

EMERGENCY

number nineteen

GAZETTE

[dramatique]

REVIEW:

LOUISE BOURGEOIS:
I DO, I UNDO, I REDO

A theater piece created and performed by Denise Stoklos, based on the life, work & writings of the French-born modernist sculptor, Louise Bourgeois. Set design by Louise Bourgeois. La Mama Experimental Theatre. May 18-28, 2000.



EXCERPT FROM NOTES, PART 1: music video; television commercial; mixed media; installation; masturbation—repeat.

EXCERPT FROM NOTES, PART 2: theatre = sublimation; performance = sublimation; art = sublimation. [n] is not always sublimation.

Sublimation is [a] gift.
-Louise Bourgeois

> I have the bad habit of comparing theater with church. I am not religious, so the situation is forced upon me. If I see theater and theater which I consider good theater, I like to see activity in the box as one entity, not fragments bound to each other by text alone.

- The set: A Triptych
- Definition: Fear, abandonment, childhood.
- Stage right: a slide half way—a ladder but no slide
- Center: a 7-sided cage with 2 entries/exits. The cage stands for an artist's studio—objects, a tapestry inside. An oval mirror hangs above.
- Stage left: a swiveling mirror vanity—6 feet by 4 feet—with chair.

All constructions made of steel and/or mirrors.

> When the music began (industrial and electric) and the actress emerged (her hair bleached, covered in black) and she climbed up one of the structures (a steel half-slide) with the actual book DECONSTRUCTION OF THE FATHER published by The MIT Press in hand, everything inside me fell. I was witnessing a music video... a commercial for Bourgeois's writings. I decided then and there that theatre should be devoid of performance at all costs (I'm tired of irony).

I also realized I that I only want to watch theatre to see something exist as one thing—like a sculpture, some type of object. The sculptures, the set, helped themselves (e.g. the angled mirror above the caged studio and the distortion of the vanity mirror). The lighting did not support the set though, and nor did the music (the only exception being the

jazz sequence with Louise Bourgeois's voice.)

Bourgeois' words and art were the only thing that saved the entire performance. Sometimes I had to close my eyes or count the holes in the caged structures as I hung onto the text. I wasn't experiencing someone's life, or even artistic sublimation, but watching someone's mimicry of 20th century western visual culture.

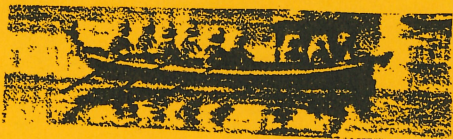
> When I found out that there was a play based on the life of Louise Bourgeois and designed by Louise Bourgeois, I knew I had to see it. I love her because I love and respect her art. LOUISE BOURGEOIS: I DO, I UNDO, I REDO is a project of steel towers and large swivel mirrors currently being shown in London. LOUISE BOURGEOIS: I DO, I UNDO, I REDO is also a performance by Denise Stoklos that took place at LaMama for one weekend in May now touring in Brazil and Norway.

Stoklos conceived, directed, choreographed and performed the work adapted from Bourgeois' book DECONSTRUCTION OF THE FATHER: WRITINGS & INTERVIEWS 1923-1997.

The collaboration between the two artists was a confusing exchange. Stoklos created the character inspired by the words of Bourgeois and edited the text for her monologue playing "louise bourgeois," but unfortunately it manifested itself into a self-satisfying performance. It was not about the artist's life as I had expected it. Bourgeois' statements were used as cheap catalysts. Needless to say, nothing worked. The "multi-media" discourse presented itself as a soulless guise for entertainment and exaltation for art's sake. What is theatre, but a self-contained spectacle... to make one reevaluate pre-existing ideas on things.

What's the difference between entertainment and art?

Marisol Limon



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LISTINGS

PHASE 1

A new piece created by Ryan Bronz & Yehuda Duenyas in collaboration with: David Cote, Bill Dawes, Anita Durst, and many more... 3 times in One night! Tuesday, July 18th at 7, 8, & 9pm chashama, 135 W. 42 (b/t 6th & B'way) Seating is limited. Reservations 212-358-3418. FREE!

