

## EMERGENCY


theater plays  
in this gazette

Gazette

the same role  
as in life

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**WARHOL'S  
MANUAL  
FOR THE ACTOR**


Andy Warhol filmed all of *CHELSEA GIRLS*: more than 7 hours of footage on 16 reels of film, usually dual-projected for a 3½ hour viewing experience. The "scenes" range from shots of daily life (like the famous sequence of Nico cutting her bangs) to presentational talk-to-the-camera shots (like Eric Emerson, stripping and talking for the camera) to various levels of staged scenarios (like Pope Ondine, in two scenes, "taking confession" from young women who were hanging around at the time.)

When Warhol screened *CHELSEA GIRLS*, he would constantly shift the order of the reels, and even replace some reels with other, newer, ones. Now, however, the order has become fairly standardized and one reel will begin, play alone for a while, and suddenly a second will appear next to it. The sound of one scene will either dominate or completely obscure the sound of the other, and when the first reel cuts out, the voices from the second pop into focus.

The joke is, of course, that Andy would turn on the camera and leave the room. Who knows? It certainly doesn't seem that way from the shots, which are all—really, in almost 8 hours of footage, all—amazing. Sometimes the camera is completely still, dotting on the face of its subject under flashing lights. Sometimes, the camera will start to spasmodically zoom in and out on the subject, jerkily and at its most closely zoomed, focused on some ridiculous body part, a shoulder, above an ear, someplace stupid, a crease in a blouse. In these moments, the camera seems to be fucking them, wildly and violently. The subjects continue their scenes or monologues or whatever they are doing, totally unaware of the camera thrusting, like people on the subway who don't see the little red lazer dot that someone is shining on their head or ass. When I see this, I am frightened and awed by Warhol, and suddenly I get the magnetism of it, the feeling that you can do anything—why not, fuck 'em with the camera.

Meanwhile, the jury is still out on whether the stars who people *CHELSEA GIRLS* can legitimately be called "actors." Are they acting? They are certainly acting, there is no arguing this point, only they never stop acting, not when the camera is turned off, not when the party is over, not even when the drugs run out. All the characters are unapologetic, vain, cruel, shallow, desperately exhibitionistic and strangely charismatic. Most importantly, all these people are utterly convincing, transparent even, and this contributes to the movie's hypnotic quality.

In a funny way, the superstars of *CHELSEA GIRLS* are the best actors I've seen in a long time, and as I watched, fascinated, I kept thinking that this film should be shown in acting classes, should be a visual Manual for the Actor. *CHELSEA GIRLS* as a lesson in a particular kind of acting, acting a role when you have nothing else other than the

role, nowhere, never. Acting when you have a gaping hole inside yourself, a place you don't have the option to fill and that even your role can't fill and it shines through your role like a light behind a rice-paper screen.

This is no glorification of these debauched derelicts, Warhol's strung-out superstars. What they are doing in *CHELSEA GIRLS* is legitimately disturbing, in the way that *SALO 120 DAYS OF SODOM* is disturbing and in the way that any theater event, if you really think about it, is disturbing. Every "scene" in *CHELSEA GIRLS* (from the most incidental to the most staged) orbits around an atrocity, an abuse of power so horrifying and so banal that it takes your breath away.

Toward the end of the film, at the screening I saw at *OCULARIS* in December 2000, there is a scene where Pope Ondine gives himself an injection of methamphetamine and says, "Send somebody in who wants to confess. I feel like hearing a confession!"

A girl (Rona Page) walks into the frame, and something about her, after the 3 hours of people who have come before her, is different. She is talking in a breathy little-girl voice. Ondine says: "Sit down because the cameras are rolling." She says: "Cameras in a church? That's kind of scary."

Cameras in a church? She is pretending! She is the first person in the film who denies the presence of the camera so blatantly and stupidly. She is acting.

"Oh Father I have to confess. Father I have this tremendous love in my heart for Jesus Christ. The problem is that it's a very low kind of love."

"A low kind of love? You mean sexual?"

"Yes. I don't know what to do about it because—"

"Blow him," says Ondine, "Go right down on him in church and—"

"And then I'll be free forever?" she asks in her little girl voice.

"You'll be free. But you must be able to work out your fantasies."

"But he's not real. That's the problem, Father, he's not a real man."

"Yes he is."

"No he's not."

