

March 5, 1983

Dear Benedict,

Thank you so much for taking the time in your office to tell me a thing or two, and for ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ generally showing me around. "Ballet pur demain" was a real education because so much of the stuff was on exactly the same level, but then that one guy was really a thrill to watch. I hope he --Philippe Deconfle--~~xxxx~~ performs in NYC soon so people here can see him.

I just wrote a note to Henry Pillsbury mentioning your idea to him, the idea of hooking up ~~the~~ workshops at American Center with guests from Festival d'Automne--Trisha and Lucinda-- and connecting that to a sponsorship of the Judson Exhibit. I told him you'd probably be in touch with him and Marie about it. I'll give more detailed information to Marie when she gets here.

Thanks again; I enjoyed meeting you.

Sincerely,

Wendy Perron
388 Broadway
NY NY 10013



Susan Salinger's *Untitled* — painted words at P.S. 1

PARA-NARRATIVE

CRAIG BROMBERG

Let's get down to brass tacks: *ParaNarrative* just won't do. You can search as long and as hard as you like for a justification for a "return to narrative" or for a "new expressionism" in dance, but in the end these appropriations of a primarily humanist critical vocabulary don't help to explain what's important in dance today. Narrative wasn't arbitrarily rejected by the Judson choreographers twenty years ago, and it can't be arbitrarily used today simply because one is tired of (I'm quoting from the *ParaNarrative* press release here) "a period when formalist experiments with fragmentation of space and time proliferated."

It's all fine and well to "rethink the referential import of movement and gesture." In fact that's exactly, literally, what dancers should be doing. Choreographers must begin to see the point of an analysis of dance based on a materialist reading of the

signifying operations of their medium. Narrative is not, however, a neutral means of representation that can be used in a signifying practice regardless of the odious stench of repression and domination inscribed within it. It is a mode of discourse that gains whatever power it has from its apparent "naturalness," from its convincing illusion of what the real world supposedly looks like.

More often than not, the choreographers who used narrative in their work at P.S. 1 failed to take into account the politics which are inscribed into the all-too-tangible act of telling a story. This is not a plea for more topical, more politically relevant dancing. Instead, to paraphrase a famous quote by Jean-Luc Godard, what is needed is a dance that is *made* politically, that recognizes through an analysis of its means of representation how it is that certain historically specific conditions of meaning are affixed to the various devices for *making* meaning.

What is needed then, is not a dance that simply uses narrative, but a dance that is *in conflict* with the dominant codes of meaning in Western society, in conflict down to its barest bones. *ParaNarrative* was a different story altogether.

One of the biggest problems with narrative is the way the dancer is positioned as a dramatic character and invested with a particular role. The problem is not so much with role-playing as it is with the relative autonomy a character is given from the dance itself, and from the social and productive apparatuses that make the dance possible. Blondell Cummings, for example, is a dynamite performer. Her every gesture compels an audience to become involved with the mother figure she plays in *Chicken Soup*: preening and scolding to the children, cookin' and fussin', washing the floor and getting dressed up. Because Cummings is a black woman one can't help but think, however, that when she's scrubbing the floor that's not just any floor but some white person's floor. Yet not only does the dance not comment on the obviousness of this racial stereotype, it allows us to believe that this situation is quite normal, that black people wash white people's floors, that that's the way the world is. The problem is not that Cummings has taken on a role but that she allows herself to play that role in a way which ultimately denigrates her blackness. To put this another way: she doesn't show that she has recognized the racism that is built into the traditional narrative roles black people often play. Again, this is narrative as "neutrality."

Likewise, dances by Charles Dennis and Marta Renzi, although admirably performed, tended to privilege different kinds



Pooh Kay's brickhouse hijinx