

The Kitchen

Center for video, music, dance, performance, film, and literature

Winter 2016 Season

Winter 2016

“From Minimalism into Algorithm”

Exhibition

January 7–April 2

Taking place in The Kitchen theater and gallery spaces throughout the 2015-2016 season, “From Minimalism into Algorithm” sets contemporary and historical painting, sculpture, performance, and musical composition in counterpoint, proposing a new through-line for art-making during the past half century. Organized collaboratively by The Kitchen and participating artists, the exhibition takes up the legacy of Minimalist art and composition during the 1960s and 1970s—whose seriality was understood by artists and critics to correlate with the era’s industrial production and increased weight placed on the presence of the individual—as a precedent for reconsidering work by a younger generation for whom serial repetition now corresponds more directly with digital technology and the reconfiguring of our encounters with physical space through networked communication.

Dirty Looks

February 8. 8pm. FREE

Dirty Looks, a bi-coastal platform for queer experimental film, video and performance, returns to The Kitchen to screen *A One Man Show*, Grace Jones’s remarkable concert video, introduced by artist Rashaad Newsome. In 1982, Jones collaborated with photographer Jean-Paul Goude, translating their iconic and trailblazing album artwork for the new, home video format. A thrilling showcase for the former disco diva-cum-New Wave chanteuse, the tape combines rock ribaldry with avant-garde theater, tearing asunder racial and gender stereotypes. Jones writes of the tape in her memoirs, “It was like the invention of a new genre, related to the musical, to opera, to circus, to cinema, to documentary, to the art gallery... It was about rejecting normal, often quite sentimental and conventionally crowd-pleasing ways of projecting myself as a black singer and female entertainer, because those ways had turned into clichés, which kept me pent up in a cage. I wanted to jolt the adult world that is traditionally left bland by white men, to shatter certain kinds of smugness through performance and theater.”

George Lewis

The Kitchen Improvises, 1976-2016

February 9. 8pm. \$20.

To celebrate the release of the archival CD *The Kitchen Improvises: 1976-1983*, George Lewis curates an evening of performances inspired by that moment of particular hybridity in the downtown music scene.

Dawn of Midi

February 10. 8pm. \$15.

Dawn of Midi is a Brooklyn-based acoustic ensemble made up of Aakaash Israni from India on double bass, Amino Belyamani from Morocco on piano and Qasim Naqvi from Pakistan on drums. With their critically acclaimed 2015 album *Dysnomia* (Erased Tapes), the band abandoned improvisation in favor of highly precise composition, utilizing sophisticated rhythmic structures from North and West African folk traditions to weave a sonic tapestry of trance-inducing grooves—a singular sound Israni has deemed “both musically futuristic and sonically vintage.” Organized by Lumi Tan.

Liz Santoro and Pierre Godard

For Claude Shannon

February 18-20. 8pm. \$15.

In search of another relay [1] between text and movement, *For Claude Shannon* uses grammatical dependencies between words in a statement [2] from computer science pioneer Claude Elwood Shannon to recover a linguistic structure that, in turn, generates inexhaustible possibilities for choreographic sequences. Twenty-four discreet movement “atoms” for arms and legs serve as a movement lexicon from which a fixed number of inputs is randomly chosen each time the piece is performed. For each performance, dancers must assemble and learn one particular choreographic outcome among the billions possible that cannot be rehearsed. They rely on the intimacy they have acquired with the fixed linguistic structure of the text and the intimacy they have acquired with one another. Engaging the resources of both their working and long-term memory, uncovering to the audience the pronouncement of the unknown, concealing the predicaments of entropy, they relentlessly switch circuits. Organized by Matthew Lyons as part of “From Minimalism into Algorithm.”

The Kitchen presents

Quicksand

Thursday–Saturday at 7pm

January 28–30 and February 4–6

Quicksand is made possible with support from Howard Gilman Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Joseph and Joan Cullman Foundation for the Arts, The Cowles Charitable Trust, The Jerome Robbins Foundation, and The Harkness Foundation for Dance; and in part by public funds from New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, and National Endowment for the Arts.



