

'Parable' Shown

The controversial film "The Parable," shown at the Protestant Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, will be shown on Wednesday, February 9, at 7.30 p. m. in the Middle Collegiate Church, 7th Street and Second Avenue.

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dance

by Robert Morris

Every movement in art in this century has been characteristically brief. It is often objected that movements rush past too swiftly; one on the heels of the next. But what seems to be the case is that in each of these movements—be it Cubism or Dada—"open" positions were very early closed out. As each of these positions is occupied the possibilities are reduced; the movement in this sense can be looked at as a set of theorems following a new and valid assumption. Each is a limiting case. What follows after the primary positions have been filled is, of course, the tradition.

Such a point of view is not so funereal as it sounds, nor are those acts which follow in a clear tradition to be thought less valuable than a movement's beginning assertions. For example, Mondrian did not found De Stijl; he joined the ranks.

These reflections follow attending the concert of dance by David Gordon, Yvonne Rainer, and Steve Paxton at Judson Memorial Church, January 10, 11, 12. No new positions were assumed by the works of these three choreographers in this concert. The forms employed by each have been seen before in their respective works. It is perhaps at this point, after the repetition of a mode or format, that one can focus on quality rather than responding with that abrupt effort of re-evaluating and refocusing which unfamiliar and new works elicit. Both David Gordon's "Helen's Dance" and Yvonne Rainer's "Three Satie Spoons" have been seen several times before.

Both dances are accompanied by the same wistful Satie piano music ("Trois Gymnopédies"). Miss Rainer's piece is characterized by a series of very frontal positions, Egyptian-like in the opposition of hips to shoulders. The positions are few, repeated several times, pretty much rooted to one spot on the floor. While the movement seems somewhat subsidiary to the registering of the squarish positions, it nevertheless maintains a taut body line and deft strength. Mr. Gordon, looking somewhat like an Art Nouveau lampshade, moves in an alternately spastic and lyrical way as he proceeds in a direct line downstage in "Helen's Dance." Spatially the dance creates an interesting tension. The movement, when it is not alluding to the handicapped, seems as decorative as the costume.

the concerns which have come to be associated with the new movement in dance. Two of the performers in "Proxy," Lucinda Childs and Robert Rauschenberg, comport themselves in the now familiar deadpan style while Trisha Brown appears less mechanical. The use of "ordinary" actions (e. g., eating and

Continued on page 24

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Early Paxton
"Proxy" by Steve Paxton was also an early work which has been seen before. Made in 1962, it seems at this point to be a classic work embodying many of

Limon Concert
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dance

Continued from page 8

drinking) confined within a small rectangle taped to the floor somehow magnifies and formalizes these actions in much the same way the sculpture pedestal does, or at least once did, the readymade. The long walking sequence of entrances and exits by the three performers plays on this theatrical convention with an aggressive humor which finally annihilates one's sense of expect-

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tation for action as each performer appears only to cross the stage and exit. That is, one's expectation that something else is going to happen is after a point removed and the subtle spatial changes of each performer's relationship to the one behind or in front comes into focus together with the exquisite satisfaction that it is just this thing, very concrete and very much there, that is what is happening. There are, in fact, occurrences in this sequence besides walking. Miss Childs sets down a yellow wash basin, picks it up, sets it down the next time around and finally stands in it in a peculiarly petrified way and is subsequently turned around on some unseen substance which renders her as frictionless as she is stiff. The same sequence of athletic-type positions is then registered by each performer. (The movement was derived from a "score" of a number of photographs of athletes in action; the performer was required to register the pose in the photograph but was free to choose the manner in which he moved in and out of this point of registration.) The work was low keyed, flat but intense.

One of the First

Mr. Paxton was one of the first to stake out new alternatives for the dance, as can be observed in "Proxy," but somehow his work has been consistently disregarded. Perhaps the explanation for this is not difficult to find. For so much attention has been focused on what has been pictorial in the new dance. Those startling images and uses of objects were, indeed, easy to see and to talk about. Structure, movement, and the uses of time are either not so apparent, or being non-plastic, require sensibilities more associated with music to be perceived. Paxton's use of time has been unique among the new dancers. Others have made long pieces but no one has reduced the incidence of action and distributed it in so uneventful and even a way as he has done. The result is a kind of ambience of duration. In "Proxy" a dramatic intensity is sustained, but in the new work this is avoided. The dramatic continuity is broken; incident follows incident with many pauses and minor adjustments to speakers, tape recorder, wires. One no longer so much watches as waits. It is within this duration of waiting that "Section of a New Unfinished Work (1965) Augmented (1966)" operates. The imagery of this piece, insofar as its cool, interminable, mechanical adjustments occur, derives from the performance style of John Cage. The "hot" elements of surreal double images and burdensome objects come from painterly sources. Paxton seems to have arrived at a hybrid form somewhere between dance and happenings. The egocentric focus of a body in motion has not been completely abandoned. And the quality of his movement within his loaded costume (loaded both literally and figuratively in terms of proportion and sex) was delicate, humorous, and tragic. Even in the mechanical adjustments to speakers and tape recorder the body, doing nothing, was performance-wise equivalent to whatever else occurred. At times, however, in his new work, the objects seem to predominate. The figures minister to them. It then becomes ambiguous as to whether the figures on stage are performers or assistants. Paxton's work is becoming increasingly concerned with objects and, perforce, becoming more pictorial. This seems an unfortunate shift of emphasis and a renuncia-

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dance

Continued from page 24

tion of the challenge to deal in new ways with qualities of movements. Animated objects have become body surrogates. And the objects themselves are tiresome and pathetic—lurching, inflating, disassembling themselves as does the double arm chair in the last part of the new work. A dryness of imagery persists in "Proxy" which seems altogether a much more tough-minded and ambitious work through its investigation of a new movement source which demands precision, allows for freedom, and avoids

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either "dancey" or mundane results.

