

EMERGENCY

No#35



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(VULGAR POSTMODERN)

Boris Eifman's RUSSIAN HAMLET, City Center, March thru May 2001. \$\$ Closed. Plus a little about Mark Morris' FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS, at BAM, March 2001. \$. Closed.

You could say that Boris Eifman's ballet from St. Petersburg is postmodern, and you wouldn't be wrong. The postmodern "style" hinges on conscious Parody (in the wider sense of this word). The movements of Eifman's dancers parody classical dance figures; their gestures refer to various styles of dance as well as emotional modes of performance. In each piece he collages disparate texts (not unlike the Wooster Group in HOUSE: LIGHTS).

Eifman does not commission new music. (Too risky? Save money for costumes?) Instead he sets his dances to music from the past, combining variegated periods. For example, his RUSSIAN HAMLET (a reworking of the Hamlet story into the vaguely historical 18th Century Russian royal court) used music from Beethoven and Mahler, while DON JUAN AND MOLIERE employed Mozart & Berlioz. His preference for such combinatorial approaches is tendentiously postmodern.

How stale! Moreover, to my great surprise, there's no live orchestra: this "world class" ballet dances to canned classical.

The audience sees Eifman and thinks it is cunning, perhaps edgy, the way his classically trained dancers incorporate baudy sexual innuendo. But the in-flight humping of Catherine the Great is so trite, so vulgar, that it ultimately insults any intelligent person... Unless you believe that intelligent people should not be at the ballet in the first place, which is what Eifman seems to be ensuring.

In RUSSIAN HAMLET, Queen Catherine's contortions around the throne are admirable, the costumes are admirable, the set is admirable (for admirable one may read well-done, gaudy, excessive). But what does the ballet tell us (in its mimetic floundering) except that which we already know from reading the program notes? There is no expressivity - forget subtlety. Eifman tells a story that can be told in several minutes, in broken English, in one and a half pages of Playbill.

So why tell it, why all the fuss (and money)? I am sure any Eifman fan, and Boris himself, would answer that it is simply beautiful. Well, what can you say against that? Aesthetic judgements are a fine retreat. Certainly long golden fabrics, superhuman dancers, huge theaters with red velvet, all that is beautiful in the vulgar way senseless spectacles often can be. What has it to do with what's going on in the world? Sorry, kids, that's a rhetorical question.

The ticket price pays for the best fabric, perhaps for some artisanship, but what part of the ticket price at such events is the fee

for some inner beauty or artistic rigor? In other words, if the tickets were 5 bucks a piece, could Eifman make anything at all?

Speaking of the lack of measure, rigor, taste... who but a Russian could still employ Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata for a love scene? Or is it a joke on kitsch, a hardy laugh from the bottom of the artist's pomo soul? Whatever it is, who can bear it, with irony or without. Certainly the majority of the audience was duped, i.e., they got what they wanted. Ladies could not hold back their gasps of "krasivo!" [beautiful], and at the end of each short section the applause smothered the music's canned cadenzas.

For me it was a revelation: They just do it because it's pretty! It's pretty to have the Moonlight Sonata playing in blue theatrical lighting, with a romantic couple dancing in a swath of blue silk. It's pretty & it doesn't take much thought.

In fact, the Eifman ballet only exists as a commercial for the Eifman ballet, to say, "we do things well, aren't you impressed with our precision and grace?" Look at the way repetitions in the choreography of RUSSIAN HAMLET (the aerial grind, the courtiers' dance) serve only to display the same move more than once, so everyone can see. These repetitions add no second level, they dull the rhythm, they make a spectacle of the move itself, they reiterate, redundant, like a catchy line sung over and over in a pop song.

Thank God for intermissions: that was all I saw.

It doesn't end there, though. Remember Mark Morris' everybody-loved-it parody of Gertrude Stein's & Virgil Thompson's FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS? The hokey jokeyness of it, the parodic movements alluding to clumsiness without actually being clumsy, invoking Stein's circular grammar but not succeeding in making you dizzy. It was soft. It was funny. And it was banal. This combination killed any Stein that happened to be walking by. Outside BAM after the dissemination of FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS, Luna Zeygman (a critic I deeply respect for her very non-postmodern sense of serious commitment) couldn't help but recall those B&N Poetry in Motion posters on the subway with Stein's "A rose is a rose is a rose..." in colorful crayon, scrawled in phony children's handwriting. That's what Mark Morris did for FOUR SAINTS. Making "Gerty" - as we postmoderns refer to her candidly, knowingly, condescendingly - harmless, playful... and making sure that it's nothing more than that. We should remember that the modernists are themselves not devoid of parody and humor: All the real humor of FOUR SAINTS IN THREE ACTS is Steinian - Mark Morris & BAM simply make it marketable.

