

# The

# EMERGENCY

# GAZETTE

Friday April 14, 2000

No Fifteen



David Herskovits is the artistic director of Target Margin Theater. His upcoming play is *THE FIVE HYSTERICAL GIRLS THEOREM* at the Connelly Theater (see Listings for details). The following are excerpts from a talk he gave to MFA students at Columbia University's Theater Division on April 4th, 2000.



Starting a company...I guess the place to begin with that is with the famous question "Why?" It's a very easy thing to say, but I think its particularly acute in this context. I've though about it a lot because in the last few years I wind up serving on these panels for state art foundations and it's really - if you get a chance, I really recommend it, it's a great experience. You learn a shit-load about what's out there and what people are doing. It just makes you think: who are these people with their theater companies, what are they doing and why are they doing it. And I feel very strongly that the world doesn't need another theater company. New York certainly doesn't. It might need Your theater company, but it might not. Do you see what I'm saying?

In many many cases, people start a theater company because they're "make work" companies, or because they can't get a job and so they want to do something to showcase their work. And that's all fine, but, to me, it's ultimately not what's going to yield a company that has a meaningful life as a participant in our cultural universe.

When I started my company—it's funny—I hardly needed to decide. I mean, I don't remember a reflective period of "Shall I? Shall I not?" That was an experience which I happily never knew. And I think that's because I had very particular ideas about things that I wanted to do, I had a pretty clear idea that it would be difficult (at best) for me to find a place in the institutional theater as it exists in our country to do that.

**QUESTION:** What are some ideas you can't do at institutional theaters?

Well, I'll give you a concrete example and then I'll try to say something generally about it. I did *THE SEAGULL* downtown at the Ohio Theater. In that production, there kept being blackouts all the time. The lights

would go out in the middle of scenes in places that are clearly not indicated in the text.

Now, maybe that was brilliant and maybe it was not. There are reasons that, to me, that was an interesting and worthwhile thing to do, and maybe it succeeded or failed. That's less of a concern to me in this discussion that the fact that it became clear over many weeks that I was interested in doing this and I can't think of the regional theater that would let me do that.

The truth is, artistically, what I'm really interested in—and this is not the way I would put it to funders or to the press—I'm interested in the strangeness of art per se. I'm interested in works of the creative imagination as constructive, bizarre detours and the ability of those works to re-frame and re-invent the world with which we are familiar so that we will see it and live it anew.

That's quite an easy thing to say, and as an artistic observation, I think, unremarkable actually. I'm sure you'll agree.

And this is the tricky thing about directors. As a general rule, directors talk pretty good, you know what I mean? They're very good at saying, you know, what they think about a play or what they think a production can be, and they tend to talk in pretty vivid and dramatic terms, but the question is: what do you really do?

And if you're going to take something and say "I really want to push this particular distortive idea, this particular strange-making idea, then how am I really gonna do that, and really commit to it in a way that's not lily-livered and cold-blooded and pathetic and watered-down? And I'm sure you've all seen this too, and I think it's a deadly and horrible thing in our artistic culture, which is that people have wonderful ideas but, you know, somehow, somewhere between the first design meeting and when it actually gets made, it's all kind of gotten compromised and it's very discouraging.

And I think the great challenge is to go, No. Why don't we really do "X"? I'm not even talking about money or big stunts or anything like that, I'm just saying why not have the lights go off in the middle of the scene, if you think that's an exciting idea?

Out of this distortive impulse, one of the exciting things to me about that idea is: it can be applied in an endless number of

ways. And so, there have arisen a particular number of things that I'm interested in exploiting in order to pursue that and to radicalize it. I might mention that, as a treater of texts, I'm quite conservative. Fundamentally, I'm interested in reading plays, and manifesting them on stage. And even more conservative, I'm not actually interested in interpreting them. I have this idea that a lot of directors read a play and get an interpretation of it, or a take on it, and their job is to convey that interpretation to the audience. This I do not consider interesting for me. What I am more interested in is trying to realize maximally the play of what the experience of reading that particular document is. So that the experience of watching it is, for me, as exciting as the experience of reading it.

So, I'll give you another example: sometimes that means we act scenes and I'll do this thing where people act, and then they stop acting and then they start acting. Or they're acting and then they stop and they go back and do something again, you know? And there are multiple motives for that—there should be multiple motives for every scenographic gesture. If something is just for one reason, then there's no interest in that; then it's like, you get it. You see it and it's like "Yes the red t-shirt with the blue Wolverine writing on it, I get it! I'm done, I can leave now and get dinner early."

So I hope that there are always many reasons that a particular gesture is on stage and reasons that I haven't thought of. Right? Terrific.

