



John Elbers

David Gordon's Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives

Wordsworth Rides Again

Jean Nuchtern

David Gordon/Pick Up Co.
541 Broadway

David Gordon. Wondrous, creative man. Expert in overlaying the simple with the complex, then returning to the simple so that one can see the balloon without air, with it and without it again.

Gordon's *Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives (or Wordsworth Rides Again)*:

Gordon. Valda Etterfield. James McConnell. Martha Roth. Stephanie Woodard. Gordon's Pick Up Company — dancers he's picked up along the way.

Choreographer/performer Gordon. Obsessed.

I) *Irony*: Gordon and Setterfield encircle the space. Gordon leads, Setterfield follows then catches up and leads and so on. On the tape: Wonderful Gordon jokes that counterpoint the spatial formalism, the minimal movement. Loosely

paraphrased: "At any moment the performer might . . . belch . . . stutter . . . be flatulent."

II) *Performance as process as performance*: Gordon and Setterfield read a script that's pasted on the wall. They rehearse a half turn that may or may not turn up in the final work, but the point is to show dancers working in rehearsal. Setterfield reads: "So, I never say 'what' like it's a question." They talk, act out directions and at the end of the two pages of dialogue and instructions, one makes a mistake so they go back to the beginning. Only this time it's Gordon who says, "So, I never say 'what' like it's a question."

III) *Circuitous emotional relating* (R.D. Laing anyone?), *tenderness*. *Performers say the same words but differ in their deliveries*:

Gordon (on tape) asks: "What's wrong?"

Setterfield: "Nothing."

He urges her to tell him what's the matter.

Setterfield: "I'm not ready. . . You'll get angry."

"No I won't."

"Yes you will."

Around and around in circles they go, so preoccupied with the other's reactions that they never discuss what's wrong.

As the tape continues, Gordon and Setterfield take small steps, arms around each other's shoulders. They're tender with one another, almost as if both emotionally and kinetically each tries to avoid stepping on the other's foot.

On the tape, Gordon's delivery seems more urgent, more aggressive. Setterfield seems sweet but distant.

IV) *Everyday movement gets abstracted into dance*: During one quintet, Woodard points to one direction, then to another. "I went wrong," she declares. The five dancers repeat her pointing finger gesture but without the verbal load and what began as a dancer's confusion ends up as a dance phrase.

V) *The performer as narcissist and/or Gordon on Gordon*: The dancers bunch up in the corner. Gordon keeps his back to us while the taped monologue describes how

he's going to perform the quintessential narcissistic act and do a solo. (The stark way in which he speaks of himself in the third person reminds me of Yvonne Rainer's taped revelations in her *This Is the Story of a Woman Who*. . . To divert the audience from thinking he's totally egocentric, however, Gordon will not only play shy but have the dancers stand around and comment on his dancing. But he knows (and I know) that's just another manipulation to be the center of attention because they'll talk about *him*.)

Gordon then muddles through a solo that he underperforms while the dancers comment: "He begins as if he hasn't begun which I find awfully interesting. . . ." "His rhythms are primitive and mysterious. . . ." "He can put one and one together the way no one else can. . . ." "Do you ever wonder what he's thinking?" "No."

Gordon leaves, the four dancers perform his solo in different timings and in a more full-out manner. So much for the necessity of the soloist, so much for the ephemerality of being the center of attention.