Miss Rainer's new work, "The Mind is a Muscle, Part I," was the most extreme of the evening in emphasizing the values of dance as a set of possibilities for high quality which the body in motion can achieve. Without noticeable phrasing, marked changes of dynamics, pauses, crescendos, bursts of energy, extreme speed or slowness, the dance ground on without development in an intractable but lyrical way, leaving one to grasp many details but no easily definable sections. Each dancer performed what appeared to be the same or very similar movements. The three were at times in and out of synchronization. One was given at least a clue to standards by this and the qualities of each dancer were thereby focused. Gordon's smooth and supple transitions were in contrast to Paxton's more staccato treatment of the same movements, while Rainer's movement seemed the most neutral in terms of energy differences; hers also seemed the fullest in terms of being a little more definitive than the other two. After a minute or so one was momentarily distracted by the falling of wood laths which were forcibly ejected from an unseen source in the balcony. These laths continued to rain down in single file without stopping throughout the remainder of the piece. A large, loose pile began to appear stage right creating a peripheral activity. One occasionally noticed the pattern which was being made as the sticks began to pile up. Soundwise they created a constant rhythmic clatter. The movement in this work was packed and dense without being heavy, and in contrast to some of the movement in the earlier "Three Satie Spoons" could not be read in terms of gesture or the eccentric or the slightly grotesque. It was the "purest" dance yet seen among the Judson group. Yet it did not make use of so many attitudes seen among the lady choreographers at Judson who make work which is indisputably dance-like: i. e., the image of the virtuoso star (Gordon, Paxton, and Rainer all held equivalent status on stage), nor were lovely bodies displayed in narcissistic attitudes (ordinary clothes were worn by all), nor were more or less badly aligned balletic movements employed, nor was there any romantic and tedious boy and girl partnering (the dancers made no physical or psychological contact). The dance set itself a stringent limit and was full and fresh within that limit.

(This is the first of two parts.)

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dance
 (This is the second of two articles. The first appeared in the February 3 Voice.)
 Miss Rainer's "Part of a Sextet No. 2," performed by herself and Al Kurchin, was a low pressure, non-dancer work. Yet the focus was clearly one of movement, and the use of objects was dry and non-pictorial. It is a work which seems to operate between

skilled dance requirements for movement and the kind of non-dance movement generated by task situations or rules (such as Paxton's "Proxy"). The dancers entered connected by 25 or 30 feet of cord. There were occasional brief movements, now energetic, now extremely reduced, now repetitive. These were punctuated by pauses, walking to different areas, and a meandering slow run which was one of the two points in the work when the dancers took account of each other; the other instance of mutual recognition occurred when the cord was pulled taut between the two bodies as they signaled and belayed each other around pillars and through curtains maintaining the taut rope all the while. It was a very open, non-dramatic work, which rather didactically demonstrated a new way of dealing with movement but was at the same time airy and at points humorous.
 One wonders if the murky gloom that passed for lighting in Mr. Gordon's "Walks and Digressions" was intended to make the work mysterious or was an afterthought that the dance should never fully see the light of day. The puerile manipulations of pants and spittle suggest an entirely new format for this dance: total darkness. Certainly the work was not shocking (the underwear was so very clean) nor did it manage any incisive humor. When a work is presented that suggests that it might have aimed at such results but fails to bring off either, the performer is stranded in his own vacuum of self-indulgence. The question arises as to just why this work was as bad as it was. Undoubtedly it is partly a result of its failed expressionism (to shock or amuse), coloring the adjacent sections of this work which were more neutral and more involved with specific, definitive movement. The childish passages of pants-removing and crotch-holding leave an after-image which affects whatever follows. But even within the non-expressionistic sections, movements kept appearing that one had seen, more or less recently, in others' works. For example, the slow motion section or the revolving on hands and toes movement are obvious annexations as recently as a few moments previously in Miss Rainer's work: was this coincidence? It is not an original movement with anyone, but with Gordon the presentation is like a placard held out and not to be missed. Rather than using the banal or the borrowed as incidental transitions or punctuations, or in a context in which such movements could be read as comments, Mr. Gordon displays them heavily, sequentially, separately, like frozen laundry on a clothes line. The transition from walking slowly to running in a large circle was precise and controlled, and perhaps the freshest bit of material in the dance. But it was a bit; and coming as it did at the end was not enough to change the ef-

fect of the succession of alternately expressionistic and borrowed material, which up to that point had informed the work and established the character of the whole.
 Mr. Gordon's earlier "Mannequin Dance" of 1962 deserves more attention. Having affinities, or rather earmarks, of the avant garde, in its use of minimal movements and static continuity, it succeeded in an uneasy balance of these elements against the mannered Borsch Belt delivery of the two songs he sang accompanied by the flatus of numerous balloons in the audience. The effect was slightly macabre.
 There was nothing startling or surprising in any of the works presented. This makes the works easier to watch and appraise. Quality and standards come into focus. What were so recently disruptive new forms already begin to be built upon as tradition.
 -Robert Morris

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