



Lap Doc

Elizabeth

Lap was choreographed by Elizabeth Chitty and performed by Elizabeth Chitty and Terry McGlade as part of the Dance Artists series held in November and December 1976 at St. Paul's Centre, Toronto.

1. _____

I became interested in violent, physical contact through my own experience with dance. I stopped dance training in the traditional, technical sense when I graduated from the York University Dance Department (April, 1975). For two years I had been working improvisationally without emphasis on traditional technique. I had grown dissatisfied with the kind of work this usually resulted in (in myself and others) — it was largely confined to very sensitive, usually "spacey" energy and movement. Violence is a counter-action. I am interested in real danger and real physical contact as opposed to theatrical physical contact. It has honesty. I am not interested in using movement to express, to create moods or feelings, etc. My previous work has been part of this process of evolution. *Mover* contained movement that, though very slow and dependent on body awareness and sensitivity, worked with physical reality, (dancers moved another dancer's body as she acted as a deadweight), and *Drop*, in which I, as a deadweight, dropped on a pulley from a fourth-storey window, contained an undistorted physical reality and added the element of danger.

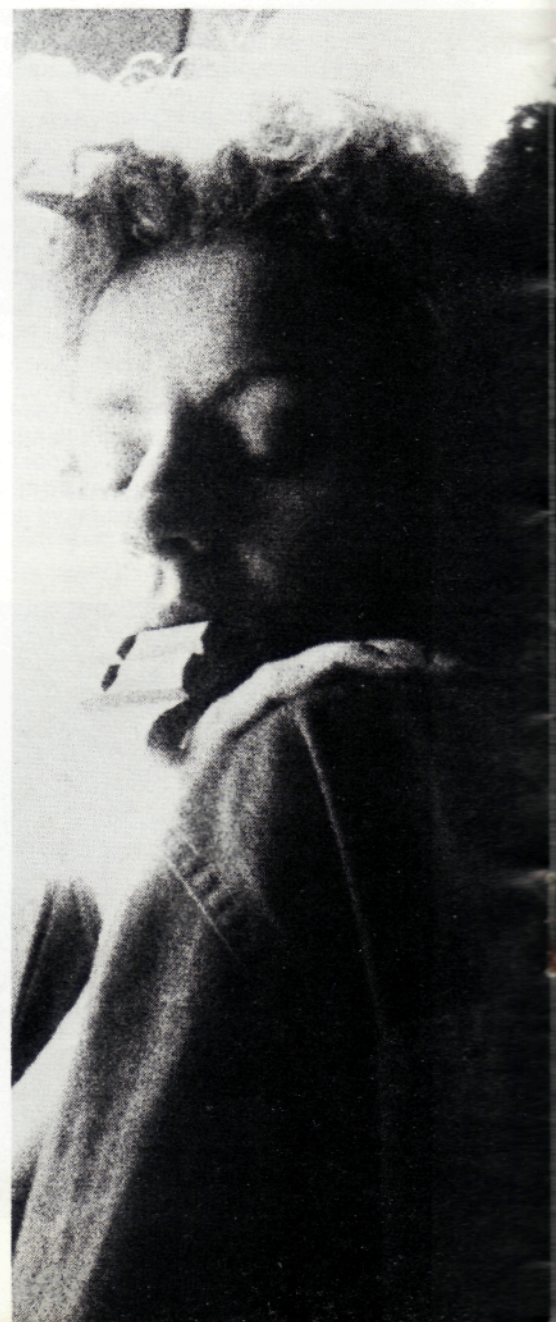
Lap was originally conceived as an attempt at changing progression in a real-time performance piece, using overlapping as a means of choreographic assembly. This metamorphosed into the overlap of video image and

performance activity. Their relationship in time changes within the piece as is illustrated by this notation:

Performance Activity		Video
A	+	A ¹
A	+	B ¹
B	+	B ¹
C	+	C ¹
C		D
	E	
A — sleeve		
B — laps		
C — whistle		
D — no water tape		
E — fin image		

(The index indicates the derivative of the original performance activity.)

The parts of *Lap* are derived from two bases. The most important one is violent, physical contact structured in each case by a parameter affecting that activity. The piece opens with a videotape of the "sleeve" activity as the performers begin "sleeve" live. We don a long sleeve which binds Terry's left arm and my right, and within the limitation which the sleeve provides, we start moving. The movement is very active, usually violent and aggressive and we interact constantly. The only occasions we are not in physical contact with one another's bodies is in recovering from a particularly hard encounter or in anticipation of the next attack. The other parameter affecting the activity is the whistles. We again move violently but with wooden whistles in our mouths which gauge with their sound our movement and interaction.



uments

Chitty



Association from the word lap is the other basis. These two bases are of a different nature altogether: the first is a straightforward execution within parameters and the second is image-oriented. The performance-video relationship goes through changes because of this: A¹ (sleeve tape) is directly derivative of A (sleeve activity) as a simple documentation; B and part of B¹ are both drawn from one meaning of "lap" (the part of the body) then the tape takes on another meaning (lapping as a rhythm, exemplified by waves); the colour "no water" tape, D in the chart, is derived from word association beginning with lapping waves-water-no water-tears-; E, in which I donned fins, snorkel and mask followed the water association. The video-performance relationship changed completely here because the live camera and monitor were what made perception possible. (It was dark and the camera had an infra-red light source.)