"Yes he is. You just have to believe in the image. Go up to the nearest image of Christ, particularly the one on the cross, 'cause he's groovier there, and kneel down, peel away the loincloth in your mind and go about your business."

"But Father, the Bible says to suppress all those horrible things because they're not good."

Their banter continues, with Ondine convincing the girl to believe in the power of the mind. "The soul is the mind," he says to her, and, later, "I'm just trying to get you into heaven."

"I'm not trying to get into heaven, I want to stay right here," says the actress and, in a moment, points to Ondine and says, "I just thought, I think you're a phony!"

Without missing a beat and with a hard voice, Ondine shoots back: "So are you. Even worse than me. You're a real real phony."

And Ondine is right, because this

girl is not convincing, she herself doesn't believe it. She is playing a game, she is slumming, she has a husband and a home on the East Side, and this is a game for her.

Suddenly Ondine is throwing his glass of water in her face, and then he is hitting her, slapping her face and hitting her head. "Creep!" he yells, and "Now who's the phony!"

The first slap makes her cover her face, but still she won't drop the role. "Father!" she yells. By the third hit, she is not playing anymore and, holding up one cautionary finger, in her real voice she says quietly, "Stop." She is taken away by an invisible pair of arms. Ondine continues ranting. There is no difference in his attitude towards the camera, or in the persona that he is projecting.

For all of us in the audience, the shock of this outburst, after hours and hours of hypnotic Chelsea comings and goings is confusing. What happened? Why did he flip out? Just because some girl called him a phony? It is hard to relay the sudden brutality of Ondine's reaction: it is raw violence. After the Girl is gone, he is screaming for many minutes. "She had the nerve to come in here and pretend!" he yells.

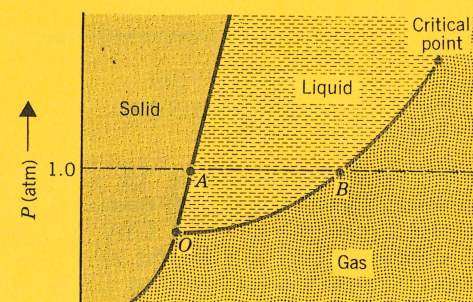
"How dare you come onto my set and tell me I'm a phony on MY set!...Who are you? WHO ARE YOU?! Posing as if I'm posing as something!"

Here, Ondine is acknowledging the basic Chelsea paradox: the absolute belief that to PRETEND on this movie set is the only punishable offense.

What is the instruction in Andy Warhol's Manual for the Actor? There is no craft in this kind of acting, and with all the pretending, there is no pretense. There is only the absence of private self, the refusal of inner life or secret identity and the exposure of oneself to the outside: total vulnerability.

All the Chelsea Girls and Boys are star actors, but they would never get an Oscar for their performance. They exist in the realm of total theater, where the backstage has vanished. Any amount of cruelty, subjugation and violence is permissible here, because it is a game. But if the game is tarnished, disrespected, the Chelsea crowd has nothing left.

Yelena Gluzman



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**ASK ANTI-  
THEATER!!**

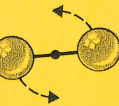
The *EMERGENCY Gazette* is proud to offer the curious, the troubled and the knackered a place to go with their questions and problems:

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Email your questions and letters to **ASK ANTI-THEATER:**

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Any letters you send may be printed in the *EMERGENCY Gazette*.



# LISTINGS

## STORY OF RATS

Romanian director Doris Mirescu has been working with Georges Bataille's text for a long time. This is her latest Bataillian offering.  
Thru Feb 3, Wed-Sat at 8pm.  
Chashama, 111 w. 42<sup>nd</sup> st, 780-3372.  
\$16/\$10.

## DIDO QUEEN OF CARTHAGE

David Herscovits and Target Margin Theater present Chris Marlowe's play.  
Jan 17, Tue-Sat at 8, Sun at 3 & 7. Ohio Theater, 66 Wooster St, 358-3657. \$15.

**THE COMPLETE LOST  
WORKS OF SAMUEL  
BECKETT AS FOUND IN AN  
ENVELOPE (partially burned)  
IN A DUSTBIN IN PARIS  
LABELED: "NEVER TO BE  
PERFORMED. NEVER.  
EVER. EVER! OR I'LL SUE!  
I'LL SUE FROM THE  
GRAVE!!!"**

What can you do when Beckett becomes "classic"? Make it funny! Funnier!! Thru Feb 3, Thu-Sat at 8pm.  
Present Company Theatorium, 198 Stanton St., 420-8877. \$12.

