The Drama Review

Post-Modern Dance Issue

Brown / Childs / Dean / Forti / Gordon / Jonas / Paxton

Contemporary Performances

Anton/Jacobs/Kaprow

New York University/School of the Arts $3

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THE DRAMA REVIEW

POST-MODERN DANCE

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about on each other's lower legs, to train the legs to safely bear weight and to teach the layer-upon how to avoid putting weight on the side of the knee, ankle, etc. There are a number of exercises that clarify the situations that only two can win, similar to the *Spring Training* form. Taking weight is slowly developed over months, usually with matched partners. The physical spectrum is pretty broad, and—considering the differences in types of skeleton, psychological barriers (which tend to disappear, occasionally to be replaced with urgencies), and the differences in mass—it is unwise to match a 100-pound woman with a 180-pound man and expect a one-to-one situation. However, there are compensating factors, and such dances have been done by developed dancers.

Expanding peripheral vision is one of those things that happens the moment you become aware of its possibilities. Additionally, an exercise in which one puts his head in all positions in the space around the body, as fast as possible this side of disorientation, the eyes open but unfocused identifying the larger objects in the room, is useful. The muscular stuff is not too important for the accomplishing of the work; sometimes people achieve good results in the first or second session. It is an important safety factor, however; a soother, a healer, and the general toning-up of the circulatory system is useful for the rest of the life. And it is important if a lot of the work is to be done, as on a tour or a concert series. Doing the stuff strengthens, and additional work is done on the neck, wrists, shoulders, back. Centering relates to standing. Stretching is done both athletically and very slowly and delicately, depending on what is to be accomplished.

Taking weight has been dealt with. I'll add that there are places on the lighter bodies where the weight of a heavier person can be comfortably taken: around the hips and on the thighs. Sluffing weight is an important part of this and a useful technique for strong and less-strong alike. If one person is falling, the fraction of a second gained with a sluffing to the thigh or to the floor can make a big difference.

Increasing joint action: many people interested in improving their bodies these days have some information about Hatha Yoga, and this has been the main approach to the joints. Here, as in taking weight, slow development is found to be best.

These exercises are used both as warm-ups and, after the workout, as warm-downs, as in exercising horses.

I feel that publishing information about Contact Improvisation is permissible if information about the exercises accompanies the other material. There have been reports of injuries to dancers attempting to do similar material in dramatic contexts or for sport, and I think it important to stress the difference *attempting* the more active and precarious aspects of it, rather then simply having them occur as a result of following the paths of least effort and with the senses enlarged to cope with the possibilities. The physical forces can become extreme.

It is, however, a natural duet-play that is dealt with in Contact Improvisation, on evidence of fast learning and pleasurable continuation. Concert presentations of the work have tended to be relaxed, functionally clothed, concentrated, and unpredictable. In concerts I have arranged, the forms have been either a series of duets or a round robin, where only one person changes in each encounter.

It's About Time

By David Gordon

Beginnings

Modern dance makes more choreographers, I believe, than ballet does. A conventional modern dance company is a very small group working with the specific ideas of a single artist. There are a limited number of these situations and an extraordinary number of dancers in training. It is not always difference in ideology or the compulsive need to explore a single vision that produces a new modern dance choreographer. It is simply expedient to create a personal marketplace in which to exhibit one's wares. The leniency with which modern dance has come to treat the eccentricities of body structure and performance as opposed to continued restrictions in ballets, allows for great variety in style and stature. But the small company, with its specific vision, often does not. So, choreography, for some of us, is self-defense.

When I began performing publicly in other peoples' work, I had a fairly good-looking body, (though not a very flexible one), good height, good balance, and no training. I was never very interesting technically, partly because I was never very interested in technique. My leg never went up very high, and turning still makes me vomit. The attempt to mold my body into the image of a technique established through the intellect and body structure of another human being seemed doomed. I also was very lazy.

