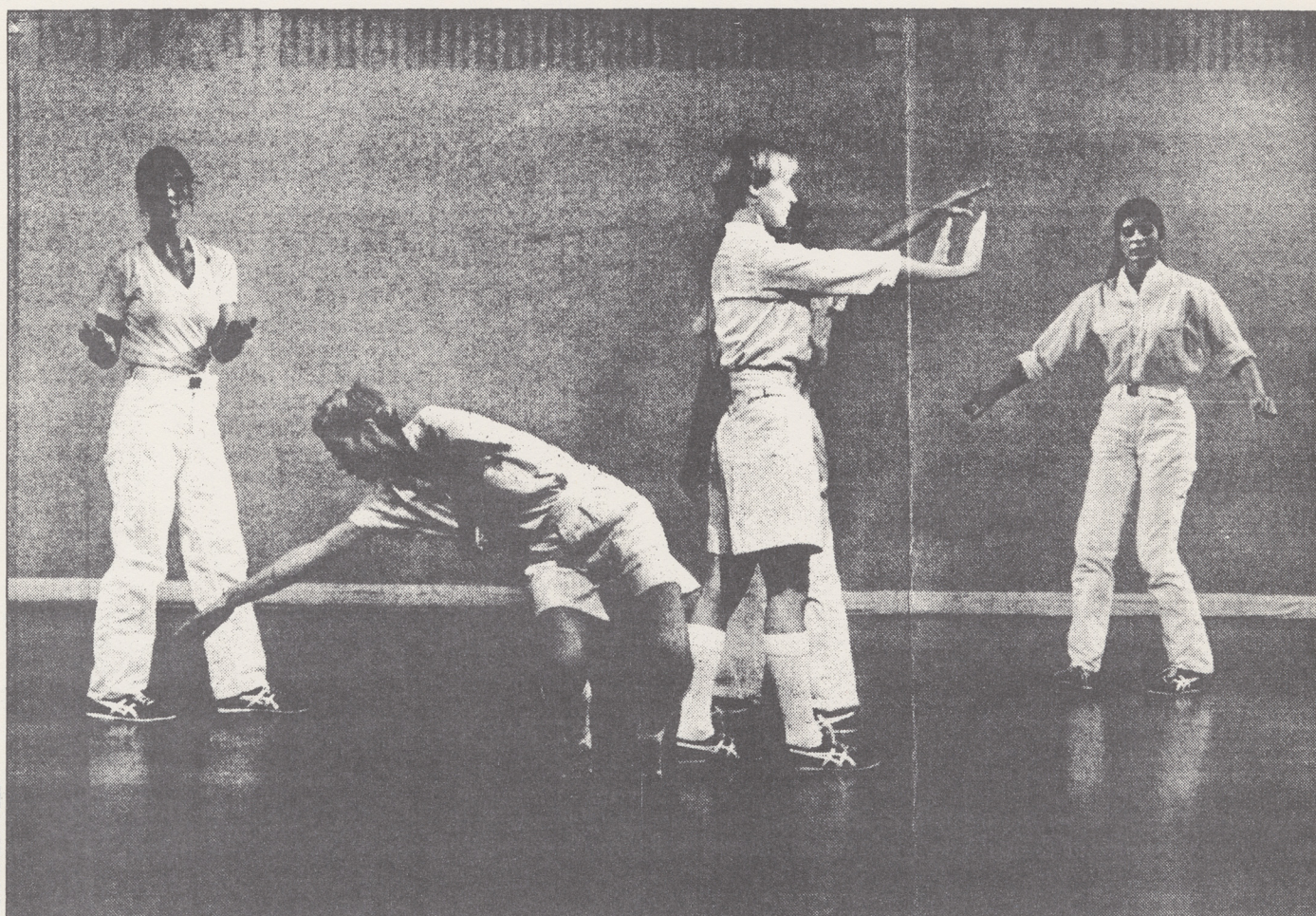


October 16, 1978



LOIS GREENFIELD

David Gordon and Pick Up Company in *Mixed Solo*

By Deborah Jowitt

DAVID GORDON/PICK UP COMPANY. At American Theatre Lab (September 25 to October 1). *Chair*, "Mixed Solo" from *Not Necessarily Recognizable Objectives*, and premiere of *What Happened*.

DAVID GORDON doesn't look shaggy now, as much as curly, and I enjoy watching the way his bearish warmth and slyness contrast with Valda Setterfield's grave dutifulness as they squirm, climb, sit, lie under, and crash-land on two blue chairs (this is *Chair*, 1974). I also enjoy the contrast between Gordon's impeccably formal phrase (seen three times: "normal," mirror-image faster, and with the performers la-la-ing through a Sousa march) and the shambly matter-of-factness of his movement vocabulary.

In addition to presenting his *Mixed Solo*, from last spring's concert, Gordon showed a new word-work on his ATL concerts, *What Happened*. Another mischievous and diabolically

cally clever one. Seven women (Setterfield, Susan Eschelbach, Irene Grainger, Margaret Hoeffel, Molly McGuire, and Christina Svane) walk on wearing dowdy-sporty white clothes. They all begin to talk and move. Now what is this? A story—are they all telling the same story? Something about being witness to an accident in which an old man got mashed by a streetcar? Is each one just at a different place in the tale? Their smooth, literal gestures fracture what they're saying. To articulate "sidewalk," they have to stroke their flank and then walk; "which" is followed by a fiendish cackling to suggest the word's Halloween homonym; "to" is always accompanied by two fingers held up. Remember dumb crambo? The aural and visual shifts between rare unison, counterpoint, and chaos are intriguing. And how can one ever figure out what *happened*? And why does it always end with everyone feeding into Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech (accompanied by a string of, I think, non-

related gestures—or gestures that build a crazy subtext).

When some of the women drop out or scale down what they're doing to a whisper, you hear more words in the thinner texture. Suddenly, you realize that they're playing a disconcerting word-game that shoots the end of one sentence into the middle of something else. A performer will say "I adore . . ." and then immediately "opened and I went in," or something like, "I walked down the street/car driver couldn't stop in time." Every now and then, two line up and speak of police and ambulances in stentorian unison.

The constant easy walking pace, the careful, calm delivery, the flow of small hand gestures, the is-it? story—they seem so reasonable, so terribly mundane. Reduced to some basic level of clarity, they don't communicate at all, or they swipe you with meanings like sidewinders. Gordon'll either send you digging into epistemology or reeling back out into the swamp.

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