

Enhancing the Individual

By Deborah Jowitt

David Gordon/Pickup Company at 541 Broadway.
An Audience With the Pope. What Happened. One Part of the Matter.

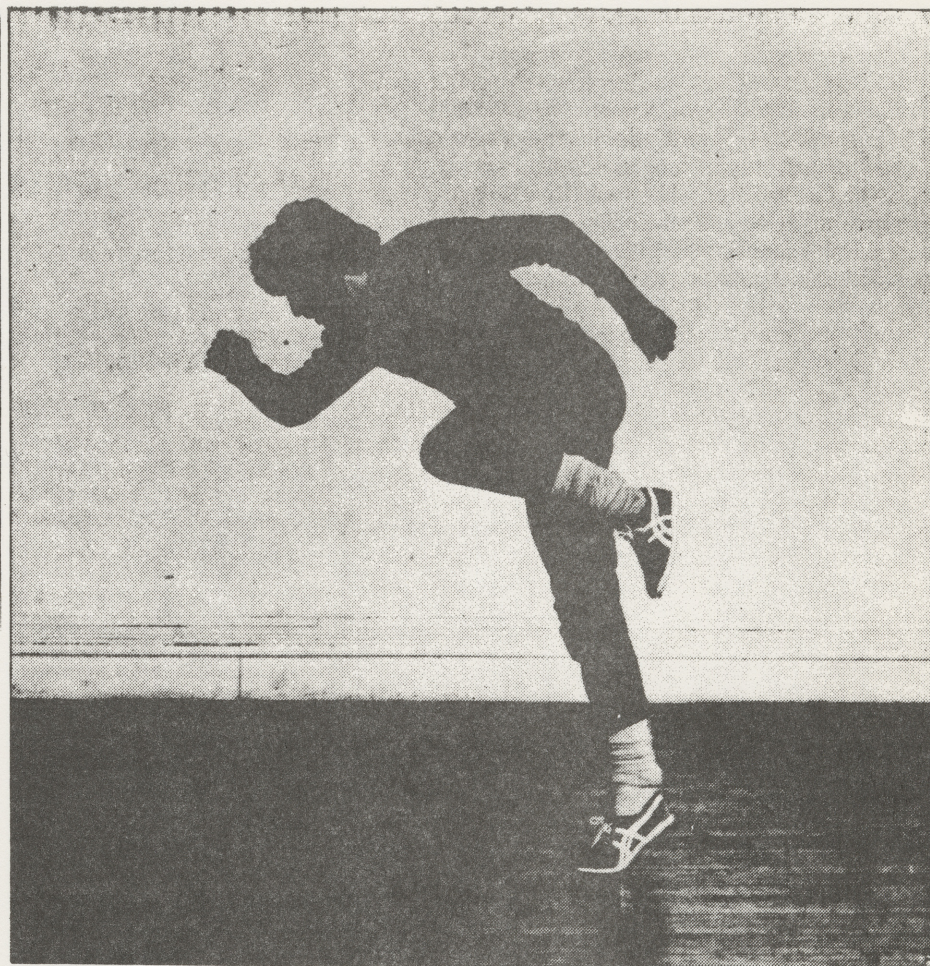
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David Gordon is also interested in showing us a vocabulary of dancing performed by different people or by combinations of people, but his canny method enhances the individuality of each performer and the movements's capacity to acquire provocative new meanings when set into new contexts.

His *An Audience With the Pope (or This Is Where I Came In)* begins with a solo by Gordon. If it seems unaffectedly pedestrian—low-keyed shambling, falling, balancing on one leg—that's because we take it in together with a compelling series of larger-than-life slides of the pope (David Vaughan looking both sanctimonious and on-the-spot). The pope moves logically from gesture to gesture; these could almost be frames from a movie. The aural background is compelling too: we hear Vaughan's voice reading a seriously absurd argument about Vatican episodes that led to the coining of such familiar terms as "Pope's nose," "Pope-pourri," "Pope-dance." We can begin to wonder if the gestures in Gordon's solo relate to the tale of a nonlingual Pope who demanded that pleas be presented in dance.

Gordon is joined by Valda Setterfield, dressed like him in vaguely medieval loose black shirt over white-collared one, black velvet pants, and blue running shoes. While they present the material as an out-of-phase duet, Setterfield murmurs a constant, barely audible monologue involving the current pope and sports. When a trio of women (Susan Eschelbach, Margaret Hoeffel, and Christina Syane)—also wearing the uni-



David Gordon in rehearsal

form—begin the "same" material in unison, it suddenly blossoms into a Dance. How could we have thought it offhand or pedestrian? Why it's full of contrasting dynamics, formal phrases. Not that the women try to perform it in a manner different from Gordon's own engaging one; the fact of three, the fact of unison subtly reshape our perceptions. A quartet with Eschelbach, Hoeffel, Marc Coates, and Doug Cummings reblocks the phrase into two-couple counterpoint. Occasionally, the dancers smoothly change partners and we're forced to notice the pull-together, pull-apart of the patterns in space. The repetitiveness is inescapable, but completely absorbing. Finally, all seven dancers perform the dance, each starting at a different point in it, so we see a dense web of deliberate activity—near collisions, subtle correspondences, diversity within mutual endeavor. Now you can understand why repeated, or similar, moves figured in Gordon's original solo material. They provide more points

of agreement as the texture thickens, as what began as a musing, private, almost roughed-out comment acquires intensity, formality, clarity, and power.

Gordon shapes his Pickup Company's small-scale nonproscenium concerts with a sense of theatre more fastidious than that of many conventional choreographers. This particular series begins with a performance by Setterfield of Gordon's 1972 *One Part of the Matter*, a solo made of poses culled from photographs (we deduce this from the tape of rehearsal dialogue that presages or recalls certain poses). This odd, gently frozen solo segues provocatively into the "moving" poses of the pictured pope. And Gordon's new dance fades imperceptibly into an abbreviated version of his *What Happened*, which deals with words and gestures related to each other in absurdly literal and fragmented ways and which presents so many views of the same story that we can hardly hear/see what that story is.