My work, as it has evolved, is the extension of what I do best as a dancer/performer. It has less to do with dance technique than with physically oriented ideas and images. It is performance with movement as the major (but not the sole) ingredient. It is still called "dance" because of the need to label things and because in dance we are not as quick to

David Gordon in solo sequence from ***Mannequin Dance.***
Photos Peter Moore.

come up with sub-strata titles as are painters or sculptors. Consequently, dance as an art form has no alternative but to stretch its too-tight, rigidly-boned corset out of shape to accommodate each lump of newly grown flesh. Obviously, this is a painful process and one which dance is not always ready to undergo. It has taken fifteen years for *Dance Magazine*, the bible of young dancers all over the country, to publicly recognize, and thereby endorse, the work that came out of the Sixties and to label it "New Dance." (It leads one to wonder if the current generation will have to wait equally as long before they are labeled "Newer Dance" or "Newest Dance" or "No Dance At All!")

In 1961, as part of the Judith and Robert Dunn composition class held at the Merce Cunningham studio in the Living Theatre buildings—the class which eventually resulted in the first Judson Church performance—I made *Mannequin Dance* and *Helen's Dance*. The Dunn classes consisted largely of a group of talented, concentrated performers, many of whom had already exhibited work. In retrospect, it seems an extraordinary meeting of explosive material with its catalyst. I believe that the contact with each other, many of us for the first time, was as instrumental as the classes in producing that explosion.

The primary concern of the Dunns was to teach chance procedures, and they rigidly persevered against any chance occurrence that might alter the course of an evening's schedule. A flick of the long yellow pad and "let's get on with what we have to do" generally put an end to spontaneous discussion. The dogmatic approach of the class often irritated me, and I sought ways to beat the system. *Helen's Dance* was made to a piece by Satie as a class assignment. We were given the options of using the music in various ways. None of these options included the possibility of ignoring the music, which is what I chose to do. The apartment that I lived in then was a three-room railroad flat, and I had no studio space available to me so I made a long narrow piece that moved through the three rooms. I performed it in about twelve feet of space at the Judson and in a hundred-foot skating rink in Washington, D.C. The costume, I remember, had black-and-white-striped tights and a black-and-white geometrically patterned top trimmed with jet fringe. Robert Morris wrote that I looked like a Tiffany lamp shade. The piece was named for a friend who died of cancer at that time, and it became inexorably confused with her death in my mind until I realized that I was performing it in a terribly sentimental fashion, and I never did it again.

Mannequin Dance was made, in response to another class assignment, while standing in a bathtub waiting for A-200 to take effect on a bad case of crabs. In the piece, I turn very slowly from facing stage right to diagonally upstage left and slowly make my way down to lie on the floor. That about covers the territory that a bathtub had to offer. The piece took about nine minutes to perform, during which I sang "Second Hand Rose" (*after* Fanny Brice and *before* Barbra Streisand) and "Get Married Shirley," two songs to which I had become addicted. It was slow, tedious, concentrated, theatrical, virtuosic, and long. I wore a bloody biology lab coat given me by a biology-teaching artist friend.

The reason the piece was called *Mannequin Dance* (in those days I called everything "something dance") was that I had had the idea to rent department-store mannequins and place them dressed or nude at various points in the performing area and to perform the piece ten times in one evening with two or three-minute intermissions between performances. During the intermissions, the mannequins would be moved to different positions, or have their costumes changed. I never performed it more than once in an evening, and I never rented the mannequins, but the name stuck.

In 1972, I shortened the name to *Mannequin* and taught the work to twenty-five performers at Oberlin College in Ohio to be performed simultaneously as one part of an evening-long work called *The Matter*. A continuity of intention exists between the even tempo of the continuously halting material of *The Matter* and the slow progression of the ten-year-old solo. Later that year, I taught it to forty performers in New York City, (see T55) its last performance to date. In both groups, each person was asked to sing a different song very softly and with no change in dynamics. The groups covered the spaces evenly and formed a landscape of gentle voices and barely moving bodies, beginning erect and covering the ground at the end.