## HYPER REAL AMERICA

Josh Fox and his International WOW Company present the hyper-real machine, looking at America's fascination and disgust with itself. Thru Feb 11, Wed-Sat at 8pm, Sun at 3pm.  
La Tea Theater, Clemente Soto Velez Center, 107 Suffolk St, 886-4551.  
\$10 weekdays, \$12 weekends.

## NOW THAT COMMUNISM IS DEAD MY LIFE FEELS EMPTY

Richard Foreman's new play. Thru April, Thu-Sun & Tuesdays at 8.  
Ontological-Hysteric Theater, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10<sup>th</sup> St, 533-4650.  
\$15.

## BINDLESTIFF FAMILY CIRCUS

The Bindlestiffs' 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Cabaret. Thru March 10, Thu-Sat at midnight.  
Present Company Theatorium, 198 Stanton St, 420-8877.  
\$15/\$10 for clowns in make-up.

## SPACE-AGE STRIPPERS

Who's to say what is theater? When *MOTHER* closed, all sorts of Goths and fetishist were sad at the loss of their favorite club. But Rob Roth and Kitty Boots have since started *CLICK & DRAG*, a bimonthly "technocolored circus," each with a theme.  
130 Madison St. (at Mechanic's Alley, in Chinatown, under the Manhattan Bridge), 946-1955. \$10/\$5 with flyer or print-out. See their website for dress-code and more: [www.clicknyc.com](http://www.clicknyc.com).

# FOREMAN DATE PLAY

The new Richard Foreman play is a great date play. Offering many and various pleasures for the senses and the mind, you and your date will be tantalized, amused, perhaps disturbed at times—perhaps not.

You, despite your intelligent comprehension of postmodern theater, may wonder what is really in Fred's box, even as you know it will never be revealed. You will wonder if your date wonders too.

Plexiglass placed between the audience and the stage is lit so that at any moment you see the faint reflection of your date and the other audience members superimposed over the stage. Further sense of community develops through your need to identify yourselves in opposition to Fred and Freddie, the repulsive characters not so much portrayed as oozed by Jay Smith and Tony Torn. Oozed with bad hair.

## THE EMERGENCY ROOM: FORM MAN

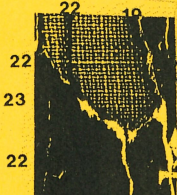


When I walked into the theater tonight, thinking about Richard Foreman and his theater of gaps, I saw Richard Foreman standing in the lobby, chatting with a gap in his moustache. Was this a shaving accident? A mad critic slashing at him Mack The Knife style? Or was he giving us a glimpse of what we were about to see? Us included in the gap.

In no previous Foreman play I have seen have I felt so included! The set spills over into the audience. The dotted lines of string now hang over us, not the actors. Photographs of mystics with bullet holes in their foreheads that make them look like bowling balls begin at the stage and continue through the glass panes onto the walls beside where the audience sits. The glass panes now cover the entire stage from top to bottom, so that the entire audience's reaction is visible. The spectator has the enjoyment or horror of watching his fellows' reactions, his own strange twitches, and the play's action as it stops and starts in Foreman's signature begin again begin again begin again form.

This theater is a working model of the universe, where Foreman plays the God, and the actors are the humans. They speak to us and they sneer at him. They look through us, speak through us, to get to him, as if we are their envoys, their only allies. They bark at him as if to tell him to slow down, lower those decibels of thuds and music.

## COUNT IT OH-OHVER



The votes are in, but not exactly COUNTED. To protest the 2000 Presidential election and the ballot-box debacle, BUSHWHACKING.NET has organized a street performance, just in time for G.W. Bush's January 20<sup>th</sup> inauguration.

Soberly titled THE SUPREME'S COURT & THE LOST BALLOTS (featuring THE DIMPLED CHADS), the protest will feature Ballots (dressed in white paper jumpsuits, available in Janovic Plaza Paint stores for \$7.99) and Judges (dressed in robes and wigs). The protesters/performers will sing, to the tune of the Supremes' STOP IN THE NAME OF LOVE.

Courtesy of bushwhacking.net

Torn in particular is notable for his intense sexual dampness, like a cellar before or after an unpleasant orgy. He makes you feel dirty by association, and attractive by comparison. The text of the play is quite linear by Foreman standards: a conversation your mind follows consistently—and thus your simple, linear mind remains distracted from considering how the sexy young veiled chorus excites and confuses other, unintelligent faculties.

