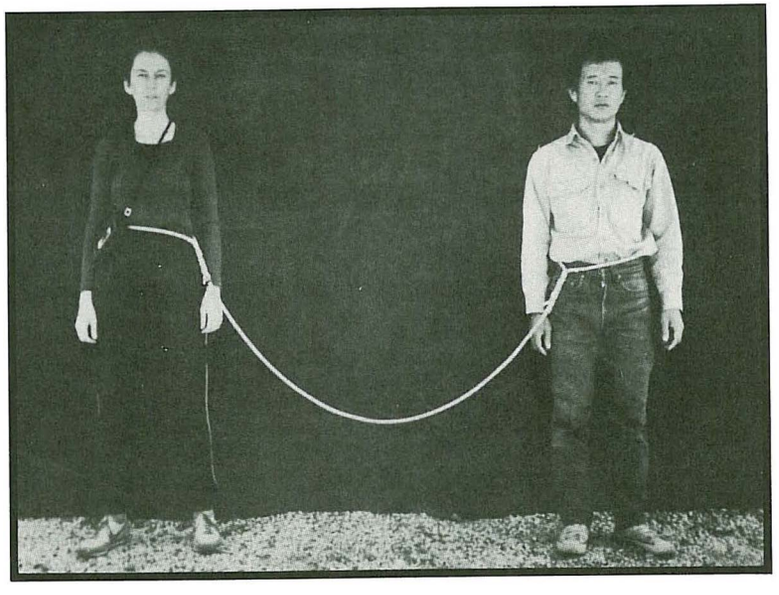
CHOICES

CHOICES: MAKING AN ART OF EVERYDAY LIFE



CHOICES: MAKING AN ART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Marina Abramovic and Ulay

James Lee Byars

Spalding Gray

Alex Grey

Tehching Hsieh

Linda Montano

Morgan O'Hara

Michael Osterhout

United Art Contractors

Ian Wilson

MARCIA TUCKER

THE NEW MUSEUM
OF CONTEMPORARY ART,
NEW YORK

Choices: Making an Art of Everyday Life

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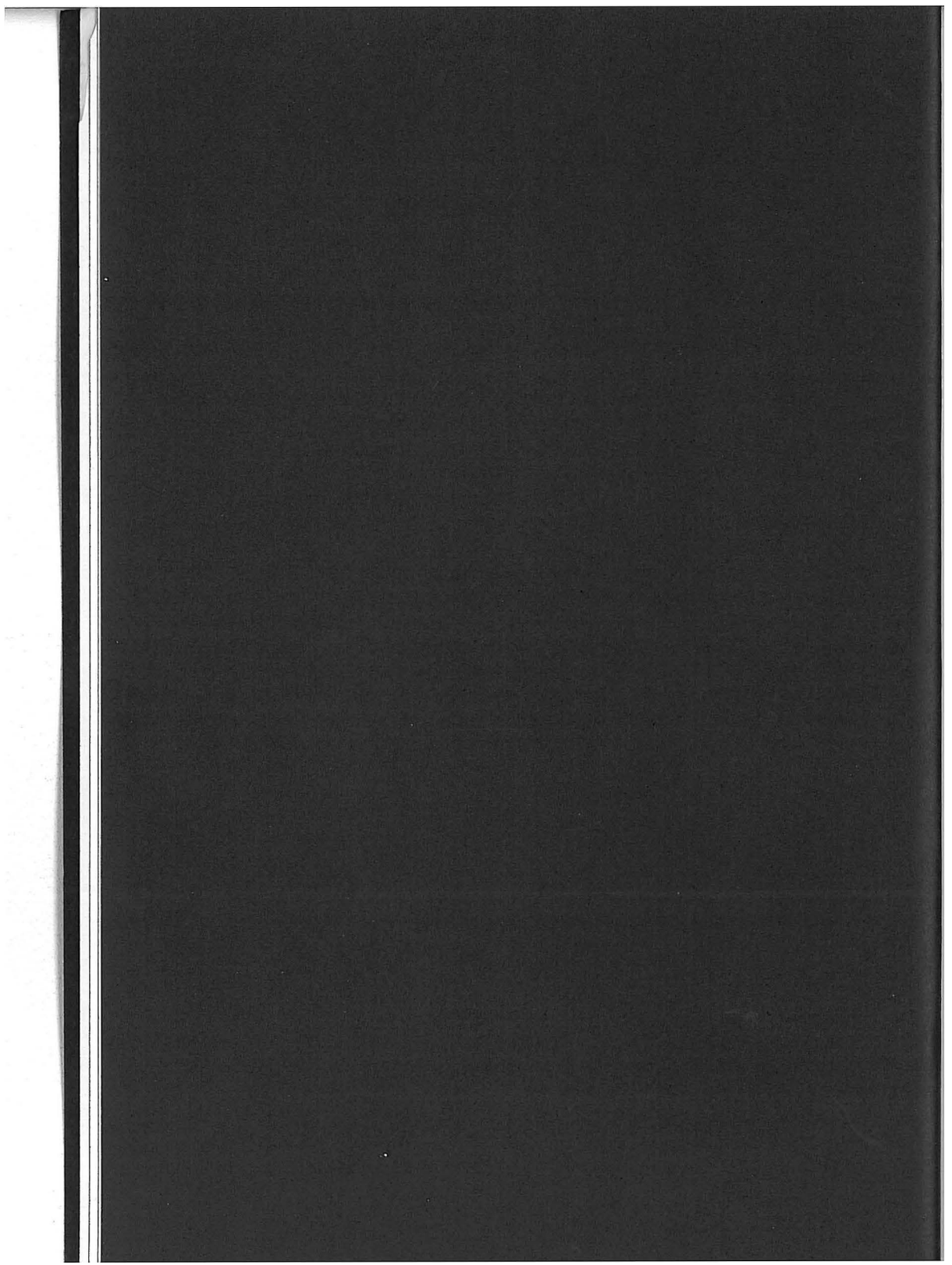
This publication has been organized by Marcia Landsman, Publications Coordinator, and Angelika Wanke-Festa, designed by Jean Foos, typeset by Phil Mariani, and printed by Eastern Press.

Frontispiece: Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh tied together for *Art/Life One-Year Performance*, 1983-1984.



The Ghost of James Lee Byars

TEHCHING HSIEH

From One-Year Performance,
1981-1982.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1981 when Tehching Hsieh was in the middle of his third one-year performance, living outdoors in New York City, I had a spirited argument with a close friend about his work. I described the pieces he had done earlier: for one year, in 1978-1979, he built a cage inside his loft and lived in it in solitary confinement without reading, writing, talking, listening to radio or television; in 1980-1981, he had a time clock placed on his wall and punched in every hour on the hour, day and night, for the entire year. (In 1983-1984, he and the artist Linda Montano were attached at the waist by an eight-foot length of rope, the only condition of their enforced intimacy being that they not touch each other during the 365 days.)

My friend's response was that the artist was "unethical," that he seemed to be making a mockery of the homeless, the incarcerated, those forced to work at jobs which were meaningless to them. My own uncertain sense of his work at that time was that he seemed rather to be making a kind of moral statement about those very issues through extremes of self-discipline, physical hardship, endurance, and danger.

Since then, I have thought about other artists whose work has led them into dangerous areas of exploration, both physically and psychically, and as a consequence has forced us to think about art and the nature of artistic enterprise in a new way. This exhibition is an attempt to share some of the questions raised by such a radical departure from the conventions of art. I have chosen to focus my investigation, therefore, on artists who drastically alter their lives as a way of making art, and through their work provide living metaphors for states of being, modes of behavior, and other ontological concerns.

"Choices" is the result of a long-term fascination with work that challenges and upsets my own preconceived notions of art, initiated by unusual work and unconventional ideas that artists have shared with me over the years. The question that most offends and irritates artists, "Why is this stuff called art?" is one of profound interest to me as well as to most of the public, continually assaulted as we are with the expansion of the definition of art.

Organizing "Choices" has been a formidable experience for me, even after so many years in the museum profession. As the exhibition evolved, it became clear that what I had chosen to focus on was only a small part of a much larger endeavor, and one which ideally would have resulted in three separate exhibitions. "Choices" presents twelve artists—eight individuals and two collaborative pairs—who designate their lives as art, and for whom objects, artifacts, performances, or documentation are only the ghost, or residue, of their real work. A second exhibition might have addressed those artists whose lives and work are inextricably related, but who nonetheless produce objects or situations of intrinsic interest and importance to them, and a third show could have presented those artists for whom the manipulation of the physical self, mostly in performance, constitutes the work.

Even after making the difficult decision to focus on only a single aspect of one of the most challenging arenas of art making in the past two decades, organizing the exhibition posed problems that I had never had to face before. Since there is so little of a material nature which results from the work, how could it be shown? Would it be possible to fill the Museum with ideas rather than objects? How could an event or situation be presented in a manner which would clearly distinguish it from performance, or remove it from the expectation of any entertainment value? How could the Museum protect the artists from having certain pieces seen as sensationalistic and perhaps misinterpreted by the media? And how could I be sure to present each artist's work individually,

focusing even in a group exhibition on the differences, rather than the similarities, among them?

These questions can only be addressed through the exhibition itself. This catalogue thus stands in relation to the exhibition as the visual components of the artists' work stand in relation to their art as a whole, that is, as only a small—hopefully helpful—part of a much larger picture. I trust that the show won't be, as some have suggested, "better as a book."

I would like to thank the many people who have helped to bring the exhibition to fruition, and who have intellectually, financially, and technically, supported a difficult and challenging endeavor.

Anne Tucker, Moira Roth, Mollie Brooks, John Hull, David Saunders, Douglas Erpf, Kent Shell, and Bambi Brown provided suggestions, historical references, and/or reading material essential to my essay. David Norris also brought invaluable energy to the project.

Elizabeth Hayt generously assisted with research and research materials early on, thus helping to shape its final form. Claire Dannenbaum efficiently organized the catalogue materials, exhibition checklist, and located biographical and bibliographic information of all kinds. She was indispensable in pulling together the myriad details of the exhibition and catalogue from the beginning. Michael Klein was instrumental in obtaining photographs and videotapes of Marina Abramovic and Ulay.

At the Museum, I am grateful to William Olander, Curator, for taking time to discuss the project with me; to Lisa Parr, Curatorial Assistant, for her organizational assistance; to Marcia Landsman, Publications Coordinator, who produced the catalogue with skill and efficiency, and to Jean Foos, who imaginatively designed it; and to John Jacobs, Registrar/Preparator, and his crew, who created the spaces and environments for the artists to work in. Angelika Wanke-Festa, herself a performance artist whose work shares many of the concerns of the artists in this exhibition, helped to finalize the details of the exhibition and to schedule and expedite the many events connected with the show; without her extraordinary skill and dedication, the project would have suffered considerably.

I appreciate the time and thoughtfulness with which Sidney Long, Erika Rothenberg, and Claire Dannenbaum read and made suggestions about my essay; I am especially thankful for the knowledge and critical faculties of my long-time, invaluable editor Tim Yohn, whose editing has once again clarified my thinking as well as my writing.

My thanks also to my assistant Mary Clancy for her enormous patience and ability to keep things working smoothly in the midst of the chaos.

created by the exhibition. My husband Dean McNeil provided time, space, and quiet at home to enable me to write the catalogue essay, which I deeply appreciate.

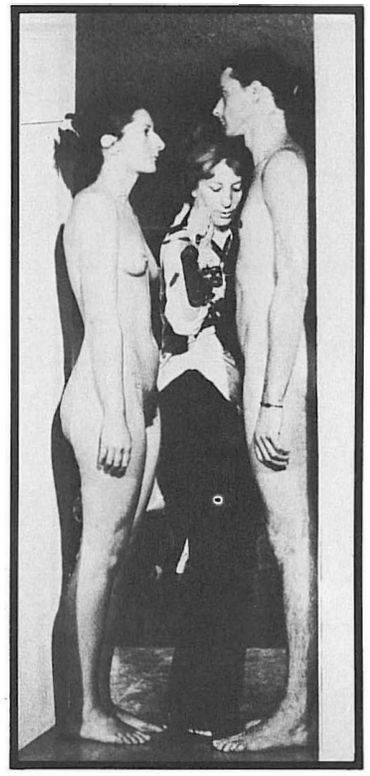
I am extremely grateful to The New Museum's Trustees for their confidence and their support of our experimental projects of all sorts, but especially for their willingness to engage in the lively discussions engendered by this exhibition in particular.

The National Endowment for the Arts alone among organizations we applied to felt the exhibition worthy of funding; I gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by the Aid to Special Exhibitions Program, which has enabled me to do the exhibition. My thanks also to Phyllis Goldman for her generous support and encouragement.

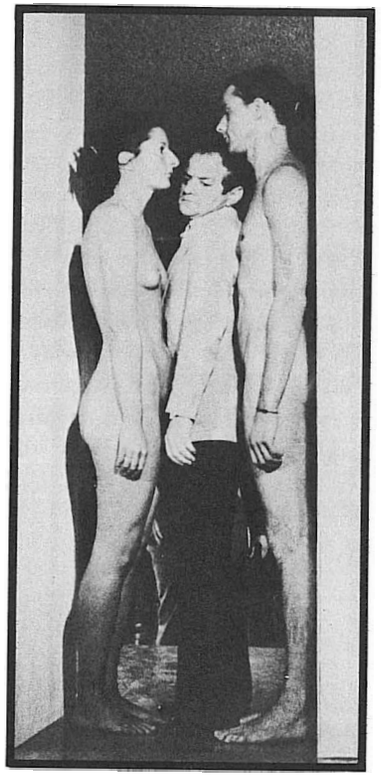
A very special word of gratitude to Susan Levin Tepper, whose adventurous spirit, spontaneity, understanding, and unmitigated generosity helped to bring this exhibition to fruition.

Most of all I wish to thank the artists, who through the challenge, courage, and commitment of their work have renewed my faith in the ability of art to teach, to change, to heal, and to bring us ultimately to a more profound understanding of ourselves and our lives.

Marcia Tucker, *Director*



MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND ULAY
Imponderabilia, 1977. Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna. Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc., New York



ESSAY BY MARCIA TUCKER

The deepest confusion is the threshold of insight.

—HERBERT MOLDERINGS[1]

I don't think I am trying to commit suicide. I think my art is an inquiry, which is what all art is about.

—CHRIS BURDEN, 1974[2]

I.

"Choices" is an exhibition of work which attempts to remove the barriers between art and life. It is about artists who make their lives their art, and vice versa, often with extraordinary results. "Choices" is not concerned with aesthetic qualities as a criterion for inclusion; its primary focus is not on objects at all. For most people, the work these twelve artists do falls outside the realm of art altogether; a mere description of their pieces is enough to generate heated debate, if not outright rejection.

It is important, in a period marked increasingly by an obsession with fashion, by overtly materialistic attitudes, and by blatant commercialism, to present work which, by intention or default, refutes these values, critiques them, or bypasses them entirely. The work in "Choices," by virtue of its controversial nature, raises questions about the validity of contemporary nonmaterial art activity and in so doing provides a way of thinking about how art and the everyday world are linked.

The exhibition, by forcing attention away from specific works of art and particular aesthetic guidelines, hopes to address such issues as the distinction between art and nonart, commodity and gift, art and religious

LINDA MONTANO

Sitting: Dead Chicken, Live Angel, 1971.

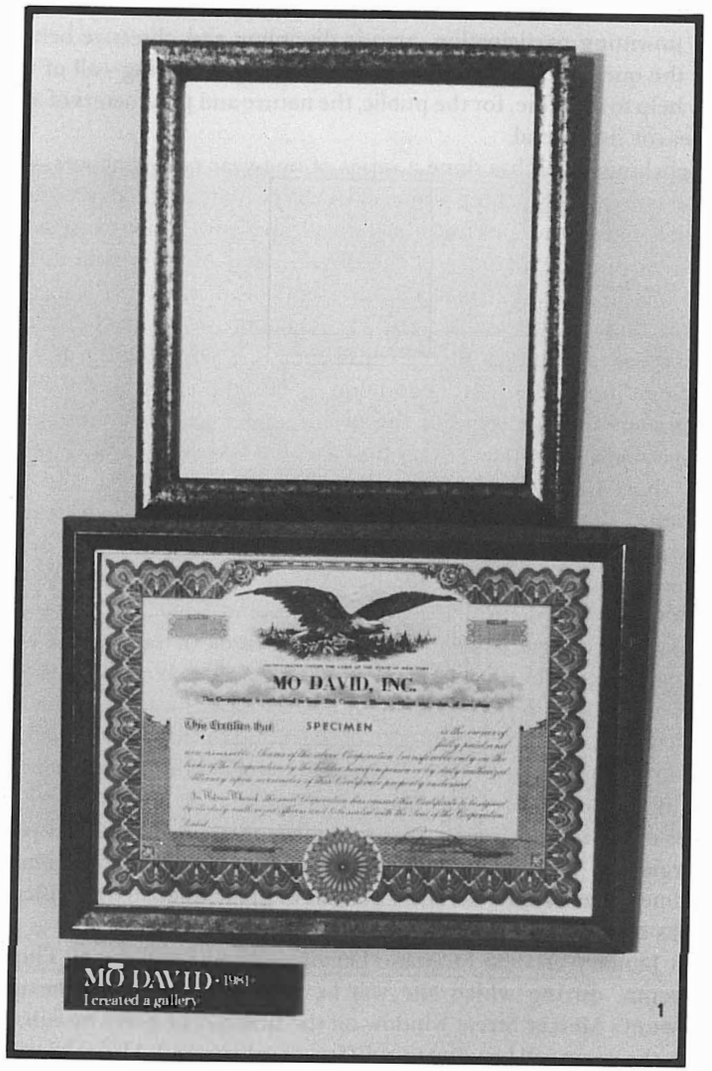
practice, theater and art activity, intentionality and accident, audience and unwitting participation, artistic discipline and obsessive behavior, and the question of morality as a function of art making—all of which may help to redefine, for the public, the nature and parameters of artistic endeavor in general.

Tehching Hsieh has done a series of one-year performances—living alone in a cage, punching a time clock every hour of the day and night, living entirely outdoors, and attaching himself with a rope to artist Linda Montano—which, because of the physical and psychological difficulty they entail, become extreme and unforgettable metaphors for such basic human endeavors as isolation, work, alienation, or intimacy. The visual residue of Tehching's pieces consists of one poster and one signed statement for each event; in addition, polaroid photographs have been taken each day for some of the pieces, and a year's accumulation of one-second frames taken every time he punched the time clock resulted in a short film record of the work. During the year he and Linda Montano spent tied together, audiotapes were made of all their conversations with each other and others, but these were sealed and are intended never to be played.

Linda Montano, prior to the year she and Tehching worked collaboratively, engaged in many different kinds of performances and pieces involving her daily life. While living on the West Coast, she was handcuffed to artist Tom Marioni for three days; she opened her house to the public as a kind of museum of the mundane for several weeks; she performed with artist Mitchell Kriegman (to whom she was married at the time) dressed as chickens; she took on various personae and made tapes of herself as these characters; she studied Zen, explored psychic energies by studying aspects of the occult, and lived with composer Pauline Oliveros and others for periods of time designated specifically as works of art.

In January of 1985 Montano began a seven-year piece at The New Museum, during which she will be in residence in a room in the Museum's Mercer Street window on the first day of every month. Each year, the room will be painted a different color, which Montano will also wear exclusively; she will listen to a single specific tone for seven hours a day, changing it when the year is up; speak with a different accent each year (corresponding to each persona she evolved in her previous work); and engage in an interaction with the public that she calls "Art/Life Counseling."

Morgan O'Hara has spent the past seventeen years chronicling every



MICHAEL OSTERHOUT

Corporate Chop and Stock catalogue
for Mō David Gallery, 1981.

activity of every day. She has kept extensive notebooks which record each activity and the amount of time spent doing it, including meticulous descriptions of her dreams, detailed shopping lists, names of people visited, times spent with her daughter, romantic encounters, and finally even the amount of time spent recording each of these activities. She has color coded these, made charts, graphs, performances, and activity maps, and has charted her own movements in space and time (in a room, in a city, in the world) as well as those of friends and acquaintances. Most recently, she has begun to use a computer to analyze the nature of these activities and to graphically record them in a new form.

Mike Osterhout, who like O'Hara and Montano lived and worked for many years in Northern California, moved to New York last year to open a gallery, called Mō David. The gallery is the most recent and long-term of many of his works. In a series of pieces generally lasting a year, he studied at a seminary (and received a degree), bought a cow, adopted a child, and produced a body of paintings by a fictitious female artist named Kristian Kohl (which he has shown in his gallery as well as at an alternative art space). Osterhout's unpublished manuscript, *Missionary (The Extended Family as Sculpture)*, is a personal, nonlinear narrative account—a poetic framework—of these "lived" pieces.

United Art Contractors is a collaboration between two self-proclaimed "minor conceptual artists," Terri and Dave, who prefer not to use their last names, and who live at present in Sacramento, California and Battle Mountain, Nevada. The collaboration is an ironic commentary on the art world, using its own conventions to mock and undermine that world. United Art Contractors has placed ads in newspapers and art magazines (*Artforum* in particular) offering to pay critics for good reviews, curators for exhibitions, and other artists for ideas and friendships. Most recently the Contractors, like Osterhout, have begun to capitalize on a particular business or money-making aspect of the society they are part of, using it as the work of art. This year Terri completed law school, earning a degree in order to use "Art as a Defense." With no intention of using the law as a profession or earning a living from it, she, with Dave acting as secretary, will take on cases of interest to them as art.

Alex Grey has recently completed twenty-one extraordinarily detailed life-sized paintings of the human figure. The series, called "Sacred Mirrors," begins with the image of a skeleton, exploring in turn in each work the basic physiognomy and structure of the body. The paintings progress through the nervous system and musculature to the body's outer layer, the male and female prototypes of Caucasian, Asian, and

UNITED ART CONTRACTORS

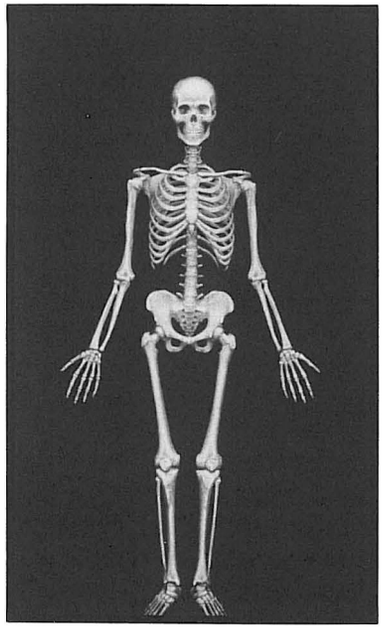
Poster.

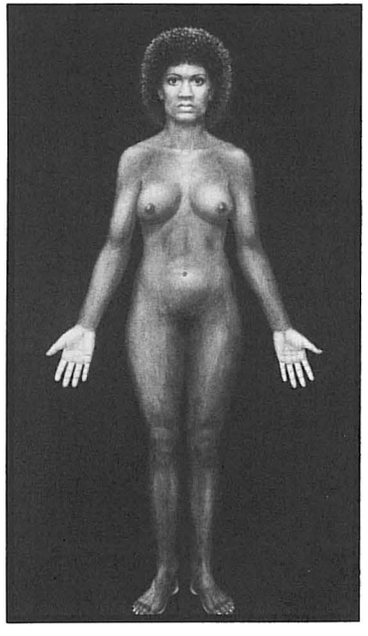
African origin, to an exploration of the nonphysical aspects of the body, such as its aura, karmic waves, or other kinds of energy patterns. These paintings, which are executed in a straightforward, intensely factual style, more like medical illustrations than art, are the result of Grey's years of daily exploration of the furthest reaches of life and death.