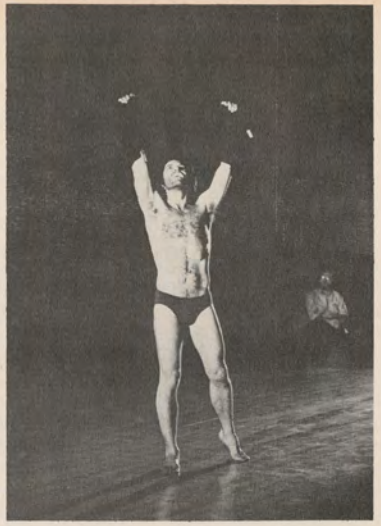
Space

My work rarely covers large space. Using groups, I tend to confine them to defined rectangular areas within a larger performance space, to focus the attention of both the audience and the performers on a limited arena.

Working alone, I almost never move about. My solo work is generally contained within the space my body can reach without going anywhere. When I have covered larger areas, the areas have been clearly defined straight lines or circles. I have never been interested in making work for, or performing, outdoors.

Random Breakfast was made in 1962–1963. It was a lavish escapade that included at least a dozen costume changes, innumerable accessories, props, sound cues, and complicated timing. Two of us were to do it in thirty minutes. It was the piece, I remember thinking, that would bring modern dance to an abrupt end.

The policy of the Judson Dance Theater was that no choreographer could be turned away, or, rather, there was no policy, because no one would take the responsibility of making qualitative judgments on the work of anyone else. Unlike many of the participants, who were able to perform in each other's work and, in some instances, begin to establish durable associations, I dealt with the situation as a voyeur, which is a tendency of mine. What I saw, and what ultimately became the material of *Random Breakfast*, was the Judson Church Dance Factory Gold Rush in which choreography ran rampant.



Costume-changing solo sequence in ***The Matter.***
Photos Babette Mangolte

This and other show business manifestations were the six courses of *Random Breakfast*.

Originally, it was to have been a trio for Yvonne Rainer, Valda Setterfield (my wife), and myself, but after one rehearsal with Yvonne I decided that I was not ready to work with anyone but Valda. The first section of the piece was a strip-tease performed by Valda to authentically brassy strip music. She appeared dressed in a long, blue-velvet, turn-of-the-century gown with about thirty tiny buttons up the front and ten more at each cuff, a white fur stole, long buttoned gloves, a feather hat, and pearls. She was the dowager empress about to remove all her clothes in public. She walked in a circle forever, taking off one thing at a time, all those buttons to open, the dress, a petticoat, a long-line brassiere, garter belt, stockings, bloomers, limping along in one high-heeled shoe, never breaking the rhythm of the circular walk. She discarded all the clothing in a neat pile so that when she was done she could stoop down and gather it all up together in a huge bundle. The dowager empress had become a naked rag lady.

For the second and third performances, at the Judson and at the New York Theater Rally, Valda stripped down to black sequined pasties and a G string. For the first performance, in a Washington, D.C., skating rink, called America on Wheels, I had not questioned the convention of dancers wearing tights and leotards as a substitute for nudity and Valda ended up in flesh colored tights with an extra pair wrapped around her tits.

Her performance was contained, refined, subdued, and incredibly funny.

The strip was followed by two sections performed simultaneously. In *Prefabricated Dance*, I improvised a series of verbal directions explaining how to make your own successful modern dance with movement demonstrations of the techniques involved. I used the dance vocabularies of most of what I had seen going down at the Judson, as well as references to established techniques, film and theatre. I conceived of it as a scathing dismissal of current values and methods. The audience thought it was very funny. People I did not attack in a given performance asked why they had been left out. At the same time Valda performed a series of four short dances costumed and choreographed to *The Seasons* by Vivaldi.

The next section was called *Lemon Hearts Dance*, named after a Taylor Mead film. I appeared in Spanishesque drag—a strapless lace dress, a red wig, large comb and mantilla, and a long fringed stole. I improvised bogus Spanish dialog, songs, and dance steps. In one performance, I ended the section, a berserk Carmen Miranda-Amaya, with the fringe of my stole caught up between all my toes. Uttering dire Spanish curses at the captive shmata, I left the stage as it slithered along the floor after me.

