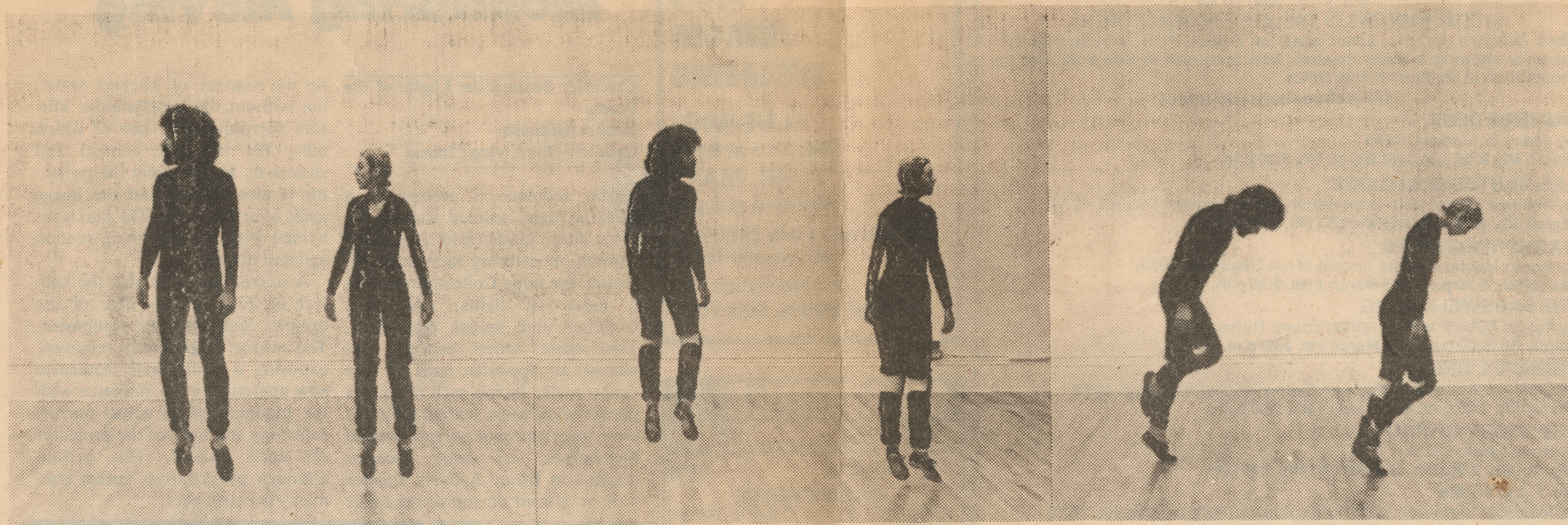


C O N C E P T S I N P E R F O R M A N C E



Followable Dancing

Mary Overlie
David Gordon
Whitney Museum of American Art

In a time when everyone is trying to do/be everything, a dance that is concise and quiet and eloquently constructed is something to be savored. I saw two such gems on the Whitney series: a delicate, entrancing solo by Mary Overlie and a brilliant duet by David Gordon.

On entering the space, Mary Overlie had an intentness that immediately brought a rowdy audience to a stunned silence. The poignant blend of authority and vulnerability in her face and the look of her strong beige-covered body will stay with me for some time.

The twenty-minute dance was

called *Small Dance* and she danced small, directing her and our attention to the quavering of her hand, the sudden sinking of her chest. Shimmers gently shooting through her body. Stillness was drawn out, and when it finally burst into motion, it was not to show contrast, rather the motion had stillness in it and the stillness had motion . . . Hovering on the edge. I kept thinking of a hummingbird and I kept my eyes glued.

In the program notes, Overlie calls the piece "a three-way conversation between the body of the dancer, the mind of the dancer, and the audience." Because she has this in mind, and because she has an excellent sense of composition (i.e., where she's coming from and where she's going), the dancing

was followable in a way that I found enormously satisfying. The kind of followable that good fiction has, or beautiful music, or a stimulating conversation—it makes me want to know, makes me *care* what the next word, the next note will be.

In dance I rarely see this quality, but I am hungry for it, so when it happens twice in one week, it is positively exhilarating. The second time was watching David Gordon and Valda Setterfield. I have recently been loving watching unison (Trisha Brown's *Locus* hooked me) and there's no more visually striking, in-sync pair than Gordon and Setterfield. Even when a teeter and fall is built into the steps, they land at precisely the same moment and with precisely the same weighted-

ness. It's breathtaking.

In *Times Four* (work in progress) a brief traveling phrase is executed in unison in all four primary directions and then another is begun. So each time they return to front, you know that a new step is coming. But they slip into it so sly that it's there before you know it and then you're grateful for the chance to see it three more times. Being on the side, I saw them do each phrase next to each other; then with their backs to me, Setterfield behind Gordon; then adjacent again; then facing me. What a luxury! There was great generosity in this progression, and patience too. A patience bordering on serenity . . . inscrutable faces (I'm sure they look just like that waiting on the cashier's line at the Grand Union).

The phrases consist of functional

shifts of weight and are so well ordered that each time new ground is covered (the first time they face a diagonal, or the first time they slow down the tempo) a whole world of possibilities opens up. As with Overlie, the changes are not for the sake of contrast (contrast upsets my stomach anyway), but for continuity.

Continuity is made with intelligence and tenderness. It is what I meant when I used the word followable earlier. It happens when a dancer resists showing all that she or he *can* do, but instead chooses to concentrate on the selecting, finding, making of the moves and how they proceed from one to another. And then . . . and then the dancer is the embodiment of a continuous train of thought.

Wendy Perron

Dissolving Opposites

woman, and the beginning of the

comparison—a comparison that

(This is addressed to both the