

Dance/Tobi Tobias

HOME TRUTHS

... David Gordon's expert 'movement' is the best part of *The Photographer*.

EARLY IN THE 1870s, THE PHOTOGRAPHER Eadweard Muybridge found a way to answer a question the eye alone could not resolve: Does a trotting horse ever have all four feet off the ground? Yes, it does—the matter was determined by a sequence of instantaneous photographs. Later in the decade, Muybridge perfected the means of isolating such split seconds of action and proceeded to create a pictorial anatomy of motion. His studies of men, women, and children—both the hale and the handicapped—of animals and even of birds, have in-

Cubistic rendering of the narrative, much abetted by lurid visual imagery. It uses authentic testimony from and about Muybridge and an assortment of writings from the popular and serious literature of the day. It takes a smart-alecky tone that is unfortunate and diminishes Muybridge as a man. The second part is a concert accompanied by a hyperactive slide show of Muybridge's pictures. The third part, a dance "constructed by" David Gordon, is by far the most successful segment of the evening.

Its locus is the beautiful, white-haired

dissolves before you can put a name to it. Gordon is expert at these ironic juxtapositions—of pedestrian and dancer; of speed, slow motion, and stillness; of apparently accidental groupings that suddenly take on a drama as potent as it is ephemeral. Throughout it all strolls the Muybridge figure, intently surveying this rich field of action and pondering—perhaps the subject of his perpetual absorption, how to make reality visible to the naked eye.



Languorous nymph: Valda Setterfield and passers-by in *Next Wave's Photographer*.

fluenced visual and dance artists from his day to ours. His own resynthesis of the images, in a crude, clever machine called the zoöpraxiscopes, which re-animated them, prefigured the motion picture.

Shortly after he had begun these obsessive investigations, whose seemingly accidental beauty exercises as much fascination as their scientific evidence, Muybridge murdered his wife's lover, was tried and acquitted. These graphic aspects of the eminent Victorian's life and work were the inspiration for *The Photographer/Far From the Truth*, the first installment in the "Next Wave" multimedia series at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

The three-part theater piece, with music by Philip Glass and direction by JoAnne Akalaitis, begins with a play of sorts. The book, by Robert Coe, is a

Valda Setterfield, clothed Isadora-style in a pearly Grecian tunic that reveals her frail arms and lush thighs. She stands in a pool of water that is swathed in pink plastic like a Christo island, a nymph at once modern and antique. With languorous calm, she flows from one pose to the next of the curvilinear activities in which Muybridge depicted the soft-fleshed women of his day: reclining, playfully splashing water, turning to adjust her skirt, head swiveling over shoulder in the gentlest provocation.

As she repeats and repeats her monologue, a handful of other dancers, in Victorian costume, pass through the space in sweeping balletic moves. Gradually the actors from the first part join them, adding ordinary locomotion—walking, running—to the panorama of activity. The groups mingle, occasionally pausing briefly in a tableau that