

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music

Creative Inattention

Robb Baker

The Original Lou and Walter Story

Jill Kroesen

Franklin Furnace

The first time I saw Jill Kroesen perform I didn't realize what was going on. Not till months later.

It was in the old offices of the *Soho News*, down the street at 59 Spring. Jill was our proofreader — our only proofreader in those days, and one of the better ones we've had. At any rate, that Monday night she showed up in a man's suit (not too unusual that, for she usually wore pants and a man's shirt) and with a tiny little mustache drawn on her upper lip, with a black grease pencil perhaps.

Jill lived nearby, and she'd drop by the office occasionally with announcements for poetry readings she was giving around town ("it's sort of like Patti Smith, but different") and a fascinating little collage magazine (that's the only way I can think to describe it) that she'd pasted together.

I didn't see Jill actually perform again until late February this year at the Kitchen, when she and a dozen or so people presented a performance piece called *Stanley Oil and His Mother; A Systems Portrait of the Western World*. I went with an old flame, dreams of reconciliation dancing in my head; he got hit with a chair halfway through the performance and left. So much for that.

I stayed for the whole two-and-a-half hours plus, and was by turns very bored and extremely fascinated. The piece had a predictable, repetitive structure that after a while, like one of Bob Wilson's marathon pieces, causes you to lie back

and quit listening or watching the way you usually do. But what seems like inattention (even conscious suspension of attention) is really just letting yourself open to another level of attention — experiencing performance on a totally different plane. I guess it's a little like being stoned. You get rid of the same preconceptions and expectations.

Stanley Oil is a materialistic history of civilization, with Kroesen (Stanley Oil) as God manifested (Jesus, Joan of Arc, Alexander, Attila the Hun) and Michael Cooper as God divine (Stanley's therefore androgynous mother). Everyone else is divided into Kings, Waiters and Beggars (or capitalist bosses, bourgeois flunkies and the proletariat, if you will), each assigned to various countries in each of the eight central acts of the piece (Ancient Civilization, Middle Ages, 18th Century, etc.), and all squabbling among themselves and with each other for land, apples, temples, nuts and bolts, and (ultimately) oil.

Sometimes this is very funny (like when Kroesen/Stanley says, "My friend just died and I'm his friend who knows all about what he meant. My name is Paul.") and sometimes it's just silly and tedious. The performers emote in a wide variety of styles, from high ham to low drone. Amateur, my friend kept mumbling before he got caught in one of the territorial imperatives and exited.

But the amateurishness was part of what was so engaging. I was a little reminded of the ingenuousness that a theatrical company like Hot Peaches has at its best — a kind of simplistic trashing of any old (or new) ideas of what performance art has to be.

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