WHAT'S THE MATTER

The architecture of a death. Choreography by Daria Fain of France. July 19 - 22, Wed - Sat at 7pm. Ice Factory 2000/Soho Think Tank. Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 212-966-4844, \$12.

THE RIDICUFEST

A Festival of Theatre of the Ridiculous curated by Tim Cusick. Directors include Aaron Beall, Tim Cusick, Michael Goldfried, Chris Gullo, Ian Hill, John Issendorf, and Kelly Nolan. Through July 23. For more info contact Ian Hill at gemmemory@aol.com Nada, 167 Ludlow St., \$12.

DER RING GOTT FARBLONJET

Part of The Ridicufest: Charles Ludlam's expansive lampoon, designed and directed by Tim Cusack. July 13, 14, 18, 20 at 7:30, July 23 at 3. NADA Show World. 212-420-1466. \$12.

THE INFINITY SIX VERSUS HALF A DOZEN OF THE OTHER

Written by Jeff Lewonczyk; Directed by Hope Cartelli and Jeff Lewonczyk. Wed-Sat, July 19-29 at 8; July 30 at 3. The Present Company Theatorium 196-198 Stanton Street 212-420-8877. \$12.

LAKE IVAN EXISTS - ON TV

Catch experimental theater on TV! Saturdays at 4:30pm. Time Warner Cable Channel 67, RCN Channel 111. Each episode runs 29 minutes. More info: (212) 774-7760.

ROBERT BECK MEM'L CINEMA

Peculiar films every Tuesday at 9pm: 18 July - RIP PAUL BARTEL A tribute to the late and lamented character actor and great Z director Paul Bartel (1938 -2000). His 1969 film, THE SECRET CINEMA (remade in inferior fashion for Spielberg's AMAZING STORIES in 1986) is one of the most extraordinary shorts you'll ever see. 25 July - A MYOPIC HISTORY OF ANIMATION: David Nevarrez (NYC) Collective Unconscious, 145 Ludlow St. RBMC info: www.crosswinds.net/~rbmc 718-706-6697. \$5.

CATSKILLS EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

Several premiers, plays, workshops, not to mention the great outdoors. Hosted by NaCl (North American Cultural Laboratory), a theatre troupe which operates in New York City and at its new theatre and artists' residence upstate. The First Ever Catskills Experimental Theatre Festival brings together some of the most innovative contemporary theatre creators and ensembles from across North America to share their unique theatre work. August 4-13, 2000. NaCl Catskills, 112 Highland Lake Rd., Highland Lake, NY. Info: (914) 557-0694, (212) 946-5734.

GLENN COKER'S COSMIC POKER: HOROSCOPE FOR LEO, LATE JULY 2000

You will arrive in Heaven and be charged for parking. You will encounter a flying uterus in your near future. Beware of gifts bearing Greeks. Is it okay to go on a rampage? Yes. If you can't start the car in the morning, eat your attire. Go to the box and stay there a while. Sit eons in her bonnet, having a mind of her own. Never idle: work on the agility of her needle. Sooner give us a good memory of yourself than the choir with a single button. Nothing is true. Everything is omitted. If you are the lion escort you fear, wade through flan. Beware of fishermen with yellow hands. Have turquoise and green and blue and yellow. Have a lie down. The snow's valet remains with you, Brainwaves.



Cosmic Poker is a syndicated monthly column by Glenn Coker

THE MAKING OF AMERICANS

"a dance exhibition" Friday & Saturday, July 28 & 29 at 9pm Merce Cunningham Dance Studios 55 Bethune St, 11th floor (between Washington & West Side Highway) \$10.

RODAN; A JIVE HUMMER

Radiohole: what to see if you're interested in the new thing, the old thing, the thing itself, that is, the theater. Erin Douglass, Eric Dyer, Scott Gillette, & Maggie Hoffman. July 26-30, at 8pm. The Wooster Group's Emerging Artists Series hosts Radiohole's new work at the Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. www.radiohole.com 212-966-3651. \$12.