His earlier pieces (from about 1973-1978) addressed the issue of death in an extreme, graphic way, resulting in a series of works executed in a mortuary where he took a job for that purpose. These, and other activities and performance works done by him and his wife Allyson to date, have been documented in an unpublished book containing a photograph and a brief descriptive statement for each piece. He has also put together a volume of photographs taken at a monster museum, images of aborted abnormal foetuses frozen forever in grotesque attitudes. According to Grey, they're "extreme metaphors and real-life tragedies for people, powerful because they contain both birth and death in one image."[3] This period of work was immediately followed by psychic explorations (initially drug-related) of a "healing and life-giving nature," which have preoccupied him to the present. Grey's work, because it explores the ontological concerns of life and death, also publicly addresses many of the taboos associated with these states of being.

Marina Abramovic and Ulay live in Holland and have worked collaboratively since they met in 1976. Their earliest pieces publicly explored their physical relationship to each other and to the world. For example, while naked, they repeatedly slammed into opposite, movable walls to create a new physical space; they sat back to back for seventeen hours, their long hair tied together until they collapsed; and they stood in a narrow doorway, forcing museumgoers to enter the space by passing between their naked bodies, having to face one or the other. They have almost completed *Nightsea Crossing*, a ninety-day meditation piece performed in seven-hour public segments. They have traveled all over the world, doing pieces both public and private in such disparate places as Tibet and the Australian desert; in the future they plan to do a piece on the Great Wall of China.

James Lee Byars's work basically consists of an attitude, sometimes embodied in the activity of simply posing questions. Often these questions are materialized in almost illegibly small gold-leaf letters on black tissue paper, on calling cards, or on the pages of spherical or cubical books. Byars often speaks an odd, abbreviated kind of language, habitually dresses in eccentric, formal costumes (a rounded top hat and mask over the upper part of his face are a trademark), and executes

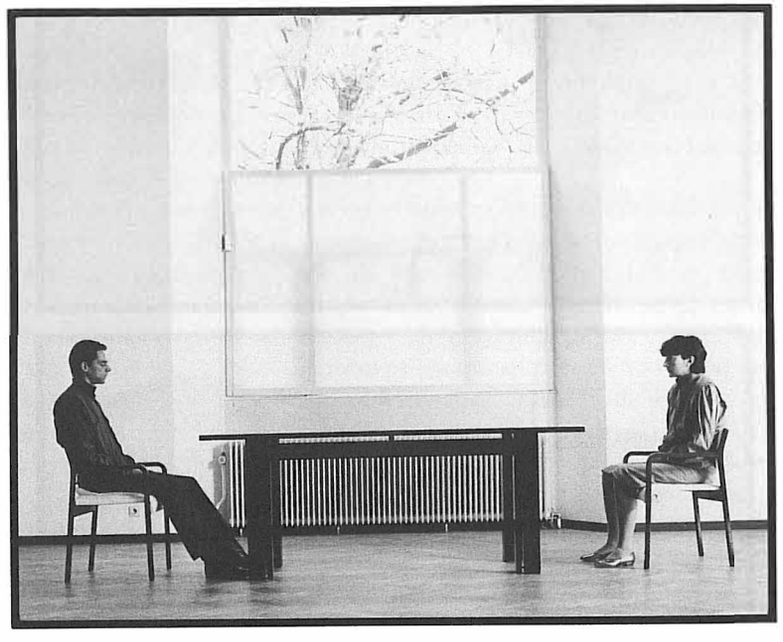




ALEX GREY

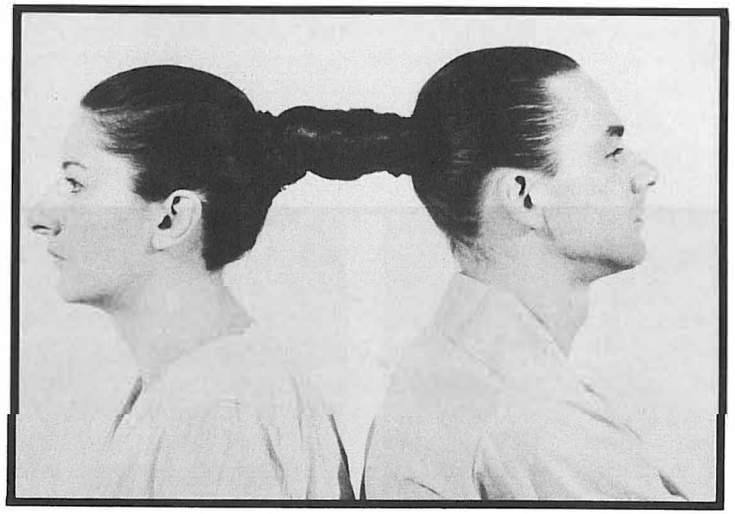
The Skeletal System, from "The Sacred Mirror" series, 1979. Oil on linen, 46 x 84". Courtesy the artist

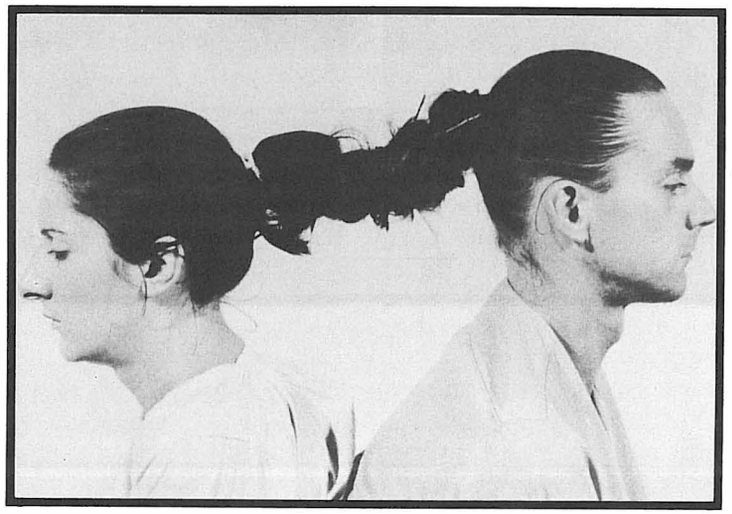
Negro Female, from "The Sacred Mirror" series, 1981. Oil on linen, 46 x 84". Courtesy the artist



MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND ULAY

Nightsea Crossing. Performance, April 1982. Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc., New York





MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND ULAY

Relation in Time, 1977 [First hour]. Studio G7, Bologna. Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc., New York

Relation in Time, 1977 [Seventeenth hour].

fleeting but dramatically memorable events at unexpected and unannounced times. During a recent hurricane, for example, Byars telephoned a number of people to announce that seven gold men would be smelling museums that day. Although the museums were closed and very few passersby actually saw the piece, it took place as planned throughout the day despite the driving wind and rain.

Often ephemeral and poetic, Byars's pieces center on the most complex philosophical discourse, couched in terms at once abstract and absurd. Much of Byars's work does not take any material form at all, or at least not one which is recognizable as art. In this regard, Byars quotes the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who explains: "Independence from external things gives us back our minds."[4]

Similarly, Ian Wilson, a Scottish-born artist working in the United States since the late 1960s and generally considered a "conceptual" artist, is an anomaly even in those terms, since his work is not linked stylistically to that of the conceptual artists of the 1960s and '70s. Wilson has moved increasingly away from making objects toward an art of nonvisual abstraction which takes the form of occasional printed books and rare two-hour, carefully orchestrated "dialogues" with a small, invited audience. His reductivism has created an art in which,

> passing beyond metaphor, beyond criticism, beyond art, beyond space and time, we come upon the formless abstractions of language. Infinite and formless, what is presented is neither known or unknown.[5]

Thus, the act of being, of thinking, becomes for him the form his work must take.

While these artists have been working in the context of the visual arts, no matter how radical their departure from its conventions, Spalding Gray has been exploring similar concerns in the area of the theater. A trained actor working at first in regional and off-Broadway theater, he has increasingly moved away from conventional theater, using his own autobiography as raw material for collaborative pieces as well as for a series of intensely, sometimes painfully personal, albeit wildly funny monologues. He has become what he calls a "poetic reporter," filtering everyday events through his psyche and sharing them with the audience without the use of special props, costumes, lighting, or theatrical spaces. Most recently, in a complete reversal of theatrical convention, he has begun to interview the audience, engaging them in telling stories from

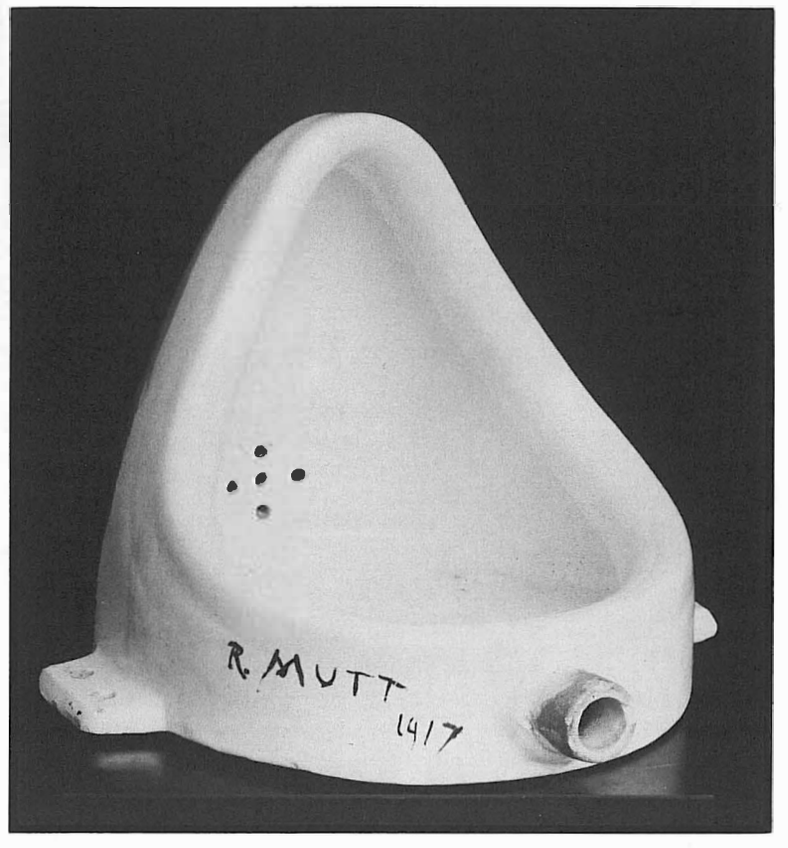
their own lives. Although he considers himself an actor, not a writer, he has occasionally published parts of his monologues as books, and has made videotapes of several of them as well, although he considers these to be only a ghost of the original performances.

Since the late 1960s, when definitions of art broadened beyond the accepted formalist boundaries to include a variety of ideas, activities, events, and attitudes which at first appeared eccentric, awkward, ugly, offensive, or just plain boring, art seems to have increasingly impinged upon the shores of real life. The question of art and life—the relationship between the creative process and lived experience—has become more important to artist and audience alike as events in the real world affect every aspect of our lives.

The late 1960s were turbulent years; those who lived through them—including most of the artists in this exhibition—were deeply affected by (or actual participants in) the Vietnam war, race riots, campus unrest and rebellion, drug culture, and the feminist movement. Art and artists were changed profoundly by these events, and the expansion of art beyond its own conventions was clearly a result of what was happening outside the art community. The change was startling, and is even more evident today when many of the attitudes that caused these protests seem to have disappeared. As Mike Osterhout says, "The 1960s' morality was serious. Not now." And critic RoseLee Goldberg, in discussing the "golden age" of performance, also points out:

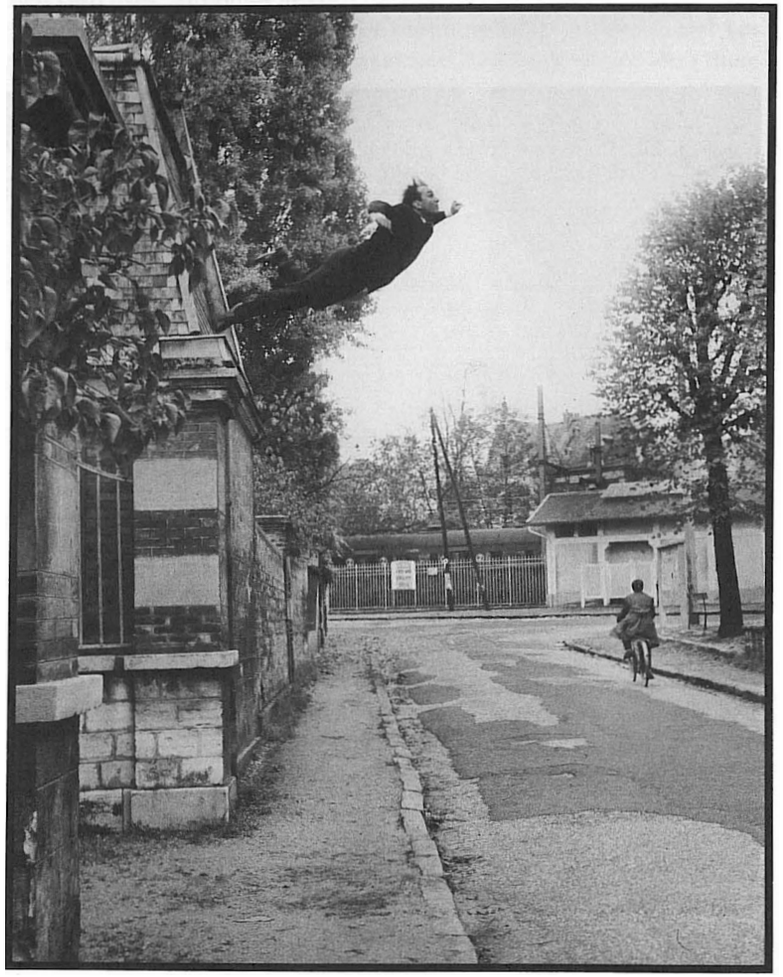
> How different now the role of the artist and critic, now from then in the late 1960s, when many artists, responding to the barricades in Paris streets and the protests on American campuses, metaphorically erected their own barricades, calling for an art of ideas and an art that would short-circuit the consumer market, an art that would find for itself a philosophical base, almost a moral code for existing, and an art that spoke for itself—through the intelligence of the artists themselves—not through the mouthpieces of critics.[6]

Today's artistic climate is marked increasingly by commercialism, the co-option of art by entertainment, the influence of television and the mass media on visual images, and a change in the humanistic and spiritual value system upon which the artists' community was originally founded. Yet there is a growing number of individual artists who, like those in "Choices," have chosen once again to explore issues connected to the world at large—to raise philosophical, moral, and ontological questions rather than aesthetic ones—through their lives and art.



MARCEL DUCHAMP

Fontaine, 1917 (#2, 1952). Selected object, 24" high. Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery, New York



YVES KLEIN

Saut dans le Vide (Leap into the Void).
Paris, France, October 23, 1960.

A work of art is not necessarily something worked on: it is basically something conceived. To be an artist is not always to make something, but rather to engage in a cultural enterprise in which artistic pieces are proffered for consideration.

—TIMOTHY BINKLEY[7]

II.

A long and venerable tradition of art making and activity provides a background and a historical context for the ideas embodied in the work in "Choices." According to the critic Thomas McEvilley, who has written extensively on this and related kinds of work, a very early example can be found in the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope (c. 410-c. 320 B.C.) who "designated his entire life as a performance of philosophy."[8] Carrying a lantern in search of an honest man was but one of his repertory of provocative, absurdist acts, which also included walking backwards through the streets, begging alms from statues, gluing shut the pages of a book one by one in the public square, or laughing continuously from a lecture platform rather than addressing the public in normal fashion. McEvilley astutely relates such activities to contemporary work in that, then as now,

> [these] gestures have dissolved the traditional boundaries of art activity and set new ones and the limits of the life-field. In many cases, the project has both an artistic goal—the discovery of new art

> forms beyond the old boundaries—and an ethical one: by refocusing art as life, it is hoped to purge it of conventional motives and restore it to a fresh and disinterested appreciation.[9]

Most historical precedents for this kind of work, however, are found closer to our own time. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, for instance, certain kinds of private pieces and quasi-performances took place in the form of soirées and salons, such as those held by Henri Rousseau for his friends in his Montmartre studio.[10] And by the early 1900s, the designation of nonart activities as art was a common feature of the dada and surrealist milieus. In terms of theater, for example, the dada attitude toward actors and acting was radically different from traditional ideas, and set a precedent for a profound change in art as well as in the theater. The dada actor

> performed for himself, in search of himself....The artist ceded a measure of his control (and hence of his ego) to the materials and what transpires between them, placing himself partially in the role of discoverer or spectator as well as that of originator. The element of "chance" and the "spontaneous act" took on new significance for performer and artist.[11]

The dada actor also remained tied to a personal identity that characterized his or her offstage life, generally working without the kind of artifice involved in creating specific characters, settings, and times. Instead, as in much contemporary work, the time was the present, the performer was the real person performing, and there was no particular physical setting required.[12]

Most of all, however, the lives and work of three individual artists, Marcel Duchamp, Yves Klein, and John Cage, provide the most direct and immediate precedents to the artists in "Choices" as well as to many others now working with related issues and ideas.

Duchamp's effect was twofold; on the one hand, his *Readymades* altered the conventions of art by placing ordinary objects in an art context and forcing the viewer to become aware of the fact that aesthetic qualities exist anywhere in the world at large, and are not necessarily tied to art alone.[13] On the other hand, he disparaged conventional art making by saying:

> I like living, breathing, better than working....Therefore, if you wish, my art would be that of living: each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral.[14]

For himself as an artist, Duchamp found in the production of an object a set of values that were anathema.

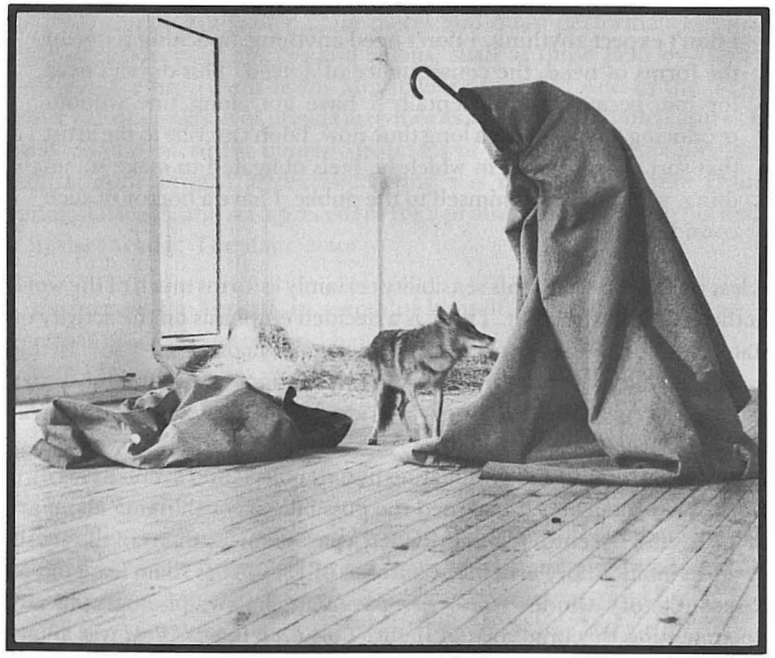
> I don't expect anything. I don't need anything. Soliciting is one of the forms of need, the consequence of a need. This doesn't exist for me, because fundamentally I have got along fine without producing anything for a long time now. I don't ascribe to the artist that sort of social role in which he feels obligated to make something, where he owes himself to the public. I have a horror of such considerations.[15]

A less irascible form of this sensibility certainly informs much of the work in the present exhibition. There is a decided emphasis on the activity or state of mind the artists are engaged in as against a product, if any. In this sense, Duchamp clearly ruptured the conventions of twentieth-century art, thereby providing an important ideological prototype for generations of artists to come.

By appropriating and designating nonart objects and events as his own work, Yves Klein also broadened the possibilities for thinking about art in the twentieth century, and provided a paradigm for many of the artists in the exhibition. In Paris, in the autumn of 1960, Yves Klein leapt out of a second-story window onto the pavement below, photographically documenting this unmitigated flight. This *Leap Into the Void* was an act (actually, a series of acts, since there was more than one leap, under more than one set of circumstances) which fired the imagination of many artists. As Michael Osterhout puts it:

> The one thing old Yves did when he jumped out that window is create a type of work that could pretty much be applied to anything. The artist was let loose. So, as a performance artist I was free to create in any time span and with any medium I desired.[16]

Tehching Hsieh was also fascinated by Klein's gesture, and in one of his earliest pieces, before he moved to the United States, he attempted to duplicate the leap, injuring himself in the process; West Coast performance artist Paul McCarthy also leapt from a second-story window in emulation of the same piece.[17]



JOSEPH BEUYS

I Like America and America Likes Me, 1974. Performance at Rene Block Gallery, New York, May 23-25, 1974. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc., New York

Klein's statement that "the painter only has to paint one masterpiece, himself, constantly,"[18] reverberates throughout the subsequent history of art. Klein, a Rosicrucian and avid student and practitioner of judo, painted monochrome paintings, identified a particular shade of blue as his own and called it "International Klein Blue," attempted to sell "immaterial" paintings, appropriated the sky by signing it, exhibited an empty gallery as art, and generally "declared that his *manner of existence* would be the foremost artistic event of our time."[19]

Though a composer, John Cage has had an equal influence on contemporary artists, providing in the field of music a rupture with tradition which was as extreme, if not more so, as that created by Duchamp and Klein in the visual arts. According to the writer Calvin Tomkins,

> art and life, for Cage, are no longer separate entities as they have been in the past, but very nearly identical; and Cage's whole career can in fact be seen as a long campaign to break down all demarcation between the two.[20]

Cage's music often consisted of gestures, ideas, instructions, or "found" sounds akin to Duchamp's *Readymades*. He was more interested in Oriental thought than Western traditions, and in sharing these with the public as a way of making them aware of their own lives. Like Duchamp and Klein, he also stressed the importance of "a perpetual process of artistic discovery in our daily life,"[21] thus engaging the audience as participants in an ongoing process.

Throughout the 1960s and '70s activities of an ephemeral and theatrical nature took place on both sides of the Atlantic, expanding upon the ideas of Duchamp, Klein, and Cage. The Happenings of the early 1960s, for instance, changed the relationship between artist and public by rethinking the involvement of the audience, by using "found" rather than established theatrical spaces, and by allowing for chance and spontaneity not only in the theater, but in art activity in general.[22] And fluxus, a dada-inspired movement which flourished in New York and Europe from the mid-1960s until early in the next decade, incorporated elements of Zen into a mélange of art forms in both individual and collaborative efforts and reintroduced a degree of irreverence and freedom into the American art community at that time.