I've found this out recently: what I'm interested in creating on stage is just a very very heightened version of the experience of reading. And that's a way of flipping back the pages. You know when you read it's terrific. Gertrude Stein writes about this actually. You say, what a great speech, I'll read it again. Is that what she said in

## EMERGENCY WANTS:

WRITING TO ACT      WRITING TO REACT

Act I, I don't know, let's find out. And that's a great pleasure for me.

So, pushing these particular ideas and being unafraid to really crack something open, to really distort it and make it strange, as a way of bringing it back more truly to what IT is, be it a text, or a performance, or a moment, or a feeling, or an idea, or a historical fact. So the world is always something that we know and that we do not know; "I understand what's going on and yet I've never seen it before."

Lenore Doxsee, my longtime artistic collaborator, lighting designer and soulmate said this to me years ago, and it's my favorite thing: she said, "You don't have to understand it to get it."



Send all post, submissions, listings, reviews and requests to:

EMERGENCY  
733 Amsterdam Ave.  
Suite 21H  
New York, NY  
10025

Bros. Lumiere, eds.



emergency@notnow.com

## LISTINGS

### THE FIVE HYSTERICAL GIRLS THEOREM

Target Margin Theater presents this new play by Rinne Groff, directed by David Herskovits. Apr 19-May 13, Tue-Sat at 8pm, Sun at 7. Special performance Sat, May 6 at 3pm, followed by a discussion. Connelly Theater, 220 E. 4<sup>th</sup> St., 368-3657. \$12-\$15.

### BUTOH

Butoh dance artist SU-EN and visual artist ZTSU collaborate and expose their work together. Wed, April 19 at 8:30pm. Galapagos, 70 N 6th St (bet Wythe and Kent), Williamsburg, 718-389-4058. \$10.

### CHEKHOV VAUDEVILLES

Pure Pop presents a mad fest of Chekhov shorts. Check out www.purepop.org for specifics. Thru April 23. NADA.

### NOTICE OF DEFAULT

Written and Performed by John Clancy. Inspired by the recent legal dispute and intense fundraising campaign unleashed by the arrival of a notice from The Present Company's landlord. Thru April 22<sup>nd</sup>, Wed - Sat at 8pm. Theatorium, 196-198 Stanton Street (at Ridge Street), 420-8877. \$12.

### SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR ON SEX, ART & FEMINISM

Written and performed by Emily Blake. Thru Apr 23, Fri & Sat 8pm, Sun at 3pm. St. Marks Theater, 94 St. Marks Place, 726-8524.

### THE CHILDREN

B-musical p-operetta based on the 1980 horror film of the same name. Thru Apr 29, Fri&Sat at 10:30. HERE, 145 6th Avenue, 647-0202. \$12.

### MATA HARI

A work-in-progress showing of this new piece about the infamous and oft-misunderstood lady spy. Sun, Apr 16, 3pm, Mon, Apr 17 at 7pm. La Mama First St. Theater, 10 E. 1 St, 353-7784. \$FREE but seating is lmtd!

### GODARD

Robert Woodruff wrestles Jean-Luc Godard, with graduate Columbia acting students filling out the ranks. Apr 25-May 7, Tue-Sat at 8, Sat & Sun at 3. Ohio Theater, 66 Wooster St, 854-3859. \$15/\$10 stds.

### PREACHING TO THE PERVERTED

Holly Hughes' latest solo flight, about the NEA debacle. Apr 27 - May 21, Thu-Sun at 7:30. PS 122, 150 1<sup>st</sup> Ave, 477-5288. \$20.

### COMPLETELY ATTACHED TO DELUSION

Choreographer David Neumann (recently seen in Another Telepathic Thing) premieres 2 new pieces, one with poet John Giorno. Apr 13-23, Thu-Sun at 8:30. PS122, 150 1<sup>st</sup> Ave, 477-5288. \$15.

### COFFEE WITH KAFKA

A workshop performance of Andrea Laurie's text. Sunday Apr 16 at 2pm. West End Theater, 263 W.86<sup>th</sup> St., 712-7105. FREE!

### RUSSIAN ART THEATER WORKSHOP

School of Russian Art Theatre at Columbia University 4-week intensive June 12 - July 7, 2000. Acting/Directing/Stage Movement. Lead by Moscow Art Theatre Director Slava Dolgachev. For more information call: 212-316-6608.