The Happenings of the Sixties were the basis for the fifth section. The sort of materials utilized and the often-random series of activities that characterized these events were its substance. The first version had Valda preparing elaborate layers of newspaper and plastic drop cloths before spray-painting her clothing and washing her feet in a basin of water. In the second version, she appeared in man's habit and, like a cricus performer, prepared, ran, and leapt upon a pair of child's bedsprings, slowly picked up six plastic washbaskets and knocked them down with a large ball, and shoved a cream pie in her own face after saying "shit" and "fuck."

In the last section, called *Garlandiana* (I think because of Balanchine's *Ivesiana*), I appeared in top hat and tails while Judy Garland sang "Somewhere Over The Rainbow." I smiled shyly and blushed and sat and stood and bashfully kicked at the ground with my foot for a long time.

At the time *Random Breakfast* was made, the subject matter was my prime

interest; the newness of the methods through which the subjects were revealed and which formed the structure of the piece was something I took for granted. In retrospect, the somewhat dated aspects of the material enable me to separate and examine those structures more clearly and to evaluate them with a keener eye.

Approximately eighty percent of the material in *Random Breakfast* was improvised around specific subject matter. I sensed at that time that the quality or style of a section could be established without setting specific steps or phrases. I could maintain awareness of the general amount of material I wanted to cover; the order and the details could take care of themselves. Some sections had barely any content other than their style of behavior.

In dealing with performance groups, the same methods and variations on these methods apply. It is possible to clarify the character of a given situation by using a limited number of "facts." A set of people nodding their heads can accompany that action by any other personal random movement choices. Their heads are bigger or smaller; their hair, skin, and eyes are different colors. The one thing they have in common becomes the strongest visual element; they are all nodding their heads.

I have worked with many nonperformers in my group pieces. I have not been particularly interested in the personal, physical, or movement idiosyncrasies of these people. I believe that I can involve my performers with my intention and set up, for them, a strong framework of action to concentrate upon. Once these structures are stable, irrelevant individual characteristics are either absorbed or serve to underline the shared group activity. Either way is fine with me.

By avoiding the struggle to pin down every detail of a performer's actions, I save myself time, energy, and the inevitable frustration of failing to standardize human minds and bodies.

Valda Setterfield in nun's habit performing washbasket sequence in ***Random Breakfast.***
Photos Peter Moore

Time/Content

I have made a few very short pieces; mostly my work is long. The movement or static acts that I choose to work with as material usually have specific and obvious connotations. These connotations appear in the style and/or content of the action. The length of a piece is generally arrived at through performing one or more activities until the clarity of their ambiguity as simple activities is established. The attempt is not to glorify a simple activity but to simplify a conventionally glorified one and to alter the predictable reaction of the audience to it.

Time and content become, in this instance, the same. An activity cannot exist, in my work, without its echoes and each echo must stand alone as a complete action. Repetition, therefore, is the basis of my work. It forms the rhythm and texture of it. I have very few habits. I change my appearance as often and as drastically as I can. I do not go to the bathroom at the same time each day, but when I dance I need to do the same thing over and over. Repetition clarifies it, determines its necessity, and changes it from a vulgar act to an inevitable one.

Walks and Digressions was made in 1966. It was a solo performed at the Judson in a concert shared with Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton. It had no sound, and the performance space was almost dark. I whistled "Nothing Could Be Finer Than To Be In Carolina" while slowly walking back and forth with my torso always turned toward the audience, alternating hands on my crotch—sort of like a smutty typewriter carriage doing a vaudeville turn. I stood on half-toe while spit drooled out of my mouth and pulled my pants down while balancing on my shoulders, on the floor, with my legs straight up in the air. Those are only the things I remember. The audience booed, hissed, clapped, stamped their feet, and walked out across the performance space while I was working. The review was devastating, and I wasn't clever enough to understand or use the possible notoriety attached to that performance (after all, obviously no one was bored) in a positive career move. I had discovered that publicly performing my own work placed me in an exceedingly vulnerable position emotionally and physically, and I wanted none of it. I believe now that I was basically uncommitted to my work and unable to take responsibility publicly for my decisions. I had worked mainly for the positive response of my peers and of an audience, not gearing my work toward that response but expecting it as the dividends of having worked. When the audience and my peers turned on me, I picked up my marbles and went home. I just decided to stop making work.