Idiosyncratic humor and sudden loud noises allow you and your date to laugh and thrill together. The extraordinary final image of the show may leave you with thoughts of your family and your future, though these thoughts will be fraught with ambiguity. I cannot reveal to you the secret meaning of the play, which remains obscure to us all, but I am sure you and your date can consider it at length at a nearby bar or cafe, never revealing that you too harbor a secret desire to see Freddie dance by himself.

Eli Rarey

NOTE: This review is based on seeing a preview performance which is illegal. Oh well. Richard Foreman's NOW THAT COMMUNISM IS DEAD MY LIFE FEELS EMPTY is currently playing at the Ontological-Hysterical Theater. See LISTINGS for details.

Foreman always has his answer prepared on the tape recorded mysteries he intones with the push of a button. The actors must speak in the moment, collide with furniture and sprinting veiled ladies in their way, navigate the obstacles the God has placed in front of them.

Two buddies shooting the shit in the interstellar cracking apart cosmos in the wake of communism, capitalism, comfort, dogs, syringes, Gods on bobsleds, whirling mirrors, boxes, flying chickens, spears, interruptions, incessant interruptions, that make us start the act of attention again and again, redefining it every time.

I have an enormous feeling of peace and exhilaration when the lights go down, almost to total blackness in Foreman's theater and I don't know what's going to happen and I feel like I am inside a shoebox channeling lightning through its fragile cardboard walls and the visions and sounds and laughter are always there.

The play deciphers the difficulties of friendship and daily living, then erases the translation, like the performers wiping away the chalkboard scrawl from the walls of the stage. Its final image questions whether any of this human race stuff can continue, and what's stopping each of us from taking a hammer to the human womb? I hope the planet continues spinning long enough for us to see next year's TRANSCENDENTAL RACE CAR DRIVERS. Each title seems more enticing than the last.

Filip Marinović

Stop in the name of Law. You've pulled a coup d'etat. Count it oh-ohver...

Everyone is welcome to join the show. Participants will meet at Federal Plaza, New York City, Friday January 19 at 11:45. At noon, the procession will move past City Hall to the Federal Building and the New York Stock Exchange for one hour. The protest is legal, with permits. On Saturday January 20, the protest/performance will continue in Washington D.C.

BUSHWHACKING.NET is a network and forum for the development of creative responses that reflects the will of the people in contrast to the recent presidential election. The website, which is, at the moment, only partially developed, will allow citizens from across the country to share ideas and coordinate activities.

# ARCA NOVA



ARCA NOVA was staged by the North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl) at Washington Square Church, October 12-28, 2000. It was billed as a "theatrical commentary" on the BOOK OF GENESIS.

Some pious people might say that the only way for a theater company to pay respect to the sacredness of this text, which continues to mold millions of lives around itself, would be to take the same approach as most Christmas pageants and Passion plays do—that is, to choose one edition of Genesis and do a straight run-through. There are good reasons for why ARCA NOVA is not such a straight run-through, besides the fact that the Village would not stand for such a thing; the play makes a serious case for a different kind of respect for the text.

While the actors don't act like "people like us," they do not really play the characters of GENESIS, either. They do not attempt to embody the stories, but to approach them. In the approach there is space for their art.

This space is strictly delimited. NaCl's technique is not that of naturalistic actors but of ritualistic performers, for whom poetic license is not freedom audaciously stolen from heaven but a code of behavior, a prerequisite for the very first movement.

This kind of self-effacement can often backfire and make everyone involved look arrogant and pretentious, especially when it is done without humor. However, here it works very well as a kind of ritual vestment that allows the play to remain a play, yet approach the Holy of Holies and survive. As long as they walk the tightrope between their pride and hubris as artists and the need to defamiliarize and revive the text, the tension is in their favor, and deepens the hush in the church.

The text of GENESIS as narrated in ARCA NOVA is likewise not a straightforward King James pageant but a mysterious build-up of obscure translations, apocryphal side-stories, rabbinical commentary and literary extemporization. For the reviewer there were many moments of "I don't remember THAT!" and "I wish that was in my copy." These eccentric sources and the actors' own ritualistic aesthetic and rigorous physical training, allow them leeway to put in lots of lo-tech Cirque-de-Soleil-style abstractions: stilts, acrobatics, impromptu music and architecture, symbolic costumes. Each episode of the book was turned into its own fully evolved, mysterious physical poem. For example, God's warning of the Flood arrives as a babbling madwoman in a box with a black balloon. The incarnation of God to Abraham in the form of three angels is here three gibbering alien monsters on stilts, one of whom gets abandoned by his mates and turns into Isaac.