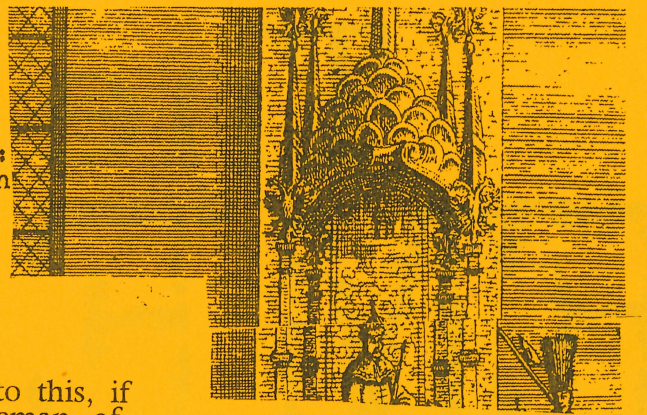
### FILMS AT ANTHOLOGY

Atomic Cinema: 8mm Films, Friday, April 14, 10pm & April 28, 10pm  
PS2000: Short Film Fest, Monday, April 24, 8pm.  
**FRITZ LANG RESTORED:**  
FOUR AROUND A WOMAN, Friday, April 14, 6pm.  
THE WANDERING IMAGE, Thursday, April 20, 6pm.  
**ESSENTIAL CINEMA\*:**  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY JEAN VIGO, Thursday, April 26, 7:30pm.  
L' ATLANTE, April 26, 9:30pm.  
New from Bruce Baillie: DAY ASHORE April 30, 7pm.  
Anthology Film Archives, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>, 505-5110  
\$8 / \*\$7 Essential Cinema / \$5 Students

### ROBERT BECK MEMORIAL CINEMA

SMALL GAUGE JAPAN  
Joss Winn (Japan) has organized yet another intriguing series of new Japanese experimental films, this time all originating in 8mm. Tuesday, May 2 at 8pm, Collective: Unconscious, 145 Ludlow, 254-5277. \$5.

EMERGENCY is a FREE and BI-WEEKLY gazette, providing an immediate response to what's really happening in theater, film and performance. EMERGENCY is not a consumer guide. The idea: To liberate the form of critical response from the limitation of conventional review etiquette. EMERGENCY seeks: essays, run-on reviews, manifestos, dialogues with colleagues, proposals for "impossible theater". Please send us word of open rehearsals, guerilla acts, collaborations, shows, and screenings.



## IN ONE ROOM WITH LAVA



Experiments in audience participation rarely turn out as planned. Edward Einhorn's rendition of Richard Foreman's LAVA plans nothing and accomplishes more than it really does.

Let me explain.

Mr. Einhorn attempts to break the most important rule of theater, that you've come to see something happen. You see, Mr. Einhorn was once told by Mr. Foreman that the former's stage productions of the latter's plays were "too theatrical," and therefore should no more stage his plays. In a sense, Mr. Einhorn's actor-less, rehearsal-less, do-it-yourself LAVA is a reply to the playwright's prohibition.

The director stages his own frustration with an impenetrable Foreman text. Unarmed with the usual weapon of interpretation, Mr. Einhorn relieves himself of directorial responsibility and asks the audience to engage in play-making. I.e., you are the actors and you are the play.

The production itself is boring; it reveals its own boredom to you. Mr. Einhorn (deliberately?) is not the greatest director. His suggestions for what to do with the text are only mildly humorous. An un-innovative American high-school acting approach is used to suggest various options for declamation of the text, an idea of theatricality that doesn't go far beyond shtick.

A lax atmosphere replaces the usual hush of pre-play anxiety. The audience suddenly acknowledges that what happens is not a result of careful blocking and rehearsed surprises, rather we find ourselves in the unusual circumstance of no anticipation with regard to the play as RESULT.

Thus, the room gives rise to moments of such beautiful non-intentionality Foreman himself could only dream of. For instance, one of the actors/audience members has to go get a monologue from the shelf: this is pure intention, not acted intention, the intention of going and getting something somewhere, like going to the deli for a carton of milk. They might bump into a chair or drop the piece of paper, but this is true accident. If they are graceful it is just because of who they are, because they are not self-conscious, because their task carries no extra meaning, none of the weight of signification.

Then comes the problem of acting, dealt with differently by non-actors and those inevitable once-upon-a-time or full-time actors who have strolled in. Sometimes, this off-the-cuff "acting" can unexpectedly produce rare discovery, gone unnoticed and unrepeated of course, because no one says "that's a keeper" and "do that again." Between these moments you just watch someone getting into place, stumbling over the difficult lines, thinking about what dumb trick of entertainment they can pull off next.

Because there is no set and no set series of actions, the lines of text refer only to themselves. We all

say "Put your head into this, if you dare." Typical Foreman, often accompanied by the unveiling of a scary object of sexual geometric obscurantism. But we are left with NADA, if you'll forgive the pun. We just say it to each other. It is an invitation to wear the text as a hat, an invitation to try it on for size.

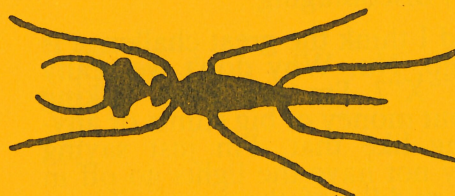
The text of LAVA, printed in homework typeface on ink-jet papyrus, is something to take away. For now we are stuck in this room with some gadgets that get boring or annoying very quickly. This room seems easy enough to exit yet no one's leaving. For now, it's a pleasure to hear others read it for the first time. We are baffled by LAVA logic, shocked by its twists and turns. And you can read it however you like.