Method

I work quickly under pressure, slowly or not at all at other times. Ordinarily, I seem not to have the need to express myself through work. Having an idea or an image is not enough to induce labor pains. To reconcile the privacy of my working process with group rehearsals and the public performance that follows—and the public performance that follows the performance—is difficult. Continuing to succumb to product-producing as a goal, I still need ample motivation. My motivation is envy! I am envious and therefore competitive. I am competitive and therefore active. At this point in my life, it is better than nothing.

To begin working, I pare down my fantasies to a scale I can deal with alone. The process of sharing the technical difficulties attached to large-scale works with other artists or technicians during the formulation of the work seems to inhibit rather than expand my thinking. When I cannot conceive of a way to do everything myself (a solo), I hesitantly ask for help.

I conceive of the process of teaching work to a group as one in which I must sell myself and my ideas to a number of people of unequal commitment in a short intense

period of time. That this process has been previously successful, that the majority of each group with which I have worked has adapted itself again to my vision, intelligently and purposefully, leaves me unconvinced. In teaching the work, performing the work, even in the repetition of a single piece of material within the work, each time is the first time.

I did not choreograph again until 1971 when Yvonne Rainer went to India. She asked me if I would work with the group of people that she had been teaching so they would stay together until she returned. For me, it was a means of beginning work again without having to reenter the arena in the vulnerable position of soloist/performer. Without a goal or product in mind, there was plenty of time to shape and order my thoughts while the pressure of the commitment to weekly sessions insured a continued minimum of activity. The work that emerged was forty minutes long and called *Sleep Walking.*

The piece is a progression of sounds and movement that reaches a peak of energy output and cuts off into silence and restless inactivity. The sound is sexual (sighing, panting, groaning, gasping, almost shrieking), while the performers stroll, walk, run, then race between two walls until they finally fall against one wall and feign sleeping and nodding. At one point during sleeping, they leave the wall. They don hats and coats, return to the wall, are ostensibly shot, and fall dead. They lie still, rise, remove the hats and coats, return to the wall and to sleeping.

Sleep Walking was performed a number of times during 1971, 1972, and 1973. At the Crosby Project, the coats and hats were 1940's gangland style. The performers lined up waiting to be shot like victims of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. At the Walker Art Center, they wore tan poplin raincoats and pale hats (spies, perhaps, or English gangsters wearing Burburries.) At Oberlin College in Ohio, they wore army uniforms and hats, and Nancy Green was a nodding-out Statue of Liberty. The performers changed into their uniforms at her base and became soldiers to

David Gordon performing solo in ***Sleep Walking.***
Photos Babette Mangolte

Valda Setterfield and Douglas Dunn, center, performing with overalls and shirt in ***Sleep Walking.*** *At left, Trisha Brown and Nancy Green in wired fat-woman dresses.*
Photographer Unknown

be shot and killed. There were several attempts to use a tape of a vulgar performance of Wagner's "Liebesnacht and Liebestodt" from *Tristan and Isolde*, which rose continuously in volume during the course of the performance until the sound was unbearable, but the tape was bad and never worked well. It was most successful in the military version. For the American Dance Marathon, Trisha Brown and Nancy Green wore wired fat-woman dresses and Valda Setterfield and Douglas Dunn performed together inside one huge overall and shirt. There have been as many as thirty people doing it at once, although it is constructed as a solo activity. In 1973, I performed in it as a half-hour solo at the Walker Art Center and in New York City.

Costuming

A means of unsettling a predictable response to a given word, pose, gesture, or phrase lies in removing its normal context. The most obvious context is the physical appearance of the performer of any given act. The stage is set at Carnegie Hall, and the concert pianist, who emerges from the wings, is obviously a fireman. He is not a fireman; he is a concert pianist dressed as a fireman. He sits down at his piano, but the piano is disguised as an automobile. A fireman is playing the dashboard of a car at Carnegie Hall.

