

MOBIUS NEWSLETTER

VOL. 2 NO. 5 MARCH/APRIL 1985

Mobius Performing Group's new piece, Time Against Time, opens Friday, March 1st, for a three week run. The work is slowly falling into place, along with the main elements of the visual image. Thanks to the persistent phone calls of Lauri Liverman, we've located a source of 1000 lbs. of bones!

If you intend to see this performance, I'd advise you to plan your time carefully (ha ha). The audience seating is limited to 25 swivel chairs in the center of the performance. Come sooner, rather than later -- so we won't have to turn anyone away.

PLEASE NOTE that there will be a PREVIEW of Time Against Time on Thursday, February 28. Tickets will be HALF PRICE.

TIME AGAINST TIME

MOBIUS PERFORMING GROUP

Directed by Marilyn Arsem

Preview February 28

Performances March 1 - 16

To generate new pieces, I keep a notebook and I have a lot of ideas in it. They may be phrases or images. Many are just a visual image or a particular concern. Time Against Time works with simultaneous realities, which is an idea that I've wanted to work with for at least five years, and probably longer. I'll write something in my journal and think it's a new idea, and then I'll go back and read the old ones and discover that I've thought about it and forgotten about it, and thought about it again. I have certain images that I've been trying for years to figure out how to put in a performance.

As a piece takes shape, generally I get the image or concern first, the staging or structure second, and the content about two days before it opens! By "content" I mean what actually gets done to play out the concern. In Time Against Time, there's a concern about how you decide to spend the limited time you have and how you are going to

prioritize it, but -- how do we actually represent that in a performance? What do we use, what activities? The staging will be on two sides of the room, with the audience on swivel chairs in the middle, and other elements outside the room. What the audience will have to do is decide what part of the piece they're going to actually watch. I work with an audience to try to create a situation that requires them to experience the theme of the work directly -- so that what they do is a direct experience of what it's about.

After I know what the basic ideas and the staging are, I will have a sense about what the performance is going to feel like to the viewer. And then at some point I decide, well, I might as well go ahead and try to do it! I've spent a lot of time this fall talking with the rest of the Mobius company about different ideas about time, to try to collect everyone's ideas. Then I cast it, and it's a little hard to tell people, "Here's this piece that doesn't exist yet, and you're going to provide the material for it. And I need people who are fairly obsessed with the knowledge that their time is limited,

and that they can't do everything that they want." Then, having chosen people to work on Time Against Time, we spent the first couple of weeks just doing images about time, with certain themes. I gave them assignments: juggling time, performing an impossible task, making a time line of their lives, as some examples. They could bring in anything they wanted to work with to do the images. I advised them not to use a lot of talking, and I wanted it to be visual, not pantomimed. I wanted them to use real objects. This is all really a kind of very broad research.

Now it's a matter of selecting activities that can be manipulated in certain ways having to do with time. We're probably going to use techniques that we've worked on for a long time, in repetition and fragmentation and transformation. We will abstract sections of the performance, with results such as isolating and heightening a certain behavior. What this performance will probably be, will have a lot to do with how six people spend an hour and a half of their time; about the process of using time.

SOUND ART AT MOBIUS: PART 3

JEAN-PAUL CURTAY AND MARC BATTIER

SLOW/FAST TRANS by Jean-Paul Curtay and Marc Battier

Performances March 22 and 23

Free Public Lectures: Jean-Paul Curtay at Payne Hall,
Harvard University, March 20 at 7:00 p.m.

Marc Battier at Mobius, March 21 at 7:00 p.m.

Free Workshop: Curtay and Battier at Mobius, March 24 at
3:00 p.m.

(Jean-Paul Curtay is a multimedia artist who has become internationally known for his "body sound art" performances. Long interested in concrete poetry and the evolution of modern poetry toward pure sound, Curtay has given over 200 performances of his distinctive vocal/body sound explorations in performance centers throughout North America and Europe.

Marc Battier's compositions for tape, tape and instruments and live electronics have been played throughout Europe, the Middle East and North America. His influence and reputation internationally in the field of computer music has grown steadily in recent years. In 1979 he joined the teaching staff at IRCAM, Paris.