As THE DIRECTOR, Mr. Einhorn is dissatisfied, dulled, jaded and out of ideas. He doesn't know what to do with LAVA, the text he has chosen to stage. The audience which he assails is equally unprepared. His directing of the audience is outright mediocre, and when he gets on stage himself (seemingly relinquishing control to a random audience member) he is as unextraordinary a performer as the rest of us.

What we don't realize is that we're still the audience. More so than usual. We laugh at ourselves. We are inadequate to the stage. THE DIRECTOR is a character that Einhorn plays convincingly. We watch him, and look toward him for hints and clues and what to do, although we can barely see him behind the barrage of lumens pointed at our eyes, and hear his voice through the mediation of electronic reproduction (live or recorded we may not know for sure).

What I like about Mr. Einhorn's production is really just an idea. Instead of having to watch a play that is a finished result of some rehearsal process, you come in and realize that whatever you experience will be the performance. That theater can be like this, that we don't have to watch ACTORS and make judgements about the director's interpretation, its relevance, its precision. We don't even have to say the tired "I liked it," nor the tiring "I didn't." Of course, this idea is beyond theater, in the sense that it doesn't need theater and theater has no need of it.

Because the door is closed and you are, for a time, stuck with other people, every little thing, every small move becomes an event. You can be attentive to it. What's wrong is that everyone is waiting for a play to happen, so we are not attentive, and so it's boring. Our expectation is unfulfilled; we don't realize that the play is, in fact, the experience of being in a room and expecting nothing.



I don't know what's so good about that, but perhaps it is the difference between real tea and herbal.

Matvei Yankelevich

LAVA performs the last Monday of every month at NADA. Call 420-1466 for info.

## The Panoptic, something-whatever manifesto (First Draft)

THIS IS THE PANOPTIC MANIFESTO.

Panopticmanifesto. Panopticmanifestopanopticmanifestopanoptic.

MAN IS...FESTO...MAN IS FF...F...FESTO. O.k.,

Look behind you...

clap, clap, clap.

Look...

clap, clap, clap... wow! I am star struck ...

No! behind you!

AHHH! The...the...

point!

you...the something unique whatever?: well done! Well done, clap, clap, clap. The Actor, The performer, The model, The original, the copy, the not yet thing already? Well done! Clap, clap, clap. Dirt or dust cosmic...shit...being?: no-Yea, well done! Clap, clap, clap. Well, well, very well done! She, he, garbage beauty, eccentric animal? well done, clap clap. Open-close IN-OUT self?... Body? Well done clap clap clap. Other, another other there?... here! Well done clap, clap, clap. The Self same now pain in the somewhere nowhere yes because absolutely thank you very much? Well done, now, well, that is well done. Clap, clap, clap. The More than one—makes more than weak—power—room for more—and more—just that and no more?... OK, well done! clap, clap. The cultivated natural catastrophic brain! ? Well done, absolutely ...clap clap clap. The I, the us, the me, the my ...the never!? Well done, clap, clap. The Boring object!? Well done, bravissimo, clap, clap, clap. The Exiting subject new under the sun burnt, toasted and reproducing!? I remember, I remember! Well done, clap, clap. The Awesome and fearsome mass consciousness, sciousness, reduced, augmented and technologically sound! ? O.K. why not... clap, clap, well done... and this one is the pan...pan...panoptic man, manoptic mani, the panoptic manifest, manifest... this is the panoptic manifestation, panoptic manifestation, manifestation, panoptic panoptic? Well now that is not, that is, well, that is clap clap. Yea that is something, somebody? That is where? How? Then/, at the?... pa, pa, no, no, ptic, ptic?, mama, nini, fefefe, stostosotostostosto, ptic, nono, mama, papa, stostostosto?? Clap, clap, clap. Clap, clap, clap, clap...

Milton Loayza

Feb 20, 2000

Performed at the Emergency Launch/Party, on February 22, 2000, inaugurating the first annual Emergency Manifesto Contest.

Yes! It's true! You can find EMERGENCY

free of cost at many pleasant participating locations in NEW YORK:

\*St Marks Bookstore  
\*The Pink Pony cafe  
\*The Piano Store  
\*Applause Bookstore

\*St Marks Church/Ontological Theatre  
\*KGB Lounge/Kraine Theatre \*HERE  
\*Incommunicado Books (Tonic) \*La Mama

\*Labyrinth Books \*Present Company  
IN BOSTON: \*Zeitgeist Gallery  
\*MOBIUS \*The Garment District

IN PHILADELPHIA: \*The Painted Bride