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QUICKSAND

Music and Libretto

ROBERT ASHLEY

Choreography

STEVE PAXTON

Orchestra Composition

TOM HAMILTON

Lighting

DAVID MOODEY

Performers

MAURA GAHAN and JURIJ KONJAR

Stage Manager

ANNIE ARTHUR

Set and Costume Design

STEVE PAXTON

Set and Costume Construction

ANDREA POE

MAURA GAHAN

Producer

MIMI JOHNSON

Quicksand furthers Robert Ashley's distinct and innovative investigation of the American language in a musical setting. Using his signature blend of speech and song, it tells the story of a composer who has been coerced by a Government Agency (the "Company") to serve as a low-level "courier" (or spy). Traveling with his wife to an unnamed South Asian country run by a military dictatorship, he becomes involved with plans to overthrow the government through his close friendship with two tour guides. With the assistance of four American mercenaries, the composer participates in the capture and imprisonment of the country's leaders, and the destruction of the torture operation by which the dictatorship has maintained its power.

The novel *Quicksand* was published by Burning Books in 2011 (burningbooks.org), and in 2012 Robert Ashley asked his friends Steve Paxton, Tom Hamilton and David Moodey to collaborate with him in bringing the "opera-novel" to fruition.

The opera is in three acts with an intermission between Acts II and III at 8:45 p.m.

Steve Paxton: Notes on the Choreography

As a performer/improviser with Lisa Nelson, I used two of Ashley's early works. One was dense with text, one was essentially mumbling. "The Park" and "The Backyard" from his *Private Parts* comprised the soundtrack for *PA RT* (my 1978 work with Nelson). *Automatic Writing* — with some other inclusions—was the soundtrack for our *Night Stand* (2004).

Ashley considered his proposals operas. With the two elements of *Private Parts*, he spun a tale of two individuals, each deeply involved in their own private worlds; the texts included their physical circumstances plus thoughts they had; allusions, digressions, memories, interests. The audiences for our performance couldn't grasp all of it...the dance got in the way. This resulted in the heard images surfacing throughout the dance, hearing and seeing split in two. Lisa and I performed *PA RT* from 1978 to 2001. I loved the support of the narrative's twists and different levels, the musical atmosphere coming to prominence, then becoming background again.

Automatic Writing was a very different score. Two voices predominate, Ashley's and Mimi Johnson's. Ashley's voice has been musically altered into indecipherability. Mimi Johnson whispers translations in French. It

seems to be a situation of a man in existential distress with a soothing companion. It is rather the opposite of *Private Parts*; his voice without thoughts, allusions, interests, digressions, memories. It was far more challenging to perform with, being a constant and barely inflected present. Together the two scores demonstrate the breadth of thought in Ashley's approach to opera.

A thought that Bob "had the odd talent of remaining still as his music and text swirled" was in my mind as I accepted Ashley's invitation to choreograph *Quicksand*. But what I found was a very different approach. The text is a story of spies, in an unnamed far-Eastern country, and a revolutionary event. The music is a background of delicately modulated electronic chords. This is Ashley in the guise of a classic noire author, yet another departure from his previous work. The text for *Quicksand* doesn't swirl much.

This is a first commission for an opera for me.

Dance within operas was frequently in the form of divertissements, not necessarily linked to the plot. I used this approach, with some references to Ashley himself, the author, and to a rather romantic connection he mentions in the text. In the main, though, I used the dance as relief from the ongoing three-hour text.

I felt that the divertissements should not overwhelm the text. They tend to be low-key, fairly brief, and occasional. They color and populate the text, provide another layer of activity to the proceedings, but aim to service the atmosphere, and not challenge the ongoing narrative. Ashley left us some general directions, mostly to enable a separation between the elements of dance, text, and light. He obviously did not anticipate illustration of the elements of the text. Nor would he have enlisted me if that had been his desire. I only wish he had lived to see this production.