In comments taken from a telephone interview, Curtay and Battier describe Slow/Fast Trans, a new collaboration to be premiered at Mobius, and comment on their means of working together.)

SLOW/FAST TRANS has as its theme the emergence of a Transformation Era, centered on self-realization and social harmonization, appearing after the Industrial and Information Eras. The performance will be a series of pieces generated by various techniques of computer treatment of the voice: accumulation, dephasing, phases vocoder, comb filtering and detuning.

Curtay: The idea is that, in some books and in some instances in institutions, and in people and in groups, there's the emergence of a new era. I think it's a trend that starts to be visible all over the Western world. The first era was the Industrial Era, where we had inventions, technology, which would allow products to be multiplied and multiplied, with very limited feedback of the people. Then we had the Information Era -- a society more with TV and with computers and communications, more and more churning out lots of information, with also very little feedback from people. What's going on now, apparently, is a push for highly selective modes of the products and the information, according to new needs, human needs, self-realization for instance, harmonization of social groups and international tensions. There is an urge for much more intense feedback on the production and distribution/dispatching of products and data. That's what I call the emergence of the Era of Transformation.

ABOUT THEIR COLLABORATION (Curtay): It's an interaction, I think, at many levels. There is Marc and there is me and there is the machine. I am very unfamiliar with the machine at the start, so Marc is the person who is there, fiddling with the patches and the buttons. Then to demonstrate the particular capabilities of the machine, he asks me to do some vocal things. I use either improvised material or planned material, I have themes in my head and so on. It's continuous

feedback in between Marc, the machine, and me, because he tells me what kind of vocal material would be interesting here and there, and then we both get started on a certain basis and build the piece. I think we're both, in the process, performers and composers: Marc performing with a machine, me performing with the voice, and both composing in the process by intervening in both levels.

Battier: I've been working with machines and this idea of transformation for a long time, using voice and other materials like concrete materials or instruments. In fact we met, Jean-Paul and I, because he was already in this field of Lettrism and sound poetry, and I was very strongly attracted by the musicality of sound poetry. So I've been working with the voice as a sound material, and basically what interests me is the interaction between the transformation processes in these machines and the sound source. In our case, most of the time Jean-Paul is there in the studio, so we are in this kind of "live" context, which is very close to performance. In fact I remember even once, we did one piece absolutely live, without any reprocessing afterwards, with even some audience around. It was like a performance situation.

I do feel that this mode of working together is fairly new, and that it brings something both to the sound poetry that Jean-Paul is doing and the music that I am doing, and that we benefit both from this cooperation. More and more in the future there will be collaboration between technology and sound sources, the voices or instruments, and this is just the beginning of this new musical phase. It's quite exciting to be here and to explore this new mode of musical life.

TALES OF Q

PAUL QUAN AND ARNOLD IGER

Sponsored by the Massachusetts College of Art Asian Media and
Performing Arts Series

March 28 - April 13

Iger and Kwan first collaborated in 1980, producing a film documentation on Len-Dong, a little-known Vietnamese cult characterized by the adoration of a vast pantheon of gods through seances and mediums. The religion is founded on ancient concepts of mother goddesses and shamanism. In 1981 the two artists traveled to Southeast Asia and to India where street performances, puppet shows, traditional folk theatres, street musicians, fortune tellers and other performance elements convinced them that their collaborative efforts should include performance art. Their diverse backgrounds -- Kwan, a Chinese from Saigon and Iger, from New York -- blend together to produce experiments with socio-political content, focussing on issues with film movement, masks, puppetry, poetry, slides, music and humor.

"Tales of Q" is a contemporary adaptation of the epic poem "The Tale of Kieu" written by Nguyen Du in the early nineteenth century Viet Nam. Major themes in this contemporary adaptation of the work include events of recent history: the Vietnam War, the displacement of the Vietnamese people and the conflicts of cultural identity in a new environment. The work itself is a blend of contemporary and traditional forms with mythological folk tales.