BAAL BY BRECHT

Floeva Floods Theatre, directed by Josh Chambers, "a circus gone mad." Ten days. July 20-30 at 8pm. The Ontological Theater, St Marks Church, 131 E 10th St. 212-533-4650.

THE ZANZIBAR FILMS

The time: May 1968. The place: France. The directors: Patrick Deval, Jackie Raynal, Philippe Garrel, and others. The films: ACEPHALE. July 20 at 7:30. DEUX FOIS. July 20 at 9. VITE ('69). July 21 at 8. KEEPING BUSY ('69). July 21 at 9. DETRUISEZ-VOUS. July 22 at 7:30. LA COLLECTONNEUSE (Rohmer, '66) July 22 at 9. LE REVELATEUR. July 23 at 7. Anthology Film Archives. 32 2nd Ave. More info: 212-505-5181. \$8/\$5.

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TRUTH VALUE

Two plays back to back at The Present Company's Theatorium in June investigated the problem of value in the theater. Together they complemented each other, forming a cohesive whole, combining the theoretical and practical concerns of the struggling, underdog art. Both were about this very place they inhabit. The Theatorium specifically—the Theater generally.

While CJ Hopkins' A PLACE LIKE THIS, is about the art form itself, a meta-theatrical polemic, John Clancy, the Artistic Director here, presented a one-man show about what it means to run a way-off Broadway theater.

NOTICE OF DEFAULT is an account of the Present Company's debt (and Clancy's personal one), a threat from the landlord, and the panic, fundraising and self-questioning that ensued after the receipt of just such a notice last winter. Clancy asks the audience about the worth of money, and then—about the worth of the theater. He complains about—and then exalts—his chosen profession because it doesn't bring in any dough. From time to time Clancy falls to brooding nostalgically over his attachment to the place itself.

Both shows are about the value of the theater, and both function as propaganda for theater, for their kind of theater—the theater of realization, of beautiful moments, of the present that so quickly becomes past. Each writer/director, in his own way, tries to ascertain and relate what he believes to be the truth about the theater.

Hopkins' A PLACE LIKE THIS knowingly climbs to the peak of American talking-head theater. What is really a monologue is scattered among ten actors, ten voices, ten stage identities. The minimalist chairs in a round, the minimum of movement, the static ironic tone, all convey a definitive voice, that of the playwright and director CJ Hopkins, sparse and sharp-penned. The actors, played by actors, attack someone named George, who they take care to note is not really the subject of their attack. George goes to the mall making ironic remarks, but still goes. George buys into—or is bought by—the entertainment megamonopoly. It's us, of course. We're George. We're the ones being dissected in that empty center stage chair.

The ills of money and consumer complacency, especially the aloof and ironic but resigned kind—syndrome of the modern world—are remonstrated, chastised.

Hopkins' attack on entertainment, on audiences, fights irony with twisted irony. Yet, who's in the audience tonight? Obviously we're here to watch non-commercial theater, obviously we're here for THE DEEPER STUFF. Otherwise we'd be at one of those better, smarter, savvier but still inane comedy acts that

now substitute for downtown theater almost everywhere you look. Or hanging out at the new Williamsburg Mall.

Both Clancy and Hopkins give the theater the benefit of the doubt, taking it as given that the theater as entertainment is a level above malls and media commercialism and entertainment itself. Well, is it? What if we were to compare the people in the mall described as content cattle in Hopkins' play, with ourselves, the knowing, discerning theatergoers who come to the edge of the Lower East Side to see the "the real thing," true "non-commercial" theater.

How non-commercial is it? Clancy manages to address, undress, and then disguise this problem. At the Theatorium he puts a price on the art. He asks us to buy it, he asks others to fund it. He is convinced that there is a value beyond the monetary value, one that is unquantifiable. That makes him free to burn a little money on stage. This misty and mystifying idea of value is what the theater offers its clients and sponsors in exchange for greenbacks, for support.

Of course, we are dealing here with the value placed on truth. Art is valuable to society only to the extent that it is seen as a bearer of truth. Truth which we are ready to support monetarily, like giving to the church which long ago has been supplanted by art.