In Europe, throughout this period and continuing to the present, the artist Joseph Beuys, in addition to extraordinary drawings and sculptures, presented an influential number of performance works (called "actions") involving animals (e.g., a live coyote, a dead hare) or people (a

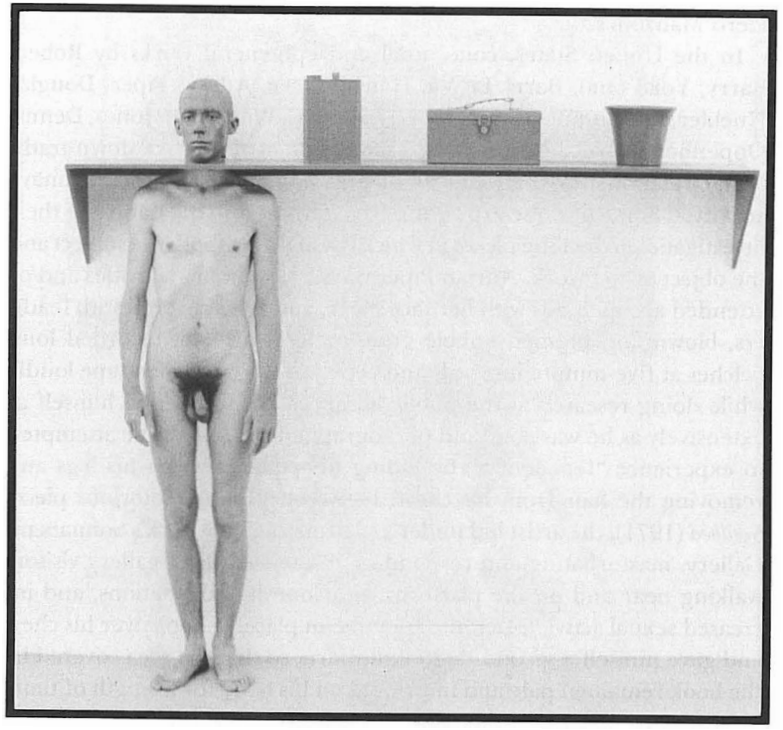
KIM JONES

As "The Mudman."

breakfast event for hundreds of New York feminist artists and critics; a birthday party at his home for 15,000 guests). Many of his works have also been nonmaterial; according to James Lee Byars, Beuys purchased his own death from Byars, continuing the tradition established in 1962 when artist Benjamin Vautier signed Yves Klein's death and, a year later, Piero Manzoni's.[23]

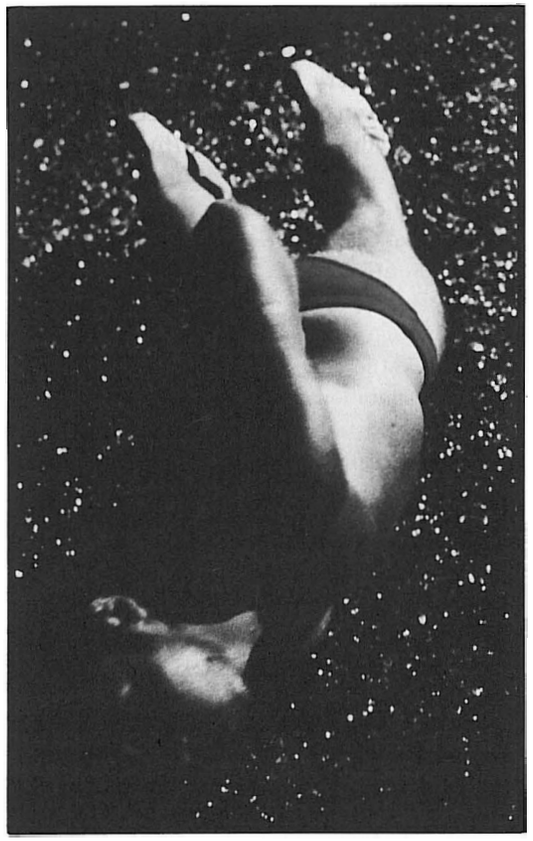
In the United States, conceptual and ephemeral works by Robert Barry, Yoko Ono, Barry Le Va, Hans Haacke, Adrian Piper, Douglas Huebler, Lee Lozano, Robert Morris, Hannah Wilke, Kim Jones, Dennis Oppenheim, Bruce Nauman, and many others also broke down traditional relationships between artist and audience, art and ordinary activity.[24] Some of these artists also began to expand the nature of their investigation to include pieces in which the artist was both the subject and the object of the work. Adrian Piper pursued ordinary activities and/or attended art openings with her face, neck, and arms covered with feathers, blown and popped bubble gum, or balloons; she recorded loud belches at five-minute intervals and replayed the concealed tape loudly while doing research at the public library. Vito Acconci bit himself as extensively as he was able, and photographed the results; he attempted to experience "femaleness" by hiding his penis between his legs and removing the hair from his chest. In Acconci's most notorious piece, *Seedbed* (1971), the artist hid under a platform at New York's Sonnabend Gallery, masturbating and responding to the sounds of gallery visitors walking near and on the platform with sounds, exhortations, and increased sexual activity. Dennis Oppenheim placed a book over his chest and gave himself a second-degree sunburn, so that the area covered by the book remained pale and imprinted on his body for a length of time. Hannah Wilke used her nude body as a sculptural site and entity for many years. In the mid-1970s, Kim Jones, known as "The Mudman," began covering himself with mud and sticks and appearing unexpectedly in public. Bruce Nauman did a performance in which he and two women bounced the upper part of their bodies into respective corners for over an hour. And in *Velocity Piece (Impact Run)*, Barry Le Va ran as fast as possible into two opposite walls fifty feet apart, for as long as he could until he collapsed. From the early 1970s on, an artist named Charles Ray went so far as to physically incorporate himself into his own sculptures, so that the sculptures consisted of animate and inanimate parts seen as a homogenous entity.

Many artists who have used their bodies specifically as their work incorporate elements of extreme danger to themselves as part of a piece.



CHARLES RAY

Shelf, 1974.



CHRIS BURDEN

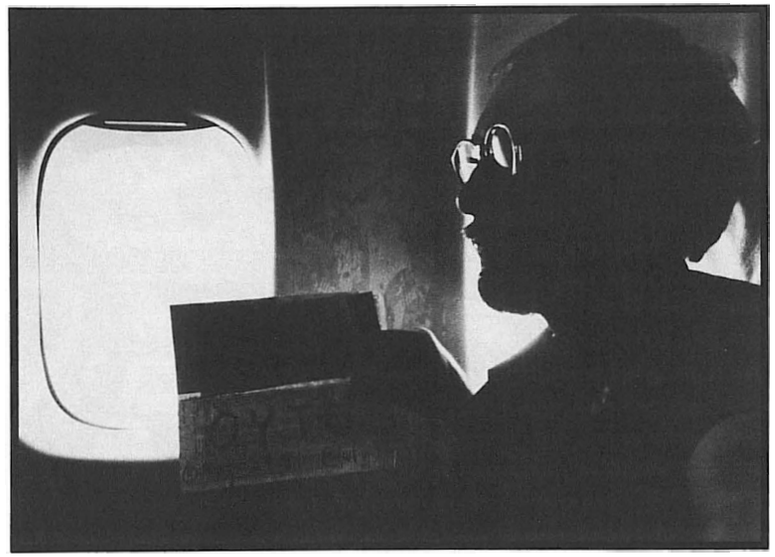
Through the Night Softly, 1973. Main Street, Los Angeles, September 12, 1973. "Holding my hands behind my back, I crawled through fifty feet of broken glass. There were very few spectators, most of them passersby. This piece was documented with 16mm film."

Chris Burden, perhaps the best known of these, locked himself in a 2′ x 2′ x 3′ locker for five days (1971), fasted and stayed in bed for twenty-two consecutive days in an alternative art space (1972), crawled through fifty feet of broken glass with hands held behind his back (1973), had himself crucified on the hood of a Volkswagen (1974), sat on a sculpture pedestal in the Hansen-Fuller Gallery for forty-three hours until he fell off (1974), and lay unseen on an open shelf ten feet above the floor for three weeks in the Ronald Feldman Gallery (1976). *Shoot* (1971), in which a marksman accidentally shot Burden in the arm, *Prelude to 220*, in which he was strapped to the floor by copper bands next to two buckets of water containing live 110 lines, and *Doorway to Heaven* (1973), where he pushed two live electric wires into his chest, were all public pieces which specifically incorporated a very real danger to himself, despite the fact that the odds were against his actually being injured.[25] (Since 1979, Burden has been making objects rather than using himself in his work.)

Psychological confrontation is clearly an important part of the performance aesthetic, and is manifest as an element of risk for either or both audience and performer. New York artist Paul Lamarre's *One Year to Live*, for instance, postulated that he would commit suicide at the end of that time (although he decided not to when the time came). At the other extreme Chris Burden locked an unsuspecting audience in a dark room for an entire night, telling them as he left that there was a key hidden there, but that it would be nearly impossible to find; the "spectators" ultimately broke out.

It is sometimes virtually impossible to distinguish between work which incorporates elements of danger or risk to artist or audience, and painful and upsetting work which is concerned with societal taboos in general. The Hungarian artist Stelarc hung himself naked from dozens of hooks piercing his flesh. Gina Pane has cut herself with razors, climbed a ladder of razor-sharp glass, and placed herself suspended above burning candles. Rudolf Schwartzkogler, part of a Viennese group in the 1960s, which included Hermann Nitsch and Gunter Brus, performed acts of sexual self-mutilation of an extreme nature. Brus stabbed himself and ate his own excretia in various performances. Paul McCarthy, a California performance artist, has explored every kind of physical, psychological, and sexual taboo in public performances, and Stuart Brisley in England has also performed cathartic rituals and horrific acts of self-denial and physical endurance involving (often involuntarily) the public.

This unsettling work can be seen as a response to particular events of the 1960s: for example, it is possible that "Chris Burden's dramatic



PAUL LAMARRE

One Year To Live, May 29, 1981.

ALLAN KAPROW

Household. A Happening commissioned by Cornell University, May 1964.

stagings...rebuked a society indifferent to violence and made catatonic by television and movie killings at all times of the day and night,"[26] or that "Gina Pane ill-treats herself in order to make one feel that violence is a daily fact, a way of denying both man and life...[so that] by her suffering, her risking, she disrupts his indifference and hostility...."[27]

Nevertheless, the practice of using one's own body as the work of art, particularly within a specific context and in a limited time frame, has become part of the vocabulary of accepted art practice, especially in the past ten years, as the theater and the visual arts (and most recently the music industry) have increasingly overlapped, influencing each other enormously. It was performance as a new genre of art making which bridged the gap between these disciplines.

Just as earlier the futurists, dadaists, and surrealists had turned to performance as "a means to gain access to a wider audience and to shake up the public's attitude toward art, life, and culture,"[28] it was performance art, emerging as a genre in the 1960s on the West Coast, which was marked by a radical stance

> against the establishment (be it art or politics), against the commercialization of art, and against the strict confinement of museums and galleries. Performance artists have acted against the overriding belief that art is limited to the production of art objects, insisting instead that art is primarily a matter of ideas and actions.[29]

For example, in Los Angeles Allan Kaprow, well known as an instigator of Happenings in the 1960s, began to do spare, task-oriented pieces with only the participants as audience; people received and followed instructions of a seemingly simple nature whose results were psychologically demanding and complex.

Performers like Terry Fox and Howard Fried in San Francisco, and Paul Cotton in Los Angeles, engaged the audience on a psychological, if not directly physical level, organizing events, doing private, ritualistic pieces, or creating confrontational and humorous works which, like those of the more extreme body artists, also addressed cultural taboos. Fox lay immobile on a bed of earth for six hours, and, surrounded by a ring of his own blood and with four plastic tubes containing blood, water, urine, and milk, attempted to levitate. Cotton, using his body as living sculpture, appeared nude and painted white in the curatorial offices of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and had the curator sign a statement that said that life was more important than art.[30] Fried also

structured his work from his life experiences, using, among other things, participatory games that often got out of hand to manipulate his audience.

Tom Marioni, a pioneer in dissolving the boundaries between art and daily life, as well as between artist and audience, established M.O.C.A., the Museum of Conceptual Art, in 1970 in San Francisco. As the artist Allan Fish, an identity he created specifically in order to do certain works when he himself was a curator at the Richmond Art Center, he structured interactive social situations, such as *Drinking Beer With Friends*, to exemplify the idea that "the *act* of art *was* the art."[31]

Sometimes concern for the audience is expressed in the very personal terms of shared experience. "Autobiographical" artists like Barbara T. Smith and Rachel Rosenthal have explored their life experiences with the audience, Smith in events or situations which she sets up in relation to the audience and Rosenthal in more traditionally dramatic and overtly theatrical pieces.

Smith, for instance, has been working with "sexual energy" for several years, and sees herself not as a performer, but as "a vehicle for something larger than myself."[32] She also says that she is not sure whether or not her performances are art.

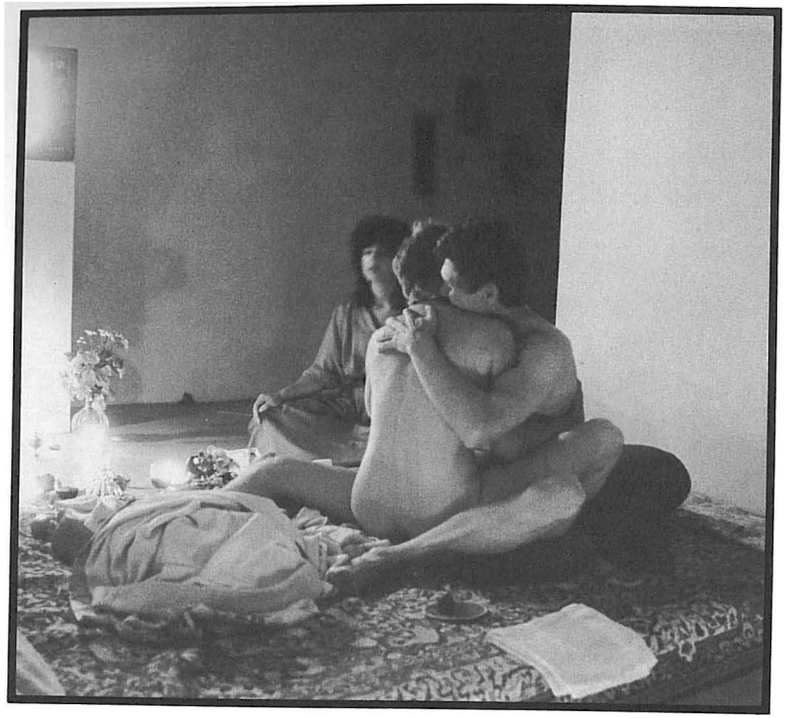
> They are neither abstractions nor representations entirely nor is understanding or discourse a substitute for the actual performance. My performances are more of a synthesis of experience.[33]

In a similar autobiographical vein, Paul Lamarre recently completed *The Chelsea Tapes*, a spontaneous and unrehearsed examination of his habits and habitat, including food preferences, sexual activities, childhood memories and events, clothing, and psychological states. His manifesto, "E.I.D.I.A., N.I.D.I.A., D.B.M." ("Everything I Do Is Art, Nothing I Do Is Art, Don't Bother Me"), points to the impossibility of distinguishing the two.

In recent art history, there are many different kinds of pieces like these that isolate aspects of daily life and present them as art. For example, beginning in 1969, On Kawara executed a series of paintings consisting of the stenciled date of each day as an ongoing project; he typed lists of every person he met each day, and mapped each of his movements for a year (1968-1969); he sent postcards for months to different friends documenting the time he got up each day; sent telegrams to people announcing simply "I am still alive"; and generally pursued, in addition to more object-oriented work, obsessive notational activities reaffirming

TOM MARIONI

Every Wednesday afternoon in the saloon of MOCA's Breens Cafe Society, 1976 through 1979.



BARBARA T. SMITH

Birth Daze. Performance at Tortue Gallery, Los Angeles, July 1981.

his continued existence.[34] Roman Opalka, the Polish artist, executes paintings that consist of sequential numbers, to date four million; similarly, everything Jonathan Borofsky has made since 1969, including the individual frames of animated films and separate pages consisting only of numbers, has been numbered.

Other artists have made "living environments" which incorporated work (in the sense of labor) into their art. One of the best known of these, Bonnie Sherk's *Farm* (now defunct), was a life-scaled ecological project located under the San Francisco Freeway, an actual working farm filled with animals, plants, and gardens and offering a series of events geared to the environment.

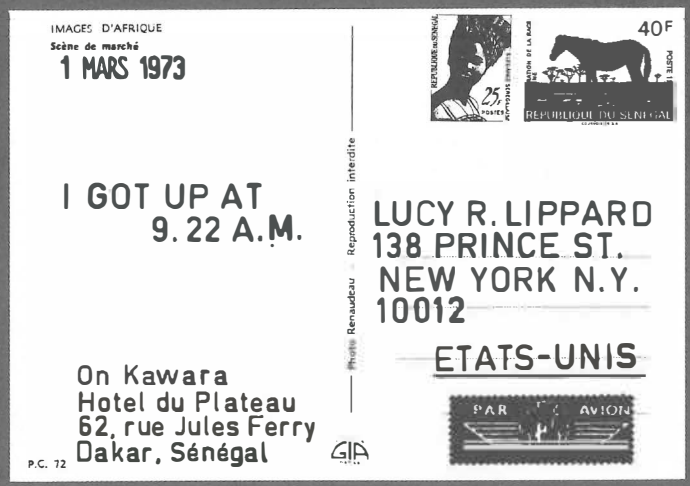
David Ireland, an artist living in Northern California, has been renovating the house in which he lives, a "labor" which began in 1976. He incorporates elements from the history of the house, such as objects discarded by previous owners, or the layers of paint, plaster, and wallpaper on the walls, into its new and evolving life. And Leslie Labowitz, also working in Northern California, which seems to lend itself to agricultural adventure, has grown and sold sprouts for a living and as an artwork since 1980.

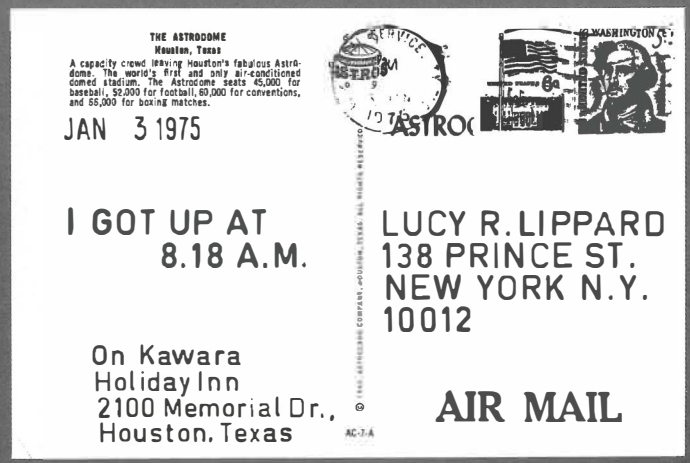
Mierle Ukeles began work with the New York Sanitation Department in 1976, and maintains an office/studio there which the Department provides. She has tried through her work to bring back to the public the hidden aspects of maintenance, beginning with the tasks she and millions of others have undertaken as parents and homemakers, and progressing to its more public aspect with the lives and work of the thousands of people who maintain our sanitation system.

Even Christo, who has been wrapping such natural and cultural landmarks as the South Australian coast, islands in Biscayne Bay, Florida, and most recently Le Pont Neuf in Paris, combines life and art by virtue of the massive bureaucratic struggles, public relations campaigns, and the mobilization of huge volunteer efforts required to make a single piece.

There is, of course, a difference between this kind of work, and the kind most of us must do daily to earn a living. According to the poet and writer Lewis Hyde, the latter is generally done during a specific time, for money, and often controlled by others. On the other hand, the kind of work which is a "labor of love," like that done by artists,

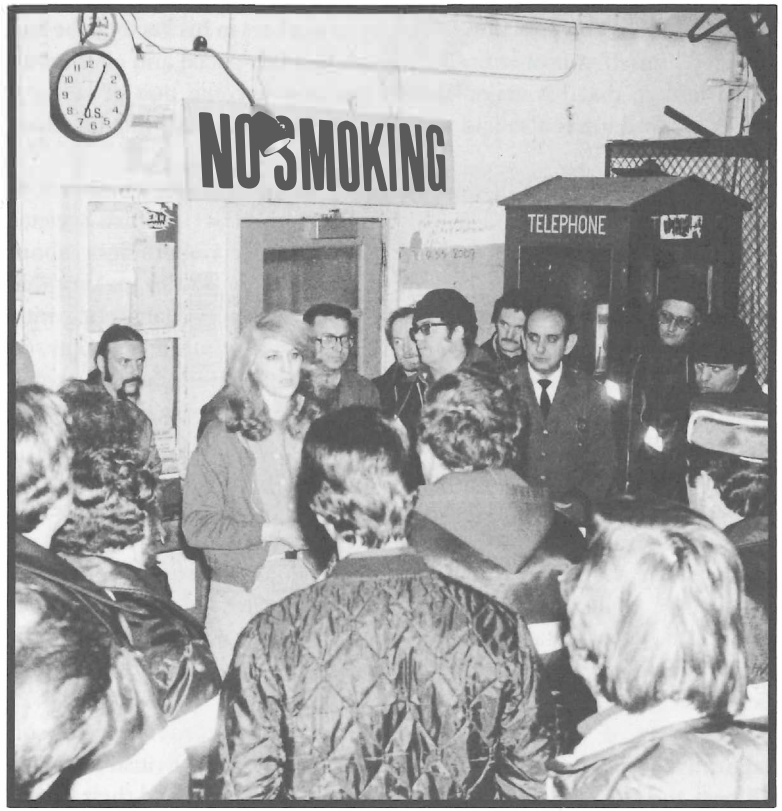
> is harder to quantify....[This kind of labor is] something dictated by the course of life rather than by society, something that is often urgent but that nevertheless has its own interior rhythm, something more bound up with feeling, more interior, than work.[35]





ON KAWARA

I Got Up, 1973/1975. Two postcards from the "I Got Up" series.



MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES

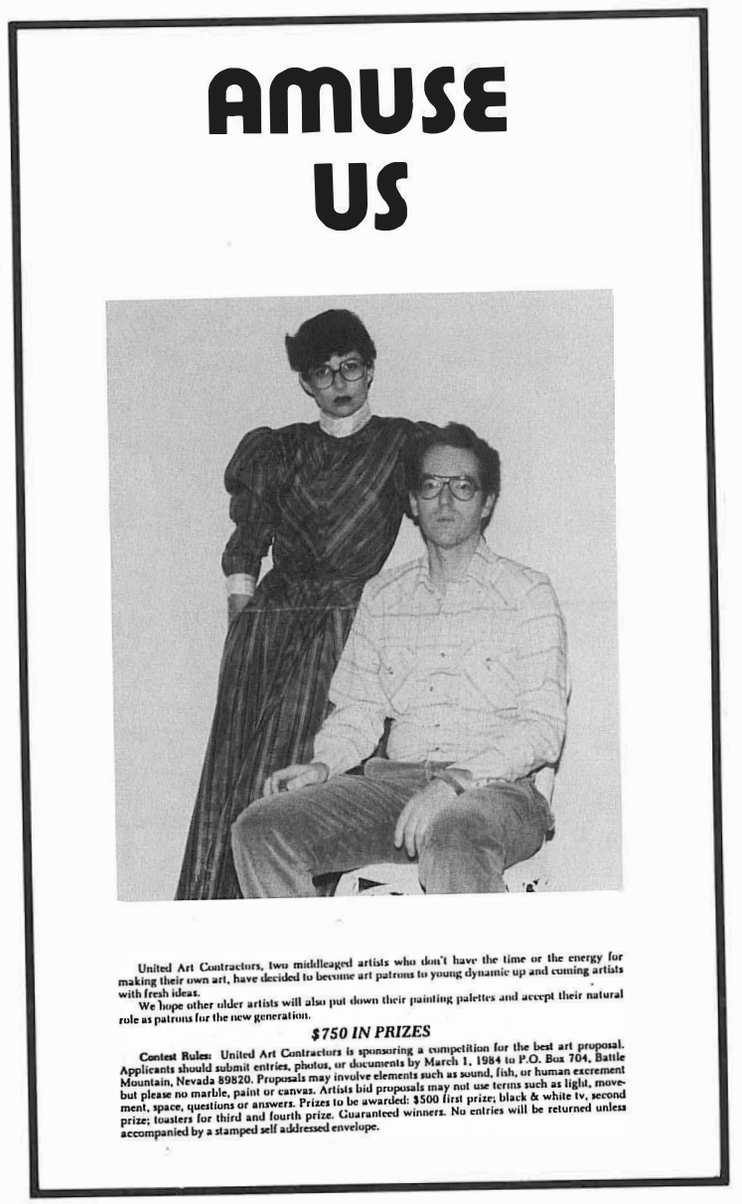
From *Touch Sanitation Performance* series. Roll call and lunchtime speaking and rapping to large groups. Queens, New York. July 1979-June 1980.