NIGHT FLOWER by Paul Kwan

Night flowers
 that bloom
night of mysterious blue
the obscure fruit of passion
passion of unknown pain
a pain that moves slowly forward
to a dark passage of loneliness and fear,
silent current of her eyes

 falls
from which her heart beats

 through
the cries of the nightingales

 piercing
the burnt-out city.
A colossal of bones

 frozen statues

 ice temples

 obituary air.
Tomorrow, today

 a silent, a light

 a flame that lit by night.

GD: What do you do?

MA: I write and direct performances that generally involve the audience in some fashion.

GD: This sounds to me like something that is in existence now. How did you get to that point?

MA: I suppose I first started involving the audience in a play by Geoffrey Bush I did in 1975, called "The End of the World." The involvement of the audience in that particular play made perfect sense -- it was about a woman who was going crazy and she was having obsessive thoughts. So I assigned an object to each section of the text, and whenever an audience member held up an object, she had to speak that portion of the text. Meanwhile she was spinning. So what you saw was a process of a person trying to keep her thoughts straight. In other words, the process of performing the piece paralleled the theme.

GD: What happened to make you think of using the audience like this?

MA: I was trying to find ways to work with random combinations.

GD: And that idea came from --

MA: From that particular script, actually. But there was another concern in there of trying to work with what makes performance performance, and not film, and that's the fact that the audience and the performers are all there together. And having been trained in theater, learning all these ways to pretend the audience wasn't there -- and yet still being affected by them -- I wanted to try kinds of performances that allowed the audience to color the performance.

GD: So at that time you were involved in straight theater.

MA: Yes. I was opening up scripts to deal with some form of audience interaction, and working on solo performances where the performers dealt directly with the audience.

GD: Were you in those performances?

MA: No, I directed them.

GD: What would you call Time Against Time, your current piece -- theater or performance?

MA: I don't believe there's a difference. I'm developing a piece with the performers, and I have certain concerns that I state at the beginning of the process, and I'm guiding where we go with the piece, and selecting certain approaches. The performers I've chosen are really providing the material. By material I mean activities, not so much text.

GD: Would it be fair to say you're directing group performances, and really taking elements from both -- theater methods and performance concerns?

MA: Great, can I quote you?

GD: What hit you back in 1975 when you tried this for the first time, that made you say, "Boy, I'm going to do this for the next ten years?"

MA: I don't think I said quite that, but I kept coming back to it. One of the things I was frustrated with about directing had to do with the fact that I would have a certain idea of exactly how it should be, and the performers achieved it maybe once, in a rehearsal, rarely in performance. It would have been fine if I were a filmmaker, and was filming it, because I could have edited together the best versions and come up with something close to my image of it.

So I shifted to trying to think of theater as a process, and when you start thinking of it as a process you're much more willing to let there be a range of things happening within a given structure. What I ended up working on was a combination of structure and improvisation.

GD: Are the visual arts a big influence on your work?

MA: Most of my work is 90% visual and 10% text.

GD: Any other influences besides theater?

MA: I would say a strong influence was an optic and kinetic art exhibit that I saw in eighth grade, and that made a real impact on how I viewed art and performance. Also, I was painting and involved in the visual arts before I was in theater. And my work tends to have a lot more to do with visual images than with anything verbal. One small piece I did in 1981, Video Vs. Memory Vs. Memory, that was one of the first which was not from a playscript, had the audience watch videotapes and then

reconstruct a scene. Actually, it juxtaposed the performers' memory of what happened, and had all these versions, ultimately, shown at the same time on video. Another piece in 1982 was a dream meditation performance on the passing of time, and had probably about ten lines of text in it, total. It was about how to deal with time passing, and used clear vessels and water. The audience was surrounded on four sides by sheer black curtains, and it was performed from four angles, so a lot of things the audience saw peripherally. It was very dreamlike.

GD: Would you say this idea of time is something you are --

MA: Yesss?

GD: -- stuck on, or do you feel like you still need to do another ten pieces before you have dealt with it?

