



The Generation Gap

by C.CARR

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None of them claims to be the voice of a generation, but there they are: three artists roughly 20 years apart. Geoffrey Hendricks, 69 this month and long identified with the Fluxus movement, quietly practices yoga with an instructor on a square white stage; projected behind him is film footage of a cow being slaughtered, and behind that a slide of fat clouds, crisp sky. William Pope.L, 45, sits atop a toilet on a 10-foot throne, calmly eating pieces of *The Wall Street Journal*, guzzling milk or ketchup, then spitting it all out. Patty Chang, 28, tries to balance on an extraspongy waterbed while a video camera taped to the mattress simulcasts every lunge and misstep on the wall.

The current “Söma Söma Söma” show at the SculptureCenter almost begs the spectator to come up with generational generalities, or to speculate on the current state of performance art.

Pope.L, who organized the show, says he wanted a “minisurvey” of what’s going on in body art, since, to some extent, it’s disappeared into photography and video. “People seem more interested in packaging it than in actually doing it.”

Let’s just say that if performance grew out of a wish to make art more present, more visceral in the ’60s and ’70s, that trend has decidedly reversed itself. Over the past decade, this art form definitely shifted toward en-

tertainment—or, at least, the proscenium—and away from such anti-tainments as those described above. That makes the “Söma” show an anomaly, not to be missed. The last performances happen this Saturday, July 15. (Call 879-3500 for times.)

In 1971, Geoff Hendricks did a piece called *Body/Hair* at a 23rd Street gallery, shaving his entire body from the neck down. The “Söma” show includes documentation of that event: the video, the written ruminations, the reliquary of 20 small jars with labels like “Hair From the Right Leg of the Artist.” He’s also re-presenting *Dream Event* from 1971. He spent 48 hours in bed at the gallery for that piece, fasting, sleeping, and recording his dreams.

Hendricks included both these pieces because 1971 marked a turning point in his life, when he decided to acknowledge that he was gay and his 10 years of marriage came to an end. Hendricks and his wife, Bici (who had also come out), then collaborated on *Fluxdivorce*, publicly cutting their bed, their wedding documents, and other items in half, then staging a division-of-property event in the backyard.

“*Body/Hair* was like shedding a skin,” he says, while *Dream Event* was about “the private becoming public.” But did he tell himself in 1971 that he was shedding a skin? Not really, he admits. Insight into what it meant

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came later.

Artists in the '70s used the body as a tool for self-discovery. In his new piece at the SculptureCenter, *Eating/Breathing*, Hendricks works with yoga teacher Christina Read for several hours, stretching, breathing, doing headstands. They pause near the end to eat brown rice with their hands. Hendricks then paints his calves and feet blue, ties grass to his thighs, and stands on his head. Even upside down, nature is right side up.

Hendricks says he realized during the performance that "all parts of the body are thinking. It seemed suddenly like the flip side of what Yvonne Rainer was saying when she spoke of the mind as a muscle. The body is a mind."

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