What's interesting, on second thought, about the ballet-parody approach shared by Eifman and Morris, is how it sends the viewer back to the traditional value system based on craft. Craft = displaying

ability to do what one already knows how to do well. Such work can only be evaluated by this distinctly obsolete (and un-postmodern) criteria, as made apparent in the New York Times review in which the critic could come up with nothing except to praise the dancers, the grace and precision of their execution. Circus tricks in short. Really there is nothing to say, and so craft takes the place of content and form.

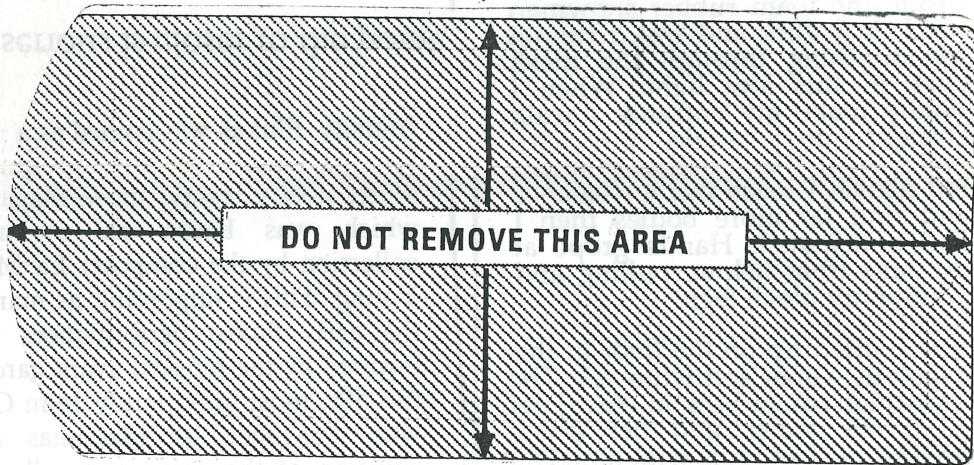
Postmodernists accuse the moderns of deadly seriousness. Making fun of earnest efforts, the postmodern parody makes nothing new because, it says, what's the point!? Quote this and that, take from here and there, betray traditions. An admirable position? Laziness? The average postmodern artist rehases without rethinking, and all because he doesn't have to think: the postmodern audience will do it for him.

These days I ask myself, am I really confronted by postmodern art? Do I

say, "Woah there! Be careful with my center!" Does it incite me to act, to change things? No, it's simply pleasing & it's kind of cool. Precisely. Most often, the postmodern attitude is cool and collected, slick and well-dressed, able to question society without questioning its own position. It has posed the question of the center, of origin, and it has filled that center with itself, now untouchable.

So, did the postmodern kill the Avant-garde or simply make it invisible? Or worse yet, harmless. Without a center (even at City Center), perhaps there's nothing to fight against. Must we become lofty, prudish snobs and advocate against vulgarity? Not me, I was brought up in the postmodern age, I'm all accepting. But I don't want things watered down anymore, I don't want to see complacency. God help me, perhaps I'm an idealist, but performance exists to incite.

Matvei Yankelevich



Dear Readers,

We are experiencing technical difficulties. Give us a copier or let us use yours. Same goes for money. Until things shape up we will be publishing bi-weekly online at emergencymagazine.com. We thank you for your support. Donors will have their names engraved on a bronze plaque on the wall in our headquarters or scratched into our arm.

Faithfully,
Auguste, Louis, Guillaume
Bros. Lumiere

P.S. Notice in an effort to
downsize we have laid*off the
hyphens.



SEX WITH THE AUDIENCE: THEATRE OF CLOSE QUARTERS

NOSTALGIA 2001.
Metropolitan Building, LIC. May 18-21.
Presented by URBAN ETC.

A loop of Abigail's voice reciting "I can fucking take it" is playing, while we stare down the audience, which I think is just perfect. Some kids I know, mostly girls, are winking at me as I stare hard into their eyes, slowing panning across the room. The gentlemen, I notice, tend to react with less smiley giggley awkwardness and more of the sour frowney sort. They will only endure our stares because they expect something fun to follow next.