There is also a distaff side to the purity of intention which manifests itself in most of this kind of labor, done by artists in the name of art. Andy Warhol, the most visible and influential artist of the twentieth century in terms of making his life and his art interchangeable, stopped making work and left the production of objects to workers in his Factory; he has devoted himself almost entirely, instead, to a fast-paced and glamorous social life, so that his major activity has now become that of being a celebrity. And it has also had an effect on younger artists in a less than positive way.

Whether the work is of the former or the latter kind, whether it is motivated by a moral code and the desire to effect positive societal changes or by narcissism and self-service, it is nonetheless labor-intensive. Because of the phenomenal efforts involved in making this kind of art, some artists engaged in it find themselves collaborating with hundreds of other people. Others, like Marina Abramovic and Ulay, or Terri and Dave of United Art Contractors, deliberately choose to work collaboratively with another artist for an extended period of time, or permanently.

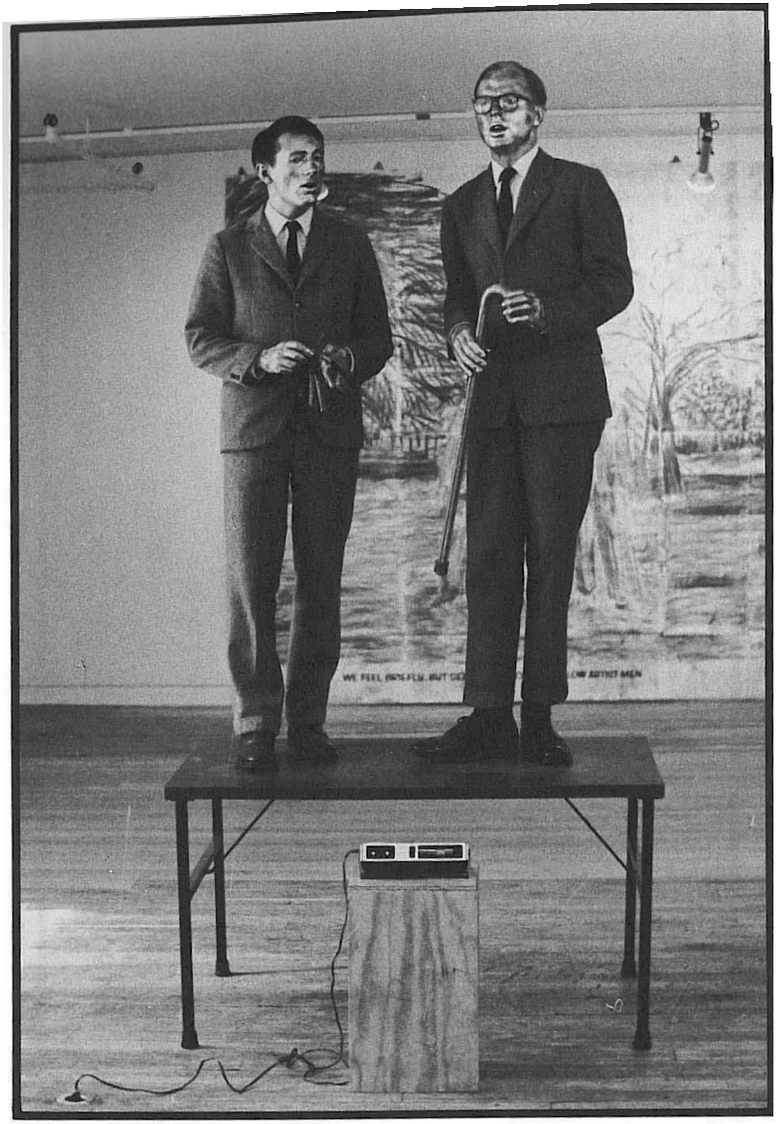
Historically, collaboration has been an important element in a great deal of avant-garde art, especially in the early part of the century; then as now the incentive toward such work has been the result not just of camaraderie, shared ideas, and mutual ambition, but also of the presence of wartime or disruptive social conditions in general.[36] This phenomenon also seems to take place in many instances when the work both artists are doing, separately or together, is difficult, dangerous, or publicly unacceptable.

Like that of United Art Contractors, much contemporary collaborative work is also humorous; the early work of the British sculptors Gilbert and George was witty, sarcastic, and irreverent, and their Living Sculpture pieces retained a strong element of black humor. The Kipper Kids, another British duo who came to the United States and performed in Los Angeles and New York during the 1970s, were outrageous characters offstage and on, incorporating violence, slapstick, and sexual innuendo into their extremely funny, but also frightening work. American artists Bob and Bob (Light Bob and Dark Bob) have published a book, done dozens of pieces, and produced two records in the ten years since they've been together. Until 1978, Jody Proctor and Doug Hall, two artists working collaboratively in Los Angeles as *T.R. Uthco*, similarly explored dangerous terrain in the form of political parody; they also did several pieces where they became a kind of living sculpture with dia-



UNITED ART CONTRACTORS

Poster.



GILBERT & GEORGE

The Singing Sculpture, 1971. Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

logue. The black humor in the work of these artists is basically subversive, serving to draw in the audience by complicity and attempting to undermine cultural, political, and sexual stereotypes.

Collaboration by its very nature bypasses formalist doctrine entirely. It emphasizes flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness rather than control, autonomy, and isolation. Work is not the result of a single endeavor, so that the aesthetic quality we have come to associate with individual genius is difficult, if not impossible, to locate. The concept of uniqueness and the admiration for a single artist's abilities are at odds with work which is the result of more than one sensibility, and therefore constantly in flux. Marina and Ulay, for instance, feel that their *Relation Work* in this respect is "more advanced. It's an exit from the one-point perspective." Such open-endedness and multidimensionality were the aim of such famous collaborations as that of Dali and Buñuel in the 1930s, and Cage, Tudor, and Cunningham in the 1960s, and remain those of the collaborators in "Choices" today.

MORGAN O'HARA

Record Books.

Wherever one should expect living relations between people in today's society, we witness a tendency to relate to objects. Examples of this kind can be found on the job as well as on vacation, in urbanism as well as in medicine, in the realm of nature and in the realm of images, in politics, science, and education.

—HERBERT MOLDERINGS[37]

III.

The artist Allan Kaprow, in a 1983 article, divided avant-garde Western art into two histories, one of which he called "artlike art," the other "lifelike art."[38] He described the latter as involving an intermittent minority of the art community, not as "serious" as artlike art, not participating in the Western tradition, not fitting into traditional institutions even when welcomed by them, and based on an integrative kind of thinking which elevates everyday experience from its taken-for-granted state to one of heightened awareness.

Furthermore, Kaprow said, it's not even certain if the artist pursuing this kind of work is an artist. In contrast to the increasing numbers of artists today who have become the "glamorous people," adapting the characteristic lifestyle usually associated with the rock music and film worlds, the artist making lifelike art tends to be unobtrusive, even modest, and steers away from notoriety.

> It is in the nature of lifelike art to reduce and eliminate the sort of fame associated with rock stars, socialites, and short-term politi-

cians. If you view the world as a unity, with all things connected including yourself and your work, then being celebrated with the exaggerated attention and flattery that go with stardom almost invariably leads to self-importance, separation, and, in time, isolation.[39]

Ultimately, he concludes, "the root message of all artlike art is *separateness and specialness*; and the corresponding one of all lifelike art is *connectedness and wide-angle awareness*."[40]

Most of the work in "Choices" shares the characteristics of lifelike art (even when it does so through irony or spoof, as is the case with United Art Contractors) and it raises the same basic question posed by Kaprow, that is, what makes it art? We still tend to define art as something which, at the very least, has aesthetic qualities, even if it doesn't look like "art." In fact, most people think of art and aesthetics as inseparable. However, as the philosopher Timothy Binkley has noted,

> although frequently purporting to be a (or even *the*) philosophy of art, aesthetics so understood [referring to a particular type of theoretical inquiry which emerged in the nineteenth century] is not exclusively about art: it investigates a type of human experience (aesthetic experience) which is elicited by artworks, but also by nature and by non-artistic artifacts....Art in the twentieth century has emerged as a strongly self-critical discipline. It has freed itself of aesthetic parameters and sometimes creates directly with ideas unmediated by aesthetic qualities. An artwork is a piece; and a piece need not be an aesthetic object, or even an object at all.[41]

Binkley goes on to discuss Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, a reproduction of Leonardo's Mona Lisa with moustache, goatee, and the letters inscribed at the bottom, as an example of art that creates primarily with ideas rather than with appearances, as does most traditional art. In the latter case,

> to know the art is to know the look of it; and to know that is to *experience* the look, to perceive the appearance. On the other hand, some art creates primarily with ideas. To know the art is to know the idea; and to know an idea is not necessarily to experience a particular sensation, or even to have some particular experience. This is why you can know *L.H.O.O.Q.* either by looking at it or by having it described to you.[42]

For Tehching Hsieh, for instance, a concise statement of intent for each piece, plus a one-year calendar, is all the information the artist gives (and all that is necessary) to understand the work. To understand one of his pieces, of course, is not to experience it, since he alone can do that. Just the knowledge of his having done the piece, apprehended through the simplest description of it, is enough to have a profound affect on the "viewer."

Moreover, we often attempt to define what art is by defining what a *work* of art is, when they are not the same thing.[43] The practice of art isn't limited to the use of a particular media, or in fact any media at all.

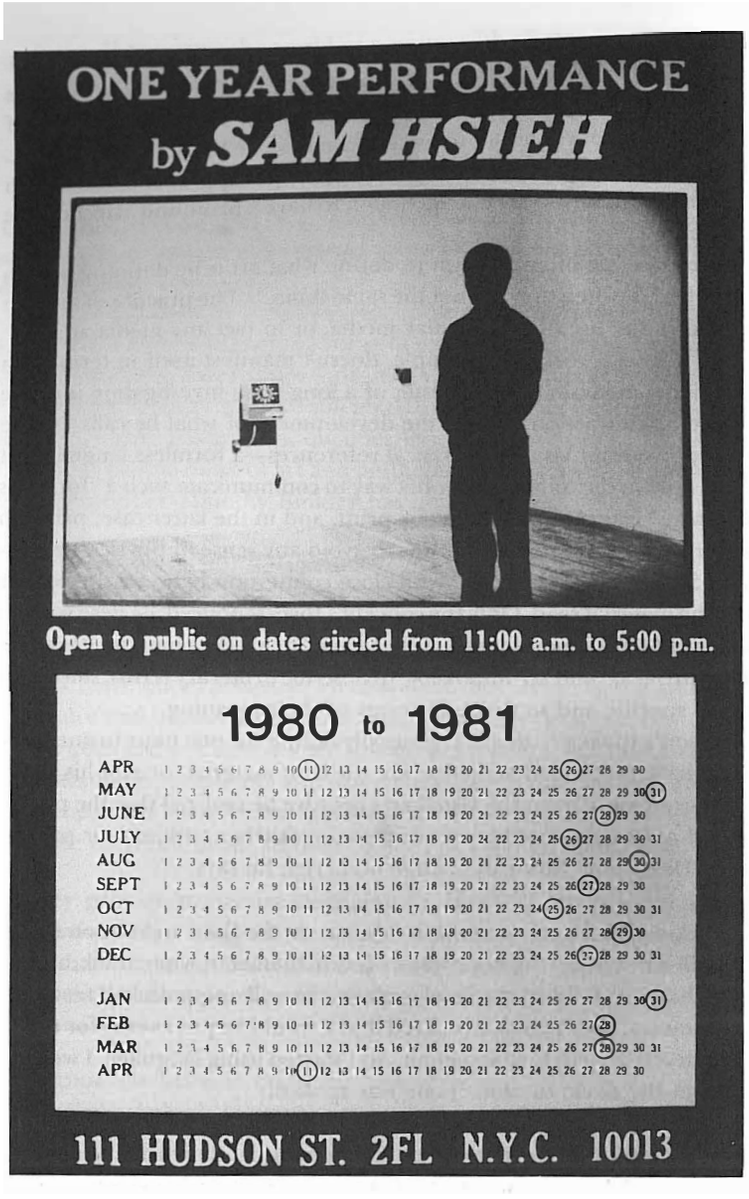
Ian Wilson's work, for example, doesn't manifest itself in terms of a traditional medium. It's the result of a long-term investigation into the nature of abstraction, that is, the development of what he calls "a true concept, without visual or physical references—a formless language. It exists only in the mind." The only way to communicate such a "formless language" is through dialogue or print, and in the latter case, print no larger than twelve point, in order to avoid any sense of physical dimension. Says Wilson, "Print allows a close connection between the reader and the material read. Only the concept's form is noticed." These written works are unlike most literature, however, in that they have no narrative structure at all, and are impossible to describe in literary terms, since they are so specific and so dense in terms of their meaning.

Wilson's spoken dialogues, generally lasting for one hour to one hour and a half, for a small audience, are the least material form of his work. He moved away from the visual arts because he realized that the principles of abstraction could not advance any further within their parameters. Describing how this change occurred, he says:

> My last visual work was two circles, one on the floor and one on the wall. The one on the floor was six feet in diameter, white chalk, and at that time I did an eye-level circle on the wall one and a half feet in diameter, grey pencil. I realized that it would be just as easy for me to describe a circle to someone...so I started using language. I went from the circle to time. Time was spoken.

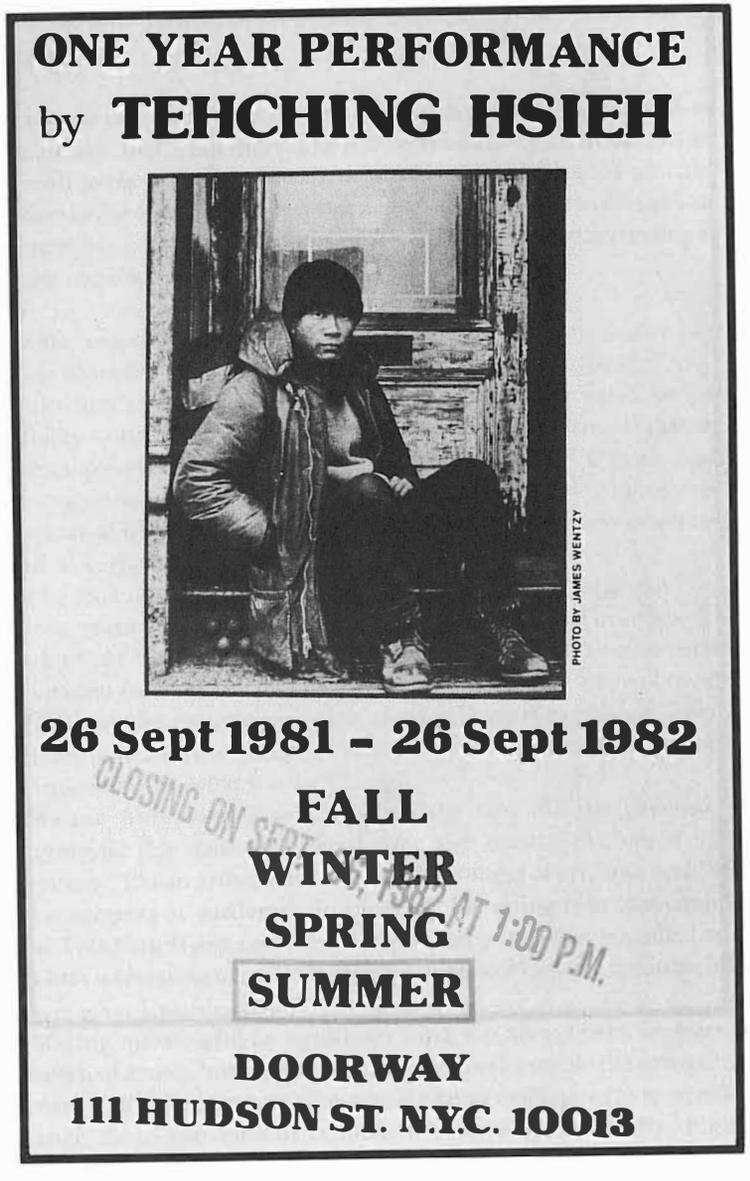
Wilson's work therefore does not have a material dimension, consisting as it does only of ideas, transmitted by means of words alone.

Spalding Gray's monologues, on the other hand, consist of experiences as well as ideas, shared, like Wilson's, by means of the spoken word. In a theatrical context, they are as spare and anomalous as Wilson's are in



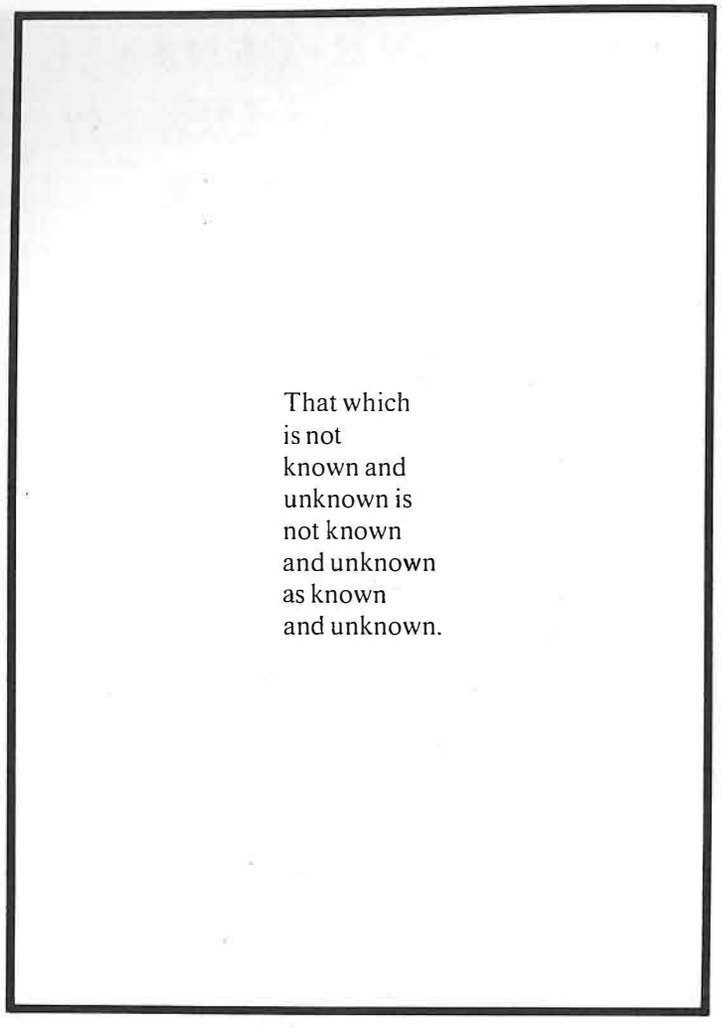
TEHCHING HSIEH

Poster from One-Year Performance,
1980-1981.



TEHCHING HSIEH

Poster from One-Year Performance,
1981-1982.



IAN WILSON

Excerpt from *Section 30.*

the context of traditional art making. Timothy Binkley points out in this regard that

> a great deal of art has chosen to articulate in the medium of an aesthetic space, but there is no *a priori* reason why art must confine itself to the creation of aesthetic objects. It might opt for articulation in the semantic space instead of an aesthetic one so that artistic meaning is not embodied in a physical object or event according to the conventions of a medium.[44]

This "semantic space" is also the arena in which a substantive part of Linda Montano's work evolves; her seven years of dialogue (or "Art/Life Counseling") with the public have no material dimension or public visibility—other than on a one-to-one basis. Similarly, many of James Lee Byars's pieces, like his *Soliloquy on Perfect*, consist of a brief, spoken interrogation which may not necessarily be considered comprehensible in terms of ordinary conversational exchange, since Byars often uses a kind of verbal shorthand with which to speak.

The idea of the artwork as a "piece," not tied to a particular class of objects, means that something need only be designated or indexed as a work of art by an artist; when this is done by an artist of substantial reputation (such as Duchamp did when he submitted a urinal to an art exhibition), the entire convention of art making is expanded. Then, as Binkley indicates, the question "Is it art?" is of little interest compared to the question "So what if it is?"[45]

Marina Abramovic says that when she first did performances in Yugoslavia, this issue was raised over and over again, much to her irritation. "I'm an artist, and I work in the context of art," she says. "I am not a surgeon or gardener. So whatever I'm doing is in that context." And Tehching Hsieh says that "the question of whether it's called art or not isn't interesting to me. Whether it's good work or not, meaningful or not, is what I worry about."

Making meaningful or significant work has always been an essential concern of artists, but especially those who work outside the conventions already indexed as art, and who may not be so well known as to be able to change those conventions immediately or single-handedly. Binkley argues:

> We need to beware of confusing issues about arthood with issues about good or recognized arthood....Simply by making a piece, a

person makes an artistic "statement"; good art is distinguished by the interest or significance of what it says. Of course, interesting art, like interesting economics, is usually produced by people who, in some sense, are considered "professionals."[46]

The artists in "Choices" are, of course, "professionals" in this sense, having attended art school or engaged in the practice of art for many years, and they are known and respected as artists by the community of their peers. For the most part, however, they have chosen to articulate their ideas in terms of activities, and some of the activities may be so subtle or private as to go unnoticed by most of us.

Morgan O'Hara, for instance, considers her work to be the act of paying attention to what she does; recording it is simply the means to this end. In an unpublished description of her work, she writes:

> The creation of a time-use record and its visual depiction is one aspect of a process of focusing and therefore heightening concentration and attention. I apply this process not only to the way in which I use my time, but in turn to every way in which I approach my life and create my art.

For Linda Montano, "attention" is also a key word; the inner process, however, is more important than the external product. When she first began to do extended pieces involving her life, she realized, "the creative process could be continuous; it didn't have to be relegated to a person, a time, a place, a material. Somewhere I was aware that [the work] was about consciousness." Her *Seven Year Art/Life Performance* is centered on this process.

> For seven hours a day, I listen to one pitch. I hear better. The drone of the sound is a self-imposed attention-making device. I spend three hours a day in a red space, and I also have a traveling space, which is a red cloth I can drape over my head. I speak in a slight accent; every word is a little different from the way I normally speak, so I feel that I'm a foreigner. I have to be careful that the red clothes aren't about a costume. It needs to be a tool rather than an issue. I learn better, qualitative ways to pay attention.

