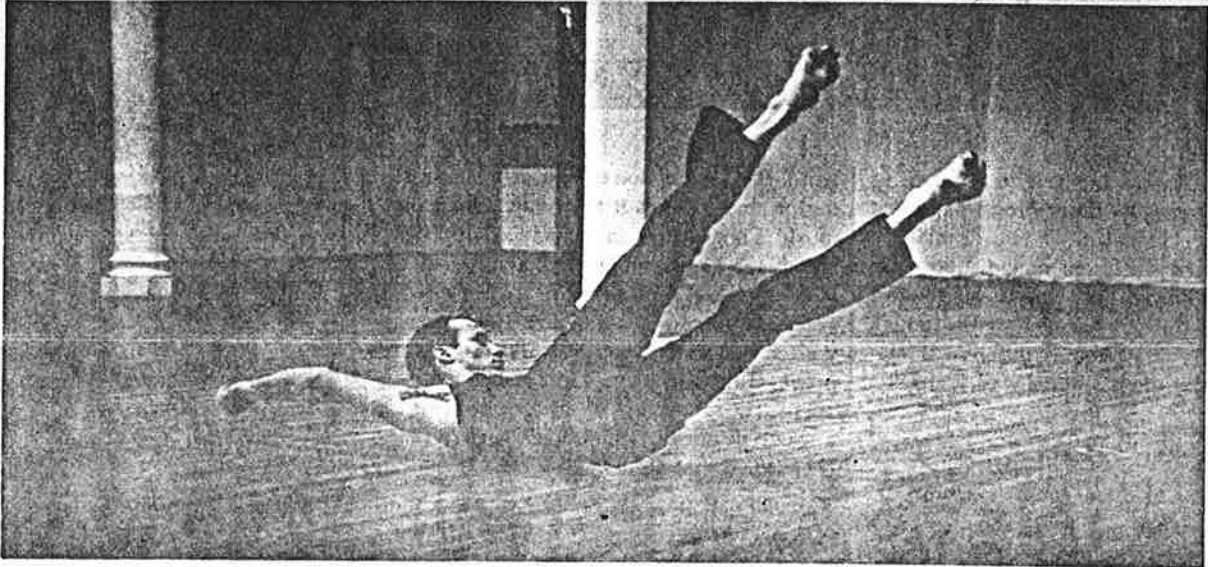


DANCE DAY AT THE KITCHEN

Robert Coe



The pleasure of the Kitchen's eight hour downtown dance sampler was the chance to discover the shape of a seventies artistic legacy in what had seemed, particularly at mid-decade, to be little more than kinesthetic afterthought. Twenty-four artists, most of whom emerged in New York during the decade, were given twenty minutes each to perform, a format ideal for reconsidering the predictability and designing preciousness to which some people think the experimental scene has succumbed. The sheer variety of

CHARLES DENNIS

the work proved the biggest surprise, clarifying as it did a continuing impetus to make it new and see what has been made—one homiletic sixties strategy still capable of fostering integrity and innovation.

There was familiar expressionist/experiential work, toeing the line between doing and being, dancing and behaving; work exploring the

How and the When which remain at the bottom line of the downtown aesthetic. Along with Christina Svane's brash tomfoolery and Charles Dennis's schizoid Paxtonian collaboration with found-objects-musician George Cartwright, the inimitable Simone Forti transformed the Kitchen into an imaginary Sahara, moving like a scorpion, a camel, a scarab, to the shrieks and howls of Peter Van Riper's saxophones. (I hope I have the animals right.) Yoshiko Chuma screened her black and white film, *The Girl Can't Help It*,

done with Jacob Burckhardt. It exploded the $E = MC^2$ theory of natural and human objects, in a style reminiscent of the old films of Neil Casady on amphetamine.

The emphasis throughout the day and into the evening was on solos: 14 of them, with 6 works for couples and only 4 group pieces. Nearly half the dances were performed in silence, appropriate to the almost universal formal privatism. The exception to this and any other rule was Kenneth King as a prancing Jules Verne of *Space City*, signalling with gesture and a taped message his future for the art in outer space and New York City, not necessarily in that order.

Karole Armitage of the Merce Cunningham Company transformed herself into a primitive tool, essaying random, abstract tasks with and around an assortment of household, urban and industrial objects. Unlike the Grand



SUSAN ESCHELBACH, JANA JENSEN, CHARLES MOULTON

Union's seductive alchemy, Armitage kept her chores and violent phrasing utterly mundane. Molissa Fenley's *Boca Raton*, performed with Elizabeth Streb to drums and a repetitive rock riff, also sought a mesh with a rawer energy. Surprisingly, it was one of the few works which attempted, with fitful success, to organize itself into a spacious, repetitive floor design. Nancy Lewis did her familiar ironic dancery ditzing around, negotiating personas, tossing them out, and ending up with an almost poignant dance about doing what she was doing there: performing. A pleasing discovery was Deborah Gladstein, whose liquid, sensuous solo was one of the only pure examples of what seemed in context an almost self-forgetful quality. The protean Cesc Gelabert, on the other hand, strung together *enchainements* as if they were amino acids, with facial expressions ranging from terror and amusement to benign apology.

