Hanne Tierney/MATRIX 97
September 19, 1987

Hanne Tierney at the control board
for The Intruder, studio set-up, 1986

MATRIX is supported in part by
a grant from the National
Endowment for the Arts, a
Federal agency.
World Premiere
Drama for Strings (1987)
in three movements
light sound gesture

Saturday, September 19, 1987
Two performances, 8 p.m. and 10 p.m.
Avery Theater
Wadsworth Atheneum

Materials and objects in order of appearance:

I. Light:
Green light, screening, beaded curtains,
red light, white light and wooden lath

II. Sound:
Aluminum pipes, sound tape

III. Gesture:
Rubber tubing, hands

These performances are co-sponsored by the Wadsworth Atheneum's Membership Department, under the direction of Anne Mayo. Special thanks for assistance with the stage installation to Richard Nonas and Michael Cappiello.

Tonight's presentation is funded in part by a grant from The Xerox Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, through the New England Foundation for the Arts.
The basic theories and ideas I work with were first expressed by the French symbolist poets almost a hundred years ago. The movement towards modernism and abstraction in the other arts naturally didn't leave the theater unaffected. Mallarmé wrote prolifically on bringing this new theater about. He hoped "that it would express the poetry of the universe through a refined and harmonious combination of movement, colour, and sound", and the symbolist playwright Maurice Maeterlinck spelled it out even more clearly. He wrote in La Jeune Belgique in 1888, "The active presence of man on the stage is an intolerable interference between drama and its audience... Instead I envision a theater where this presence will be replaced by a shadow, a reflection, a projection of symbolic form, or some being with all the appearance of life, though not actually living."

The vision the theater shared with poetry and painting at that time was to create a drama that could be emotionally as immediate and as penetrating as is music. (Kandinsky's Yellow Sound and Schönberg's The Fortunate Hand are probably the best known works based on this premise.)

The fact that I perform my drama on an instrument seems to me to be the crucial link here: after all, what is so extraordinary about music is that a rational and logical system of measuring and repetitious moves produces the incredible result of music.

My own system has evolved over the last ten years. It still is evolving, and I have begun to pay more serious attention to notating it. The notations, as in music, are based on high and low, although at this point I'm not yet measuring time and tempo. Theoretically, once it is notated, anyone can perform a given work.
But the real affinity to music lies in being able to free the notion of drama from the material considerations of the cast. For example, after I work out the combination of strings that will produce a gesture or movement of despair, whatever I attach to the string, cloth, rope, or even a chair, will make a movement of despair. Just as a melody remains the same melody, regardless of the instrument on which it is played. This is quite close to Arnold Schönberg's vision of "making music with the media of the stage."

Another turn-of-the-century argument for a non-representational theater that interests me is Edward Gordon Craig's thesis (The Art of the Theater, 1909) that in order for the theater to become an Art, it needed to abolish human actors. He argued that art arrives only by design, never by accident, and to create a work of art requires materials that are predictable and, therefore, reliable. Human beings can not be such a material, their whole being tending towards self-expression. (This may have had something to do with the fact the Craig's mother was an actress.)

Notions and concepts of abstraction, in the sense of the general and non-specific, have not gone very far in the theater yet, because actors can ultimately only pretend at reality. If the movements of a construction rope communicates despair to the spectator, than it is the spectator's knowledge of despair (largely unconscious knowledge) that makes this communication possible. The process is perception rather than observation.

In Drama for Strings the movements of objects and materials are performed to confront these questions of theatrical illusion and pretended reality. Three elements of the theater, light, sound, and gesture, are isolated and their functions dramatized.
The lights are physical objects that move towards the situations they light up. They are not a sunset or a dark, mysterious night; they are lamps that give light. And in spite of all absence of illusion, or maybe because of it, they create magic and dramatic tension. The latter is supplied by the power the lights have over the materials and objects on the stage: without the lights they can't transcend their materialism. They can not even be seen.

The second movement is a somewhat ironic statement on the same questions. Sound effects are played, intermingled with totally impersonal electronic rhythm to the choreographed movements and repositioning of two eight foot (plumbing) pipes. The sounds are arranged to involve the audience in a murder story, complete with the tension of waiting for the next move. The story is neither told, illustrated, nor acted out, and yet, because of our ability to translate symbols (sounds and otherwise) into dramatic knowledge, it takes place.

For the third movement I have chosen gestures as the element to dramatize. Freed of their theatrical particulars, costumes, psychology, environment, they signify the existence of an essence of drama, a drama that is universal and goes beyond the specific. Rubber tubing and two hands provide the gestures, and the intensity of the gestures provides the drama.

Throughout Drama for Strings it is clear that all materials and objects are performed. They do not confuse the audience with the possibility of 'a life of their own.' I perform this work in full view of the audience. It is simply a recital, instead of the ears hearing music, the eyes see drama.

Hanne Tiemey
New York City
August, 1987
Beaded curtains (and light) from
Act I, *Light, Drama for Strings*, 1987
Selected Installations
and Performances by Tierney:

New Clothes, The Kitchen, NYC '80; Genesis, P S 1, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, NY '81; Rosie's Compromise, Queens Museum, Flushing, NY '81; Jazz, Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY '81;
Mcfarley's Floozie, Rosa Esman Gallery, NYC '81;
Mcfarley's Floozie, Biennale of Sydney, Australia '82;
Mcfarley's Floozie, Arts Council of Australia. Canberra, Australia '82; Mcfarley's Fraulein, Akademie Der Kunste (International Theater Meeting), West Berlin '82; A Drama in Ten Acts, Delacorte Theater, NYC '82; A Small Tragedy, with Phyllis Rosenzweig, Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D. C. '83; A Drama for Voice and Strings, Whitney at Philip Morris, NYC '83; Salome (Oscar Wilde), Art Galaxy, NYC '84; A. B. C. and Variations sur la Theme, Theatre Espace Kiron, Paris '84; The Book of Job...Amended, Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, Roslyn Harbor, NY '85;
Variations on a Theme, Lenbachhaus Städtische Galerie (Konstruktion und Process 1985), Munchen '85; Stories, Mickery Theater, Amsterdam '85; The Intruder (Maurice Maeterlinck), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC '86;
Salome North Dakota Museum of Fine Art '86; Salome,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC '87;
Selected Bibliography about Tierney:


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