

**NEW THEATRE  
REPORT SECTION**

# The Drama Review

## Dance/Movement Issue

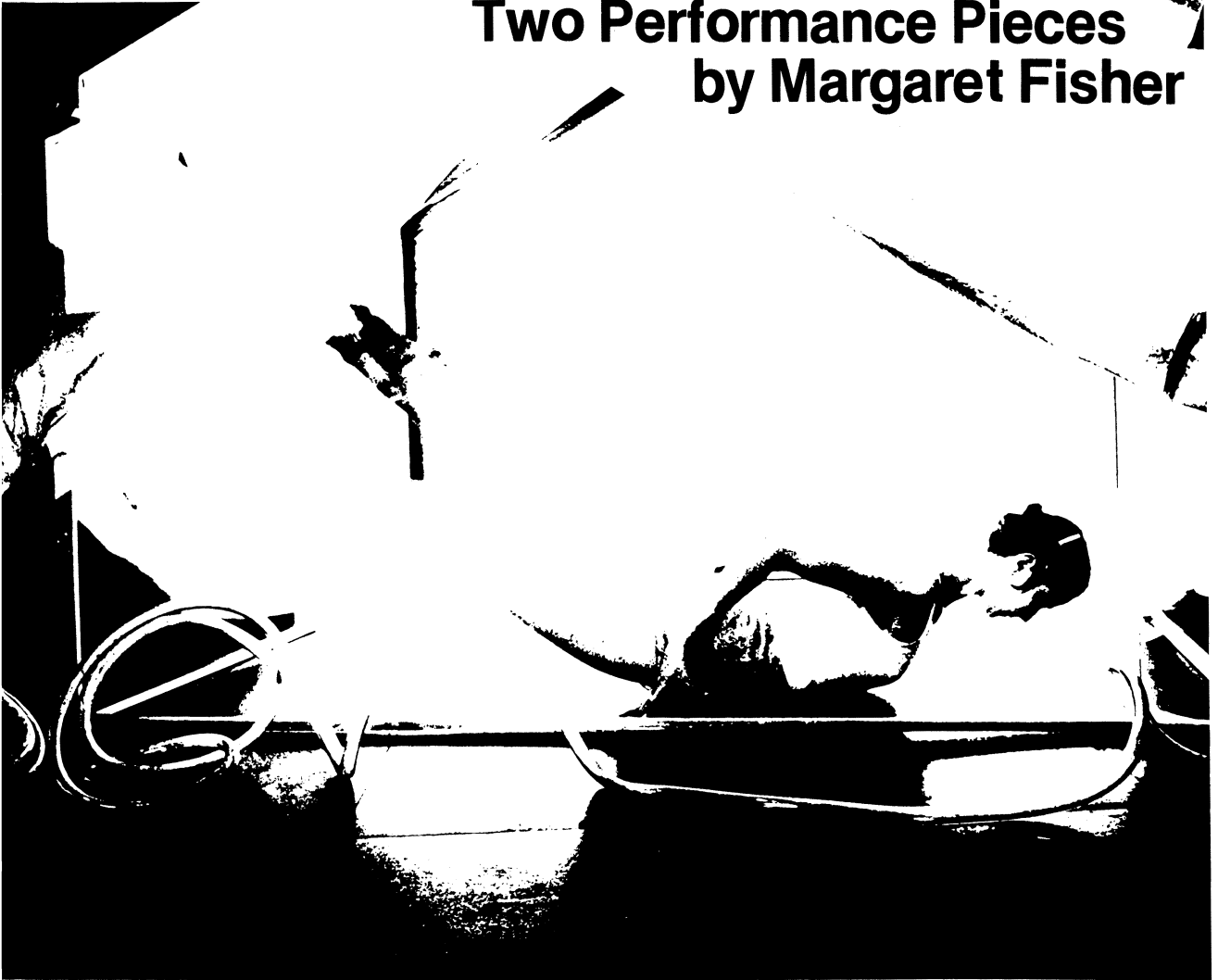


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**New York University/School of the Arts**

**\$4.00**

## Two Performance Pieces by Margaret Fisher



**by Gail Bochenek**

*Margaret Fisher is a performance artist who lives near San Francisco and works primarily in the San Francisco Bay area. Descriptions of two of her latest pieces follow. Both were first presented at the San Francisco International Theatre Festival in 1980.*

### ***Il Miglior Fabbro (The Better Maker)***

In the performance area are two wooden-frame tents side by side. They are 8 feet square, 6 feet at their apex, and covered with white muslin. The "insect" tent is at the right, tent flaps open, a duplicate miniature tent suspended within the opening. Two fluorescent industrial lighting fixtures form a bright "V" upstage on the tent floor. From the opening a clear plastic tube coils its way over to the "scientist" tent at the left. This tent is closed, except for a triangular window centered on its front wall. It is illuminated by a blue light from within. In front of it, on the floor, is its cut-out—a piece of triangular

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Title photo: *Il Miglior Fabbro*

pleated posterboard. A tech station is to the left of the cut-out and its resident technician (Tech #1, Ron Vincent) is dressed in a white laboratory coat. A similarly dressed technician (Tech #2, Beth Fein) is stationed at the right to manage a cluster of film and slide projectors on the floor and mounted on tripods and lazy Susan devices.