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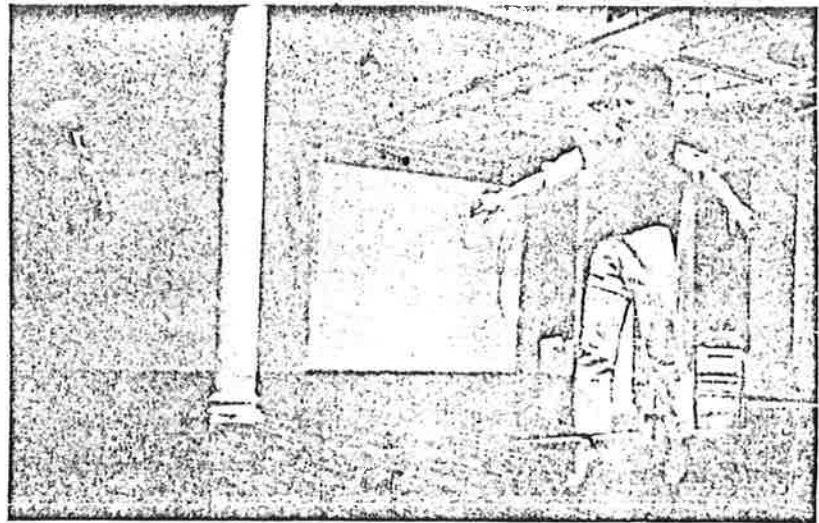
Allowing for mistakes remains a cardinal downtown enthusiasm, a chance to see how things get put together—though it's an idea which can be taken too far.



NANCY LEWIS



CHRISTINA SVANE



SIMONE FORTI

There was a widespread concern with explicit gesture and with games . . . games useful for making, thinking, and experiencing the dances themselves.

ing, and experiencing the dances themselves. Dana Reitz has become a master of gestural dance. *Steps* is no new direction for her but her richest, most sophisticated work to date: thinking with her hands and feet, she plied the space softly as if it were a loom. Nancy Topf traced invisible lines and squiggles; Mary Overlie and Wendell Beavers accumulated mundane semaphoric postures and repeated them, like characters trapped in a Robbe-Grillet novel. Charlie Moulton, Janna Jensen and Susan Eshelbach stood in a line and rapidly passed three balls between them. They kept dropping the balls. "This is a bitch," Moulton commented. "We wanna work it out, OK?" Allowing for mistakes remains a cardinal downtown enthusiasm, a chance to see how things get put together—though it's an idea which can be taken too far.

There were ritualistic, meditative works by

Ellen Webb and by David Woodberry, with Sara Vogeler. Robyn Brentano premiered a film of Andy de Groat's alert dancing in a seraglio of hanging yarn, to music and poetry by Michael Galasso and Christopher Knowles, respectively. And there were academic, ersatz classical works by choreographers uninterested in resisting or transforming the stigma of the dancery, though in general the leotard costume appears to have survived its recent desuetude. Choreographer Satoru Shimazaki fetishized Junko Kikushi's big extensions in a dance lithely performed but uncomfortably bizarre and rarified. Grethe Holby's disastrous sextet to a metronome forced non-balletic dancers through repetitive classroom exercises, like some postponed project of Dr. Coppélius. Holby may have hoped to both withhold and expose the secrets of classicism, but the concept deteriorated out of sheer technical in-

THE KITCHEN

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adequacy. It was not a kind trick to play on her dancers.

Conceptual work by theatre/dance people like Peter Rose, Joan Strausbaugh, Anne Hammel and Alice Eve Cohen was most compelling in the instance of Pooh Kaye and Elaine Hartnett, wearing only synthetic pink hula-skirts and building a jungle of twigs to inhabit. They sat morosely, chattered their teeth, and shook their asses at the sky, like degenerate savages out of Levi-Strauss. Johanna Boyce presented a work in progress with her sixteen member troupe, dressed in colorful all-American polyester, like a class reunion at Willowbrook. Singing their names in round to the tune of "Hey Ho Nobody Home," they got into a clothes fight and ended up in their underwear. One had to have a high tolerance for the obvious.

The eight hour day was broken into four sets, with Chinese firedrills around the block to clear the house for newcomers—a chance to get some fresh air and pick up on the Superbowl scores. Back inside, the changing light made the lighting troublesome, and too many dancers insisted on working in the distant end of the Kitchen loft. But in general, downtown dance appears to be sustaining a remarkable range of movement possibilities into the eighties.

Robert Coe has written for the *Village Voice* and *Soho Weekly News*. Photographs by Nathaniel Tilleston.

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HALEAKALA, INC.
59 WOOSTER
NEW YORK,
NEW YORK
10012
(212) 925-3615