Tom Hamilton: Notes on Making the Orchestra

I joined the Robert Ashley ensemble in 1990, with a background as a composer and performer of electronic music and as an audio producer and engineer. We began by focusing on the electronic orchestra for Bob's opera *Improvement (Don Leaves Linda)*. In the 25 years that followed I collaborated in the making of orchestras in nine operas and many shorter pieces. As Bob always held innovation and change in

the highest regard, there are formal designs and gestures that were very different from one piece to the next, and often we made up the studio techniques on the spot, adjusting the elements empirically until they sounded right within the intended context. The processes that we evolved in those 25 years certainly informed those that I used in preparing this present music.

Quicksand went through a long gestation and actually two different versions. After an initial attempt at recording a vocal ensemble piece that was strictly metered and very stylized, Bob decided just to tell the story himself as fast as he could read it. He was aiming for a kind of run-on vocal style and encouraged me to edit out as much silence between the words as I could manage. He also wanted to break away from his former practice of measuring the orchestra in bars and beats, and to break away from conventional musical time altogether. The music was to be paced strictly by durations of sounds within a harmonic scheme, and I was charged with making an orchestra that fulfilled that plan. I fashioned a demo orchestra for Act I that tested these ideas in a kind of homogenous setting and played it for him in January of 2014, the last time we saw each other.

The actual musical material is based on the 16-chord sequence used to structure Ashley's earlier opera *eL/Aficionado* (1993). In *Quicksand*, those chords are used in two ways: First in their original linear sequence, heard as kind of a harmonic cloud that changes with each of the scenes in each act; then, as isolated groups of chords in a different order and of different durations, superimposed on the original harmony and sounded by timbres that change at their own rate. The result is an unstable harmonic landscape, never fully grounded in any familiar context—a patch of musical quicksand.

David Moodey: A Note on the Lighting

It was an honor and privilege to work with Robert Ashley. Over the course of the last 15 years I worked on every new opera that Bob wrote and produced. He entrusted me with designing both the lighting and the settings. As an artist, because of the creative freedom he gave me, I was able to grow and expand my capabilities. We became close friends. We talked about his works, his goals with each new piece, the state of art and life. My craft and my life were enriched by his presence and our collaboration.

Bob never told his collaborators exactly what to do; he allowed them to respond to his work with their own. With *Quicksand*, he provided structural guidelines—a place to start. In my case he left me free to create lighting that helps the audience connect to the opera visually. The libretto tells the story in a more or less linear progression. I don't have to tell the audience whether it's day or night, indoors or out. What I hope I have accomplished is the creation of a light environment that, along with Steve's choreography, enhances the story's emotional content.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Steve Paxton was born in 1939 in Phoenix, Arizona. Paxton's work has recently been presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Tanz im August, Berlin (2013); Spanski Borci Cultural Centre, Ljubljana (2014); Venice (2014); and Tanzwerkstatt Europa, Munich (2014). In 2013, Dia Art Foundation presented *Night Stand* (2004), a work by Paxton and Lisa Nelson, at Dia:Chelsea in New York City, and in 2014 performances of early work and a recent solo at Dia:Beacon. In 2014 the Dance Biennale, Venice, awarded Paxton the "Golden Lion" for Lifetime Achievement; and in 2015 he received a New York Dance and Performance Award (or "Bessie") for Lifetime Achievement in Dance. He lives in Vermont.

Tom Hamilton maintains overlapping careers in audio production and music composition. Since 1990, Hamilton has been a member of the composer Robert Ashley's touring opera ensemble, performing sound processing and mixing in both recordings and concerts. His audio production can be found in over 100 CD releases of new and experimental music. Hamilton has also composed and performed electronic music for over 40 years; his work with electronic music originated in the late-60s era of analog synthesis. He is a Fellow of the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, and participated in a residency at its center in Umbria in 2005. Hamilton has released 15 CDs of his own music; his CD *London Fix* received an award in the Prix Ars Electronica, and a 2-CD set of his electronic music of the 1970s was named one of *The Wire's* Top 50 Reissues of 2010. Hamilton was the co-director of the 2004 Sounds Like Now festival, and he co-produced the *Cooler in the Shade/Warmer* by the Stove new music series for 14 years.

