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IV SALLY BANES

The **First Intermedia Art Festival** (January 25-February 5) was an ambitious undertaking. Performances, seminars, panels, presentations, and workshops were crammed into less than two weeks. Participants traveled uptown and downtown to hear and watch choreographers, composers, directors, video artists, and critics define the term "intermedia" in theoretical and practical sessions. The term never really got defined, though. Elaine Summers, director of the Experimental Intermedia Foundation, which sponsored the festival, proposed a very specific meaning: intermedia, she said, can only be applied to performances that incorporate film, moving bodies, and music. Critic and playwright Michael Kirby pointed out that poet Dick Higgins first

Natalia Makarova and Jorge Donn in Béjart's *Mephisto-Valse*. The distorting mirror reflects the disturbed mind of the character Makarova dances.



Below: Bertrand D'At and Olivier Perriguet in *Traversée*, Perriguet's first choreographic effort and a work of extraordinary strength. The review begins on page 32.

used the term in the 1960s to refer to the gap between any two art forms. By the end of the festival it seemed to me that intermedia meant any instance when technology intrudes on performance.

Although its title suggests a whole series of future events centering on a new art form, by the end of this first intermedia festival I wondered whether it was the future or the past that the conference celebrated. Energy shortages, recent cuts in arts budgets around the country, the skyrocketing cost of film, and the perennial lack of space in New York City, where much intermedia work has gone on over the past twenty years or so, create a milieu in the 1980s that makes the technological experimentation of the '60s seem an innocent dream. The conference reminded us again and again that technology has ad-

Shonach Mirk and members of the Ballet of the Twentieth Century dance Béjart's *Variations "Don Giovanni,"* set for the company's women.



Photos: Norma McLain-Stoop

vanced to an astounding degree of sophistication over a mere two decades. But I missed discussion about how the arts will use technology now, after Three Mile Island. The dream has become a nightmare. Can the arts afford to keep sleeping? The festival brochure stated that one aim was "to develop a contemporary language for the study of Intermedia and the theory and criticism of this art form." Instead of engaging in boundary-fixing and canonization, it might have been more useful to see where we go from here.

Seven workshops were given: autobiographical theater, videotape documentaries, dance and sculpture, mind-body training, video as sculpture, electronic music, and kinetic theater à la Carolee Schneemann. Eight performances were given at the Guggenheim Museum. The filmmakers Ed Emshwiller and Stan Vanderbeek presented programs of expanded cinema, composer Carman Moore orchestrated four "lecturing music makers," and *bricoleur* Ping Chong recreated his 1975 *Fear and Loathing in Gotham. Sames*, a 1965 performance by the late Ken Dewey, with music by Terry Riley and a film by Jerry Chalem, was reconstructed by Usco (Gerd Stern). Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, dada vaudevillians, performed a retrospective of their "greatest hits."

Two of the performances moved toward the dance end of the intermedia spectrum. Elaine Summers's *Crow's Nest* (1979) is a landscape constructed from three elements: film images of natural phenomena, six dancers, and a chant composed by Pauline Oliveros. The screen on which the films are projected, a three-dimensional structure with hanging fabric panels forming a ten-foot square within a fifteen-foot square, was placed in the middle of the museum's rotunda. The audience was seated all around this screen, and four projectors simultaneously cast identical images on its four sides. The color images moved from birch trees, which seemed to be growing as the camera rushed downward, to a forest, an ocean, a desert, and a rocky stretch. The live dancers progressed very slowly through this illusionary moving landscape, disappearing behind one panel and emerging somewhere else, circulating inexorably in a counterclockwise path through the structure. They stretched and leaned, sometimes showing only fragments of their bodies as a head or entire torso vanished or a leg and an arm appeared. In their flesh-colored leotards they seemed almost like chameleons quietly lurking in these vast, unpopulated places. Once a dancer turned on her back and seemed to be drawn, floating, into a whirlpool of water and foam. But it was the one time the two planes of vision merged.

The chanting, a series of sustained tones that seemed to draw on a chance harmonic arrangement as each voice gradually inched up the scale and sandwiched itself into the other voices, emanated from singers stationed at various points along the museum's ramp, filling the rotunda with cathedral splendor. And yet the unremitting meditation on natural beauty began to cloy early on in this twenty-five-minute work. Too often the films shone with a Hallmark-card aura and the dancing neither challenged that glossy image nor expanded it.