MA: Probably another twenty. It's funny because I think about how people in other media are allowed to be obsessed with a particular theme or image . . .

GD: Twenty paintings.

MA: Right. So why not?

GD: What obsesses you about time?

MA: I feel that each of my pieces really reflects a different state of mind in relation to it. On the Passing of Time was really about loss. Whereas this piece I'm doing now, Time Against Time, is really much more about how you have a limited amount of time. It's much more directed toward the future. So it has a real different energy about it, more on the frenetic end of things.

GD: Can someone look at your piece and figure out how "Marilyn" feels about this?

MA: I don't do a piece unless I feel really strongly about it, because it relates to something in my own life at that time, but hopefully the audience sees themselves. I am concerned about creating resonant imagery. I want to set up a situation that gives an audience time and space to think about themselves, that sets off their own musings.

GD: What do you have to fight against?

MA: What you have to find is imagery that is not so personal that no one can relate to it. The whole idea of what is resonant is that it works for twenty people, as opposed to only the performer. A lot of the time my main function as director is as viewer.

GD: How much of the piece is yours and how much is the people you happen to be working with?

MA: I've always worked closely with the performers. It's not like a playwright writing the script and stage directions, then telling you that you have to do it this way. I collaborate with the performers, which makes the selection of the performers more difficult. I try to choose people who are feeling close enough about the same subject, so that I won't get into arguments or have to reject 90% of what they do.

GD: Like finding a roommate.

MA: Yes.

GD: What do you get out of doing these things?

MA: An answer.

GD: An answer?

MA: To my life (laughs).

GD: No, seriously, you keep doing these performances and these things about time, and the word "obsessive" keeps popping up -- when this is over, what do you get out of it?

MA: OK, what do I get out of it? I actually do think that I've found a perfect excuse to spend three nights a week talking with people about how they manage to live their lives. And I'm concerned about that at this point.

GD: If you weren't doing these kinds of performances, not working with the audience anymore, what would you be doing?

MA: (Long pause) Sculpture. But I'm really more interested now in doing performances outdoors and have them blend in with the environment. One of the things about Orpheus that was really fascinating was that people didn't realize that some things that happened on the street were part of the performance, but then they also began to imagine that everything was part of the performance. Reality is always richer than anything you can construct. I think that's what I'm interested in, really viewing the world anew, with a heightened sense of reality, seeing it as if for the first time.

YOUR RAVING REPORTER

Endgame, The Crucible, and abortion. The answer is: there are no questions.

Beckett has instructed Samuel French, Inc., to insert a new clause into all contracts governing productions of his plays, to effect that "there shall be no additions, omissions or alterations of any kind or nature in the manuscript or presentation of the play as indicated in the acting edition." Arthur Miller, displeased with The Wooster Group's treatment of portions of The Crucible in L.S.D., closed the production down completely by threatening a substantial lawsuit. And Ronald Wilson Reagan (6-6-6) promised antiabortion marchers that he favors legislation making all abortion illegal, even to save the life of the mother.

What all of these have in common is the desire to summarily resolve and enforce by legal means, questions that do not properly belong within the sphere of the law. On one hand, we have the complex relationship between the creative work of the playwright and that of the actors, directors and designers in mainstream theater. On the other hand, we have an extraordinary cluster of questions pertaining to the location of power over reproduction, and the definition and quality of human life. In both cases, elderly white males have declared that there are no issues, no questions to be asked or answered. (Uncomfortable as it may be to consider, Beckett and Miller are prominent members of an actual power structure.)

Make no mistake: I do not equate abortion and play production as issues with equal moral weight. One can simply choose to ignore Beckett's plays as potential productions, or enjoy them only as literature (where they will be

eternally incorruptible as "the plays he wrote"). And the gap between Beckett and Miller, as playwrights we need to produce, is enormous (the next century may remember Death of A Salesman). But the legal status of abortion is a matter which profoundly and immediately affects the lives of millions of people, who must prosper or suffer according to the decisions made. If I compare the two situations here, it is because both are manifestations of a political/cultural climate which is small-minded, fearfully clutching at phantom certainties, frightened of debate, of question, of possibility.