The results of this attitude are experienced by anyone who has had the opportunity to engage in Montano's "counseling," where her focus on

LINDA MONTANO

Seven Years of Living Art; Linda Montano giving a palm reading, 1984.

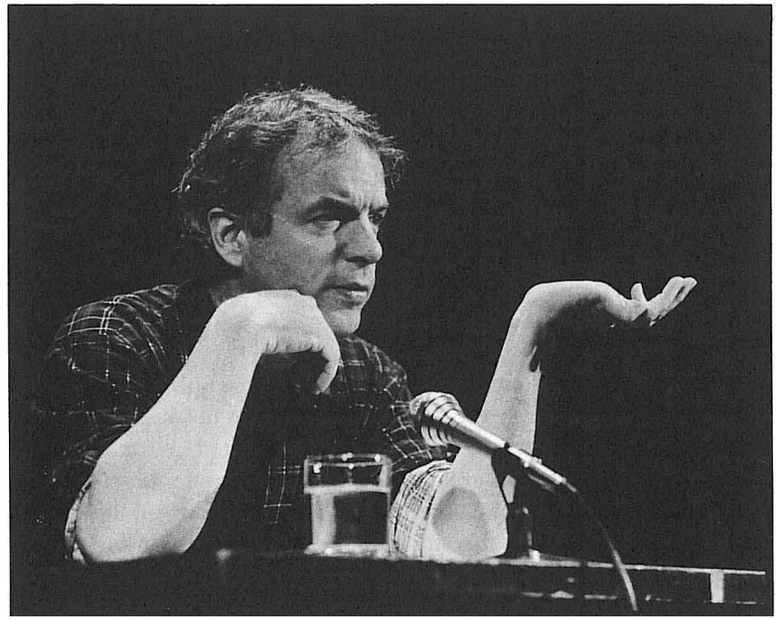
the visitor is so intense as to be both moving and unsettling.

For Marina and Ulay attention is also essential both in the preparation of their pieces (for which, they say, "we must acquire a state of mind from which we can work directly towards the audience") and the pieces themselves. *Nightsea Crossing*, for instance, came out of an extended period of time they first spent in the Australian desert in 1979.

> We do not consider the trips to the desert a piece of art but rather conditioning, or de-conditioning from having been exposed to an audience. We needed to be exposed to the elements instead....It was important that the desert was only that, completely a desert and so hot that your body temperature is cooler than that of your surroundings. It's so hot all activity drops. You do nothing. Just to face the possibility of being non-active....And the idea of not thinking, not moving from one place to another....We're very active people. When we couldn't do anything at all because of the heat a whole different world opened up for us. From the desert came *Nightsea Crossing*, which marks five years of doing motionless work.

Spalding Gray pays attention to both mundane and exciting facets of his own life, beginning with his childhood (*Sex and Death to the Age 14*), and adolescence (*Booze, Cars and College Girls*), then exploring, most recently, his own involvement with political reality as an actor in the film *The Killing Fields* (*Swimming to Cambodia*). Like Marina and Ulay, the material for Gray's pieces covers the globe; travels in India and Thailand vie with adventures in Hollywood and Rhode Island, where he was born; the provincial and the international, the personal and the political, people famous and ordinary, are interwoven in a complex narrative tapestry.

In theatrical terms, paying attention seems to raise some of the same questions it does in the visual arts: one critic asked, "Is it art or is it (shudder) entertainment?"[47] And theater critic Mel Gussow wrote that "were it not for the absolute simplicity of the presentation, one might be tempted to say that Spalding Gray has invented a performance art form."[48] More bluntly, yet another critic simply referred to Gray's "newfangled technique,"[49] meaning that the monologues don't seem to fit into any known category of theatrical activity. This may be, in part, because to share this kind of focus on one's life with an audience requires the use of real time, or at least real storytelling time rather than condensed or theatrical time. And there is no linear narrative in Gray's work, that is, no



SPALDING GRAY

From *Swimming to Cambodia*, 1984.

beginning, middle, and traditional *dénouement*, because if you really pay equally close attention to all things, they have equal weight.

In James Lee Byars's work, it is the audience who must pay attention, because if you don't you might miss the work entirely. Byars's pieces seem either outrageous (his extravagant costumes, eccentric gestures, and unpredictable events include gold, red, or black suits, black top hat and mask, and a public persona which is often confrontational and domineering), or so subtle and unassuming as to be almost invisible. McEvilley points out that:

> It is not perceptual quirks, cultural codes or patterns of relationship that Byars's work focuses on, but the quality of delicate and open attention itself. The artwork is less the object of this attention than the subjective experience of it. Attention relatively purified of past and future associations, attention that can see the thing as strictly experience, *is* the substance of his art, and the purpose of his unusual persona.[50]

Attention of the kind these artists are involved with is not common to our own lives, where it usually functions selectively, and in fact enables us to act according to the priorities that we have selected. What happens, however, is that we miss a great deal; we rarely pay attention to things we're not already used to focusing on. By becoming aware of the quality of attention *itself* through this kind of work, we may possibly have access to our own lives in a more profound way.

This is perhaps why Kaprow describes "lifelike art" as therapeutic, since its purpose is "to reintegrate the piecemeal reality we take for granted. Not just intellectually, but directly, as experience—in this moment, in this house, at this kitchen sink."[51]

Attention, of course, takes time. Perhaps this is one reason that so many of these artists make work which exists in an extended time frame. Unlike two-dimensional work, which can (at least superficially) be apprehended quite rapidly; or three-dimensional work, which requires only the time to walk through or around it; or film and video, in which time is at least finite, although often quite a bit longer than the viewer's attention span, much of the work in "Choices" shares real time with the world at large.

For Linda Montano, time has always been a crucial element. "It's used to extend, differentiate, frame, and change experience," she says. "It's the difference between a two-year and a twenty-year marriage." Similarly, O'Hara's time-charts constitute a lifetime commitment. For Marina and Ulay, time is energy; in a piece done in Bologna in 1977 where they sat alone for sixteen hours, back to back, with their long hair tied together, the entry of the audience at the end of the piece and at the limits of their endurance enabled them to sit for another hour.

Many of Mike Osterhout's pieces last for a year because, for him, "it's a nice, even bracket " But he also feels that

> ten years ago time was much more available than it is now....The atmosphere that once allowed for experimentation and manipulation of time within the "performance proper" is now gone. What has taken its place is Performance as Entertainment.[52]

Tehching Hsieh says of the time frame he's chosen:

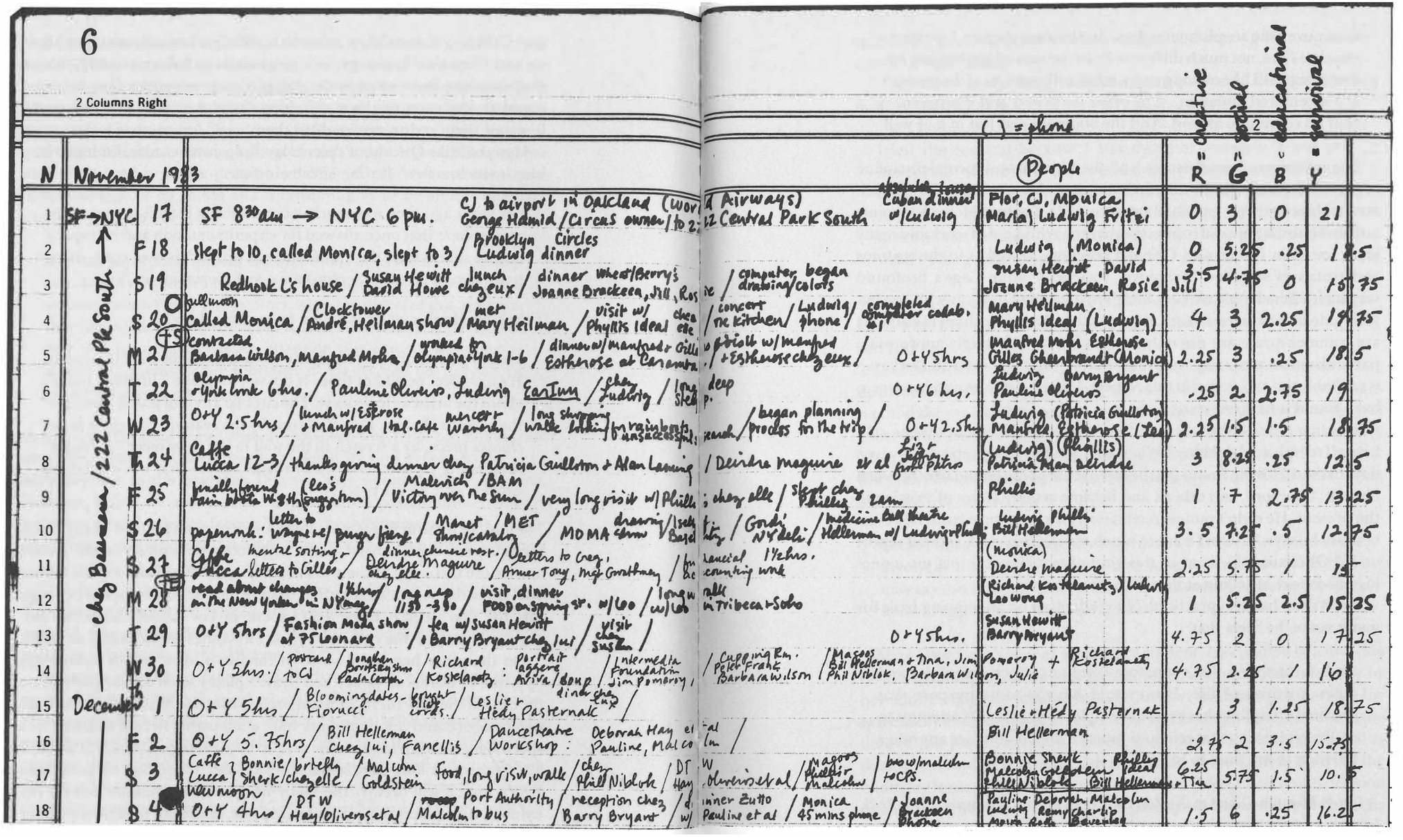
> I use a period of one year in my work because of the life process. It's a perfect period of time. It doesn't look like a lifetime, but it's about the artist's life process. The circular rhythm is very natural the seasons change. I marked time by the seasons' changing in the *Outside* piece, by a scratch in the wall in the *Cage* piece....I "waste" time and I "spend" time—so I made a piece that was a thinking process and an art process.

For most of these artists, time is duration; it can be a lifetime, many years, a single year, cumulative days, or only hours, depending on the nature and/or the difficulty of the work. In any case, seven hours spent immobile, three days spent handcuffed to someone else, a year spent in a cage (or, for that matter, three years spent in law school), all seem outrageously long to the rest of us (and sometimes to the artists as well!).

On the other hand, the sense of time in a work can be exactly the opposite of duration. James Lee Byars's pieces seem to take place in no time at all; they are there, or not there, equally. He has done a four-hour performance and a four-minute one; a telepathic needle installed in a specific site would allow him, he says, to be present psychically at any and all moments as long as it remained installed. The Ghost of James Lee Byars, which will occupy the lobby of The New Museum during the exhibition, is conceptually an infinite piece, requiring his absence rather than his presence. Time is collapsed and duration irrelevant to his work.

Spalding Gray says that he doesn't understand time.

> It's a slippery concept It gives me the same fuzziness that used to



6

2 Columns Right

( ) = phone

N	November 1983				People	creative R =	social G =	educational B =	survival Y =
1	SF→NYC	17	SF 8:30am → NYC 6pm.	CJ to airport in Oakland (wov / George Hamid / Circas owner / to 2:	(Airways) / 12 Central Park South	Cuban dinner w/Ludwig	Flor, CJ, Monica (Maria) Ludwig Fritzi	0	3	0	21
2		F 18	slept to 10, called Monica, slept to 3 /	Brooklyn Circles Ludwig dinner			Ludwig (Monica)	0	5.25	.25	18.5
3		S 19	Redhook Li's house /	Susan Hewitt David Howe lunch chez eux / dinner Wheat/Berry's / Joanne Brackeen, Jill, Ros	ie / computer began drawing/colors		Susan Hewitt, David Joanne Brackeen, Rosie, Jill	3.5	4.75	0	15.75
4		S 20	full moon Called Monica /	Clocktower André, Heilman show / met Mary Heilman / visit w/ Phyllis Ideal /	concert / re kitchen / Ludwig phone /	completed computer collab.	Mary Heilman Phyllis Ideal (Ludwig)	4	3	2.25	19.75
5		M 21	(+S) contacted Barbara Wilson, Manfred Mohr /	worked for olympia&york 1-6 /	dinner w/ manfred + Gilles Esthersose at Ceramta	/ + Esthersose chez eux /	0+4 5hrs	Manfred Mohr Esthersose Gilles Ghenbrandt (Monica)	2.25	3	.25	18.5
6		T 22	olympia & york link 6hrs. /	Pauline Oliveros, Ludwig	EarInn	chez Ludwig /	deep p. 0+6 hrs.	Ludwig Barry Bryant Pauline Oliveros	.25	2	2.75	19
7		W 23	0+4 2.5hrs /	lunch w/ Esthrose + Manfred Ital. cafe	mercer + Waverly /	long shopping walk looking /	for rainboots / unsuccessful; / reach / began planning / prodes for the trip / 0+4 2.5hrs	Ludwig (Patricia Guilleton) Manfred, Esthersose (Lee) (Ludwig) (Phyllis)	2.25	1.5	1.5	18.75
8		Th 24	Caffe Lucca 12-3 /	thanksgiving dinner chez Patricia Guilleton + Alan Lanning		/ Deirdre Maguire et al	Liz + Jeff Pitts	Patricia Alan Deirdre	3	8.25	.25	12.5
9		F 25	snailly bound rain bottle W 8th (Leo's suggestion)	Malevich / BAM	Victory over the Sun /	very long visit w/ Phill	; chez elle / slept chez Phillies 2am	Phillis	1	7	2.75	13.25
10		S 26	paperwork: letter to Wayne re/	purge piece / Manet / MET show/catalog /	MOMA show	drawing / Isely Bay	ity / Gordi NY Deli /	medicine Ball theatre Hellerman w/ Ludwig+Phill	Ludwig Phillis Bill Hellerman (Monica)	3.5	7.25	.5	12.75
11		S 27	Caffe Lucca letters to Gilles /	mental sorting + dinner chinese rest. / Deirdre Maguire chez elle. /	Letters to Greg, Anner Tony, Meg Goodman /	for he	ancial 1½hrs. counting work	Deirdre Maguire (Richard Kostelanetz) Ludwig Leo Wong	2.25	5.75	1	15
12		M 28	(+S) read about changes in the New Yorker in NY mag /	1 hr w/ long nap 11:30-3:30 /	visit, dinner FOOD on spring st. w/ Leo /	long w/ Leo	ble in Tribeca + Soho		1	5.25	2.5	15.25
13		T 29	0+4 5hrs /	Fashion Media show at 75 Leonard /	tea w/ Susan Hewitt + Barry Bryant chez Liz /	visit chez Susan	0+4 5hrs.	Susan Hewitt Barry Bryant	4.75	2	0	17.25
14		W 30	0+4 5hrs. /	postcard to CJ /	Jonathan Borofsky show Paula Cooper /	Richard Kostelanetz: Portrait taggers Aviva /	soup / Cupping Rm. Peter Frank Barbara Wilson /	Magoos Bill Hellerman + Tina, Jim Phil Niblock, Barbara Wilson	Intermedia Foundation Jim Pomeroy, Pomeroy + Richard Kostelanetz, Julie	4.75	2.25	1	16
15	December 1		0+4 5hrs /	Blooming dates - Fiorucci /	bought bday cards. /	Leslie + Hedy Pasternak	dinner chez Tim /		Leslie + Hedy Pasternak	1	3	1.25	18.75
16		F 2	0+4 5.75hrs /	Bill Hellerman chez Iui, Fanellis /	Dance Theatre Workshop:	Deborah Hay et Pauline, Malco	al Im /		Bill Hellerman	2.75	2	3.5	15.75
17		S 3	Caffe Lucca /	Bonnie Sherk / briefly chez elle /	Malcolm Goldstein	food, long visit, walk /	chez Phill Niblock /	W Oliveros et al / Magoos Phillie Malcolm	bus w/ malcolm to CPS.	Bonnie Sherk Malcolm Goldstein Phillis Ideal Phill Niblock Bill Hellerman + Tina	6.25	5.75	1.5	10.5
18		S 4	(new moon) 0+4 4hrs /	DTW Hay / Oliveros et al /	recap Malcolm to bus	Port Authority /	reception chez Barry Bryant /	iner Zutto Pauline et al / Monica 45 mins phone /	Joanne Brackeen phone	Pauline Deborah Malcolm Ludwig Remy Charlip Meira Gale Beverley	1.5	6	.25	16.25

MORGAN O'HARA

Notebook excerpt.

> come over me in geometry class. In the monologues I go into a timeless state, not much different from the state of meditation, sex, and drugs. It's like moving into a terrific dimension of the present. It's a centered situation....I'm often surprised and disappointed that it's coming to an end. And the audience gets lost in it as well.

The sensation of timelessness, and the physical and mental discipline required to do pieces of extended temporal duration, are often associated with religious or spiritual practice.[53] As Thomas McEvilley points out, there also is a special connection between this kind of work and many ideas found in Indian and Oriental religions, as well as in the customs and rituals of so-called "primitive" societies.[54] John Cage's profound respect for Zen theory, or Yves Klein's involvement not only with Zen but with judo and Rosicrucianism, suggests that those for whom life and art are commensurate are not only aware of, but deliberately appropriate particular aspects of religious practice into their work. (Marcel Duchamp is probably the exception; in this respect, United Art Contractors seem to have found a kindred spirit.)

Spalding Gray is also interested in religion to the extent that he calls himself a "spiritual dabbler." When he attended a Zen retreat for seven days in the 1970s, he found that he lost a sense of the boundaries between himself, the room, and others, and became acutely aware of existing in the present. He didn't pursue meditation on a long-term basis, however, because he says, "I didn't want to watch my mind at work and not report on it." Of course, the irony of this kind of experience is that the monologues consist of telling stories from the past.

Ian Wilson has also practiced Zen meditation on an ongoing basis for many years; he feels that

> art is a discipline that's separate from any other disciplines and other activities of life. However, it has the same purpose that spiritual disciplines have—for example, to inspire. Art attempts to do the same thing that religious practice does. I don't see any other purpose to art than to inspire.

Linda Montano lived at the Zen Center in Mount Tremper, New York, for two years, and continues to utilize Tibetan religious practices, among others, in her present work and life. Although she feels "presumptuous for having borrowed these ancient techniques," Montano uses her knowledge of many religious modes of thinking as a way of growing

spiritually, expanding her self-knowledge, and sharing her own understanding with others.

When she was nineteen, Montano spent two years in a convent as a nun.

> I left the convent because I was dying of anorexia. I was very nonverbal, something I've worked on since as an art form. I couldn't communicate in the convent. Everything was held inside, so my body spoke because I couldn't. I was choking down information and not getting it out. My body spoke for me and decided I wasn't doing well. I weighed eighty-two pounds.

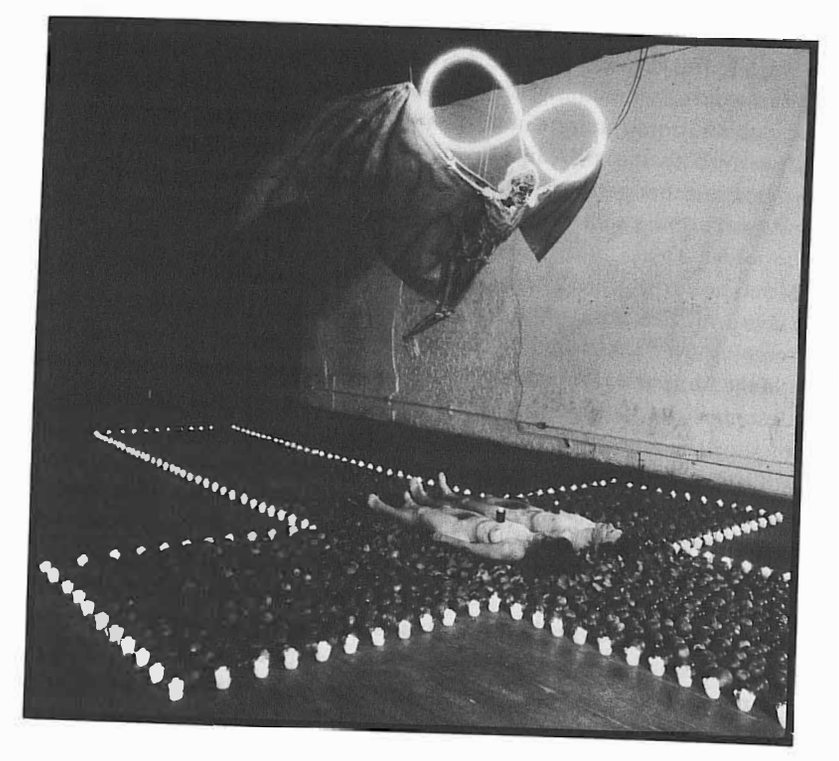
Montano's tape, *Anorexia Nervosa* (1980), explores this condition in interviews with five women (all "type A high achievers"), including herself, carrying over a critical life experience into her art.

Like Montano, Morgan O'Hara also was a nun early in her life. She describes the backwards writing she uses often in her journals as a method she evolved for staying awake during a boring class in college but which later became a "way of slowing down and developing another capacity in the brain which develops structural visualization." O'Hara left the convent to accomplish what she understood as "God's will"—the development of her art.

> Society doesn't encourage discussion of it, but many individuals *are* involved in spiritual concerns and have spiritual needs. Society may say this is not necessary, but time will teach us what we need to know, regardless of social pressures.

Mike Osterhout's year as a seminary student, his creation of a one-day Church, his acquaintance with Jeanne Mills, who was killed allegedly by her son, a religious fanatic, in 1979, reflect both his predilection for spirituality and a mistrust of religion *per se*. Coming of age as he did in the time of Jim Jones's People's Temple and other religious cults, as well as during a period of profound cultural unrest, this duality is a part of the enduring legacy of the counterculture of the 1960s. Osterhout's decision to enter seminary as a work of art is perhaps a choice which reflects the sense of alternatives (or alternative lifestyles) provided by that counterculture.

Alex Grey's work perhaps best exemplifies this kind of sensibility, and deals most overtly with spirituality. After the early years when Grey



ALEX GREY AND ALLYSON GREY

Living Cross. Performance, Randolph St. Gallery, Chicago, October 15, 1983.

explored the process of death and decay in often horrific depth, he embarked on a series of works which have been concerned with the healing and life-giving aspects of the human condition. His *Sacred Mirrors* are portraits of the human being in a universal sense, attempting to address every aspect of the body and spirit.

Mysticism in Grey's work is connected, he says, to his use of drugs for a short time in the mid-1970s. With his wife and colleague Allyson, he experimented with controlled substances used in psychiatry as well as with more readily available psychedelics like LSD. Grey took a dissociative anesthetic used widely in Vietnam for burn victims, for instance, which creates a clear and immediate separation between mind and body; this was the drug John Lilly used when he wrote *The Scientist* in 1978. Another drug, MDMA, says Grey,

> doesn't alter your body image, but allows you to key into your center and your experience of God, self, love, imagination, etc. The sense of being with God and being sent to your life to perform a task or do a job is very strong. There's a feeling of purpose and unity with the world, your own mind, others. It promotes a positive view of the world and of the future, and allows me to see that there are states of consciousness beyond the normal, rational state.