In order to get to the party, I have to pass through a small room full of some sort of performance art chaos. There are performers in the middle of the room, blocking my way, and others standing around watching. I am not sure who is a performer and who an observer. As I attempt to pass through, one of the performers turns and stares intently at me. I stare back at him for a couple seconds.

In our ten cubic feet of "backstage" Luis peels off his reeking white plush snowman suit and I climb into it, while he returns outside to perform a scene as Wilhelm Reich. It is dripping with his sweat. Luckily, anonymous arms keep peeking through the curtain to hand me glasses of wine and beer. Inside the foam rubber snowman head, it is dark and wet. I cannot see anything through the mesh eyes in this low light. When I finally make my entrance I walk straight into a tangle of speaker wires from the musicians in the loft above. I reach out for balance and find far more bodies than I had anticipated. Hands grope at my legs from below, pulling and petting my plush legs.

I am curled up on the floor in this fabulous, super soft white fur. The snowman comes back in. Yay. I pet him. He comes and lies down beside me. I snuggle with him. Oh, wow. He leaves. Tommy gets with me under the "snow." He's rolling, too. We snuggle on the floor. The show ends. I leave with Tommy. I take a snowman mitten for a souvenir. We sleep at his house. I throw away the mitten.

My snowman character is running out of clever things to say. I attempt to return behind the backstage curtain. I discover instead the blinding light of the next room, where a different group of performers are dancing in matching party girl uniforms. My eyes adjust to the light a second before retreating back into the darkness (in this second I see one hundred heads turn on me, their eyes full of terror, glee, pretty much every reaction there is). Back in my home performance world I am blinder than before, cannot find the backstage curtain, cannot get through the masses of bodies. Finally, I lie down to rest. My snowman character exclaims, "I need to rest." Someone is stroking me all over. My snowman character exclaims, "you're making me hot." I begin to pet her in return ("I'm melting. . .") Somewhere, a new scene is beginning. Laughter from above. I wonder, am I still performing? I wonder, can't I just stay here on the floor? My snowman character stands up and takes off his snowman suit. My snowman character lies back on the floor with the eighteen year old girl on ecstasy. We watch the show.

Nick Jones
& Terri Coleman

Everything I know about Fluxus, I learned three days from now ago

It's impossible to say anything about Fluxus without saying nothing at all. A combination of several twentieth Century art movements — Dada, Futurists, Happenings — that began to blur conventional artistic structures, Fluxus was a cloud of bipolar artistic disciplines and medias that was born out of George Maciunas' AG Gallery in New York City in 1961.

While Fluxus was strongly influenced by these past avant gardes (both aesthetic and representation), it anticipated postmodernism by emphasizing event, performance, and medium fusion (or intermedia). Fluxus was characterized by four principals: an international, ever-shifting group of artists; anti-art (insofar as art is maintained as a privilege of high culture); its insistence on art as life/life as art; and its strong reliance on humor and irony.

"Anyone who thinks fluxus is serious, misses the point"

Al Hansen INTERVIEWING Al Hansen

but still misses the point"

"Anyone who thinks fluxus is not serious is closer to the point,

Initially, Fluxus was coined as a name by Maciunas for an experimental score, poetry, essay, prose magazine, which was based on a similar collection by the composer La Monte Young. This is important, as many of the early fluxist performances were inspired by the musical avant garde of the '50s, most importantly John Cage, who was seen by Maciunas as a collision of the noise and collage of the Futurist and the concrete and conceptualism of Dada.

Cage's emphasis on chance in the production of music and theatre can be seen in Fluxist performance which, along with action painting, highlighted creation rather than finished work — the act of painting versus the painting. Take for example Nam Jun Paik's *Zen for Head*, which was performed at one of the earliest flux festivals in Weisbaden, Germany.