Beckett's case: Is it not possible that directors, actors and designers exist whose vision can be the equal of even the greatest playwright's? Is it not possible that a fine play demands a wealth of interpretation beyond what the playwright envisioned? Are these not important basic questions? The answer is: "Let him look to his bond."

Miller's case: Can text be considered as found object? Can the principle of collage incorporate the acknowledged work of other artists? Does every dramatic text possess such integrity that it cannot be renewed and refreshed by radical treatment? The answer is: I'll see you in court.

Reagan etc.'s case: Can we know when human life begins? Must the life of the fetus be given priority over that of the mother? Can we equate quantity of human life with quality? The answer is: Shut up and obey the law.

A man whose opinion I respect maintains that Beckett, alone among living playwrights, deserves the legal protection that he has received, due to the integrity of his vision of text and scene. Perhaps.

*XP*R*M*NT*L

"I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed."

-- Garry Winogrand

AS IF: To be experimental means to approach something openly, in order to find something out.

YET: The means, I photograph, will be known beforehand, like what the content is.

SO: What happens between the look and the photograph? How does the ed make something into something like something?

AND: Does the I find it, or the something, or the photograph?

Read: I = THEY
SOMETHING = IT
PHOTOGRAPH = YOU

-- Gary Duehr

But to deserve it and to demand it are two different things: the Samuel French action is a small conclusion by a great artist. The small and petty action dominates now, when to open the mind and spirit means to ask questions, to raise possibilities, to have to consider not only the possibilities of art-making but the terminal (mushroom-shaped) possibility as well. In the face of that, the answer to complex questions is: No. Don't ask. No additions, omissions or alterations. Not even to save the life of the mother.

-- David Miller

TIME AGAINST TIME directed by Marilyn Arsem

presented by MOBIUS PERFORMING GROUP

Thurs. - Sat. March 1 - 16

8:00 p.m. Tickets: \$6.00

PREVIEW:

February 28

8:00 p.m.

\$3.00

SOUND ART AT MOBIUS: PART 3

JEAN-PAUL CURTAY AND MARC BATTIER

Slow/Fast Trans for extended voice and computer music

Fri. & Sat., March 22 and 23 8:00 p.m.

Tickets: \$6.00/\$4.00 students

Free Public Lectures:

Wednesday, March 20, 7:00 p.m.

Jean-Paul Curtay at Payne Hall,
Harvard University

Thursday, March 21, 7:00 p.m.

Marc Battier at Mobius

Free Workshop:

Battier and Curtay at Mobius

Sunday, March 24, 3:00 p.m.

TALES OF Q

Performance by

PAUL QUAN AND ARNOLD IGER

Thurs. - Sun. March 28 - April 16

Tickets: \$6.00

Sponsored by the Massachusetts College of Art Asian
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MOBIUS EVENTS

Deborah Fortson will perform Baby Steps at the Production Company, 15 W. 28th St., NYC, for a three week run beginning January 31. The number to call is 212-686-1470. This performance has been shown "in progress" several times at Mobius, and we wish her the best.

Shabeaux Productions will present an unusual version of Dutchman by LeRoi Jones. The play will be performed on a bus parked on City Hall Plaza, with the audience seated inside the bus (which will be heated). Performances are Wednesdays - Saturdays at 8:00 p.m. from February 20 - March 16. Tickets are \$7.00 W & Th, \$8.00 F & S, \$5.00 for students and seniors at all times.

HOLD THE PRESSES! The Mobius Board of Directors is throwing a Fundraising Party on Saturday, April 20th, and it will truly be in keeping with the nature of Mobius. It's a performance of a party -- with music, dancing, food and video. You'll purchase your roles and lines for the evening ahead of time (and prepare accordingly). The first thing that evening will be a rehearsal of the party, then immediately following that will be the performance of the party, which will be shot on videotape. And then we'll have a cast party, and watch the videotape! Invitations, with all the details, will be coming to you next week. Come party with us.

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MOBIUS

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