Many people reject the notion of drugs as a viable means for attaining greater awareness or reaching other states of consciousness, and Grey's work has occasionally been attacked on this basis; however, as he points out, drugs simply catalyzed a process for him that was already in motion, a metaphysical interest that began at an early age.

Grey points out that he could have come to the same insights through other religious practices, through meditation, or by having a near-death experience, for example, and that drugs are simply a tool, like other tools, for achieving certain states. (Unfortunately, he says, it's illegal to have mystical experiences in this manner.)

Grey, like Morgan O'Hara, is very much aware of the ambivalence toward religion that is so much a part of today's society.

> I think that with the ascendancy of science from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries onward, there was an increasing skepticism about traditional dogmatic religious subject matter in the arts. Some people, like Freud and many materialist scientists, think that religion was something that was outgrown as a need, a sort of

> substitute for a parent's love, and that out of our insecurities we created a God. To some degree, that's an appropriate analysis of the Church as a sort of need for membership in a community. But the original inspiration that doctrine was founded on, those original mystical experiences, hearing a great teacher or sage—that reality is still with us and is in fact the basis for our existence....The Church still fulfills the need for membership and security for many, but for many others the experience of divinity doesn't need to be confined to any particular church or sect.

Art, he feels, has always been one of the most effective ways of communicating the relationship of the human and the spiritual. We relate to ancient and foreign cultures through their religious art, he says, and that's one of the primary reasons people made objects or temples, in support of the spiritual, and because of a sense of the sacred and the need to create a sacred space.

> I think that I relate to that flow of artists who've always been involved with making work that was related to spirit, and yet mine is not necessarily confined to a specific religious tradition....I think it's difficult for people to acknowledge that they use their work to have an experience of spirit in some sense. It's a very hidden kind of thing. You're tapping into creative energy and the imagination. If God is the ultimate creator and artist, the artist reflects that creative energy and potential in a microscale. I'm not uncomfortable thinking that I have a relationship to God and God is part of me and all beings and things. I'm not uncomfortable with the word. It does make many people uncomfortable, though, like the word "love." They're close in their meaning.

For Marina and Ulay, the relationship between religious thought or practice and their work has to do with a larger dimension.

> Who doesn't like to love and be loved?...Religious thought...when it becomes experience, may be the underlying force for many artists and critics even though the word is taboo.

Ulay is particularly interested in animism, which he feels is the first notion of religion, and part of a primordial condition, part of our daily lives even today. He has studied Tibetan Buddhism for seven years, but

MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND ULAY

Modus Vivendi, 1984. Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc., New York

admits that the writings of Samuel Beckett are just as attractive as those of Samuel Yellen. Marina says

> religion *per se* doesn't interest me, but the knowledge that certain religions possess and use does. We went to the desert in Australia to explore all the possibilities, to change our way of life completely. We came to realize that certain groups, the Aborigines and the Buddhists, for instance, have a knowledge not only of the body but of the soul....[And] I was always interested in work that deals with the concept of the "divine"—El Greco, Piero della Francesca, Rothko, all kinds of artists who are busy with the idea of the nonmaterial.

Of course, interest in religious thought and practice or the appropriation of certain means inherent in these spiritual attitudes doesn't mean that art and religion are the same. Kaprow, for example, points out that the difference between the practice of *zazen* and lifelike art is that one is carried out under the guidance of a teacher and the other is "self-conducted and self-responsible."[55] According to the scholar Joseph Campbell, who has written extensively on religion and mythology, religion in general consists of a fixed doctrine which tries to explain what we don't understand, and to which a "religious" person tries to adhere. When this is not possible, when we cannot respond with an experience of commitment and belief, we struggle to believe or "pretend to believe and live, in the imitation of others, an inauthentic life."[56] The creative way, the way of the artist, is to reverse this order, so that one proceeds from a personal experience to finding the most effective form in which to communicate it. As Tehching Hsieh says:

> Art can be similar to religion; it's like being a monk, making art, but with different means. Monks do what they do because they believe in God....I have to ask the question of what I believe in all the time. But I *create* rather than believe. It's very different from being a monk—the idea is different. What's the same is that they're dedicated to religion, me to art, on a very serious level.

Without a religious framework, the kind of dedication Tehching refers to may seem to be simply a form of obsession; but the difference between obsession and the discipline required in order to create something is important in this context.

Ian Wilson's work addresses this question because he has carried the principles he is interested in to an extreme. The work requires a great deal of effort on the part of the reader or listener. It is difficult—"hard to read and hard to appreciate"—because of this extremism, which can be seen, in one context, as a kind of obsession.

Spalding Gray says that he tries not to draw lines between the two, but that obsession implies a degree of compulsion; he feels, on the contrary, that he is very much in control when he tells stories, and that they are carefully shaped from the very beginning. However, he also says that his work is *about* obsession and its form is itself the structure of obsession.

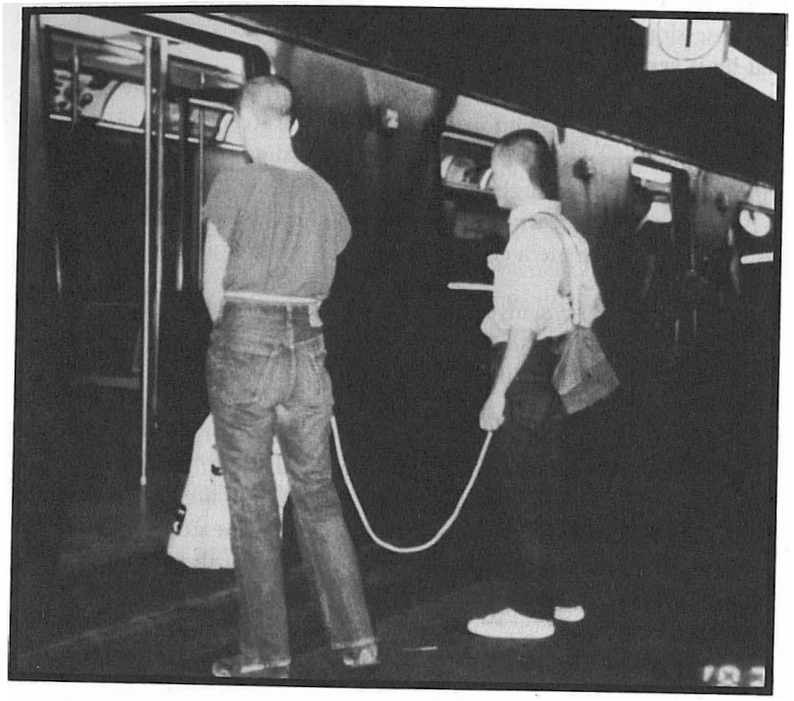
Linda Montano, on the other hand, relinquished control of her work completely when she sought out Tehching Hsieh and made the decision to do a one-year piece with him. However, she deliberately chose to "let go" in order to pursue a certain kind of investigation.

> What I learned from my association with the piece itself was having chosen a self-designated prison. I had a chance to re-see how I wanted to be emotionally. I had to drop some of my usual emotional reactions. Like a training. I used it as a way to attend—via danger, confinement, and endurance....I was surprised by the level of madness and rage I experienced, and how important it was to raise that to the surface. It's important for life to offer us opportunities to bring those kinds of demons to the surface, so that they can be worked out and passed over. It's growth-producing. I prefer intensity. I like colonically emptying myself of those kinds of darknesses.

Morgan O'Hara, whose detailed recording of how she spends her time is often mistaken for obsession (if not just simple compulsion), also makes choices about her activity, and occasionally decides to stop for long periods of time. She feels that not doing is as much an art activity as doing:

> I stop because I don't want it to become automatic. When I stop I go through a real period of semi-neurosis, and when I start again I go through a period of resistance because it's so tedious....For me, although the work is incredibly structured, it's the structure that allows me freedom. Without the structure, you're at the mercy of so many things. A clear structure provides freedom.

In just this way, Tehching's decision not to make, read about, look at, or



Linda Montano and Tehching Hsieh tied together for one year, 1983.

talk about art for one year (1985-1986) is also about stopping, a way of separating oneself from the work in order to achieve control over it.

The personal and artistic discipline that all professional artists engage in to do their work is only thought of as obsession when no aesthetic object results from it. It is at this point that we find the even more common reaction that such work is not simply obsessive, but is the result of neurotic and even psychotic behavior. At the extreme, for instance, Byars is unwittingly dismissed by those unfamiliar with his work as a kind of gentle madman, Montano as a psychic extremist, and Alex Grey as a psychotic. At the very least, much of this work is seen as self-destructive or simply unhealthy. For example, Terri's decision to attend and complete law school for United Art Contractors' work, but not to use the degree to earn a living, is considered in our practical society to be an irresponsible, if not completely impractical, act.

Much of the work is also seen by the public as masochistic, although the artists regard their extreme endeavors quite differently. Alex Grey says:

> If you feel that there's an effective way of connecting what you feel and it takes a certain kind of behavior, you do it. If it were done for no reason, then it might be called masochistic.

Marina and Ulay want to break open "repressed reality, like a seed." They feel that since their work is about transformation, then it's necessary to employ both mental and physical efforts to this end. This is why their work "permits pain"; this is somewhat different from masochism *per se*.

The rigorousness of punching a time clock every hour day and night, thereby limiting all activities to this time frame—being unable, for instance, to see a movie, travel, or have dinner out with friends—and incurring sleep disorders, might seem self-destructive to many of us. Tehching, however, says:

> Life at some point for all of us is masochistic. When you want more challenge, you make things difficult for yourself, whether it's in a stupid way or on a higher level, a more meaningful one....Art is artificial in many ways. Art is also special because you know how to make the medium fit your experience, so that people can share what you're doing. Of course it's easier to just live, not to make art at all. I have to *focus* to make art. But I've experienced discipline

and hardship in my life before. I use the conscious *will* to make my art. It's difficult work but I feel comfortable with it. It's not masochistic, it's my background.

Tehching believes we all choose difficulty when we change our minds or aspects of our lives, that is, whenever we decide (or are forced) to grow or learn. In this sense, he and the other artists in this exhibition point to our commonality, to our shared experience. This attempt to escape elitist attitudes often backfires, however, especially when the public simply doesn't understand what's going on and feels disenfranchised.

It also backfires when the public responds negatively to attempts to liken what they do to what artists do. When artists allow a degree of vulnerability in their work, when—because they do not necessarily know the outcome of a particular activity—they cannot complete a project, or cannot meet the stringent requirements they have structured for themselves, the public is often unsympathetic or indifferent. Tehching, for example, was unable to find enough people to execute the piece he had originally planned for this year; he had attempted to enlist enough people in advance to carry or hold a lit torch for any period of time, handing it to the next person when they were done, to keep the torch aloft day and night for a year while he acted as a witness. As the artist Les Levine points out:

> They [the public] have this sort of middle-class conception about specialists. And they want the artist to be a specialist. That's what they want from him, that he not fall down on his job. So when they're embarrassed by his being no better than they are, they don't just assume that, indeed, maybe he is not better than they are. They won't accept that. They won't accept the artist saying, "I'm not better than you. I'm just as fucked up as you are." What they will say is, "He's gone mad."[57]

The attitudes informing the work in "Choices" indeed seem to constitute a "lunatic fringe," because this kind of behavior does not have a place in our society at large. It isn't criminal, since it certainly isn't physically dangerous or harmful to others. But because we don't have the habit of thinking of this kind of activity as art, we put it in the category of mental aberration. Actually, as Osterhout says, "sanity is only a question of immersion."

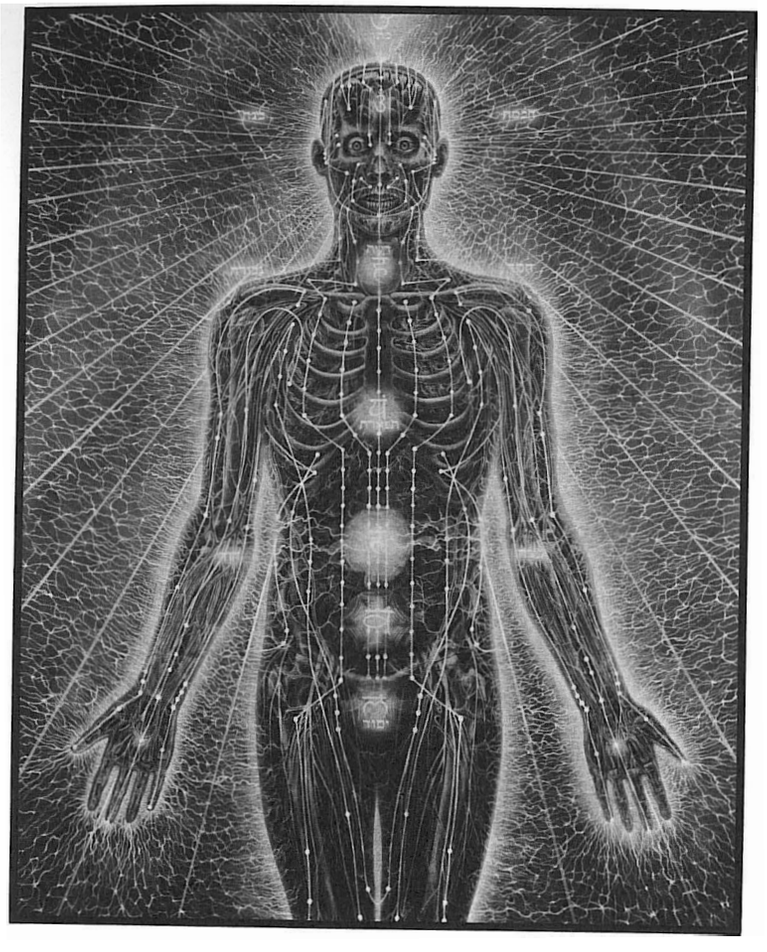
Thus, madness (as a matter of degree) is something that can be deliberately used as a tool. Alex Grey says:

> I think there's a certain time when all those things are interconnected very closely, when madness and creativity, destruction, creation, really fight it out in people's minds, and it's kind of difficult to untangle the connections....I felt that I was very close to the edge of sanity when I did some of the early pieces. I say to myself, "This work was done by a madman." But at that time I was playing with those boundaries. I felt that that was where the work was headed, and so I had to follow it.

The difference between this and true madness, of course, is that the artists remain in control. Grey *chose* to explore this aspect of his own psyche, just as Montano chose to utilize some of the darker aspects of her own personality in her work; both sought, then as now, to achieve a deeper level of awareness through this kind of investigation. In Don DeLillo's novel, *The Names*, one of the protagonists says:

> In this century the writer has carried on a conversation with madness. We might almost say of the twentieth-century writer that he aspires to madness. Some have made it, of course, and they hold special places in our regard. To a writer, madness is a final distillation of self, a final editing down. It's the drowning out of false voices.[58]

In art as well as literature, the end result can be a kind of excision which results in absolute honesty.

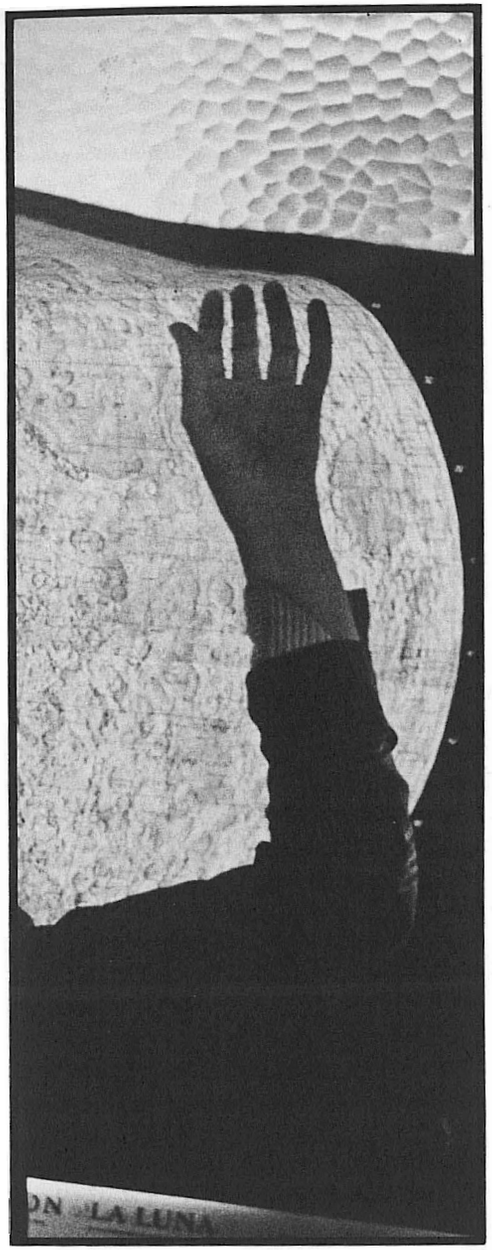


ALEX GREY

The Psychic Energy System, from "The Sacred Mirror" series, 1980. Acrylic on linen, 46 x 83". Courtesy the artist

We are accustomed to understand art to be only what we hear and see in theatres, concerts, and exhibitions; together with buildings, statues, poems, and novels....But all this is but the smallest part of the art by which we communicate with one another in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind—from cradle-song, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils, to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity. So that by art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feeling but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance.

—LEO TOLSTOY[59]



MORGAN O'HARA
La Luna, 1985.

Moral laws cannot be applied to human beings but through their bodies. So that moral phenomena are also tightly associated with the images of the body. To say that one never suffers alone is not a simple cliché. The laws of identification and of communication between images of the body make one's suffering and pain everybody's affair.

—PAUL SCHINDLER[60]

IV.

How, then, are we to recognize art when it takes the form of one's life? Is there, in fact, any difference between the two as far as these artists are concerned? What is the value of "lived" art when all of us could be artists within this expanded definition of the convention of art making?

To begin with, as Allan Kaprow points out, it is in fact difficult to "see" or recognize much of this kind of work at all. This is because "lifelike-art-makers' principle dialogue is not with art but with everything else, one event suggesting another. If you don't know much about life, you'll miss much of the meaning of the lifelike art that's born of it."[61] Kaprow does suggest, however, that what distinguishes these works as art is that they are "purposive and interpretive acts instead of mere routine behavior."[62]

O'Hara's attitude, for instance, is an interrogative one. She says:

> I think of art as a question about life which has visible manifestation, which in turn influences living....I record living pattern, making it visible. I observe the pattern. I continue to live. My art is not my life, nor is it my self. It is, rather, an intermediary between

the two, a passageway between myself and my experience of living.

Marina and Ulay feel that they can make a clear distinction between art and life, but aren't sure that they should. They see their art as the largest and hardest part of their lives. "Our work," they say, "is like an edited life, a form of choreographic systems, a culmination. We can say that never has so much happened with so little to be seen....We prepare by reducing, intensifying, and simplifying the volume of life."

This kind of work can act metaphorically for the public. Tehching Hsieh says that he is most interested in art as a life process; for us, however, it becomes something more. His outdoor piece, in his own words, becomes "about living inside, which has to do with being balanced, or outside, which is about violence and lack of control." Similarly the cage piece serves as a living metaphor about isolation, and the time clock piece a metaphor about work.

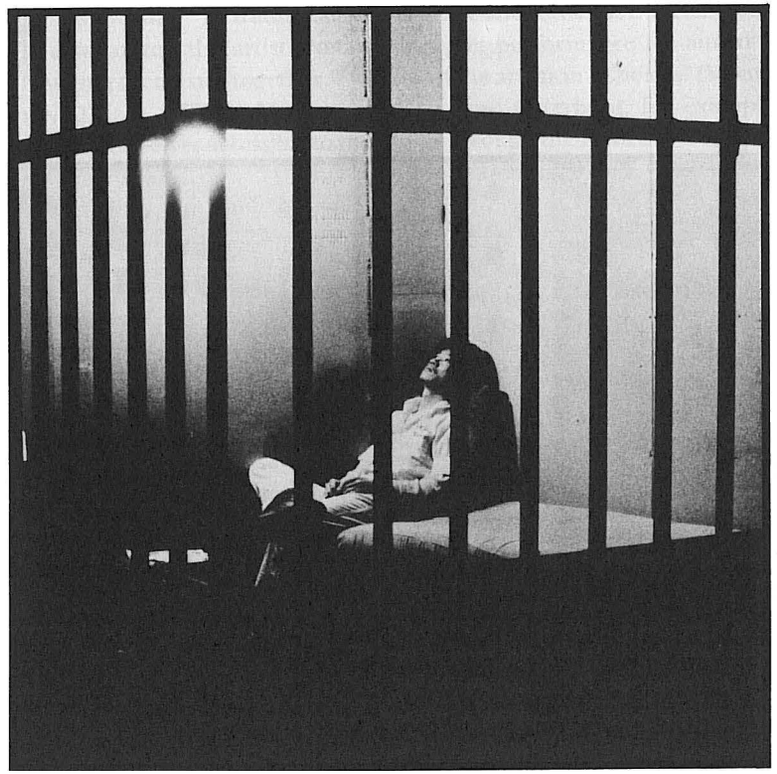
> I thought about Sisyphus; everyone moves a stone, a symbol of doing everything over and over. Ron Feldman once asked me, "If a worker changes jobs, isn't that a change?" No. Outside it may appear to be, but inside it isn't. But it's about choice, to do this as art....When I lived in the street, I wasn't a bum, when I lived in the cage I wasn't a prisoner. It has to do with *choices*.

As for the collaborative piece he did with Montano, a work which makes us really think about the nature of intimacy, he says:

> It's about independent individuals. We were woman/man, American/Oriental, different ages. I heard people use the word "couple" but in many ways it was the opposite. As two individual artists, we tried to understand each other....She felt she was right, and so did I when we fought. It's like Russia and America, although they of course are on a bigger scale. It's more than art—you have to be a human being *and* an artist. It's like Rashomon in that everyone's point of view and understanding of the same thing will be different.

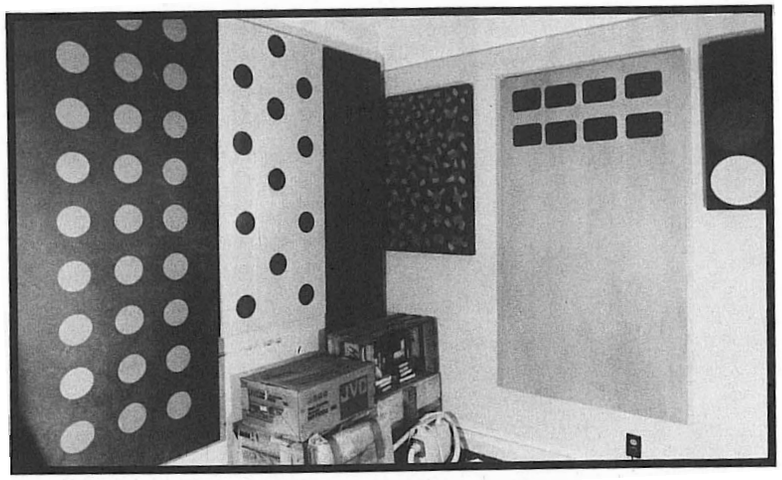
Tehching's observations situate his work in a larger context, in the realm of our own lives and the "real" choices we all make. The work constantly turns back on us, the public, changing in an unsettling way the usual distance between art, the artist, and the audience.