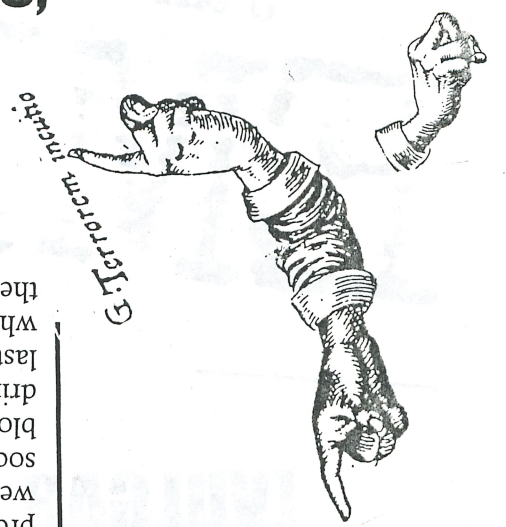
Following a score written by La Monte Young two years earlier (which gave the directions: "Draw a straight line and follow it"), Paik dipped his head into tomato juice and ink and, crawling backwards, dragged it from one end to the other of a long sheet of paper. Like *Zen for Head*, many performances were conducted through the instruction (or

the end of Fluxus. (Continued)
which is also the year most mark as lasted until approximately 1978, drinking vodka. These performances blow tubes or a 100 yard dash while soccer with a ping pong ball using were called Fluxolympics) such as pre-existing sports (these performances were humorous takes on the audience). Many later City, or the *Flux-Labyrinth* (a maze for Jun Paik's walking tours of New York performance. Take for example Nam directly a part of an ongoing Audience members became more instructions by individual artists. Fluxus was characterized by four principals: an international, ever-shifting group of artists; anti-art (insofar as art is maintained as a privilege of high culture); its insistence on art as life/life as art; and its strong reliance on humor and irony.

in its membership of artists.
for Fluxus to remain fluid and varied early Fluxivals, the Fluxkit allowed widely eccentric and diverse nature of earlier Fluxboxes. By maintaining the and *Fluxus 2* were anthologies of artist, Fluxkits (the *Fluxkit*, *Fluxus 1* were centered around a particular artist to artist. While most Fluxboxes artistic theory that varied widely from were concrete realizations of ideas and design). Inside each box, however, design (owing to Maciunas' graphic and relatively similar to each other in ensure audience/reader participation) These boxes were inexpensive (to and ordinary objects).

of individual art, poetry, film, games notable were the Fluxbox (collections scores, advertising, objects), but most many forms (magazine, books, event magazine). The publications took on original intention of Fluxus was as a on publishing (bearing in mind the Fluxus became increasingly focused until approximately 1964, whereby throughout Europe and New York carried out at several Fluxivals These direction performances were manipulation of traditional scores) of either incidental sound or the extramusical aspects of musical performance.

Everything I know about Fluxus, I learned three days ago from now



FIGMENT I: FLUXGLAM VOYAGE IN SEARCH OF THE REAL MACIUNAS

Paul Sharits. 1977/1986, 175 minutes, video Non*narrative in favor of an episodic (or idiotic) chonical-like "form."
Sat 23*Sun 24 at 4. Anthology Film Archives, 32 2nd Avenue. 505.5181

LISTINGS

ANTI*READING (#2)

Thanks to Loudmouth Collective, nothing like it. New work by Richard Kostelanetz, James Hoff, Ellie Ga, Joel Schlemowitz, Julien Poirier, Ryan Haley, Matvei Yankelevich, Marisol Martinez, Filip Marinovic.
Saturday June 23, 1:30 to 4pm.
TONIC, 107 Norfolk. Free.

SCHOOL for SALOMÉS

A SCIENCE PROJECT work*in* progress. Directed by Yelena Gluzman. 12 Performances.
June 27*July 14. 8pm*9:15pm.
chashama, 135 W. 42nd Street.
212.853.9623. \$15/\$10.

QUARTETT

The erotic Heiner Müller. Translated by Marc von Henning and directed by Gabriella Maione.
Wed-Sun, June 27*July 1 at 8, Sat at 2 & 8, Sun at 3. BAM, Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton St, Bkln.
718.636.4100.

THE ROBERT BECK MEMORIAL CINEMA

June 19: Rudy Burckhardt Mem'l.
26 June: THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN (Rarely Seen Films & Videos by Established & Emerging British Artists)
All programs on Tuesdays at 9pm at Collective Unconscious, 145 Ludlow St., www.rbmc.net, \$5

WHITE RAVEN

Robert Wilson and Phillip Glass together again. The opera was inspired by the adventures of 16th Century Portugese explorer Vasco da Gama. Montage, nonlinear, allegory. Tues, July 10-Sat July 14 at 8. New York State Theater, Lincoln Center. 875.5030. \$20-80.

THE GHOST SONATA

Ingmar Bergman directs Strindberg. Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden.
Wed-Sun, Jun 20-23 at 7:30pm, 24 at 3pm. Tix only at box office.
718.636.4100.



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