I once did a concert in which I performed the same movement patterns covering the entire space for an hour, only stopping to change quickly into different costumes or to pick up and exchange props. The circling figure that passed the audience at regular intervals was one time a boxer and another a bride.

Costumes are an extra transluscent layer of matter through which one identity can often be seen undergoing transformation (flux, a second identity) into a third—the conventionally inappropriate identity.

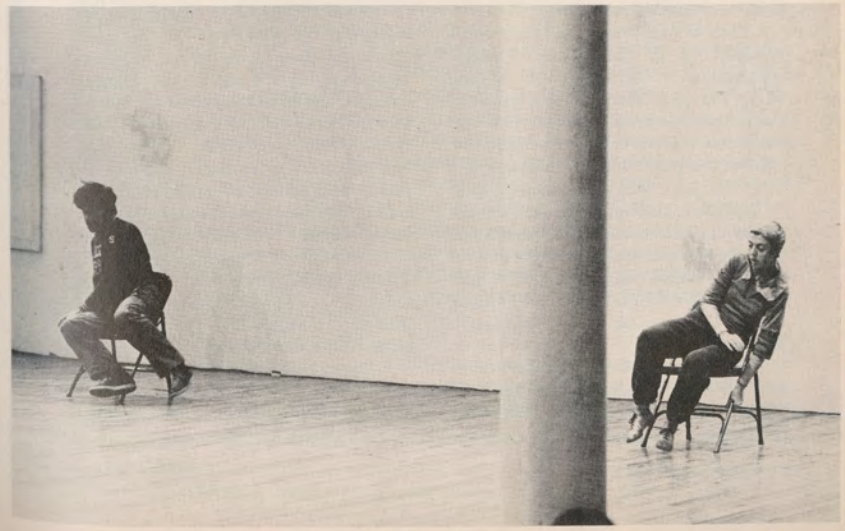
While writing this article, I worked on a new piece. It is called *Chair, Alternatives 1 Through 5.*

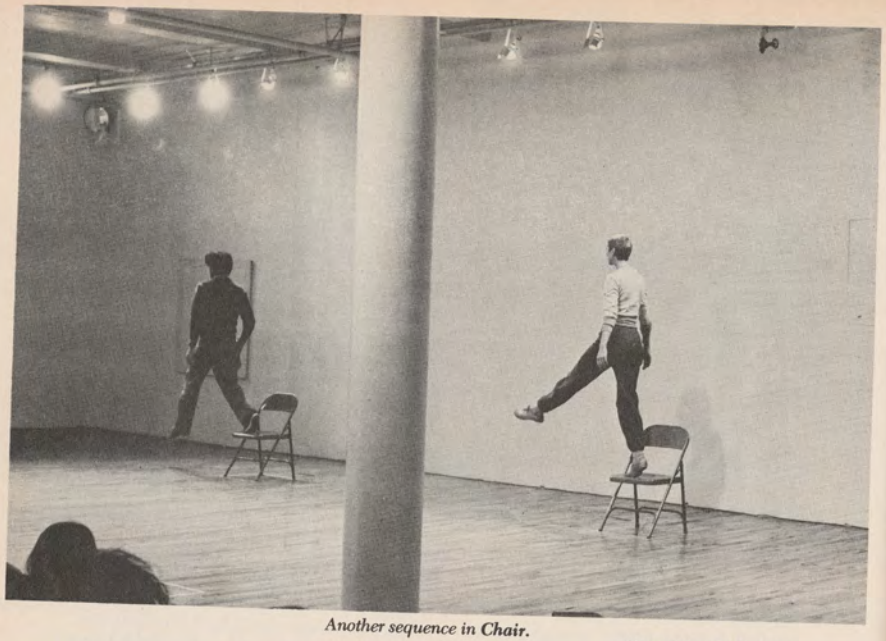
Beginning with a single idea, I expand it

Top and bottom, Gordon and Setterfield in ***Chair, Alternatives 1 Through 5.***
Photos Babette Mangolte

until it is often totally obscured by the material it generated. I have always accepted this as part of my working process and abandoned my original ideas as they shifted, without looking back.