## The Performance

From a lab coat, a man's hand (Bob Hughes) emerges to clutch a red ax at the window of the left tent. It rises in slow motion. In front of the right tent, Fisher balances on her hips, her hands angled behind her for support, her knees to her chest, back sloped in an ellipsoidal curve with its long edge just off the floor. Her body is in profile to the audience although her face is front.



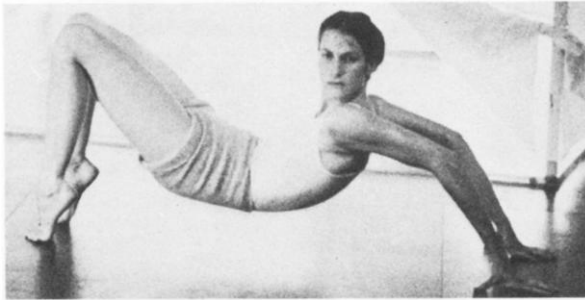
The ax disappears into the upper reaches of the tent and slams down violently into a log, thus triggering a blast of musical sound. The ax repeats this gesture, the blast is deciphered as an Italian punk rock song (*Feromoni* by Bob Hughes), and Fisher begins miniature insect movements. These are intricate small gestures emanating largely from the joints of the shoulders, knees, elbows, neck, ribs and ankles. The act of breathing is choreographed to include the expansion of the ribs as one of a long series of gestures. There is a contrast between the high decibel-level of the rock song, the miniature precision of Fisher's movements and the premeditated violence of the ax.

The scientist chops at the log. He sits at a table and props the log upright to examine it with his tweezers and his magnifying glass.

During this time, Fisher executes the following actions: Her legs beat from the knees in small upward thrusts, gradually increasing until the legs are completely straight, the thighs pressed against her chest. The feet flex, her left thumb lifts from the floor and returns. The toes wiggle. The legs descend; halfway to the floor she pauses. She juts her neck to the side, puffs her right cheek in and out (it is silhouetted against the brightness of the fluorescent lights behind her). Her legs continue in their excruciatingly slow descent to the floor. She turns her head to the side. Her stomach moves in and out. Her thumb lifts, twitches, and returns to the floor. Her head returns to the front. The knees bend outward and bounce lightly. She draws her feet close into the body, her knees straighten, and her left ankle and heel lift, shake, and return to the floor. Her rib cage expands and contracts. Her sloping spine gently pushes in and out at the chest, her lower back slouches and recovers. Her head turns to the side. A small object in her mouth extends and retracts repeatedly. Her head turns to the front. She lifts her hips from the floor and undulates her lower back in and out at an erotic pace. She sways her torso along a horizontal path, gradually lifting it until it is almost straight from the knees to her shoulders. Its momentum is slow and steady. The hips lower to the floor, the stomach undulates, the legs are drawn up to the chest, and she returns to her original position in which she rocks along the curve of her spine. Her right leg juts out quickly, and she flips over to face the floor, her left leg extended, its knee on the floor. The right foot has found its position between her hands, in front of her face so that she is almost in a side split. Her forearms rest on the floor, forcing her long back into a curve. She bounces her hips toward the floor. Her back foot lifts and returns three

times. Her fingers quiver. The back knee is lifted and a small vibration sent throughout the entire leg before it is replaced onto the floor. She thrashes her chest in and out. Her elbows straighten, extending her arms and lifting her chest and spine upward. She breathes deeply, expanding the rib cage, and . . .

The electrical power fails. The rock song moans to a stop, the lights are extinguished. In the blackout, a voice is heard over a walkie-talkie: "*E buio*" (It's dark). Fluorescent lights flicker as the voice delivers (in Italian) orders for reinstatement of the power. A blue front light shows the scientist still at his table with walkie-talkie in hand. The blue light changes to green to illuminate the back of the tent and silhouette the man. The light alternates in this manner at a steady rhythm, effecting a continuous sense of spatial alteration. The scientist quietly goes about his task of recording the insect sounds that he hears and creating a cipher for them. When he speaks ordinary words, rather than imitating the insect sounds, it is in Italian: "*C'e una hacca, c'e una be . . .*" (That's an "h", that's a "b").

