

J U I C E



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a dance and performance journal

(de plastico inmortal la rosa
barata atesorada), ¿seria acaso
injusto o loco que deseara
que no muriera el tampoco, o solo
muy poco a poco,
ni bajo el polvo ni
bajo la traza diminuta
de la mosca que a diario
nos visita, amor, y nos inquieta
con su revoloteo y su amenaza;
y asi durara y perdurara,
aunque a cambio de ser plastico,
un poco mas, o mucho mas,
el amor nuestro inagotable,
hasta el hueso duro de su edad de material
no reciclable, imperturbable el,
como si nada, y puro, con el paso
lento y largo
de los anos?

1989-1991

Rafael Castillo Zapata

This was performed in Venezuela by Miguel Issa as part of the Joven Choreografico Festival de Caracas, August 1994.

LUCY SEXTON LUCY SEXTON LUCY SEXTON LUCY SEXTON LUCY SEXTON LUCY SEXTON

It's noon and I'm sitting at my desk listening to Hole and trying to write something, maybe a letter to go with the tape I'm making for a friend in the hospital. As I'm looking for paper in the drawer, a picture slips out. It's a photo of my brother and sister and Miles, my sister's husband who died of leukemia 3 years ago. I'm completely overcome by the joy in the picture and how beautiful they all look. It was probably just a joke the person taking the picture made that's making them smile so hard, but it bowls me over just the same. **It unleashes an ocean of loss in me and all I can do for a few songs is sit and cry.**

Again and again and again I come back to Neil Greenberg's piece at the Kitchen (April 1994), the Not-About-AIDS-Dance. I gave it one of the three spontaneous (i.e., solo) standing ovations of my life. It was profound and funny and moving and intensely personal in such a way as to be earth-shatteringly political. **And it was about my favorite thing: dance. Pure elegant movement done by gorgeous committed dancers.** Simple and clear and incredibly strong, the piece leveled with the audience as it grappled with the issues: grief and death and life and the act of creating. Slides projecting text on the back wall let us know, among other things, that Neil's brother Jon died of AIDS last summer and that Neil is himself HIV positive. Reason enough for someone to be righteous in their anger and pain, one would think. But what is most striking and truly extraordinary is Neil's generosity and sense of inclusion with respect to us, the audience. **Grief is so overwhelming it's hard not to say this is mine and you can't feel it.** And there is Neil, talking about unbearable loss and hovering disease and not only letting us in but assuming we, his audience, are all dealing with it too, in our own lives, in our own ways. What a gift.

I still see Cunningham in Neil's work, in the best way. Not so much in the movement material, although it was obviously crucial in shaping his gangly "guy"

