-eyeglasses wired to a small recorder on my chest, the content of the recording a philosophical monologue, along with memory reflections on the way things looked before they were shot with a camera and after as in a print. I also used my own voice to coincide with and contrast with the recorded sound. I wore a white robe and passed through a large open room . . . It's the way it is, it's the way it always has been, feeling the nerves.

"An hour long proscenium theatre piece using several sound tracks, a door, chair, typewriter, blanket, and spot lighting. This piece was about the space between thinking and perceiving. But I do deal with visual statements and autobiography, so this work was designed to produce that feeling of the stream of consciousness. For instance, in part of the piece I reflected on looking at a painting of Monet's, then suddenly polluted waters."²³

Luigi Ontani, an artist who uses mythology, fable, literature, and the iconography of painting in his *tableaux vivants*, once gave what he termed "an endless interview" which is perhaps more esoteric than Heeks' elucidations. This "endless interview" consisted of Ontani imitating four times the call of the coot—"Aaaaaaque, aaaaaaque, aaaaaaque, aaaaaaque"—followed by his statement of five words—*Alibi* (alibi), *armonia* (harmony), *redondanza* (abundance), *similitudini* (similitudes), *senze fine* (without end)—and ending with four more coot calls. He later said of the five words, "My work and my life so far are based on these five conceptions. In the future I will add two more words. I do not know them yet. My life and work will encompass no more than those seven basic ideas."²⁴

In a more recent interview Ontani discussed his work in the following terms:

"... a voyage, an adventure without time, without limits, with no differentiation between the studio and the world, whose tracings and whose simulacrum have taken various forms. In my work there has always been very evident this use of heteroclitic elements, this putting almost in competition diverse media, for the requirements of my growth, of liberty, to have more breathing space. Now, for instance, I am thinking about a film. A sort of extension of the *tableau vivant*."²⁵

It would be illuminating to quote what other performance artists say about their work, to hear Eleanor Antin, for example,

talk about her assumption of several alternate personalities, including Eleanor Antinova, the black Russian ballerina; to cite Jill Kroesen on her musical plays, the Kipper Kids on their humorous ceremonies, Min Tanaka on his body skin art, and Colette on her tableaux in which she appears as "Justine." There is even an entirely distinct phenomenon worth investigating, of people who are not artists producing theatrical works which borrow heavily from ideas developed in the plastic arts, and in some cases eliminate the actor completely. These would include Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson in New York and the group "La Gaia Scienza" in Rome. But space is too limited.

The actual circumstances of presentation, and indeed marketing, with regard to performance art has varied from era to era. The Renaissance had its courtly patronage (and palace halls and theatres) and the modern art movements their systems of interdependent members and supporters spilling out into cabarets and theatres hired for the occasion. The last decade saw the emergence of usually non-profit, non-partisan centers devoted to the presentation of artists' performance.

Many such centers appeared around the world—the Kitchen in New York; Beat 72 in Rome; the Museum of Conceptual Art, La Mamelle and 80 Langton Street in San Francisco; Le centre d'art contemporain in Geneva; I.D.E.A. in Los Angeles; Le centre d'information et documentation in Paris; A Space in Toronto; Il Diagramma in Milan; Etage in Philadelphia; El Centro de Arte y Comunicacion in Buenos Aires; De Appel in Amsterdam; the Western Front in Vancouver; Véhicule in Montreal; the Museum of Temporary Art (sic) and the Washington Project for the Arts in D.C.; And/Or in Seattle; and others. These were supplemented by the less complete involvement of profit and non-profit galleries normally given to exhibiting static artwork and/or video and film.

There was also initiative from academic quarters, usually on an individual basis, by teachers and school gallery directors. Italo Scanga, a painter-sculptor who taught at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Tyler School of Art of Temple University in Philadelphia, encouraged his students (including Willy Heeks) to explore forms of performance. Under RoseLee Goldberg's direction, the gallery at the Royal College of Art in London featured an important sequence of performance between 1972 and 1975.



Marco Solari of "La Gaia Scienza" in "Il Nodo di Gordio" ("The Gordian Knot") presented at Beat 72, Rome, 1979 (Photo © Andrea Fiorentino, Rome).

Of course, such initiatives date back at least to John Cage's class, nominally in new music composition and practice, at the New School for Social Research in New York between 1956 and 1958. This class was attended by Allan Kaprow—who subsequently mounted several Happenings (and proto-Happenings) at Rutgers University, where he taught—and by several future members of Fluxus.

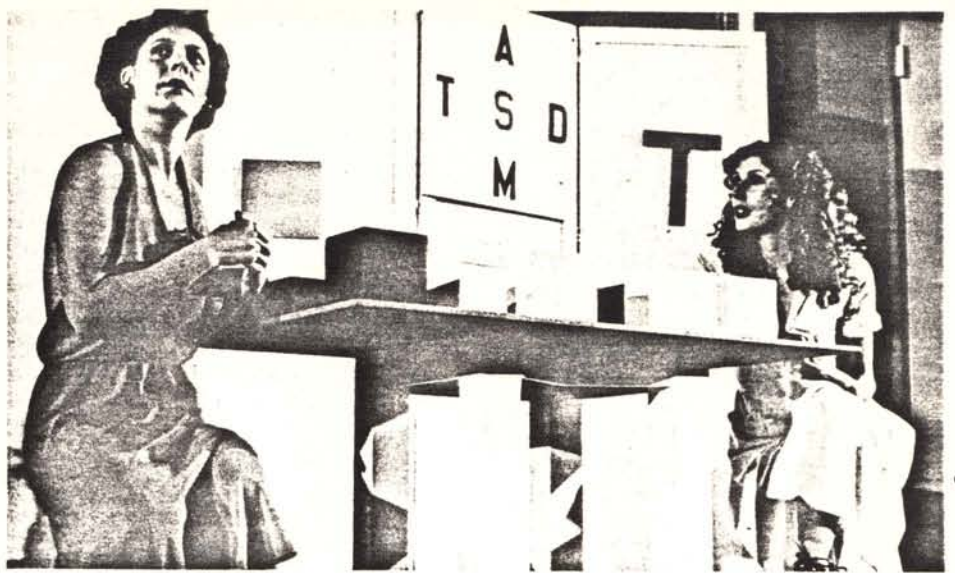
Finally, independent, space-less organizations have organized individual performances and performance festivals and have published catalogues of their activities, for the benefit of their particular communities and of the art community in general. Some of these organizations, like Public Arts International in New York, are entirely artist-established and run, while others, like CARP and Some Serious Business, both in Los Angeles, are operated by art professionals.