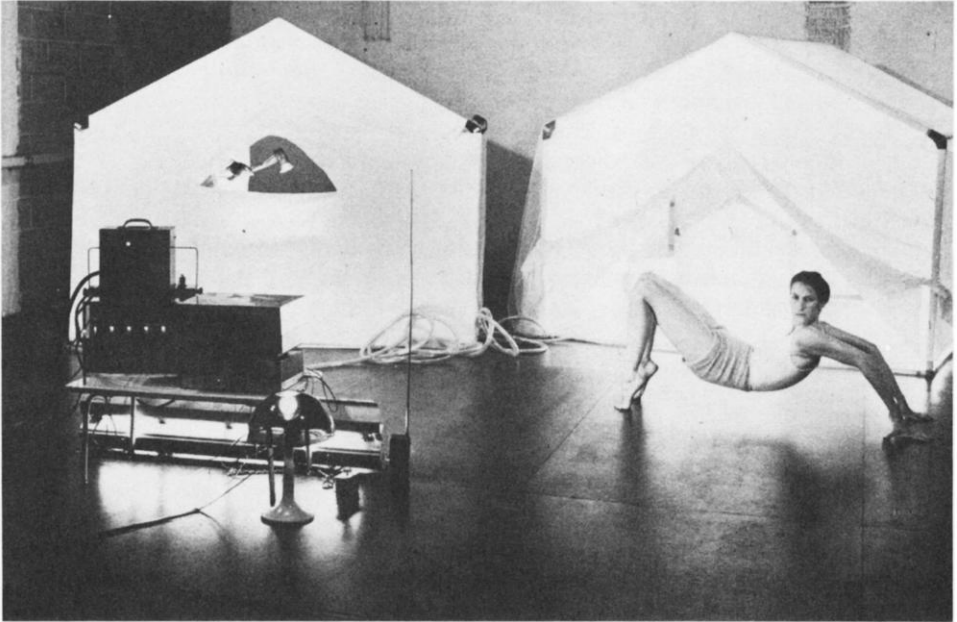


He finishes his task and leaves by way of the rear of the tent. A small spotlight roams across the front wall of his tent. In its tight circle are the letters of the alphabet. The circle travels randomly at first and subsequently follows the man as he passes along the wall at the left. The circle of letters stops over his head as he stops and faces the wall. He holds an eraser in his right hand and sweeps it in a wide arc across the wall to his right. As he does this, the spotlight (a rectangular sheet of press-type letters) illuminates the man, the wall and all of his tent. A film is projected onto the front surface of the miniature insect tent at the right. It shows the arm of a scientist working and reworking a formula at the blackboard. When the scientist's hand in the film erases part of the formula, the performer in the lab coat similarly works at the press-type projected letters with his eraser. Although the movements are related, the film image is much smaller than the performer. The insect sounds slowly have been transformed into a rhythmic loop of eraser sounds.

The film ends. The large alphabet covering half the performance space disappears line by line. The miniature tent "falls" outside the right tent, and a blue glow emanates from within. It rocks slowly from side to side. A childlike voice recites an Italian poem about insect sex in a slow and sensuous manner.

At the right rear, the outside fluorescent tube in the "insect" tent flickers in an uneven arhythmical pattern. An image of a segmented insect is projected onto the triangular posterboard cut-out in front of the left tent. The pleats of the triangle cause the image to appear to be crawling across the surface. Seven insects crawl back and forth across the triangle.

The man in the lab coat turns on a standing lamp; its blue glow gradually increases. There exists now a diagonal line of light and projected images stretching a distance from the fluorescent tube at the right rear through the miniature tent, the cut-



### ***Il Miglior Fabbro***

out, and ending at the man's lamp at the front left. The diagonal line is extinguished in four successive moments. The man crosses to the right tent and ties up the fabric side walls, exposing the frame. The original level of brightness from the two fluorescent lights resumes, and the Italian rock song repeats in its English version: "Pheromones, species specific . . ."

The man sits down on a bench at the back of the right tent and jots his notes onto a clipboard. Technician #2 (who had been standing by the projectors at the right) enters the performing space, lies on her back, and rubs her hands and feet together in a gesture called "the cricket rub." She jumps up, goes to another part of the floor, changes the direction of her body, and repeats this action. After her third "rub," Technician #1 (who had been stationed at the left) enters the performance space. He performs the "cricket rub" while she balances on her upper arms and rubs her feet together at the ankles. (Fisher derives these actions from basic yoga postures and adds her own rhythmic and isolationistic percussive movements to them.) The scene is humorous and playful.

When the scientist joins the two technicians, they all alternate their movements with various tasks. They shake test tubes, blow white powder through the large plastic coiled tube, carry equipment from one place to another, and continue to rub their hands and feet against themselves and in the air. A hand emerges from a lab coat at the window of the scientist's tent. This hand chops wood, swings the ax wildly about, makes erasure gestures across the front wall of the tent and in the pattern of a car windshield wiper, sweeps the walkie-talkie antenna into the space, snaps its fingers, throws splinters onto the floor, and shakes in time to the music.

The technicians take all the film and slide projectors into the right tent with them. The scientist lowers the tent walls and enters. Technician #2 puts her head through an opening between the tent wall and its roof and rubs the palms of her hands together outside the tent. The music ends. Blackout. The piece has lasted 30 minutes.