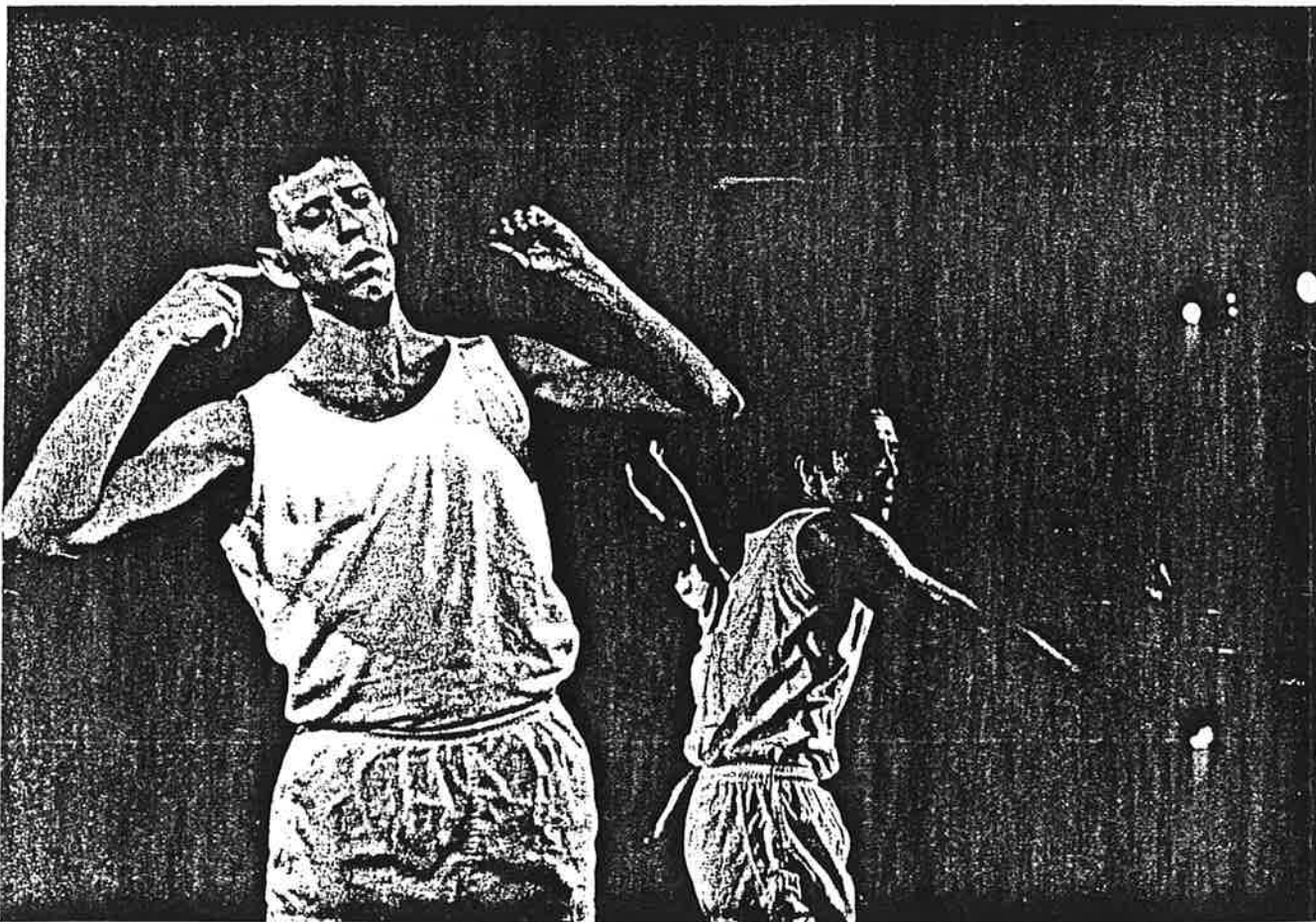


Photo by Tom Brazil

body into a dancer, but more in his way of putting things together. Short sections of dance coexist with very occasional snippets of a music score by Zeena Parkins, like someone turning on a radio for a few seconds every five or ten minutes. Although it is clearly information about specific dancers (as Ellen Barnaby dances a solo we learn her mother died during the making of the piece and she had to go home for the funeral), or specific references to the movement material (we are told which quartet was the first material Neil made after his brother's death), the text on the back wall has an exquisitely random quality in its relation to the dance. **I am, as viewer, left free to construct the intersection between the intimate information I'm being told and the balletically elegant movement being done in front of me.** I get excited by two women (Jo McKendry and Justine Lynch, I think) dancing in unison very close to the audience, their arms extended, legs flung upward against gravity only to clunk down again and again in beautifully awkward lunges. At the same time, or close to it, I'm learning that Lynch recently graduated from college and is worried about success (I remember being there) and McKendry choreographed an opera in her native Australia and got trashed by the critics (Yes, I know that place, too).

The anchor to the piece for me was the stunning Christopher Batenhorst. Interestingly for most of the piece we learn nothing personal about Christopher in the slides. He simply comes onto the stage and dances, holding branches and swords as he cuts through the space in clear lines. Energy and clarity of purpose emanate from his limbs and torso and head as they leap and lunge and jump in finely tuned concert. The text merely announces what material he is performing; "Christopher will now do his solo from Stage-Gun-Dance." I've seen Christopher Batenhorst dance in various people's work for about ten years now. Though I've met him socially on occasion, I know nothing specific about his life. I feel like I know him the way he wants to be known, through the language of the dances he performs.

He is a dance warrior; he trains and performs with commitment and integrity in whoever's work he's doing, and that points to the underlying hope implicit in Neil's piece.

Although loss and death and even the trauma of everyday life constantly threaten to crush, Neil and company continue to find the energy to push it off just enough to find room to breathe, to create, to love, to make this wonderfully abstract and ridiculous thing called dance. Towards the end of the piece a slide tells us what we knew already, that Christopher wants the dance to speak for itself.

I will never tire of seeing Neil Greenberg dance. He does dancey dance with a powerhouse, goofy, graceful body and a face that looks like it's explaining the most complicated things in the clearest possible way. The first time I remember seeing him dance is on the miniscule stage at the old Wah Wah Hut. It was a tiny box of a stage in the back room of the bar and Neil would do these huge dances on it. His head would be about five inches from the ceiling and his arms and legs would just barely miss the walls, but he would dance intensely and energetically and always "full out." At the Kitchen in its cavernous space, its black brick walls exposed and lit with stark atmospheric beauty by Michael Stiller, the effect is somehow the same. The space doesn't seem big enough to contain this man with his endless limbs and penetrating face as he moves through it and down dangerously close to the audience.

AS THE DANCE CONTINUES, A TIMELINE OF DEATH MARCHES ACROSS THE BACK WALL. The text keeps making note of friends dying during the making of the piece, "At this point in the piece my friend Ron Vawter died." The effect is at once to bring attention to the devastation taking place in this community in this time of plague, and to let us in on the intimate process of making a dance. All I could think of was the enormity of the losses carried into the rehearsal room and the insistent challenge to go on creating. At one point Neil stands downstage and lifts his hands in limp positions to either side of his face and closes his eyes. The text

says, "This is how my brother Jon looked in a coma." I thought of my brother-in-law Miles on life support with his eyes taped shut. **I HAVE NEVER HAD A PLACE FOR IT TILL NOW.** Neil stands there portraying this awful image without being morose, without reducing it to sentimentality, but simply and very personally acknowledging its presence within him. It is painful and powerful. **I am moved by Neil's courage and intelligence and grateful for his existence and his ability to make dances. In doing so he locates hope in a landscape of loss.**

- Lucy Sexton

LUCY SEXTON has worked with Annie lobst for 10 years as DanceNoise.

NEIL GREENBERG WILL ENCORE HIS NOT-ABOUT-AIDS-DANCE AT THE KITCHEN, DECEMBER 13-17, 1994 AT 8 P.M.

Photo by Tom Brazil

