



Diagram of *Walk, She Said*, first performed in toto during *Performance* at the Whitney Museum (page 242), later in *Lives of Performers* (page 213). The unattached arrows indicate the directions in which the torso and head face (at the end of each 4-count measure). The numbers denote number of steps in a given direction. 73, 103

Late random notes and quotes on four points of focus:
Performance, Autobiography, Fiction, Media

"For me the body alone is no longer the main focus. I'm interested in private experience and the problems of projecting and transforming it. But I think I still put things together in the same way. My content is different, but I have the same ideas of duration and continuity. I call myself a choreographer because as such I first discovered my artistry and formal methods for framing it. I also like the concrete kind of problem-solving that the word choreography encompasses. Besides there's still dancing in my work."

Performance, A Conversation edited by Stephen Koch, Artforum, December 1972.

Autobiography

After *Rose Fractions* of 1969 I began to have a new concern with performance, with different levels of performance, and later with the idea of "performance-work" as a background or justification for fiction. Right now I'm trying to develop a certain kind of narrative, and since my work in a broad sense has always been autobiographical, one point of departure is my own persona of performer, as previously my own body was a point of departure.

The easiest way for me to think about character is from my own point of view. One result of this is that all the performers become extensions of this point of view, sometimes interchangeably. There are no clearly delineated lines of character, except where the performers are allowed to be themselves. Sometimes both of these things happen at the same time, as in *Lives of Performers* when they sit around talking and using their own casual social mannerisms while the voice on the soundtrack invents what they are talking about, pieces of jumbled autobiography.

Autobiography, as I use it, is a rich source of material, and like all material, can be manipulated: fragmented, redistributed, magnified, analyzed, juxtaposed. I am a performer, a dancer, a director, a person who has been through shit and come up smiling, etc. The actuality of these roles lends a credibility to what otherwise I would have to invent totally from my imagination, which I'm not prepared to do. Autobiography saves me needless work. When it is distributed among a number of people, as in *Lives of Performers*, or depersonalized by the use of the third person pronoun, as in *This is the story of a woman who . . .*, it has the possibility of becoming more objectively biographical, and finally, fictional.

I like to think that I have a careful screening process operating to exclude personal material that applies uniquely to my experience. What passes my screening must somehow be identifiable with probabilities of experience of you, the audience. Surgery, no; illness and thoughts of suicide perhaps; love, pleasure, rage,

self-doubt yes. (When and if I become aware of a prevalence of intestinal difficulty in the population of my audience, then maybe I will consider dealing with that as material!)

I kind of have my feet in two different places. I go back and forth between documentation and fiction.

I shall quote something Jonas Mekas wrote which pleases and flatters me, but also raises some questions:

"The evening, for me, became a meditation on the cliché, on melodrama, on memory, on feelings, on language. It also had something very personal. It all pointed to some very personal experience of Yvonne herself, with man-woman relationships, doubts, re-evaluations, reconsiderations, questionings. It was a very personal looking into the meanings of one's actions, expressions, movements. Yes, it was a very personal piece about certain areas of experience that are not touched too often by artists because they are very difficult to tackle, formally. This content can be caught only by a certain kind of form, a form that is very very dangerous, a form that can collapse on you any moment, leaving you with a pile of nothing. A form that needs a certain kind of fusion of the utmost rigidity and the utmost openness, and this kind of openness has always been one of the peculiar gifts of Yvonne's genius."

(*Movie Journal*, Village Voice, May 4, 1972)

My work is personal, but not strictly autobiographical, if for no other reason than that I don't intend it as such. It contains many autobiographical elements, sometimes identifiable, sometimes not. One way it is saved from being autobiographical, or merely personal, however, is by being so frequently pushed into the realm of fiction. Which is where cliché comes in. The degree to which I can interject the familiar — in language, artifact, and reference — is the degree to which the purely personal factor in the work can be offset and distanced. Sometimes this familiarity verges on cliché (the gun, the letter, "Is love really so blind?"); sometimes it goes beyond cliché (the letter, the suitcase, "But she feels her jealousy acutely."). References to others' work function in the same way: the use of movie stills from Pabst's *Lulu* and Hitchcock's *Psycho* relieves my work of the danger of insularity and solipsism; documents of fiction put to new fictional use.