David Moodey has collaborated with Robert Ashley since 1999, most recently designing for the remounting of Ashley's *That Morning Thing* at The Kitchen and *Crash* at the Whitney Museum of American Art and Roulette. He is the principal designer and production manager for Molissa Fenley, Robert Ashley, and the Joffrey Ballet School, NYC. His design for Fenley's *State of Darkness* earned him a Bessie award for lighting design. He has also designed and toured numerous shows for Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parsons and their company, Big Dance Theater; for David Neumann's *feedforward* at Dance Theatre Workshop; and for Peter Boal's three seasons at the Joyce Theater in New York. He is a member of the United Scenic Artists, Local 829 as well as the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local One.

Maura Gahan is a freelance dancer, puppeteer and painter. She has been combining dance, puppetry and objects in performance since 2000, while earning a BFA in Dance Performance and Choreography with minors in Art and Theater from Ohio University. For over ten years, Gahan has worked with Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater touring Europe, Asia and North America building and performing with puppets, masks, music, clowning, opera and choreographing street dances. In 2008 she collaborated with Schumann to transform Luberland National Dance Company into a touring, community-based political dance form. Gahan began studying Steve Paxton's *Material for the Spine* in 2010 and Lisa Nelson's *Tuning Score* in 2012. Gahan also works for Vermont Fish and Wildlife while living in the mountains of Vermont.

Jurij Konjar was born in Ljubljana in 1978. He trained in judo and practiced singing from an early age, then began dancing in ballroom competitions. In 2007 he suffered a head injury that shifted the focus of his work towards the potential of the present moment. An in-depth observation of Steve Paxton's *Goldberg Variations* video triggered what became an ongoing improvisation practice. He has been working with Paxton since 2010.

Robert Ashley (1930-2014), one of the leading American composers of the post-Cage generation, is particularly known for his work in new forms of opera. In the 1960s, during his tenure as its director, the ONCE Festival in Ann Arbor presented most of the decade's pioneers of

the performing arts. With the legendary ONCE Group, he developed his first large-scale operas. Along with Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma and David Behrman, he formed the Sonic Arts Union, a group that turned conceptualism toward electronics. Throughout the 1970s, he directed the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, and produced his first opera for television, the 14-hour *Music with Roots in the Aether*, based on the work and ideas of seven influential American composers. In the early 1980s The Kitchen commissioned Ashley's *Perfect Lives*, the opera for television that is widely considered the precursor of "music-television."

Quicksand is produced by Performing Artservices, Inc. and is presented by The Kitchen.

Winter 2016, continued

The Glenn Branca Ensemble

The Third Ascension

February 23 at 7pm and 9pm, February 24 at 7pm. \$25.

Glenn Branca conducts *The Third Ascension*, a new world premiere for guitar, bass, and drums with Reg Bloor, Arad Evans, and Owen Weaver. This piece is the latest development of Branca's influential 1981 work *The Ascension*, in which he experiments with resonances generated by alternate tunings for multiple electric guitars.

Andrew Ondrejcek

ELIJAH GREEN

March 10-19. 8pm. \$20.

Andrew Ondrejcek continues work on an adaptation of influential Swedish playwright August Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. The play presents the scenario of a divine visitation into the contemporary tedium of the everyday human. Despite unremarkable existences, the characters' stories layer and culminate in a portrait of the interconnectivity of all humans, with each individual both the center of the world and part of something they cannot comprehend.

DD Dorvillier

Extra Shapes

March 25-26, 8pm; March 26, 5pm; March 28-29, 8pm. \$15.

Extra Shapes is a performance for lunging figures, a musical concert for loudspeakers, and a light show. Created by DD Dorvillier, in collaboration with composer Sébastien Roux and lighting designer Thomas Dunn, *Extra Shapes* occupies a rectangular space divided into three horizontal bands, featuring sound in the front, light in the middle, and dance in the back. Picture a slice of Neapolitan ice cream with its three separate bands—strawberry (sound), vanilla (light), chocolate (movement)—then rotate the plate to view each of its sides. In *Extra Shapes*, the idea is to present the three mediums simultaneously but separately, and to propose a new way of experiencing and thinking about abstraction in a live situation. Organized by Matthew Lyons as part of "From Minimalism into Algorithm."

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