

DANCE

A Golden Age Ages Just a Little

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By Deborah Jowitt

JUDSON DANCE THEATER RECONSTRUCTIONS. At Danspace at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery (April 17 and 18). Lucinda Childs's *Carnation*; Deborah Hay's *Ten*; Aileen Passaloff's *Structures*; James Waring's *Octandre*; Carolee Schneemann's *Lateral Splay*; Steve Paxton's *Jag Ville Gorna Telefonera* (excerpt); Elaine Summers's film collage *Judson Nights*.

It was like the '60s, and it wasn't. Quite a few of the people who filled the Danspace at St. Mark's to see the second program of Judson Dance Theater reconstructions were infants during the '60s; others weren't even born. The church itself, finally rebuilt after the disastrous fire several years ago, is a pristine composition in white-and-wood—less intricate and cluttered and worn than Judson Church. The spectators cheerfully—delightedly even—complied with a series of directives from Danspace director Cynthia Hedstrom to clear aisles to the pillars for Carolee Schneemann's *Lateral Splay*, to move to one end of the space for viewing Aileen Passaloff's *Structures* and Elaine Summers's film collage, *Judson Nights*, to watch and not watch Deborah Hay's *Ten*, which was performed during intermission. Some people sitting on the floor loved it when the *Lateral Splay* performers crashed onto their laps; others didn't. The brilliant, the beautiful, the brave, the boring, and the banal mixed in pretty much the proportions I remember and there was a similar hot excitement coursing through the audience.

The anarchistic physicality and intellectuality of the 1960s aren't as easy to recover as you might think. When I saw in the recent Judson photograph exhibit the score of sports photos that Steve Paxton devised for *Jag Ville Gorna Telefonera*, a duet that he and Robert Rauschenberg performed in Stockholm in 1964, I was amazed. How did Rauschenberg manage those base-slides and leaps-to-catch? It must have been rough-edged then. I don't think even Paxton moved with quite the buttery grace-in-awkwardness that now characterizes his dancing. The reconstructed excerpt is performed by Stephen Petronio and Randy Warshaw, both

of whom know how to move just like Steve Paxton: the soft-kneed recovery from jumps, the complex shaking down of weight through subtle rolls of hips and shoulders, and so on. As one dives upward and is caught prone on the other's head (base-sliding six feet off the ground), you see the embryo of Paxton's contact improvisation. In 1982, a dancer can study something that hadn't even been formulated in 1964. It's that technique applied to this old dance that gives the physicality such luster, downplays unruliness, and makes those moments when the two men's parts intersect seem masterpieces of choreographic planning.

The dancers of the 1980s, even in vanguard circles, think differently from those of the 1960s. Those 10 people who composed the three teams in Deborah Hay's *Ten* back in 1967, were, as I remember, studiously natural in demeanor and let ideals of plainness and simplicity dictate the leaders' choices of poses to assume in relation to a horizontal bar and a vertical pole. The live rock accompaniment by "Max Fraction" for the reconstruction is appropriately raucous; the performers are a proper mix of people being dancers and dancers emphasizing their peopleness. The rules of the game still produce configurations of people imitating each others' poses ranged along the bar, touching the pole, or attached to the person who's attached to the person who's attached to the pole. The performers stroll in to peruse the pose they're to copy—sometimes taking what looks like an unnecessary amount of time or asking questions like "is your weight more on your head or more on your feet?" (The exaggerated care irritates me just as it did in 1967, but now I recognize its political import: a simple act deserves just as much respect and understanding as a fancy one.) Today's 10, however, seem more interested in being interesting, in devising poses that may be quite difficult for others to sustain, or entertaining for us to see.

In Schneemann's words, her *Lateral Splay* "functioned as an explosive and linear refrain, a propulsive jet of move-

ment cutting through the sequences of other works and the materials of the environment." Then, the environment was created by sculptor Charles Ross; now it's the pillars of St. Mark's. At first, the dancers are a bit cautious. I don't always believe they're running or backing up or running-turning-falling or crawl-running as fast as they can (that's the directive). They don't look hell-bent to go until they crash into a pillar or someone else. They take good care of themselves (and they don't even have the bare chests or exposed midriffs the 1963 performers did). But by the third go-round, they do get into it, and there are some wonderful and terrifying collisions and unforeseen encounters with each other and the audience, and the wild, warm daring of it is grand all over again.

I had forgotten, and many people probably never knew, that Lucinda Childs could be witty. Her marvelous solo *Carnation* (1964) is as meticulously ordered and performed as any of her recent dance pieces, but the materials are very different. She sits before a white table, one leg, from the calf down, encased in a plastic bag. With a terse gesture, she inverts a flexible wire strainer so that its contents—foam curlers and colored sponges—pile out. Then she slowly places the strainer on her head. Makes four tidy curler sandwiches—three curlers between two sponges. Lines them up. Picks up one "sandwich," staring straight ahead. Pulls one curler briskly out of it: whsst. Pokes it firmly into one of the strainer's border triangles. (Since the curler being inserted is always toward the audience, she must turn her head farther to one side and then the other with each addition). Then she tips the border of the strainer modishly up. Takes the pile of sponges. Puts it in her mouth. Removes the curlers one by one and blindly pokes each into one of the seven openings between her accorcioning eight-sponge tongue. Removes the strainer. Removes the bag. Spits the sponges and curlers into the bag. Puts her leg back in the bag. Deadpan.

Her second event is a headstand against a white flat. The act flings the bag away,

revealing that her right foot is encased in a red sock attached to a white sheet which has another red sock attached to it. Which she, inverted, puts on her left foot. Disengaged from the cloth and the socks (neatly folded), she places the plastic bag near the audience, retreats, runs and steps onto it. Hands folded, body a study in embarrassment, she looks at us, the ceiling, the floor; her face crumples. She retreats and tries again, and again. Even passes the bag and somersaults imperfectly back onto it. Mixed pride and shame. *Carnation* struck me as a stunningly bizarre comment on the search for perfection: the ritual of beautification, the preparation of the body, the final stunt—one top-heavy downhill slide.

Aileen Passloff also performs one of her pre-Judson solos, *Structures* (1960) as well as one by the late James Waring, *Octandre* (1957-58). Judson evenings didn't feature all nonelitist performing either. Passloff is a solidly built woman with a strong, handsome face. In both solos, rather elegant gestures gleaned from ballet and then skewed mix with bold stances and odd gestures. Sometimes she stares frankly at us or the air; sometimes she assumes roles or attitudes, grand, forlorn. In her chance-determined *Structures* a black trunk is slowly pulled across the area; the black-gloved hand that protrudes from it can hold a pistol, a heart, a bouquet, a tambourine; each of these (and other) objects appears to trigger a subtle change of heart. In *Octandre*, she wears a long, plain black dress and close-fitting black hat that makes her look like some German modernist of the 1920s.

And Summers's film is a garland of 1960s footage: nude bodies and rough play, Paxton and Hay running an inflatable plastic over a lawn, Fred Herko in a number of preposterous outfits watering garbage cans which yield improbable flowers, glimpses of unrecognizable brilliance. Also, beautiful images from the films Summers made for her *Fantastic Gardens*: a bouquet of little figures from Godey's *Ladies Book* raining down to reveal real flowers where they stood.

For sure, the seeds sown then did yield some prodigious and hitherto undreamed-of crops. ■