

my body. If I had a weird idea, I would not just leave it in my head, I would say: o.k. body do this weird thing, and wind up on the edge of a cliff, in the middle of a pit or walking the edge of a volcano. I would not get that kind of sickness which would be purely abstract, it's not in my nature. Trying things out that are physically dangerous, that's where my danger is. I use my body as a framework. I used to live such a dangerous life when I wasted it in terms of my career. I felt I was wasting it, wasting my sense of adventure for nothing. I've set up my regular life in a much more mundane way. I've set it up so that I could, when I work, be much more abandoned. My life totally revolves around dedication to my work and part of that is its building up my sense of boredom in my everyday life so when I finally do something, it's jet-propelled.

What was your feeling as far as the German and Austrian artists who injured themselves physically?

It's very different from me. I feel that the Germans need a lot more to make them feel emotionally. Pain is something that is challenging to them; they have to do things physically to themselves to feel violent pain. I never got the sense, unless I'm wrong, that they were experiencing the euphoria of pain. I don't even have to touch myself sometimes and I am in the euphoria of pain. The idea of external pain isn't as powerful in my world as internal pain is, especially the euphoria of it. The numbness of seeing blood is interesting, but that to me is not nearly as powerful as the sensations of internal pain. That's why love's pain or fear's pain is more challenging to me than being maimed. It's not as poetic as that's why it does not really entice me. If there's a good reason, if each action is related to a dramatic necessity, then for me, the viewer,

it evokes a profound response. Why a slit in the cheek? Why a puncture in the stomach? Why a slice in the groin? Then it is not only in itself but it also gives one insight into the life of the person doing the sacrifice. I rarely got that expanded sense of any of those works and consequently it never really stayed with me; my memory of it is very small because it didn't hit in my universal cavern of experience.

Do you feel related to Jackson Pollock?

I feel very close to Pollock. There are a few artists that I feel close to. I feel very close to him and to Rothko. I would probably say that in some strange way I'm the living hybrid, in my own work, of the physical gestuality of Pollock and the spiritualistic colour chemistry of Rothko. If these two had conceived a child, I'm it. Both of them have a relationship with death that is close to mine. One was suicidal and the other one played with danger. One lived dangerously externally, the other had a strong self-destructive inner haunting.

Why do you think they both committed suicide?

It's easy. You live a life. I am sitting here. I am trying to do something that is difficult with incredibly constant frustrations. One can't be a hero in the world, what is a hero in the world? When people like what you do, that is not satisfactory ... when you like what you do, that is not satisfactory, the pain is constant, it is always there and the only things that make it better are daily escapes. If you could always be in pleasure, that would be good. So you have that. Maybe food would make you feel better, maybe drink. If you obliterate yourself, that does not feel so good. Maybe if you made love all the time, every woman, every place ... well that does not do it. Each one does it for a while, has its time. Or if you could just work, but then you start to work and you

cannot work. Then health, there are so many things. Like my initial energy, once I am up, in the day, very often, if I unleashed it pure, it would want to maybe blow-up a city, by my own hand. So with that energy everyday, when you just happen to let it go, there is always the fear that it will come back on you and even, perhaps, kill you. It is having that kind of energy that is dangerous, especially in a heritage that externalizes and plays out such madness. These kinds of demons or energies manifest themselves very physically. They don't stay in the mind. They bounce out into the body and into reality. That is what both of them seemed to have.

I guess that at some point it gets quite frustrating for an artist to have an audience as limited as the art world?

It's paying your dues, just paying all your dues. It gave me a chance to work things out. Like I was doing my thesis or something. Here I am now at thirty-three and I'm ready. I'm ready for the entire world. It took me till now. Now, I've graduated. I'm ready for anything. All of my means, all of my thoughts all the elements that make me who I am are churning, all the organs inside are healthy and ready. Maybe this is the halfway mark, I am ready for things that I will be remembered for. Until now, it was preparation, now come the epics. Because finally that is what I want to leave, behind, great epics, not just little bittly tiddly farts.

Do you feel that it's happening more and more, that the "art" performer would like to have a larger audience, would like to get out of galleries?

Sure, it's in the air. We all tried things out in the art world and now we are just getting too good.

So you think of the art world as of your practising field?

