

FOUR WORDS

by Kara Feely

JUNK

There is nothing less practical than having to carry a giant suitcase of junk with you night after night to rehearsal, or God forbid as a checked bag on an overseas flight (“why exactly are you bringing this suitcase of rocks into our country?”) And yet, every piece I make seems to require a sprawling pile of senseless objects: rubber gloves, sugar cubes, a fake pink cockatoo tied to a rope, a fat suit, tennis rackets, buckets, buckets and more buckets, saran wrap, pantyhose, army figurines spray painted gold, a flash with no camera, sunglasses, masking tape, rocks, the list goes on. At the start of every piece I say, this time: no props. But performers alone on stage, with nothing surrounding them and nothing to engage with, has never been interesting to me. Every minute of our lives we are surrounded by profoundly present objects that we use, don’t use, adore, hate, accumulate, break, throw away- our relationship with these objects is way more complicated than any of us would like to admit. And of course we exist now on this planet at a crisis point of consumerism, seemingly unable to handle all the objects we create. Junk is familiar, disarming, sometimes funny and always distracting. It scatters focus, and reorients perspective from the large to the minute (the important to the unimportant.) It is inexorably there, never behaving as it should. A regrettable reminder—a field of potential.

VIRTUOSITY

Performers should unlearn how to perform. Actors in particular are taught to speak a certain way on stage that is familiar within a theatrical context- loud, clear, confident, efficient, convincing. But wouldn’t it be interesting if a performer were unconvincing? Or consistently performed in an inconsistent style? Or didn’t seem to care if you watched them or not? I like it when the audience sees the performers as unreliable participants. They should put on emotions like clothing, and switch effortlessly from one mode of performance to another- have a complete meltdown with a plate of sandwiches at one moment, and then carefully lay out a design onto the floor with masking tape the next. Both task-oriented activity and heightened emotional outbursts should go side by side. This performer doesn’t fulfill any expectations or conventions of the performance context, because rules are meant to be ignored (provided they are replaced by different more rigorous, more bizarre rules.) This is a new type of virtuosity, carefully studied and acquired, that requires precision, flexibility, stamina and a good dose of attitude.

OVERLOAD

Object Collection pieces are frequently an unrelenting, diffuse mass of sweaty actors moving furniture, rummaging through piles of debris, and looking impenetrably at the audience; musicians counting off on the side, ping pong balls in one hand, an instrument in the other; and lots and lots (and lots) of stuff. What is an audience member supposed to do when there’s too much to watch? I’ve always found this situation comforting, because when there is too much to watch, you get to choose what to watch. Getting to choose what to watch gives you agency, and thereby activates how you watch. Nobody is going to process the piece in the same way, because nobody is going to be watching the same thing. It says, there is no right way to view this and there is no one idea to understand, but several, depending on what you see. It is respectful, and doesn’t assume that an audience of diverse backgrounds and perspectives is all going to agree on what is interesting about a performance. When a piece is too singular, too focused, too solidly constructed, I find myself looking at the lighting instruments instead. I want to watch a city on stage, a collapsed bookshelf, an exploded candy store, a disintegrating landscape through a rainbow filter.

WRONG

Artists are usually taught to focus their ideas, to have a strong concept and see it through. Making a well-constructed art piece sometimes feels more like organizing your silverware drawer. Everybody has ideas, and everybody can construct a solid concept, but making something interesting to watch is something else entirely. Audiences expect certain conventions to be upheld when watching a performance—conventions relating to pace, focus, the consistency of the performance style, the careful unraveling of an idea that all elements support. To throw these

conventions into question, throws the competency of the piece into question. The audience is on unstable ground, which is a good place to be because this is where the piece has the potential to lift off into another dimension. I prefer to diffuse an idea, and make the relaxed search for it... the half-hearted rummaging for it... the skeptical questioning of it (is it even there?) a holistic part of the viewing process. If the spine of a piece is too obvious, then the audience has nothing at stake. I want to be in that strange middle ground of relaxed, unattached viewing (where my mind can wander) and at the same time have no sense of time passing, because time has been re-invented. I am *sucked into the action* and yet *completely outside of it* at exactly the same moment. And how do you get to this place? Through rehearsal: hours and hours of rehearsal. There are no easy answers.