Both NOTICE OF DEFAULT and A PLACE LIKE THIS stand firmly in the artistic tradition of economically-sanctioned "truth." And, as with any ideology, they use certain techniques to make that truth evident to their audience. Even in their extreme simplicity, both shows employ manipulative tactics of the theatrical craft, subtly to be sure, but nonetheless theatrical conventions of controlling the audience, the demographic as it were. Not so different from the mall's mood music, the appetizing storefront. Except here, in the theater, we're selling the truth, or limited-time access to it.

What does the ideology of the entertainment industry (which seems to serve as a model for political events, scandals, controversies, etc.) and the theater's attempt to counter it, have in common? Namely, they share the compulsive need for control. Perhaps it is ingrained into our understanding of spectacle, of art, part of the natural biology of our perception. Why do we need all this? The charm factor, the pretend, the curtain; and the subtle, almost indiscernible, but despicable effects—dimming, spots, atmospheric lighting?

ECCE ROMANI!

It bothers me: why can't Clancy come out on a bare stage and tell it like it is? He begins to, he promises to, almost becoming real... only to return to the safe role of actor, performer, pretender. The stage tears and suave talk of an actor, a man in

control, the center of our attention. CONCLUSION: if he doesn't manipulate, i.e. have control over the audience through his craft, then even his marginally "marketable skills" go out the window. He's left with nothing. If our well-meaning theater-revivalists downtown were to get down to that, then maybe theater could start from scratch. But not until then.

Art is good. An axiom? A commonplace? No. More than that—an ideology of enslavement, of capitalism with a kinder, human face. Our society doesn't consider art to be Art unless it has a place on the market, i.e. has value. (The Voice once reported that there are no "starving artists." I wonder who they interviewed. Artists, of course. And who are they, the people who have earned the title of Artist?)

We value Art. It packages truth. Therefore the high price, the packaging, the Goods. Support for downtown theaters is good, yes, no one is arguing—and why not?

For instance: it's cool for Artists to open theaters in the Lower East Side, to take up residence in depressed neighborhoods. They bring in the art-going demographic. Cafes open, pricier ones (where the artists don't go) for the tourists, the hipsters, the arts-scene which may or may not include Artists. Then come the bars. Everyone knows what happens next, we've seen it everywhere. But, it strikes me, we don't blame the Artists. Aren't we implicated? We—the Artists—bring the people with money into the neighborhood who then squeeze the neighborhood out of the neighborhood. And us along with it. Artists and fellow low-income groups are sent packing to the next subway stop and further. Poor Artists—everyone says, the artists say to each other—where will they go, where will they make art, their main crop and product. But what about the neighborhood people—has anyone mentioned them?

Anyway, you recall the point, which is theater. Getting back to it. Getting back to it is what it's about. What these plays want to be about. But the beginning of theater is NOT truth, nor the value placed on truth post-mortem. The beginning of theater is the event. The event has no meaning, therefore—no price. The event needs no scenery changes, lighting tricks, not even a theater. The event is bare skin. Surface. You can't buy the event.

These two plays are good, no doubt about it, good plays. Yet, Art is not GOOD a priori. It is a tool of our (most humane) ideology. The ideology of truth above all else. Truth enslaves Art to propagate itself, if not its current definition then its inherent and unquantifiable value.

The artist who upholds the value of art is simply selling his wares, reinforcing their worth, their market-value, reminding us of how we'll miss it if it goes. I won't miss it.

—Matvei Yankelevich

MANIFESTO OF THE

LAST THING

When there is a structure already established within which a person is allowed and expected to have an experience, that very framework or machinery guarantees that the experience will never truly happen.

There is something too organized and AGREED UPON about event-machines like the Berlin Love Parade or the Edinburgh Fringe Festival that makes a true experience (the nature of which is inevitably PERSONAL and UNPREDICTABLE) next to impossible.