The end of the seventies saw significant developments in two distinct areas which could prove crucial to the presentation of performance in the years to come. One entailed the presentation at major museums of performance series. In New York, for example, there have been such series at the Whitney Museum (as early as 1976), the Museum of Modern Art, and most recently the Guggenheim, which hosted a festival of the Intermedia, in-

cluding several major performance presentations, at the beginning of this year. Similar sponsorship has arisen in Europe where, for instance, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris has hosted performances since its inception in 1977, and museums all across Italy, Germany, Holland, and other countries are in the habit of staging live as well as static art presentations. Museum activity in the performance realm goes back at least to 1943, when MOMA served as the setting for John Cage's debut; there, in 1960, Jean Tinguely's "performance-sculpture" *Homage to New York* destroyed itself before an audience in the garden. The Good Gray Modern now maintains a performance coordinator and archivist, Cee Brown, who has been responsible for at least three evenings of performance activity by several artists.

The other development, which harks back to the Futurist-Dada cabaret, is the frequency of art performances staged in clubs, discos and even bars, hot music spots like the Mudd Club and Tier 3 in New York, both instrumental—if you'll pardon the pun—in the rise of artists' (Punk-New Wave) rock bands; Le Palace in Paris; Jett's Café in Los Angeles; D.C. Space in Washington; and the Hotel Utah bar in San Francisco. In New York, at least, there now seems to be a flurry of plans to establish rather High-Tech art club complexes combining exhibition spaces with cabarets, bars and restaurants, all providing a Las Vegas nightclub-like atmosphere as a frankly commercial outlet for performance. The only project of this nature to have neared realization was Pravda in SoHo, which, ironically, has been closed by community opposition.

Performance art is also drawing to itself a growing body of critical commentators, who have been writing with increasing frequency in both specialized and non-specialized publications. Last year, the *Performing Arts Journal*—which, with *The Drama Review*, has been probably the most dependable source for theoretical and critical discussion of performance in America—began a spin-off periodical, *Performing Art Magazine*, now rechristened *Life*, devoted exclusively to performance art. But the body of critical and historical writers is still less than proportionate with the surge in performance activity. The form is notably lacking in extensive written histories. A breakthrough came last year with the publication of RoseLee Goldberg's book *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*. One hopes this remarkably compressed book will inspire others to write more extended



Jane Zingale and Helen Mendez in "Tell Me", by G. de Cointet, performed at MOMA February 22, 1980 (Photo: Kira Perov).

histories in the coming decade. Speculating on artists' performance, one thing becomes abundantly clear: as the live-art inheritors of Leonardo and Bernini grow in numbers and sophistication, a Vasari is once again needed, and is likely to emerge, to recount artists' performances in a contemporary *Lives*. ▲

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PICASSO
The American Connection

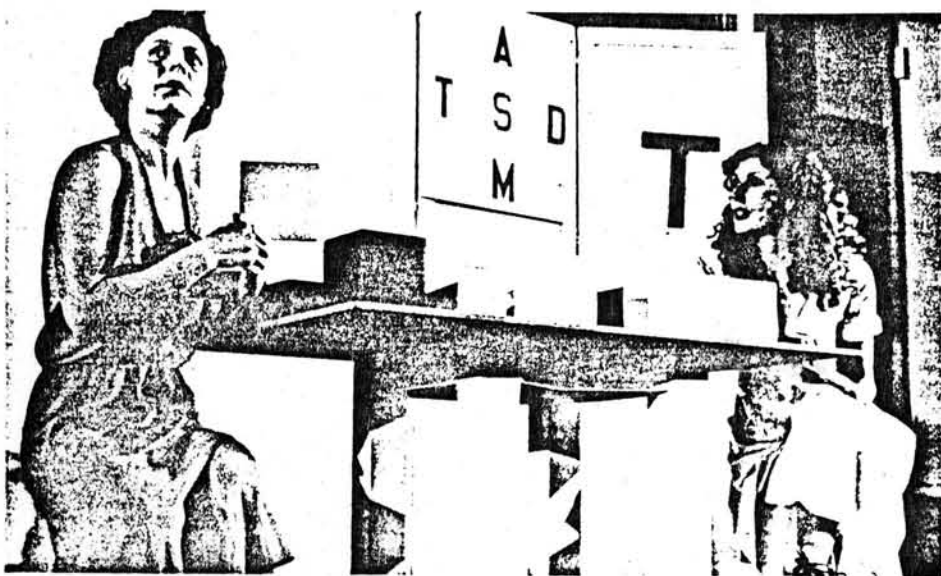
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National Arts Guide

Volume II, Number 4

July/August 1980

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