Practising ground for performance perhaps. Art is what the art world is. So now I intend to concentrate just my visual art for the art world.

Are you thinking more precisely of the performers than of any other group of artists?

Performers didn't have another world to work in. I think for visual art, the art world is the art world. It's the home of visual art, and there's no two ways about it. Everything else is sort of a little like having visiting immigrant status, but you're not really a resident of that world, financially and every other way.

What about this idea we had talked about in New York, a theatre, a home for performers?

Yes, it would be a home for young artists, like a camp until one finds their way. I'm thinking about it. It would be like a family. I, the father, Elaine Hartnett, an important female performance artist, the mother. A place for individuals, for loners, for people who just want to grope in that nebulous space called performance, that no-man's-land, not really dance or exactly anything else, that homeless theatre.

How would you define performance?

For me performance is everywhere, it includes everything and everyone — all response, all intents, all things related to the individual and the world. Every moment is a performance, every gesture, every sip, every mouthful, every spoken word, every single thought in time, every twitter of one's eyebrows. All human transactions, telephone conversations, sleeping, fucking, shitting, all is performance but unframed. All the genre called performance or theatre does is to frame and package rarifications of this continuous spaghetti of living content. Like we were out last night, we did a performance with that other person in the park because everything created responses from the minute we walked out the door.

All those things happen as a New Yorker. That's what I've always lived all my life. When you set up an energy, it creates a response, it accelerates, creating a chain reaction of energies and responses: that's a performance, so I'm performing all the time. For me, performance is being *on*, you feel *on* and the world around you treats you differently. Life is a performance, I see people around me performing, some are better than others, for me it begins with attitude. Performance is attitude, performance is a continuum that's always going on, it's just a question of focus, if you decide to perceive it, it becomes a framed performance for you but it's going on twenty-four hours a day.

Do you feel that it's all too new, it's too soon to feel where it's all going, that there is no way to have any historical perspective?

Yes, that's why it needs a home, but if I do build a home I'm too much at the beginning, what happens is that after I'm dead and after a few of us are dead, if I built a theatre, The Charlemagne Palestine Home for Performance, well already there's a tradition. People would have a place to perform and they would not be alone. Theatre has a home, art has a home, now performance needs a home. Yes! Performance needs a home in a larger sense, not just one place like I'm interested in starting, but many oases that give aesthetic freedom, architectural flexibility but exist more tangibly so that a more stable public could follow its development over the next decades. Not just a neighbourhood or underground public. But in order to continue, we must find a support system that's not too commercially obsessed so that the concept of just entertainment isn't forced but not a no-strings endowment which often inspires inaction.

But now it's even taught in school?

It's too new. It still isn't the right time, it takes more than fifteen years. It began only fifteen years ago or so. It'll take a decade or so, more. I mean now I'm thinking of the idea, I'm sure a few others are thinking of it too, the idea of centres, homes.

Let's talk about the scenarios of your performance?

I never take notes. It just happens, one step follows the next. And of course, when I know I have to do something like a performance, it is an intensified kind of instinctual certainty that makes me think more intensively and finally make fatalistic decisions of destiny.

You just talked about your animals. They are public now. Teddy is even doing a piece of his own. They are part of your work, of your life ... were they always with you?

No. I went through a whole period when I didn't have them. From around the time I was thirteen, when I left home, for ten years I didn't have them. I don't know what I did without them. For those long amounts of time I spent with women, I was always with women, women had that place. They were my teddy bears. In bed, it was the only place I felt secure. The animals have proven now that they are an important part of life to me. If I had had them for a little while and gotten rid of them, then I would say they were a passing phase. But Teddy has gone the seven-year line. To me, when something lasts at least seven years, it remains with you internally for the rest of your life. I am going to start becoming like a director, a writer, not only about him but about everything so he will have his life. I am going to keep every element contained in my work.

You are pretty much a loner?

I call myself a public hermit.

We talked about the animals before, I guess you give the same importance to the

scarves, the knives and even the cognac?

Oh yes, they are always around me. I wear them, they are very soothing to me. They're real therapeutic, they're my safety. They're my symbol, whenever I am around, one sees them all. When I enter a space, it reinforces my waning knowledge that I exist. It's the same with cognac, it's symbolic. In many religions, there are always trance tools. It can be the smell of incense, of herbs, like Sufis use in rituals. Cognac is my peyote, so when I take it, it puts me into another world, where I experience pure emotive energy easier.