In *Chair,* I began working with a thirty-second hold, one short phrase, and a chair. After one rehearsal, I had a one-minute piece finished. After two rehearsals, I had a half-hour piece begun. As the hold filled with the possibilities of taped material and the short phrase became attached to seven or eight minutes worth of other phrases, I became determined to hold onto the original form. As each variation of the original material occurred, instead of altering by insertion, addition, or replacement, I kept the one-minute piece intact and formed its alterna-





Another sequence in ***Chair.***

Photo Babette Mangolte

tives in sequence as they appeared, clearly defining the beginning and end of each alternative.

It is in its way a "theme and variations" except that the variations are not always indebted to the theme for their genesis. They can modify each other or be modified by unrelated material. They can be very distant relatives of their original cousin.

Chair, in its current state, begins with a somewhat lavish recording of 16 pianos simultaneously playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever." There are two taped fictional explanations of how the piece was made, during which the performers are still. The first tape plays with mystical allusions to color, charging it with creative significance. ("There was a *black*out at the studio today. Perhaps the piece is done!") The second tape describes the creation of the work in terms of chance procedure taken to lengths. (I must live in a hallway for three weeks to oversee the grid I've drawn on the floor and how it becomes erased.)

The eight minutes (approximate) of choreographed material with chair as partner and cohort is repeated three times consecutively. The first time is a straight run-through. The second time includes repeats of phrases or fragments of phrases. The performer decides what to repeat and how many times. These repeats can be set by the performer in rehearsal or improvised in performance. The third run-through is slightly faster and includes the singing of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." The performer has the option of emphasizing the rhythms of the movement with the march tempo, or performing the two sets of rhythms independently. Much of the energy, strength, and breadth needed for the accelerated tempo and the singing of the third version has been expended on the previous two. The forced momentum (when both the energy of the performers and the audience is waning) and its pulse and insistence are both heroic and inane. The final action, stepping out of and leaving the fallen chair behind, is followed immediately by a full rousing military band recording of "Stars and Stripes Forever," during which the performers remain still and at attention.

Chair is solo material that will be performed, initially, simultaneously by Valda and me. We have not performed together for almost ten years. It's about time.

Loïe Fuller

By Sally R. Sommer

Loïe Fuller's contributions to the theory and practice of theatre and dance are numerous, yet few dancers and even fewer theatre people know of her work. Most dance and theatre historians, if they mention her at all, only devote a cursory paragraph to her achievements. As is often the case, repeated omission is gradually solidified into misinformation. Other people have often been credited with her innovations.

Between 1865 and 1891, Fuller had a rather successful career as actress, manager, and sometime playwright. After 1892, she influenced (and was influenced by) Art Nouveau, Symbolism, and Impressionism. She was written about, painted, and sculpted by most of the important artists in Paris at the turn of the century. A theatre was even built for her. And she set up and managed the initial European tours of Isadora Duncan, Maude Allen, and two Japanese acting companies. All the while, she kept on writing plays. In 1904, she made her first experimental film, and would later make at least three more. She also founded a school and trained many dancers, who continued performing long after her death. There were many other notable events in her life: for example, she invented and patented light machines, costume design, and technical stage devices; published an autobiography; became a respected member of the French scientific community; was deeply involved with war relief work during World War I; had an astounding political career; and founded two museums in America. On top of all this, she continued to perform until 1925.

Physically, Fuller was slightly over five feet tall, plump, and rather pretty in her younger years. She would later become grossly fat. Although her eyes suffered damage from the intensity of the lights and she was myopic and often bespectacled, her energy was limitless. Ambitious, inventive, and tough, she worked constantly to realize and perfect her ideas. As she reveals

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The title photograph is of Loïe Fuller, experimenting with costume design and butterfly image. All photographs with this article courtesy Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.