Artworks and audiences have been moving closer together for the past



TEHCHING HSIEH

From One-Year Performance,
1978-1979.



MICHAEL OSTERHOUT/ KRISTIAN KOHL

Studio view.

fifty years; one contribution of performance art, for instance, has been to give the audience access to art and to the art world in a way that objects alone do not allow, because objects are experienced at a remove from the act of being made and the person who made them. Herbert Molderings points out that "in traditional art, market and exhibition mechanisms had separated the artist from the people; performance art aimed at bringing them back together."[63] Many of the artists in "Choices" (Montano, O'Hara, Wilson, Marina and Ulay, and Osterhout, for example) make themselves accessible to the public through their work by engaging with people on a one-to-one basis, or by structuring intimate situations in which artist and audience can interact.

Another legacy of performance, which applies to the work in "Choices," is that there is no interest in psychologically distancing the work from the public. Even when these artists work in private, and we can't experience their art directly or even share in its process, the activity itself is not esoteric in intention and the artists do not seek out an elite audience.

However, since this kind of work often consists of activities that might easily be part of our own lives, or at least activities of which we are potentially capable, it becomes difficult to deal with it objectively. To be an artist, in this sense, doesn't require special skills (or so it seems), merely a degree of passion or commitment the rest of us are unwilling or unable to engage in.

In "Contra Aesthetics" Timothy Binkley argues that to make art is to isolate something, whether an object or an idea, and index it as art by utilizing artistic conventions to do so. Anyone can do this, therefore anyone can be an artist. (Whether "anyone" would be recognized as an artist, or whether a single artistic gesture would have significance, is another question.) This concept creates enormous difficulty for many people, because we tend to respect what we ourselves cannot do; skill in rendering, for example, is what most people think of as "art." When someone says, in front of a nonobjective painting, "My kid could do that!" what is meant is that the person thinks there is no skill, no "talent," no special training necessary to have executed it. Similarly, when an activity is undertaken as art which we think we might be able to do (but wouldn't because we would be considered mad by friends and neighbors), we dismiss it by saying that it isn't art.

Many of the artists in "Choices" are particularly interested in these kinds of responses. Rather than separating their activity from ours, they would like us to feel that we also could make art if we chose to; more

realistically, they hope that thinking about their work might help us to pay attention to our own activities and see our own lives in a new light.

Says Morgan O'Hara:

> So much art is deliberately mystifying. People feel cut off because they don't understand someone's language. I don't want to deliberately mystify. Other human beings are also grappling with questions like the use of time and human productivity. I've made a commitment to try to work with the problem of living. I have an old-fashioned idea of art as inspiration for others. I want to do art for artists but it's also important that others can understand it and get something out of it.

Similarly, Linda Montano says:

> Art has functioned for me—it's pragmatic. Ideally, this show could teach people that every commitment is as valuable....It would get them to say, "I could do that too!"

Since 1981, Spalding Gray has periodically done a piece called *Interviewing The Audience*, because

> I got tired of hearing myself talk...and wanted a break, so I thought of the idea of talking with people...to hear other people's stories and also to try to prove a point: that every person's personal history is for me and for many people as interesting as the so-called stars who are interviewed on television. That's why I took on the television format, so that people understood it. But within that form I wanted to plug into the everydayness and try to find things within that.[64]

This attitude is partly why Gray's work is so moving, prompting one critic to say, "What he does is absolutely unique, and yet absolutely essential in theater. Through his words and presence, he is forging a bond between the actor and audience in which both sides share in a surpassing experience."[65]

This is also the reason so many people who witness Marina and Ulay's *Nightsea Crossing* are moved by it, although both artists are completely immobile and silent throughout. The artists do not work in solitude and then share it with others; they feel rather that "the urge for doing already includes an audience," and that they do not make a separation between private and public space.

These artists, like most of the others, see themselves as intermediaries between their lives and those of the audience, where traditionally the work of art performed that function. They feel that art itself, whatever form it takes, is an instrument in a process of transformation. The transformation can be of a spiritual or material nature; the art equally can be serious or outrageously funny. Montano's "counseling" can inspire, Byars's ephemeral gestures help to pose new questions, Marina and Ulay's world view help even in the most modest way to attain global understanding. Wilson's work can make us think, Gray's make us feel, O'Hara's turn our attention to the detail we live in. Through Tehching we can see our own quandaries, through Alex Grey our own mortality. United Art Contractors can even fight our legal battles as art in the public court of law. Like Osterhout's gallery, Mō David, each person's work in its own way acts as "a conduit, a collector, an empty glass, a gathering point."[66]

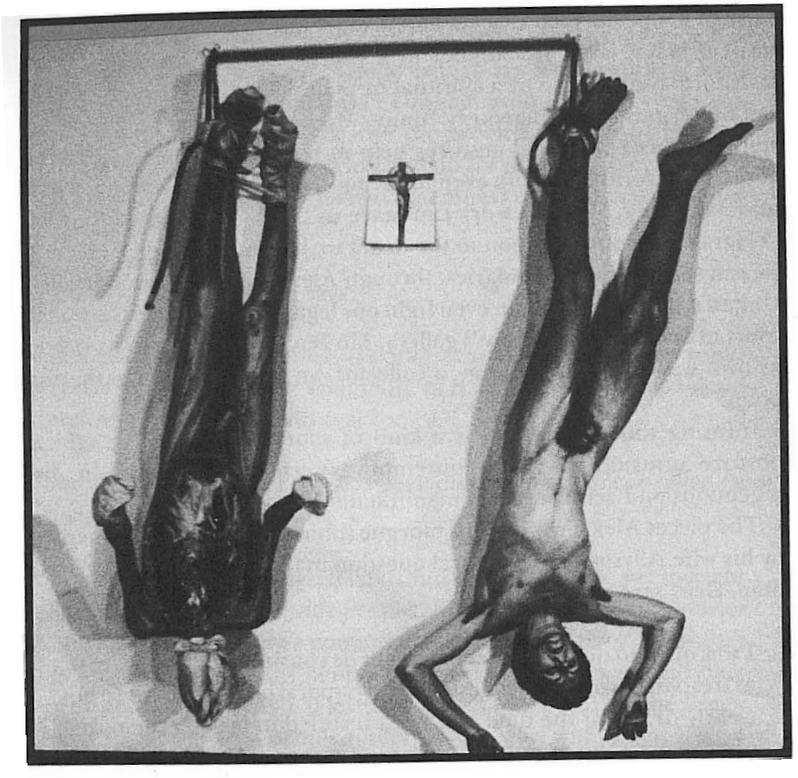
Infusing this work, then, is a kind of moral awareness, an ethical posture unusual in much contemporary art today, except in disingenuous and self-conscious manifestations.[67]

The pieces Alex Grey did in a morgue (photographically documented by his wife Allyson) raise a moral question in the opposite sense. At the time, Grey says,

> I was open to doing things that might be considered destructive or as trespassing on moral boundaries. *My* moral boundaries were not clearly drawn at the time and I felt justified in leaving them that way because the moral boundaries of the society were in decay. And as an artist I felt justified in adopting the confused values of the culture. For instance, there's a certain death obsession with the military, and the nuclear arms race is like courting death, a treacherous moral structure (or immoral one!) like necrophilia.

This work of Grey's was done in the mid-1970s, but his experience, in the wake of the Vietnam war, seems similar to Spalding Gray's today in addressing recent events in Cambodia. Gray has found the issue of morality becoming more important in his new work.

> I'm still trying to show as much as I can, *all* aspects of humanity. But I'm a slippery relativist. It's hard for me to see in black and



ALEX GREY

Life, Death, and God, 1975. Performance.

> white. Being a relativist is a luxury which borders on decadence....Now I'm at a good point where I want to do larger things outside myself, where I'd like to see reportage as being shaped into a more political, spiritual stance that can be shared or taught. But I'm not there yet....I have problems with making a stand. What is the issue? What is to be done? My work seems to be heading toward that and is less about the neurotic seeker who can't take a vacation.

What I referred to as a sense of morality or an ethical posture need not take the form of specific political commitment, although it's difficult to separate one's political beliefs from personal ones. There is, certainly, a concern for humanity on a global level that is expressed by most of the artists in terms of a sense of being responsible to and for others. Alex Grey says that, in making his art,

> there's a sense of purpose and unity with the world, your own mind, others....It makes me hopeful that more people can experience compassion and a sense of unity with the cosmos and each other, and that an ethic can evolve with that sense.

In a similar vein, Linda Montano says, "I'm interested in training the mind....I want to cut through the programs that can keep me from being compassionate." Compassion is created by changing one's level of consciousness, and this "inspired state," as Ian Wilson calls it, is commensurate with morality. There is also a strong moral dimension in work which exists through the artists' presence and which is apprehended through their actions rather than through objects, although in the hands of many of these artists objects are also ways of sharing experience, albeit secondary ones.

The idea of sharing, whether ideas, objects, or experiences, is a powerful one, and one which is at the heart of most art activity. Lewis Hyde's book, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, explores the way in which works of art—literary, visual, and nonmaterial—are gifts in our society. While works of art exist simultaneously in both the market economy and what Hyde refers to as a "gift economy," it is not necessary that a work of art be marketable to remain a work of art; it is essential only that it retain the qualities of a gift.

Among the characteristics of a gift is that it must always keep moving in a community (although it is not necessarily the same gift that does so), that it is "property that perishes," since once given one no longer has it,

that as it moves it increases in its sense of worth.[68] Hyde goes so far as to say that "the increase is the core of the gift, the kernel...at times it seems more accurate to say that the increase alone is the gift and to treat the object involved...as its vehicle or vessel."[69] Gifts, he goes on to say, establish strong spiritual bonds between people in a way that commodities cannot, since the latter leave people free of such emotional and psychic ties. And last but not least, gifts are presented—at least in the universal folklore and tales in which they play a central role—as being "a companion to transformation, a sort of guardian or marker or catalyst."[70]

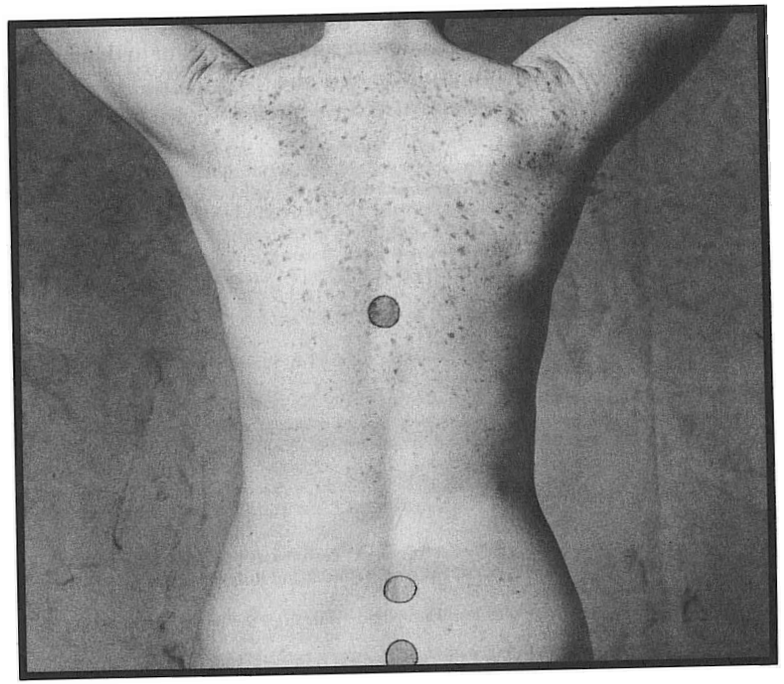
In every sense, then, the work that these artists are doing is both intended and functions as a gift. The fact that for them objects are the "vessels" for ideas, that their work is deliberately transformative, that it is shared on such an immediate level or passed on, as Montano's is, through "counseling" or personal exchange, is significant. Ian Wilson says simply, "Increasingly, I've felt that the only justification for art is if it's going to give something to someone."

The choices these artists have made are also not polemical. Whether through humor and ironic distance, through extraordinary personal discipline or poetic suggestion, honesty or elegant deception, their work offers insight and alternatives. Although it participates in the art community and often uses its mechanisms in order to be seen, it is not offered at the expense of other work; it cannot devalue it, because the work does not engage or compete in terms of style, aesthetics, or "quality."

Alex Grey quotes Barnett Newman as saying, "What are you making your work *about*? It's not what it looks like that's important." Grey speaks for his fellow artists—not just those who have made choices similar to his own—when he says:

> The most honest work comes out of what I feel is most important in life. It's an understanding of self in relation to others, finding love, trying to connect with your relation to spirit....The combination of science, religion, medicine, philosophy, art—they can sustain each other, because it's all about knowledge, all about the mind, all about human experience. Einstein said that the deeply mysterious nature of the universe is the most important feeling anyone could have.

The nature of this investigation, in art as in other fields, is such that its development might result in another way of thinking altogether. We



Chakras tattooed on Linda Montano's back.

might think of art as more than the making of objects or commodities with only a peripheral connection to our existence, but as a profoundly transformational activity. Allan Kaprow asks us to consider the fact that this kind of work "restores the possibility of the practice of art as a practice of enlightenment....We may," he says, "see the overall meaning of art change profoundly—from being an end to being a means, from holding out a promise of perfection in some other realm to demonstrating a way of living meaningfully in this one."[71]

Perhaps, as these and other artists have already shown, we are closer than we thought.

NOTES

1. Herbert Molderings, "Life is No Performance: Performance by Jochen Gerz," in *The Art of Performance (A Critical Anthology)*, ed. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1984), p. 178.
2. Quoted in Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Through the Night Softly," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 223.
3. All quotes from artists in the exhibition, unless otherwise indicated, have been taken from interviews with the author in May, June, and July of 1985.
4. *Currents* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984), brochure for James Lee Byars's exhibition.
5. Ian Wilson, "Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 22, no. 6 (Feb. 1984): 61.
6. RoseLee Goldberg, "Performance: The Golden Years," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 75.
7. Timothy Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics," in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts*, ed. J. Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), p. 38. Reprinted from *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35 (1977): 265-277.
8. Thomas McEvilley, "Diogenes of Sinope (c. 410-c. 320 B.C.): Selected Performance Pieces," *Artforum* 31, no. 7 (March 1983): 58.
9. Ibid., p. 59.
10. RoseLee Goldberg, "Performance: A Hidden History," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 25.
11. Annabelle Henkin Melzer, "The Dada Actor and Performance Theory," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, pp. 45-46.
12. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
13. Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics," pp. 25-44.
14. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp by Pierre Cabanne*, in "The Documents of Twentieth Century Art Series" (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. 79.

15. Ibid., pp. 81-82.
16. From an unpublished article by Osterhout, 1984.
17. Thomas McEvilley, "Art in the Dark," *Artforum* 21, no. 10 (Summer 1983): 66.
18. Quoted in Thomas McEvilley, "Yves Klein: Conquistador of the Void," *Yves Klein, 1928-1962, A Retrospective* [exhibition catalogue] (Houston and New York: Institute for the Arts, Rice University and The Arts Publisher, Inc., 1982), p. 21.
19. Ibid.
20. Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 75.
21. Ibid., p. 73. Other artists during this same period actually designated their lives, or those of others, as their art. Benjamin Vautier, having done so, exhibited himself in a London gallery for two weeks, and Piero Manzoni signed and exhibited other people as sculpture.
22. Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 111.
23. McEvilley, "Art in the Dark," p. 62.
24. These are admirably documented in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (New York and Washington, D.C.: Praeger Publishers, 1973).
25. For a more detailed description of Burden's work, see "Chris Burden," by Robert Horvitz, *Artforum* 14, no. 9 (May 1976): 24-31, and "Chris Burden: Through the Night Softly," by Jan Butterfield with Chris Burden, *Arts Magazine* 49, no. 7 (March 1975): 68-72.
26. Goldberg, "Performance: The Golden Years," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 77.
27. François Pluchart, "Risk as the Practice of Thought," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 130.
28. Goldberg, "Performance: A Hidden History," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 26.
29. Ibid., p. 36.
30. These and other performances are documented in *Space, Time, Sound, Conceptual Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: The 1970s* by Suzanne Foley (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1981).
31. Foley, *Space, Time, Sound*, p. 55.
32. Barbara T. Smith, "Birthdaze," *High Performance* 4, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 20.
33. Ibid., p. 24.
34. Lippard, *Six Years*, pp. 49-50.
35. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 50.
36. Cynthia Jaffee McCabe, *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1984), p. 15.
37. Molderings, "Life is No Performance," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, pp. 174-175. The kind of artistic activity represented here can be considered a critique of this situation.
38. Allan Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," *Artforum* 22, no. 4 (Dec. 1983): 37-43.
39. Ibid., p. 41.
40. Ibid., p. 38.
41. Binkley, "Piece: Contra Aesthetics," p. 25.
42. Ibid., p. 26.
43. Ibid., p. 34.
44. Ibid., p. 37.
45. Ibid., p. 38.
46. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
47. David Sterritt, "Spalding Gray, mainstay of the theatrical fringe," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 14, 1985.
48. Mel Gussow, "Stage: Spalding Gray as Storyteller," *The New York Times*, November 16, 1984.
49. Jack Viertel, "'Swimming' along with Spalding Gray," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, January 18, 1985.
50. Thomas McEvilley, "James Lee Byars and the Atmosphere of Question," *Artforum* 19, no. 10 (Summer 1981): 55.
51. Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," p. 39.

52. Michael Osterhout, unpublished article, 1984.

53. The extraordinary discipline required for many of the activities undertaken by these artists is reminiscent of the kind of devotion of the Nazirites, a group described in the Scriptures as composed of devotees who, "not content with observing what is obligatory, [sought] austere modes of self-dedication....The Nazirite vow was often taken by men and women alike purely for personal reasons, such as thanksgiving for recovery from illness, or for the birth of a child. The minimum period of the vow was thirty days, but we have instances of [such] vows extending over repeated periods of seven years. Scripture records also life-long Nazirites who, however, were not bound by all the regulations of the temporary Nazirite." (Numbers, VI)

54. See Thomas McEvilley, "Art in the Dark," *Artforum* 21, no. 10 (Summer 1983): 62-71.

55. Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," p. 42.

56. Joseph Campbell, "Mythological Themes," in *Myths, Dreams, and Religion*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc., 1970), p. 148.

57. Les Levine, "Artistic," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 241.

58. Don DeLillo, *The Names* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 118.

59. Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?" in *Essays in Art* (New York: Oxford Press, 1962), p. 124.

60. Quoted in François Pluchart, "Risk as the Practice of Thought," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, pp. 131-132.

61. Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," p. 38.

62. Ibid., p. 42.

63. Molderings, "Life is No Performance," in Battcock and Nickas, *Art of Performance*, p. 170.

64. John Engstrom, "Ramblin' Man," *The Boston Globe Magazine*, October 7, 1984, p. 4.

65. Richard Christiansen, "Horror, hijinks in Gray's 'Cambodia,'" *Chicago Tribune*, June 19, 1985, p. 5.

66. Michael Osterhout, unpublished article, 1984.

67. See Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985). Chapter Six: "Secularism," subtitled "The Disenchantment of Art (Julian Schnabel Paints a Portrait of God)," addresses this phenomenon in detail.

68. Hyde, *The Gift*, Chapter 1, pp. 8-24.

69. Ibid., p. 36.

70. Ibid., p. 45. Further, he says, "...it is when art acts as an agent of transformation that we may correctly speak of it as a gift. A lively culture will have transformative gifts as a general feature, it will have groups like AA which address specific problems, it will have methods of passing knowledge from old to young, it will have spiritual teachings available at all levels of maturation and for the birth of the spiritual self. And it will have artists whose creations are gifts for the transformation of the race" (pp. 46-47).

71. Kaprow, "The Real Experiment," p. 43.

BIOGRAPHICAL COMPENDIUM

MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND ULAY

Excerpts from an unpublished interview between Marcia Tucker and Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Spring, 1985.

MT: *What role does the audience play in your work? Could you describe pieces that were not done for an audience, etc.?*

M & U: *We cannot describe this type of piece because we have never done it without an audience. An audience is part of the performance itself. When there is an audience, sometimes we can go further. It's like a transmission of kinetic energy that comes into our work and gives us an enormous amount of force.* Relation in Time *was a performance that bridged this gap between audience-nonaudience. In Bologna in 1977, when we tied our hair together like a bridge, we wanted to exhaust our energy entirely before the audience came into contact with us. We couldn't stand it another minute after sixteen hours. When the public came we were able to sit for another hour, at the end of our own energy. When they arrived our reservoirs were filled again, a new force. It was very interesting to watch how you come to the* end of energy *and how that can be extended just by the presence of an audience.*

U: *In the early pieces (1976-1980) there were no rehearsals or preconceived notions regarding the duration of the piece;* everything *relied on endurance. To the individuals involved, we don't want to show similarities or present a perfect couple. Our own mental/physical construction was mutually performed as* unknown to us, *we had the idea to "be" within the realization of the piece. In that respect, we bear a similar condition as the audience, as the spectator does; none of us have that particular experience. So we never build expectations; we just experience the idea. Later pieces were the opposite: from 1981 to the present,* Nightsea Crossing *has a fixed physical/behavioral structure.*

MT: *Of all the work, which pieces have been the most important to you and why?*

M: *I don't really have this idea of priority from one work or another. They are in an order which reflects our development at that time. I would never want to change the order or think one was more important. I can only say something about some pieces that give me a very strong feeling, especially* Tree, *done on our birthday in Weisbaden in 1978, with a snake, our python, that hadn't eaten for two weeks. The space was warm; we stretched piano wires across the floor which we made sounds with, vibrations for the snake.*

The snake could choose one of the sources of vibration over the other. Everything else was left to the snake. Remember, in the Bible, the snake chose me. *The snake followed me for a long time, coming very near. She put her tongue out and I put my tongue out. I didn't have any idea how we would finish this piece. Ulay tried to produce an attractive vibration but without success; she would not go to him at all. So I was going backwards and she was still following me. I had a little rationality left so that I did not touch my tongue with her tongue. The attention was so strong; I felt that at any movement she would jump around my neck to strangle me. It was the kind of attention that at every moment you have to be completely aware and completely here. I experienced such a strong moment of being here and now, not questioning the end or knowing the time. I left the decision to the snake. At one point after four hours and fifteen minutes, for no visible reason, the snake turned and went away. And that was the end. It was a very intense experience for me—something to do with the biological psychology of the snake. I think at one point I understood.*

Sandwich made from brown bread with butter, salami, garlic, and covered with gold leaf. We cut it in half and ate the sandwich on our birthday.
November 30, 1978

RELATION IN SPACE

In a large, empty space two bodies repeatedly touch each other frontally at high speed. Time: 58 minutes.
Venice Biennale
Venice, 1976

CHARGED SPACE

Two bodies spin around a vertical axis until centrifugal force throws them apart. Past the state of control,

the bodies continue to move in random space. The physical dynamism is sustained by the acoustic rhythm of work chants. Time: 32 minutes.
Brooklyn Museum, Europe dialogue
New York, 1978

CHOICES, 1986

Performance

Nightsea Crossing

Polaroid Installation

Videotapes

Positive Zero, 1983
City of Angels, 1983
Anima Mundi, 1983
Terra degli Dei Madre, 1985
Assemble tape of early performance work

Publications

Marina Abramovic/Ulay
Ulay/Marina Abramovic,
Relation Work and Detour,
Amsterdam: Idea Books, 1980.