Like Paik and Moorman's performance, *Double Lunar Dogs* by Joan Jonas was a retrospective. It was even titled "Solo Hits" in

REVIEWS (Cont'd on page 146)

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REVIEWS (Cont'd from page 45)

the program notes. Paik and Moorman spent two and a half hours genially presiding over a loose format of events, with Paik donning and shedding workboots and sweatshirts, calling out to Moorman to hurry up with her costume changes, Moorman waving to a friend in the audience, and both often stopping between pieces to comment or explain. It was a leisurely evening that could have probably ambled on forever, except that the museum guards probably insist on locking up the building well before midnight. Jonas's evening had just the opposite effect. Her two hours felt packed with complex, demanding events, polished and theatrical.

The evening comprised fragments of the performances *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (1972), *Mirage* (1976), *The Juniper Tree* (1977-78), and *Upsidedown and Backwards* (1979), as well as a film by Richard Serra, another film by Babette Mangolte, and documentary footage of a volcano. Interspersed between the pieces and during *Mirage* were music pieces by Jon Gibson.

Jonas's performances are structured as series of images anyway, and in this anthology format it was sometimes hard to tell where one piece stopped and the next began. In certain ways her work is seamless and yet in other ways it's not. Jonas is a wizard who reveals her techniques. She "bares the devices," as the Russian formalist critics put it. She fiddles with images, numerology, masks, repetitive movements (like rocking, stamping, marching, running, swaying hips, circling a ball in one hand and a mallet in the other, or spiraling a small mirror down and around her nude body).

She's interested in symmetries and reversals of colors and shapes: she paints a heart or face on white satin with red paint, then on red satin with white paint when talking about the two children in Grimm's *The Juniper Tree*. She holds a mirror up to her own face so that the audience sees a single face that is half flesh, half glass. She projects a slide of a strange dog's face, with eyes that seem to stutter—one double eye white and one black. Then she draws the dog's image and holds it up to the mirror, where it is recorded by the video camera, so that in the end we see five images. Then she splits the video screen so that when she draws this same face in splintered fragments it coheres on the screen. She bangs a big spoon violently against the mirror which lies flat on her small tilting stage (which is also a blackboard) and we see, on the monitor, the squiggly path of the spoon's invisible trajectory, suddenly made visible on screen. She bounces the back of her hand loosely against the surface of the stage and, on the split monitor, she seems to be clapping while we hear clacking noises that strengthen the visual illusion.

Jonas's work is sometimes irritating to watch. You want the images to hang together in some sensible way, especially in the two later works, which use fairy tales as content, and yet those images often seem deliberately obscure and disconnected. You are thrilled by the sudden sparks of magic when the concentrated moment ignites—when Jonas saunters down the ramp, dressed as a burlesque queen, to rock music that seems strange and powerful, for instance, or when she completes the video mirage, or when her reiterated motions take on an incantatory power. But the dialectic of illusion-making



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and -breaking never emerges as an explicit theme of the performance, which seems to waver between two poles. Jon Gibson's music took him on constant journeys along the ramp. Sometimes he clacked wood together rhythmically, deliberately; sometimes he played what sounded like gently bleating bagpipes, then a saxophone. In the darkness and stillness and with the height of the rotunda, the music coming from all points did weave a magical spell.

For me the most valuable part of the festival was the historical documentation. Contrasting the sparse attendance at the panel discussions with the crowd at Billy Klüver's presentation and the sold-out houses for the performance reconstructions, I'd say the audiences were more interested in history than theory too. The part I saw of Robert Withers's film translation of Meredith Monk's 1966 solo *16 Millimeter Earrings*, reconstructed and filmed last year with Monk, was beautiful. But it was screened twenty minutes earlier than scheduled, and very few people saw it in its entirety. Klüver's slide documentation of *Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering*, the 1966 collaboration between Judson Dance Theater choreographers, composers, Happenings makers, and technicians from Bell Laboratories, was exemplary as a documentation. Klüver talked about and showed slides of the beginning stages of the collaborations, including the artists' wishes and fantasies and formal planning meetings, the construction work—dancers crimping wires and testing machines—and rehearsals, as well as production shots. After familiarizing us with each of the ten pieces (by Steve Paxton, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor, Yvonne Rainer, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, Robert Whitman, and Oyvind Fahlstrom), and explaining the rudiments of the technology, Klüver showed a short film Aphonse Schilling made of the series. Once we had rehearsed the structures and images of the piece, the film made it all come alive.