And what about your relationship with the audience? Somebody once said: "It's mainly the 'charisma of the performer' that makes a performance work or not"?

I'd have to say that at least fifty percent of my power lies in just pure raw charisma. With me it's a more vital aspect than in the work of many other artists. I can just sit doing nothing and perhaps succeed because my instinct is to super exude, I have an animalistic kind of impulse to leave an aromatic impression on people's bodies and feelings so even if I was forced to silence, I'd penetrate anyway. I'm a charmatist. I love audiences, performing for them is very sexual, my contact with them arouses me, the sexy females in the audience, or more abstractly, the audience made of breathing, hearts, salivas, eyes, noses, ears, hair, sweat, it's very exciting. I sense it a lot. Many of my pieces are done in the dark; I like that because I prefer to deal with the total energy audiences exude. I can experience more unconsciously, perhaps psychically, in the dark, pacing energy through audience. People are my gauges, they decide how long things last. I respond by what energy fills the air. It starts like an inhale/exhale relationship and if I begin exhaling a lot and get little response, I feel like I'm choking,

not getting enough air so I exhale less, until things change or end. It's all very sexual. It's like you can tell if somebody is having an orgasm.

You don't seem to be doing any of these violent body pieces anymore?

Not right now anyway.

How do you feel after these pieces, you're in what kind of state?

I feel very relaxed, like I just came.

Again, very sexual.

Soon again I am going to start doing more dangerous body pieces, not for a while. Pieces where I am hanging like Houdini. I have these ideas where I am hanging from a large arena by a rope and I swing smashing against the walls. I feel like doing them now only when thousands will come to see it. I am not going to do it just for a few then. Houdini is one of my heroes. But I wouldn't want to be a traditional magician. That's how I live out my death wish. I would live out my battles very openly, my battles with life and death but of course being a good strategist, living as long as I can. That's why Houdini was able to live long. The only reason he died being an ill-timed appendix attack.

What about your working relationship with Simone Forti?

We seemed to have certain things about singing in common. My relationship with her began by show rituals every day or every few days. We would have a meal together then would go and work. It was like temple time. At that time, singing was the basis of the work. We are both Jewish, we both had worked for a little while with Pran Nath and we were both attracted to the voice as a way to vent one's melancholy.

When you started performing together, what were your roles?

At first, she was more well-known than I

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was, so from that point of view, she had the clout that I didn't and she dealt more with movement, she was known for movement. I dealt with lighting, with sound, I dealt with the climate. I built the climate and at the beginning she was the more important character and I took a more subordinate role. Then, times changed and I began to rebel from that structure. Where before, my body just carried the sound, I began to do these large and very aggressive male acts which scared her, which became the beginning of the end actually, that is why we began to separate. I was interested in male and female form that had many dramatic overtones. A grand theatre duet, an epic about man and woman. I forced that form on her and often she would not talk to me for months because of it. I led her to believe that I was just going to play music and instead I would concoct an epic again and force her to be part of it. She was always angry but for a few years I think it was extraordinary.

You said a few times she was getting afraid. Afraid of what?

Well, I think it's traditional that a woman is afraid, many women are afraid of the primeval macho factor in men; they're attracted to it at a distance but when it's right there on top of them, it terrifies them. That's what it was about basically. It manifested itself in performance material. The machismo of male which I was beginning to show pure was terrifying her.

Let's talk again of the situation in the arts going through the sixties and the seventies.

If we are talking of the sixties, I was never a minimalist. I happened to be doing something privately then; there were some people that decided that there was such a thing called minimalism and it was born around New York. I happened to be in New York and I happened to do things ... people

like Bob Morris, he could be my uncle, what they come out of is very different than from what I come out of. Allan Kaprow, he could have been my uncle too. What I am saying is that I wasn't there at the beginning with them, I wasn't the disciple of anyone, nor did I believe in it; I just happened to walk into it and then everybody saw what I was doing and said: "Hey, you're one of us." So I said: "O.K. If you say so." so for a long time, I was considered a minimalist but it was only a momentary coincidence. People were obsessed by wanting to look at things one way. So from that point, that aspect of the sixties, I had nothing to do with it.