The trip through the book is a twisted one: It starts at Adam and ends at Jacob, but is narrated from inside the ark during the Flood (which happens in between the two). Thus the female Noah figure who tells the stories to her assembled arkmates can be seen as both historian and prophet. She tells them that this position outside of time and history is their heightened responsibility, connected to being inside the ark, not outside: "The tale will be told THROUGH US." The travelers then fulfill the obligation by acting out the stories, each one taking several roles.

When we came in to take our seats a few minutes before, the travelers were already wandering around the stage, dressed as early-twentieth-century immigrants, Ellis Island types. We might be tempted to say, "Ah, Jewish immigrants!" but Noah and his kin were not Jews. What's more, this play is being staged in a church. So from the start there is confusion as to WHOSE story is being told: the story of humanity or of just

one privileged sect of humanity? To whom is it granted to say, "The tale will be told through me"? On a Christian/Islamic planet, it is impossible to read the Old Testament and avoid this issue. NaCl wrestle with it throughout the play.

The characters give birth to whole nations, sacred and profane, chosen and unchosen. Certain characters are exalted, but the book is just as recognizable by who is rejected. Genesis is more uncompromising about unfairness than most other texts we ever read, because the mystery of survival—that is, of who survives both literally and through their children—becomes a RELIGIOUS mystery. The human being that approaches it must struggle to read in the unfairness of God's choice a direction towards purity. Therefore NaCl bring together all the stories in which the paths diverge between the blessed, the cursed, and the just left out: Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel.

Though God is perfect, the ones he blesses often aren't. God's first choice, Abraham, is an easy one "because he has listened," as the angel tells him. But his grandson Jacob snatches his own blessing through every strife and subterfuge he can get his hands on, tricking his brother Esau out of his birthright and actually wrestling God for recognition. That makes it harder to accept when the rejected ones are not bad people—just folks. These are the characters who, like Hagar and Esau, are bound closely to the blessed but eventually knocked away, back into the Flood of history, like so much more impurity. They make us uneasy, because in their innocence they redeem the unseen rejected, the ones who aren't even in the book, and open the door to a vast nameless multitude that deserves better (including us?).

Christianity would later offer a solution to this problem by locating chosenness in not being chosen. However, NaCl steer clear of that cliff and leave it merely implied. Their play exemplifies the human approach to the Bible as an Ark leaving from a perpetually dying profane world, on its way to an eternal sacred one, with mortal human beings inside it.

Michael Lumelsky

NaCl Theatre will be producing the second annual **Catskills Experimental Theatre Festival** at its theatre and work center in upstate New York, July 27th to August 5th, 2001. Currently, NaCl is looking for proposals from artists and ensembles interested in participating in the event. Performance groups and artists who create their own, original performance work are encouraged to participate. To receive an application and more information about the festival contact Tannis Kowalchuk or Brad Krumholz at NaCl: Call: (718) 398-4589. Email: nacl@nacl.org. By post: NaCl Theatre, P.O. Box 2201, Times Square Station, N.Y., NY 10108. Deadline for submissions: March 31, 2001.

# LISTINGS

MOMA

VARIOUS SHORTS:  
Including Bruce Baillie's QUIXOTE & Joseph Beuys I LIKE AMERICA AND AMERICA LIKES ME.  
Sunday Jan 20 at 5pm.  
FILMS BY JOHNSEN, GIBBONS, BRAKHAGE, ADELSTEIN, ACCONCI, LIMURA and CLAUER. Jan 25, Thu at 6:30pm.  
Museum of Modern Art, 708-9480.  
\$9.50/\$6.50

BAM ROSE CINEMA

Krzysztof Kieslowski's THE DECALOGUE (episodes I and II) Jan 20-26. The rest of the episodes will be screened in the next month. BAM, 30 Lafayette Ave, Brooklyn, 718-623-2770. \$8.50/\$5.

POETRY PLASTIQUE

34 poets and artists working to move poetry off the page and into sculpture, film, painting, assemblage, photography—even skywriting. Curated by Jay Sanders and Charles Berstein.  
Feb 9-March 10.