The video aspect of *Lap* is of equal importance with the performance. Usually when live activity is going on with video, the audience focuses on the live activity. The arrangement of the monitors is important in attempting to shift this emphasis to create a more equal video-performance space. Three small monitors were placed in the audience, and four large (two colour) were placed at the back of the performing space.

2. _____

"The other perspective that has to be looked upon is how the audience reacted to it — the comments that the audience has said back to me are along the lines of an amazing amount of

frustration, amazing amount of anger, amazing amount of pent-up sexuality that is expressed as male to female relationships that are breaking down and the anger is there, the need to escape, the interdependency in any type of relationship that wells up every now and again and causes anger and violence and frustration. Those are some of the responses I've got from some of the people who saw it."

*Excerpt from a video interview
by Terry McGlade*

"offensive; a woman so white and a man so dark, they fight physically — brutally two tv's, black and white, kinetic, methodical but they (the dancers) fight. the bruises that you see are real: and the woman took such a beating and it's so offensive, but so so powerful I think she hates men."

Terry Crack

"I'm sitting comfortably, ready to think clearly and accurately about this work. I expect to relate to *Lap* in an analytical manner knowing that Elizabeth works in a conceptual way. After a few minutes of watching Terry and Elizabeth frantically and desperately throw each other about, my controlled, structured perception is shaken. I actually "feel" a part of the piece it is so emotionally and physically demanding. But frightening too. Every detail of the fight becomes crucial. Skin scrapes on the wooden floor, joints twist and crack, flesh becomes bruised from repeated blows and falls. Elizabeth has created fear and violence in me. I find myself trying to hang on to a cool, detached role; and for a time I regain a state of organized perception. I am in control. But *Lap* keeps going; and again

I feel overwhelmed. There's Elizabeth, naked to my eyes, since what coverage is a sleeveless, skin-tone leotard? And Terry comfortable in head-to-foot overalls. How can she keep going back for more? Her greater aggressiveness in contrast to her greater vulnerability leaves me shaken and wondering. But that's the challenge of *Lap* and its strength. The work demands that you "go through" both its intense and subdued moments in the same way that Elizabeth and Terry endure. The viewer has no easy, complacent position because *Lap* somehow makes the nerve endings bare and raw. Objectivity is a myth."

Janice Hladki



3. _____

Lap was created conceptually, intellectually. That's the way I work. However, its impact seemed to be largely emotional. Because an artist is a human being, human content is

knew at the time of making *Lap*; it was simultaneously happening, therefore part of the *Lap* process. It was not until a week before the first performance that it dawned on me that the piece might be perceived in the light of that remark. So

Is a piece what the artist conceives it as or what the audience sees? To perceive from only one of many possible perspectives limits one's response to a very narrow scope. An audience hopefully opens itself up to new perceptual possibilities and an artist should be aware of the same. Even though we are geared towards thinking of *Giselle* as *Giselle*, the identity of a work of art, particularly performance art, is undeniably a very nebulous thing. This is even more the case with the avant-garde, in which I believe the most vital work takes place. This is perhaps because new work does not carry with it such a pattern of pre-programmed response which results with the use of established and recognizable techniques and perceptual approaches.

A piece is a representation of a process; the process of creating the piece, the living process of the artist, and also the process of information passing between the artist and the audience. Performers are lucky to have a living context in which to realize that last potential.

Something else — I've said that I work from a conceptual, not expressive or narrative content-oriented base. I am presently very curious about the relationship between the two. Is idea only a vessel for human content to make meaningful? Or, is the recognition of human content merely a perceptual handicap of an audience as programmed individuals?



inevitably present in her/his work, and I can easily accept that the piece was largely approached by audiences from a different viewpoint than the one in which I created it. Many of the responses I received indicated that the piece was "about" man/woman interaction, sexual frustration, etc. I consider it positive that human content was revealed, though unintentionally, and believe that it actually had more experiential potential because it was not "engineered". To work from an emotional base, to engineer a piece to express an emotion, is to me an unsatisfying way of working partly because it confines itself to a narrative, linear mode of perception. FACT — The entire time I was working on the piece (three months) my life was very emotional — I cared very much for an inaccessible man — thus the reference in the colour tape to women suffering from unrequited love. I included it because that was what was happening to me and other women I

what is the relationship of the above FACT to the piece? I didn't know while making *Lap* that it had anything to do with the content people perceived! The discipline of art history teaches that an artist's life and state of mind are relevant to the art. It may be relevant as an available means of grasping a work, but just how important is it in the overall perceptual framework?