Ulay/Marina Abramovic
Marina Abramovic/Ulay,
Two Performances and Detour,
Adelaide, South Australia: The Experimental Art Foundation, 1979. Text by Marina Abramovic and Ulay.

Ulay & Marina Abramovic - Modus Vivendi, catalogue for exhibition "Modus Vivendi: Works 1980-1985," Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

Acknowledgment

Michael Klein, Inc., New York

MARINA ABRAMOVIC AND ULAY
AAA-AAA, 1978. Courtesy Michael Klein, Inc., New York

SPALDING GRAY

Spalding Gray began his career as an actor in regional and off Broadway theater. After a season at the Alley Theater in Houston, he returned to New York to act in Robert Lowell's *Endicott and the Red Cross* and Tom O'Horgan's production of *Tom Paine.*

In 1969 he joined The Performance Group under the direction of Richard Schechner, where he performed in *Commune* and for two years played the leading role of Hoss in the New York premiere of Sam Shepard's *Tooth of Crime.* He also played leading roles in *Mother Courage* and *Cops* and in 1976 toured India in the group's production of *Mother Courage.*

In 1977, with co-creator Elizabeth LeCompte, he formed the Wooster Group and wrote, as well as performed in the autobiographical trilogy, *Three Places in Rhode Island* (*Sakonnet Point, Rumstick Road,* and *Nayatt School* as well as the epilogue, *Point Judith*).

Over the past five years, he has written and performed a series of seven autobiographical monologues: *Sex and Death to the Age 14, Booze, Cars and College Girls, India and After (America)* (1979), *A Personal History of the American Theater, Nobody Wanted to Sit Behind a Desk* (1980), *47 Beds,* and *In Search of the Monkey Girl* (1981).

He has performed these monologues with high critical acclaim throughout the United States, including the Goodman Theater in Chicago and the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, as well as in Canada and Europe. All these monologues have been broadcast over radio and videotaped for the Lincoln Center Library.

In 1980, he developed a new work, *Interviewing the Audience,* in which he invites members of the audience to be interviewed by him and to tell stories from their lives. He has toured this piece with great success in Europe and the United States.

In the summer of '83 he performed *Interviews Under the Brooklyn Bridge,* which was sponsored by the city of New York.

Mr. Gray has taught workshops in

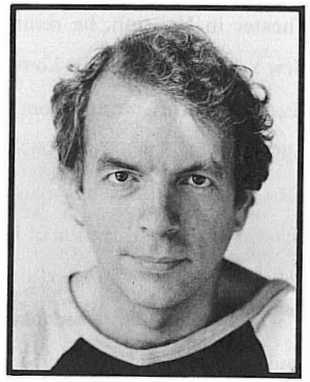
autobiographical theater techniques and storytelling in Europe and the United States, as well as having taught for six years at New York University's Experimental Theater Wing. He has also taught a course in Storytelling as a part of the Creative Writing Program at Columbia University.

He specializes in doing workshops with children which he has conducted for the past seven years at The Performing Garage. In 1974, he received a grant from the city of New York to conduct a workshop for children at a city school of his choice.

Mr. Gray has received Playwriting Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation as well as a CAPS grant in multi-media.

Most recently he has been appointed to the board of directors for the Theater Communications Group and acted in his first major motion picture, *The Killing Fields*, produced by David Putnam and released by Warner Brothers in the fall of '84.

His newest monologue, *Swimming to Cambodia*, based on his experiences while making this film, opened at The Performing Garage in the winter of '84.



CHOICES, 1986

Videotapes

Gray Areas, by Spalding Gray/Renee Schafransky, produced by Robin Doty, 1984.
Alive from Off Center, "A Personal History of the American Theater," by Spalding Gray, 1985.
Spalding Gray/John Calloway, 1985.

Lent by:

The Kitchen, New York
The Wooster Group, New York
KTCA2 & KTCII7, Saint Paul, Minnesota

ALEX GREY

Interview with Alex Grey by Linda Montano

L: *Much of your work is literally and symbolically about death. Most people are afraid of their death, but you face the issue with bravery and insight. How early did your interest in the subject begin?*

A: *When I was ten I experienced the death of someone I loved when my grandmother got sick and died. I was affected by the fact that I would never see her again, that she would be buried and go away forever. Life took on a different texture after that...time became precious.*

But earlier than that, from the ages of five to ten, I was a "mortician" for dead animals in the neighborhood. I had a graveyard in the backyard and would perform funeral dissections on worms, birds, cats, dogs, and everything else. I was interested in dead things and saw that they were different from living things.

L: *Did you continue your interest in death while in art school?*

A: *For a couple of years I went to the College of Art and Design in Columbus, Ohio. For sculpture class I brought in several garbage bags with rotting grass and vegetables and cut them open, allowing the odor of decay to fill the room. I brought a dead dog in a bag into the classroom and showed it....The administration and I never saw eye to eye so I left school and painted billboards for about a year. Then I came to Boston and studied with a conceptual artist, Jay Jaroslav. I started doing more performances and began a series of works that had to do with polarities. I shaved one half of my head and left the other half shoulder length for five months. The piece was inspired by the polarities of the right and left hemispheres of the brain—the intuitive and rational sides. I stole a brain from a medical school to do a piece...*

L: *Were you becoming fearless by doing this work?*

A: *I don't consider myself a fearless person. It seems that the way I grow is to face fears and so I was working with things that scared me the most. My performances educate me, morally and philosophically. Even though I never entirely understood the pieces, I knew that I was scared doing them and that I would probably learn something.*

Looking back on my performance work, I relate it to the "shamanic journey"—going to the underworld, facing death, and then coming back with new insight.

When I was working in the morgue I was always overwhelmed when cutting open a body and looking at all that stuff. It's like being awestruck when opening up a car, the back of a TV or a computer for the first time, but it's a million times more complex with the human body...it's a miracle. In the paintings you can stand in front of the circulatory system or the nervous system, etc., and mirror your own anatomy. It's like facing the building blocks of what we are made of.

Now I am doing paintings about relationships that make visible the interconnections on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels. One is an X-ray view of a couple copulating. It shows the anatomical and metaphysical energies that pass through the body when we make love. Another is "Kissing," and I've done "Praying."

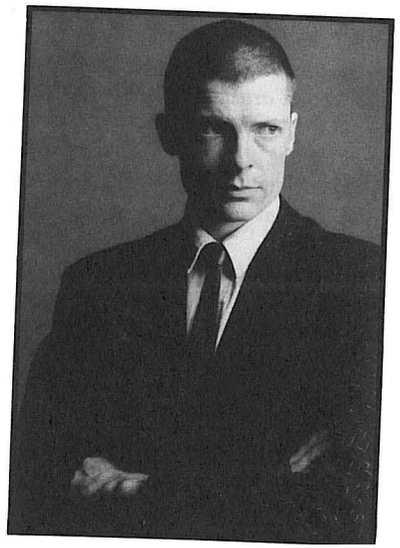
From a soon to be published book, Food, Sex, Money/Fame, Ritual/Death; Interviews with Artists, *by Linda Montano.*

CHOICES, 1986

"The Sacred Mirrors"
installation of 21 paintings,
1979-1985

Performance documents

Acknowledgment
Allyson Grey, wife and collaborator
Stux Gallery, Boston



TEHCHING HSIEH

1978 - 1979 ONE-YEAR PERFORMANCE. Remain in cage for one year.

1980 - 1981 ONE-YEAR PERFORMANCE. Punch time clock every hour on the hour, 24 hours a day, for one year.

1981 - 1982 ONE-YEAR PERFORMANCE. Remain outdoors for one year.

1983 - 1984 ART/LIFE; ONE-YEAR PERFORMANCE. Tied with rope to Linda Montano and do not touch, for one year.

On July 1, 1985, Tehching Hsieh began a year-long performance during which he will not look at, make, read about, or talk about art, or enter a museum or gallery. The piece will end on July 1, 1986.

The plans for Tehching's inclusion in this exhibition were made during February 1985, and all interviews and discussions with the artist were conducted in the spring of that year. In order not to violate Tehching Hsieh's present one-year performance, documentation of the piece is not included here.

Acknowledgment
Collection Gilbert & Lila Silverman,
Detroit, Michigan
Exit Art, New York

LINDA MONTANO

SEVEN YEARS OF LIVING ART

December 8, 1984 - December 8, 1991

An experience based on the seven energy centers in the body.

PART A. **INNER: ART/LIFE INSTITUTE**

Daily, for seven years, I will:

1. Stay in a colored space (minimum three hours)
2. Listen to one pitch (minimum seven hours)
3. Speak in an accent (except with immediate family)
4. Wear one-color clothes

PART B. **OUTER: THE NEW MUSEUM**

Once a month for seven years I will sit in a window installation at The New Museum and talk about art/life with individuals who join me.

PART C. **OTHERS: INTERNATIONAL**

1. Once a year for 16 days a collaborator will live with me.
2. Others can collaborate in their own way wherever they are.

CHOICES, 1986

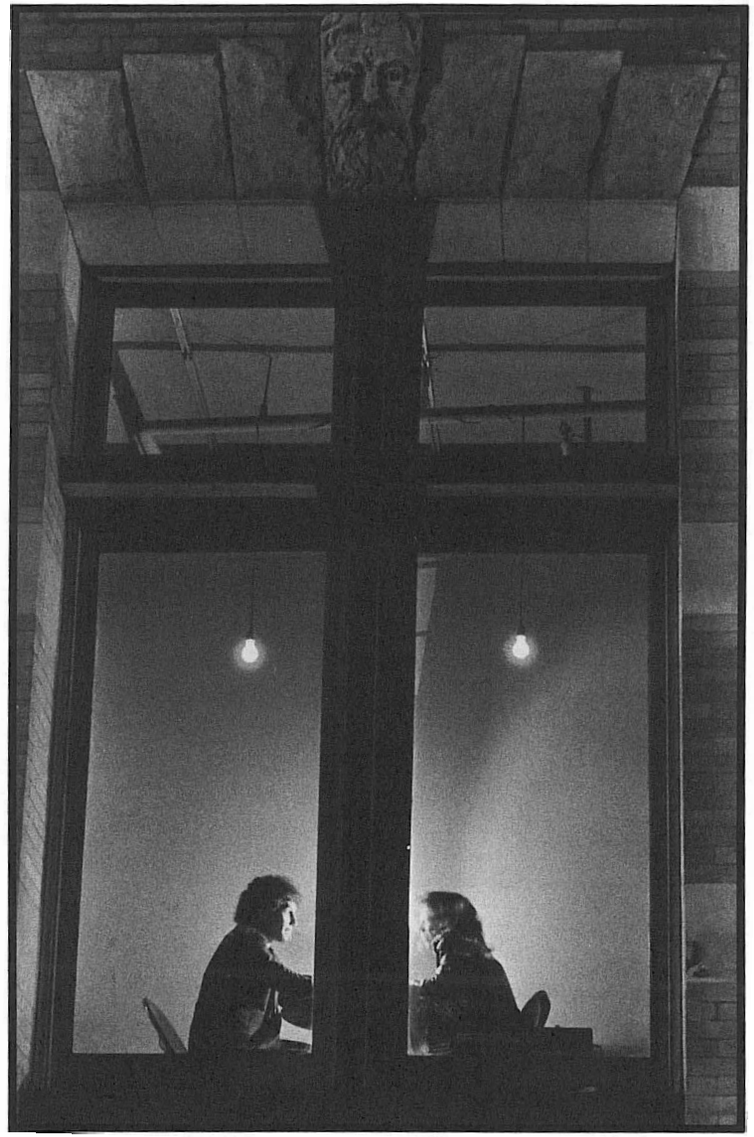
Linda Montano occupies the Mercer Street window at The New Museum every Sunday during the exhibit "Choices." She will talk to visitors about art and life on an individual basis.

Book

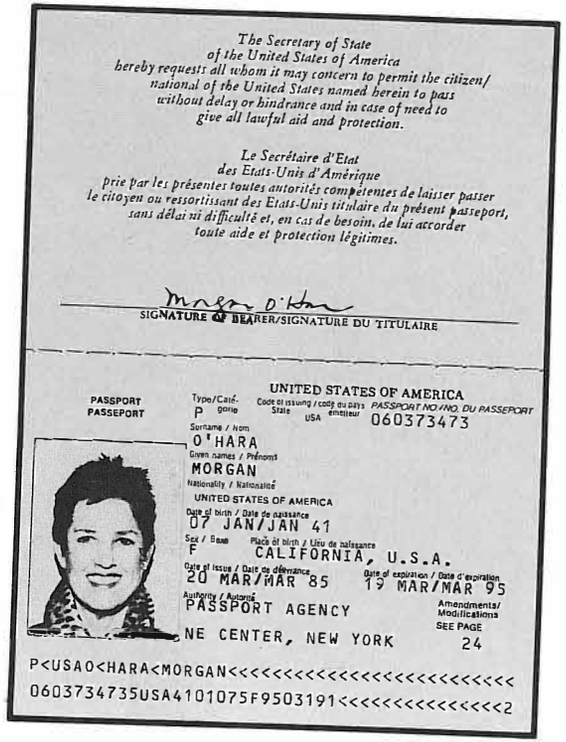
Art in Everyday Life, Los Angeles: Astro Artz in Association with Station Hill Press, New York, 1981.

Videotapes

Characters-Learning to Talk, 1978
Mitchell's Death, 1978
Anorexia Nervosa, 1981



MORGAN O'HARA



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Amendments/Modifications SEE PAGE 24

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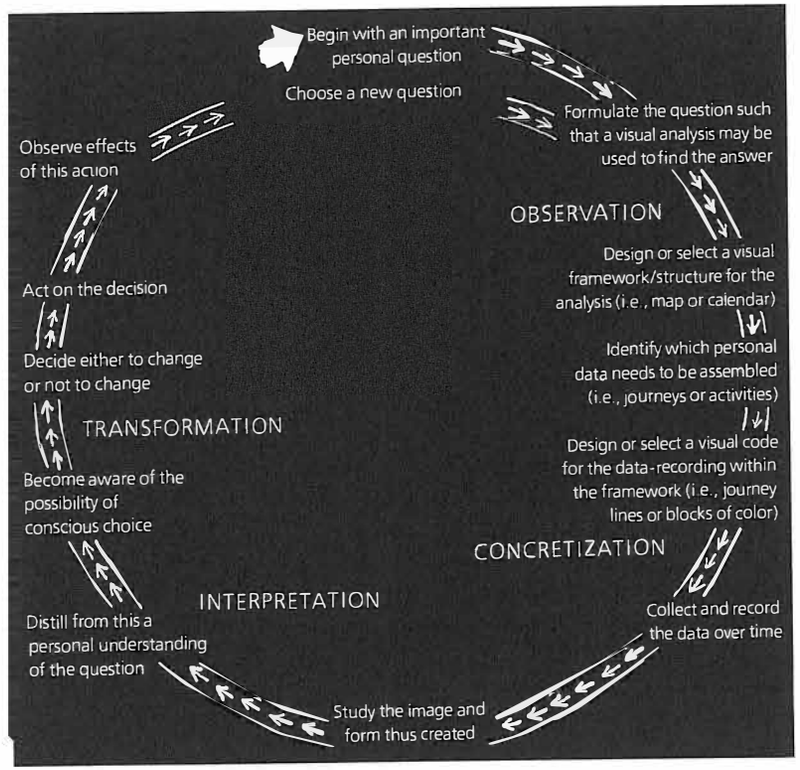
CHOICES, 1986

A workspace in which the artist and audience observe and record details of personal experience, producing charts and diagrams to develop a visual sense of one's own process of living. Body, time, and space provide the fields of information. The artist invites the Museum visitor to explore and develop these personal research methods for the duration of the exhibition. Morgan O'Hara will be at The New Museum on the first and fifteenth day in February and March from one to five o'clock.

An Autobiography in the Context of the 20th Century, 1985.
Journals, time charts, computer printouts, maps, diagrams.



Cycle of my creative process.

MISSIONARY

In 1978 I read in the paper of a boy who was cleaning up an alley in one of the worst districts of San Francisco. I met the boy and was impressed by what he was doing (in sculptural terms). Over a period of four months I took Darrell out of the city on various "outings." I documented this activity through objects that appeared, photos, and writings.

BLOODPRINTS

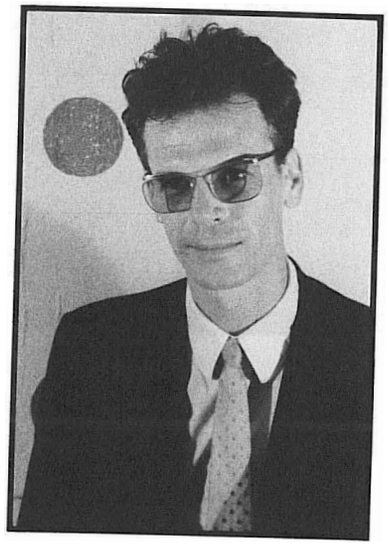
In 1980 I began a series of tattoos. There are to be thirteen tattoos on thirteen people. I have alternated woman, man, etc. The eleventh tattoo is now available to a woman.

MY COW

In 1980 I wanted to do a piece similar to the bloodprints only on an animal. A brand on a cow seemed like a logical choice. I bought a cow, branded her, and arranged for her to be boarded on a friend's farm.

MŌ DAVID

In 1981 I opened a gallery in a garage in the Mission District of San Francisco. In 1983 I moved the gallery to New York. In 1984 we became a corporation.



A SEMINARIAN

In 1982 I wanted to know what a priest, or nun, or minister studied, and what they were like. I applied and was accepted to Seminary on the basis of past work. I completed a one-year graduate program in Theology.

MA VACHE MORTE

My cow was accidentally hit and killed by a truck. I pulled prints from the steaks and eventually dried them into art objects.

KRISTIAN KOHL

In 1984 I did a series of paintings and exhibited them under the name of Kristian Kohl, a German woman painter, at Mō David and the Saidye Bronfman Center in Montreal.

GALLERY DOOR

In 1985 I wanted to convey a positive self-image for people entering my place, "Where you're the most important person in the World."

CHOICES, 1986

MŌ DAVID

KRISTIAN KOHL

Twenty-four paintings by Kristian Kohl

1984-1985

Certificates

MŌ DAVID, INC. stock certificate
MŌ DAVID, INC. chop mark
advertisement from *Artforum*
death announcement of Kristian Kohl

Letter installations

gallery motto
review quote by Vivien Raynor

Writings

Missionary (Extended Family as Sculpture), 1978-1983.

Collections

Tony Labat
Les Levine
David Ireland

We want to make art in the courtroom. We plan to use the courtroom the way other artists use museums and galleries, as a place to exhibit ideas. How wonderful it would be to discuss robbery, rape, and murder in artistic terms. Everyone agrees art can be anything, and if it can be anything certainly it can be a legal defense. And what an amazing defense it could be right up there with freedom of speech and religion in the first amendment.

We think law is a much better, more effective artistic medium than paint, clay or steel beams. That's why Terri went to law school for three years and graduated, so she could be a better artist. Dave will be her receptionist.

(excerpt of statement by UNITED ART CONTRACTORS)

CHOICES, 1986

Posters

FAMINE ARTISTS IN TROUBLE/ART AS A DEFENSE

BACKHOE ARTISTS IN TROUBLE/ ART AS A DEFENSE

CEMETERY PLOT ARTISTS IN TROUBLE/ART AS A DEFENSE

USE MY BRAIN/USE MY LAW DEGREE

YOUR ART IDEAS MAY ALREADY BE WORTH A CLOCK

YOKO ONO BE OUR PATRON

WE'RE DESPERATE/WE WANT TO BUY OUR WAY INTO A SHOW

PLEASE TELL US HOW PRETTY WE LOOK/SWEET PAIR DESIRES FRIENDS

UNITED ART CONTRACTORS RIDES ANDY WARHOL'S COATTAILS TO SUCCESS

BRILLIANT NEW WORK BY UNITED ART CONTRACTORS/"TERRI & DAVE STILL FUNNIER THAN HELL"

YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR/"NO TALENTS BUY THEIR WAY IN"

Book

sam's cafe $1.00 OFF, A Book Worth Stealing, © SAM'S CAFE, 1970.

Famine Artists In Trouble

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Why not advertise through the mail for donations for starving Ethiopians. With the money raised buy electric ice cream scoops from the current Bloomingdale's catalog. Send the electric scoops to Ethiopia. Postal authorities may arrest you for mail fraud. Art is your defense. Art is sharing and caring through international cultural exchange.

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IAN WILSON

"My project will be to visit you in Paris, April 1970 and there make clear the idea of oral communication as art form."

"Mon projet est de venir vous voir à Paris en Avril 1970 et rendre claire l'ideé de la communication orale en tant que forme d'art."

"Mein Plan ist Sie im April 1970 in Paris zu besuchen und die Idee der oralen Kommunikation als Kunstform klar zu machen."

"Ian Wilson came to Paris in January 1970 and talked about the idea of oral communication as art form."

"Ian Wilson est venu à Paris en Janvier 1970 et a parlé à propos de l'ideé de la communication orale en tant que forme d'art."

"Ian Wilson ist im Januar 1970 nach Paris gekommen und hat über die Idee der oralen Kommunikation als Kunstform gesprochen." (Catalogue: 18 Paris IV 70, exhibition catalogue.)

"There was discussion between Ian Wilson and Fernand Spillemaeckers on the 23rd of January 1972." (Catalogue Deurle 11/7/73, exhibition catalogue.)

"On the 15th of August 1972, Jack Wendler purchased his discussions with Ian Wilson." (Ibid.)

"On the 23rd of January 1972 there was a discussion between Herman Daled and Ian Wilson. What was said remains in the collection of Herman Daled." (Ibid.)

"On the 26th of March 1974, Ian Wilson will be in the Jack Wendler Gallery for discussion from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m." (Exhibition announcement)

"Le 4 Avril 1974, à 20 heures précises 16-18 rue Littré 75006 PARIS Ian Wilson sera présent pour un entretien dont le sujet sera lu par Michel Claura."

"On the 4th of April 1974, at 8 p.m. precisely 16-18 Rue Littré 75006 PARIS Ian Wilson will be present for a discussion whose theme will be read by Michel Claura." (Invitation sent by Michel Claura)

"The purchase of the discussion of January 31st 1975 is acknowledged by the undersigned." (Certificate of the discussion of 31 January 1975)

"On the 28th of April 1977 at 8:30 p.m., the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Ian Wilson will present Plato's Epistemology of The Parmenedes *for discussion." (Exhibition announcement)*

quoted by René Denizot, "Ian Wilson, For Example: Texts on Words," Coupure, *Gent, 1976. ("Ian Wilson, par example: Textes des Paroles,"* Coupure, *Gent, 1976.)*

CHOICES, 1986

That which is both known and unknown:
a discussion with Ian Wilson,
Thursday, February 27 at 7:30 p.m.
Audience limited to thirty. By reservation only.

Not unknown. That which is not unknown. Not known and not unknown. Not unknown. Not known and not unknown. Not known and not unknown. That which is not known. That which is not unknown. Not known. Not unknown. Not known and not unknown. That which is not known and not unknown. Not known. Not known. It is not known. And it is not unknown. It is that which is not known, that which is not unknown.

Section 41 (Extract)

Section 34, 2nd Set, 1983
Section 30, 1982
Section 31, Set 22, 1984
Section 21-29, 1985

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Biographical compendium organized by Angelika Wanke-Festa.