But fiction is created not only by this resorting to the familiar. *Incongruity* can transform the banal into the fantastic: 1. Two images — familiar in ambience but incongruent in time — when juxtaposed, create a third reality. 2. The use of two plausible, but conflicting readings of the same image moves meaning from one reality to another, from a semblance of truth to a confirmation of fiction. 3. Discrepancy between emotional neutrality of image and emotional stress of simultaneous text subverts the "authenticity" of both.

And then, of course, the fictional thrust sometimes reverses itself: A "real" family photo is juxtaposed with a "fake" family photo. Two members of the latter also appear in the "real" photo. Or one person in the real photo and two in the fake are actual performers in the work. A cross-sectioned slice of truth made as strange as fiction.

I used continuous verbal material as early as 1962 (*Ordinary Dance*, page 288), film and slides in 1966. How is my use of these things different now? As for texts: The text now functions to construct a fictional continuity and cohesiveness. In the past it was an independent element that was meant to enrich a sequence of events and very often replaced music. It provided an emotional or dramatic fabric that I had not necessarily been concerned with in the making of the dance, a filling in of crevices with a content that the dance itself did not supply. Sometimes the text contained a thorough exploration of a given content, a cataloging of a body of information in as complete a way as I could (the William Bentley diary used in *Parts of Some Sextets* — page 55). This was not the way I went at dancing at all, at making movement. The physical aspect of my work had always been more erratic and eclectic; I didn't always feel the same obligation to make the dances hang together in a contextual way. But the texts fulfilled what obviously was some kind of need.

Film and slides now too project the imagery and content of an elusive story. Slide projections of text are a recent development. My process requires that I make certain distinctions for myself: What do I want the audience to do: read or hear textual material? When should such material be heard as a recording and when should it be heard live, i.e., from the lips of the performers themselves? In film should the spoken words be *in synch* or *out of synch*, or should there be *voice-over narration*? (This last decision is often based on economics.) Should the performer read the words, recite them, or paraphrase them? These decisions are usually contingent on the nature of the material itself (such as length) and/or the context within which it is to be presented. The particular construction of a given sentence may be more important to me than a quality of "ad libbing", or vice versa.

In my live shows I look for a certain amount of diversity. I wouldn't like the audience to have to read all night; better they stay home with a good book. We do have the metaphor, however, "in one ear and out the other", which doesn't exist in relation to the eyes. When I want to be certain of strongest impact from a given text, when I want to avoid the possibility that the words merely "wash over" the audience, I present the material in printed form. Four-letter words, erotic, and more emotionally "loaded" materials are dealt with in this manner. The complicity of the audience in being "face-to-face" with such material is an important factor in the quality of impact.

One outcome of these considerations in making a film is that any one choice automatically puts that part of the film into some kind of convention, such as the *acting* of the narrative film, the *inter-titles* of the silent movie, the *sub-titles* and *dubbing* of the foreign language film, the *voice-over* of the documentary and the flash-back, and the *face-front-to-camera delivery* of Godard.

Some people are overly affected by the solemnity of some of my subject matter. It seems to me that this can happen when one separates content from context, or the means by which the content is projected. For instance, the line "Her shit got more attention than she did" is one of the most awesomely horrible pieces of text in all of my oeuvre. But when it gets isolated as a slide projection in the middle of an eccentric taped reading — well, something else happens: it becomes pitiful and absurd *as well as* horrible.

Supposing I had placed that line next to the film of the little girl lying in bed? 99 Would I have gotten bathos? Sometimes I feel like a cliff-hanger about to plummet into a sea of my own grease.

