

THE KITCHEN

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The new content of LUCINDA CHILDS'S dances might be anger. I might be wrong. When dancing is as basic, repetitive, and austere as hers is, you tend (or I do) to become interested in how the performer accomplishes it.

Childs strides crisply out into the middle of the Kitchen to begin *Plaza* (1977). She's wearing dark pants and a soft gray chiffon blouse. *Plaza* is about a diagonal. Childs works on one end of it for a while, walking and about-facing, walking and about-facing. With her arms, she makes a counterpoint, an argument with the brisk feet. She crosses her arms and swings them open vehemently the way some people do when they're saying "no" very firmly. "No admittance." "And no backtalk." She flings one arm loosely down and lets it swing up into the air; two arms.

She makes a chain of little turning steps to the other end of the diagonal and works there for a while. Then back again to the starting point. The implicit area of the corners and the time spent there vary, as do the lengths of the connecting chains. Her beautiful, clear-featured face wears a severe expression. Her shoes make two noises—one for the stride, one for the turn. After a while, you can hear her breathing. After a while, you imagine that she's trying to get rid of her arms.

Childs's group works are often so patterned in path and rhythms that I find myself counting them. In her solos, the materials are as visible, but the ways in which she's exploring them less apparent. You never know exactly what she will do next, but you take it for granted that it will be a new combination of elements you know and that it will differ very slightly from the preceding phrase.

Katema (1978) advances and retreats from

the part of the audience seated on the north side of the Kitchen. It has a slightly less even rhythm than *Plaza*, and Childs performs with the same frosty, businesslike concentration; but a little less aggressiveness. *Katema*, among its strides and military-drill turns, has a daring turn on one leg. Childs really drops her weight into this and pushes her hips forward; her raised foot is so close to the leg she's standing on that she almost appears to have tripped herself. But she recovers easily from this minor bout with the drastic, sometimes even turning again, before she backs up along her line. And starts again.

Childs's work in progress is performed to (or with) music by Philip Glass. George Andoniadis plays it on an electric piano. In the clear, bright tumult of music, you hear repeating patterns edging in and out of step with each other. It's as if a phrase (a) and another (b) play together for a while, then (a) changes into (c); while (b) and (c) are playing, (c) marches up from the bass, and (b) leaves. Childs dances along a north-south line and a connecting east-west line. She has changed her chiffon top for a dark T-shirt, and given herself more arduous tasks. The small hops and jumps and runs and turns that would seem relaxed and easy in the context of a hopscotch game acquire the status of an ordeal when they're repeated for such a long time without rests.

On some level, perhaps Childs is relaxed. She has chosen to deal—thoroughly—with plainness and with managed dailiness. She doesn't stylize her gestures to the extent of trying to make them look the same each time they happen. What interests me about Childs and excites the people who like her work more than I do is, I think, the tension between the humble bases of her movement material, the sophisticated treatment she gives it, and the elegance and severity of her delivery.

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