

VI

NEW DANCE

after nary an appearance on their home turf in over a year, *grand union* up and performed five times in the new york area in late spring. i caught the first and last of these, at pratt institute in brooklyn and at the kitchen on wooster st., and, as with the group's two-month stay at the dance gallery in the spring of '73, it seems the more they perform together in a single span of time, the better they get. communication builds, connections come faster and faster, everything gets more and more cohesive. improvisation—particularly when it walks the tightrope between pure movement improv and dialogue improv, daring all sorts of splicings of the two—is always a chancey business, and the more the individuals involved learn to trust each other and to sense developing patterns (of movement or thought), the more successful the end result is. so by the fifth performance (the second night at the kitchen), things were so tight that it was like witnessing the whole

tation process (shorthand, transcription and the typing of the final draft) without a break. telescoped in a single flash.

grand union is performance about performing, talking about process, dancing about it. (trisha brown: "that was a terrific ending." david gordon: "what about a beginning? do you have a beginning to follow that ending?") the union fragments performance as well, juxtaposing conflicting movement styles, tempos, body attitudes, speech patterns, etc.—so that the "non-cohesive" parts of the whole stick out. sore thumbs. forced combinations that result in new ways of perceiving the familiar.

at pratt, five little black kids decided they wanted in on the fun. trisha put on a wig and hat and tried to scare them back into non-participation. it didn't work. david gordon, the most theatrical union member, seemed the most disturbed by the outside threat. doug dunn and steve paxton more or less ignored the heckling, but nancy lewis and barbara dilley kept giving the kids sly little smiles as if they almost welcomed the intrusion.

at the end, the kids took over, rolling oranges, exhibiting their yoyo expertise, funky-chickening it up to the record-player soul of "bright, bright sunshiney day." the union members sat on the sides and watched, having changed places with their challengers. the reversal happened so quietly and naturally that it seemed almost a part of the show. but i doubt seriously that it could ever happen again.

at the kitchen, laleen jayamann, a dancer and friend of union member doug dunn, likewise tried to join in the performance at one point of the evening. evidently she had attempted the same thing the night before. "i had a good time last night," she announced, "so i thought i'd try again." the atmosphere was tense. this wasn't some little street kid from brooklyn, this was a real live dancer daring to try to insert herself into the carefully balanced, achieved-only-with-great-difficulty improvisational structure that is *grand union*. trisha looked at laleen coolly and said, "maybe you could get a group of your own together and call it the A&P." the audience laughed loud, breaking the ice, and laleen went back to her seat. the confrontation was dealt with (postponed?) once more.

process: "dear god, thank you," emotes david gordon, "for giving nancy a rest. she was looking around desperately for material to use, and doug fell off the stool so nancy fell into a trance."

dance into dialogue: nancy goes into a hand-flailing solo, full of funky syncopation, with a black floppy hat down over her eyes. she dances to a kind of jazz she obviously feels more than i do, giving visual expression—beautifully—to something that does nothing for me soundwise. then without warning, david and doug crawl into the middle of her dance. onlooker barbara dilley snaps out, quite realistically: "you had to get in there, didn't you? there are fewer and fewer fine dances in this bullshit group."

"i don't think you should put down *grand union* in public like that," comments trisha.

"but they're telling lies," insists barbara. "there's no difference between my public and private lives, and they're telling lies. i'm fed up with it."

that very no man's land between public and private, between performance and life, is exactly the area explored most fascinatingly in this *grand union*, of course. . . .

union member barbara dilley has for some time now been working towards a dance manifestation of the energy pattern inherent in the mandala figure of oriental philosophy. her most recent project was a live-performance-with-simultaneous-videomonitoring experiment at the byrd hoffman school.

the outline of the mandala is inscribed on the floor with yellow tape. there are four television monitors, two each for the two videocameras lying upside down on the floor. two blank monitors facing the left end of the small room; two facing the right.

carmen beuchat and barbara are on the floor, between the two sets of monitors, inside the circle. lying down, relaxed. they limber up their fingers, toes, necks. carmen rises up, begins pacing. barbara is still down, stretching, then gets up, too.

juan downey and andy mann, dressed like the women in flowing white garments, pick up the cameras and turn them on. point them at the floor, then at the women. who, slowly, begin to move.

the cameras record, follow. close-ups. angles. perspectives. the women make slow, fluid arm poses, spirals, turns, circles with their bodies. circular paths on the floor. and there are equivalent circular movements with the cameras.

on the monitors we see full circles, too: dancers and dancespace cameras and cameramen on the monitors. monitors on the monitors. even the audience—us—on the monitors. images and reflections, and even the people doing the reflecting.

back to the women, their elbows slightly crooked, their palms cupped, givers and receivers. transmitting angles and curves. loose, calm, asymmetrical, natural.

and the camera compliments it all, knowing that there's no reason in the world for it to remain static, to present an "objective," "representational" image. maya deren also knew cameras can dance. why have the rest of us forgotten it, so often? . . .