This is perhaps what I mean when I say that theater is interesting and viable precisely because it is a DEAD FORM, forgotten, abandoned, a ridiculous and embarrassing relic left to us by some high-strung and overly sentimental great-aunt.

Because no sensitive and intelligent person (or, for that matter, no mildly conscious bourgeois) actually expects to go to the theater and be confronted by ART, with a real and deeply affecting experience, because the theater is, at best, an old-fashioned FETISH to be tolerated, or worse, a totally senile obsession to be smirked at, precisely because NO ONE anymore expects to take anything related to theater seriously (except for those laughable and weak-minded fetishists delicately and knowingly labeled "THEATER PEOPLE"), that, in this world where everything seems pre-programmed, predicted and mass packaged, that in fact something of the gravest consequences can happen in the theater.

In a world lunging toward TOTAL CONSUMPTION, the theater remains inadvertently subversive, and—funny!—frets all the time about how it can finally FIT IN, be accepted and, most importantly, be LIKED.

But the fact is that theater will NEVER (and in fact can never) be LIKED by the masses, because theater cannot be consumed. It is, after all, an EVENT, leaving behind no traces or souvenirs, generating no real MERCHANDISE and, worst of all, replicating, in a two-hour span, the schematic structure of MORTALITY.

It is born, with intent and attention.

It plays on and on, and keeps going still, until, in the middle, our mind begins to wander and we get bored and forget about all the POTENTIAL and expectation that accompanied the birth of the event. And then suddenly, it is over and perhaps the end comes as a shock and we are left with a longing for more or perhaps it has been boring and painful and finally the end has come as a relief, the final fulfillment of our LONGING for it to JUST BE OVER.

In either case, when it's over it's over and there are no re-runs or double features to temptingly twist our sense of time (linear, finite!) into soothing loops where nothing is ever lost, no person or memory beyond redemption, and immortality is as easy as an endless flow of Happy Meals, each deliciously alike and comforting as a mechanical heartbeat.

In the theater we expect NOTHING except the mildly entertaining if somewhat embarrassing flailing of a bunch of infantile and deluded people. And, THEREFORE, it is perhaps possible that in the theater, in the last place we would look, that we can be caught off-guard, unprepared by packaging and self-conditioning and be suddenly CONFRONTED with an action that is so extreme that a light switch is thrown and we hurl ourselves into an instant, at least an instant!, of LUCIDITY and perhaps HORROR and maybe the deepest sort of RELIEF. And we are, for this fraction of an instant, SO ALIVE THAT IT HURTS, until we scramble to Get a hold of ourselves! and Pull ourselves together! and come down off this high to the point that we can get a god-damned Happy Meal and feel, again, okay and safe and immortal.

Luna Zeygman

the emergency gazette

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Published and distributed by Ugly Duckling Presse
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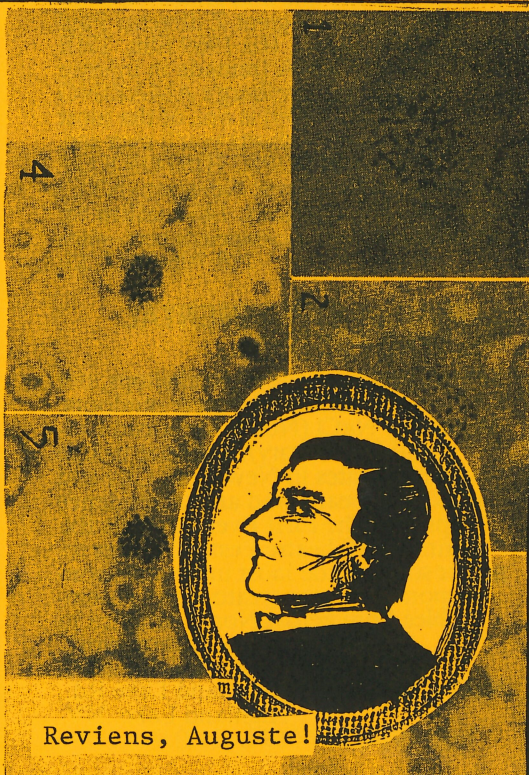
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