But what was happening in the world of performance?

To tell you the truth, I really did not know what was happening. I was always very private. It is only in the last eight years that I've become more in the scene. I didn't care, really. I was struggling with my own aesthetics. I really wasn't a member of the community.

Yes, but in terms of audience, when the performances started, something must have changed?

Yes, it's true that something started, it started small and it began to grow and that started with the community of artists, artists looking at each others' work, it was a small group, a neighbourhood group. For performance, the important ones were perhaps at first Rauschenberg, Warhol, Kaprow, Cage and Cunningham. There were many others too but if I think of the names that stick, those are the ones.

Let's talk of the other aspects of your work, like drawing, video, etc.

As far as drawing is concerned, I've come up with a format now that I'm really happy with. It's like when I created body music in video, I knew I hit the mean, I hit on the basis for a language. When I started doing

strumming music, I hit on the basis for a language, and now I've come upon these book forms, the crumpled surface on the one hand, the book format on the other, and then my expressionist sense of simplistic drawing altogether. Now I have a format, there can be many many variations on this theme. I have found my materials. It's happened in the last two or three years. A lot of the drawings I've done started out as books, the idea of the book. For me the book has many surfaces in time, one can't experience it completely at any given moment, that's what I'm trying to bring to visual art. It's a sense of time and environmentality.

And the video medium?

I first got involved with video as an extension of multimedia in the sixties. I would make documents of things on video but I never really thought of it as something I would use in a different original way. It all began in 1972 in Paris when Ileana Sonnabend told me about Maria Gloria Bicocchi who had a production company that was making videotapes. That's when I created Body Music which is probably one of my best tapes and it just came out of nowhere. I don't know why or how it happened, within a month, I was getting telegrams from Europe and when I came back to Europe, a few months later, Body Music was a very well-known videotape. It happened totally accidentally.

Are you still involved with video these days?

Yes, I'm interested except that to do video as I'd want to do it, I would need a production company because to do videos for galleries doesn't interest me and to just do it for small public broadcasting doesn't interest me either.

You never got involved with T.V., like Channel 33 in New York?

No, not really because it felt to me too elit-

ist to go through all that trouble and it's interesting but my works aren't very well received by the intellectual community. They are better received by the populace because they are very raw, expressionistic and full of action and violence. They don't have the kind of sheen and elegance that the video world thrives on.

Since most of your work is ephemeral, in a sense that it is not recorded, does the documentation about your work have any importance for you?

I want to start to make documents of things that I've done; I don't like to document while performing because I feel that equipment gets in the way of the audience's perception of what I am doing. It takes the privacy out of it. It objectifies it while it's happening. I don't like the audience to be able to get too distant from what I'm doing while I am doing it. I like to feel that they're sucked in and that they're in danger, their perceptions are in danger of being pierced and that they're in danger of thinking things they don't want to think, and feeling things they don't want to feel. If there are cameras and things around, it gives them a defence, a barrier against my impact.

What influence did the Bosendorfer piano have on your music?

I was not even playing the piano before, I played for fun but I did not consider it an instrument that I really was interested in. I was using electronics, bells and I was involved with the voice but the piano didn't interest me. But when I first played the Bösendorfer, it rang the way bells did, it had overtones like electronics and it was as sensitive as the voice. The perfect incarnation of all those things I had been groping with separately. It helped take my ideas further and now I'm ready for the orchestra and larger forces.

What do you think of punk music today?

I think that pop music is always looking for cults. Punk is another, though its obsession with violence, poetry, madness and its return to the clipped hair look give it a powerful new flavour. Since it deals with sadism and masochism and anger, it does relate a bit to my own work. Some New York and California groups have even told me that I've had an influence on their aesthetics somewhere or other. But finally, for me, it's too much enforced weirdoism —

too culty for my taste, not individualistic and poetic enough for me. On a certain level, what I am about and what Patti Smith is about isn't so different. We are from the same generation, I'm obsessed with my persona, obsessed with a lot of different emotional things about the male but I could never be a cult hero in that way because my weirdness is too aristocratic. I am just a primeval aristocrat, suffering from an overdose of paranoia and megalomania.