Some words about *Inner Appearances* (page 251): Originally made for a female, it was performed as an independent work and also incorporated into *Performance* and *This is the story of a woman who . . .* After I began to receive feedback about the political overtones of the piece — that the vacuum cleaner stood for women's oppression, that it was a statement about "women's lib" — I had to re-think the whole thing. I felt very ingenuous in not foreseeing this response. I usually live alone and I occasionally use a vacuum cleaner to clean my house. I have never felt oppressed by having to accommodate certain hygienic needs in this manner. Well, I thought, if it's going to be received as a political statement then it must be made more radical. My solution was to re-write it for a male performer. The problems involved were fascinating and staggering.

I made four different versions of it and continued to have problems. I consulted male and female friends, and they confused me further. It was impossible as a rule-of-thumb to simply change the gender of the pronouns. This would have resulted in some cases in readings that were physically untenable, but these were simple to take care of compared to dilemmas over cultural transpositions. For instance, the second paragraph originally read ". . . Now she is reviewing the conversation in her mind. 'He doesn't take me seriously. God-damn him!' Her mind works in spirals behind the eyeshade." In my first attempt I simply transposed the pronouns so that the inside quote read "She doesn't take me seriously. Goddamn her!" I made similar changes in other paragraphs, then showed the whole thing to a male friend. His response in effect was that the same readings when applied to both male and female made for a 'strong woman' and a 'weak man.' I naturally objected. If a woman is 'strong' for revealing her humiliations and vulnerabilities and a man 'weak' for doing the same thing, then that just points up our need for new values.

I felt suddenly like a missionary: *Inner Appearances* would give men permission to be as human as us women and give women a vision of such a man. Then I started to show the stuff to others and the response kept coming back: For a man to have such feelings is one thing; for him to reveal them puts him in a 'bad light.' It was hard to ignore the prejudice attached to the expression of inadequacy on the part of a man.

For a while I stuck to my guns: A woman's complaint about "not being taken seriously" by a man is so ordinary as to be commonplace, and women's anger over this has become similarly familiar, thanks to the women's movement. However, "She doesn't take me seriously. Goddamn her!" as spoken by a man is by no means culturally commonplace at this time. The line jumps from the page with an urgency that the female version just doesn't have. On reading this one asks either "What is wrong with him?" or "Why is he so vulnerable?" Thus the male version is highly political in the question it raises, while the female version is not. Now I really had to ask myself "Just how radical do you want this to be?"

If *Inner Appearances* were to stand as a singular work, I would make its stance as extreme as I could imagine. But I had to take into consideration that, since it formed the beginning of a larger work and introduced the sole male performer in that work, I had to make some concession toward making him a less culturally controversial person. (A small psycho-analytically minded voice in me says I had to make him heterosexual rather than homosexual. I am not prepared to elaborate on this notion. I am afraid that my own prejudices are at stake. And I still don't know if the small changes I made really effected that psychological change.)

So I made several concessions: 1. "She doesn't take me seriously. Goddamn her!" of the second paragraph became "She hasn't changed a bit," he muses. 2. In the paragraph beginning with "Again he thinks about making love . . ." *she* remained the performer in *his* gaze as in the female version, rather than *he* becoming the performer for *her*. I couldn't make him that narcissistic. (page 252)

One last comment on *Inner Appearances*: THE VACUUM CLEANER! In the spring of 1973 John Erdman and I did five west coast performances of an abridged version of . . . *woman who . . .* called *This is the story of a woman and man who . . .* The vacuum cleaner, which was a different kind of machine in each place, elicited many gender-oriented remarks. The industrial vacuum cleaner was called "man-size", the little electric broom was thought appropriate because it was so "phallic", etc. The image of a man vacuuming was obviously too extraordinary to pass notice. I had never encountered such remarks when I had performed the work myself.