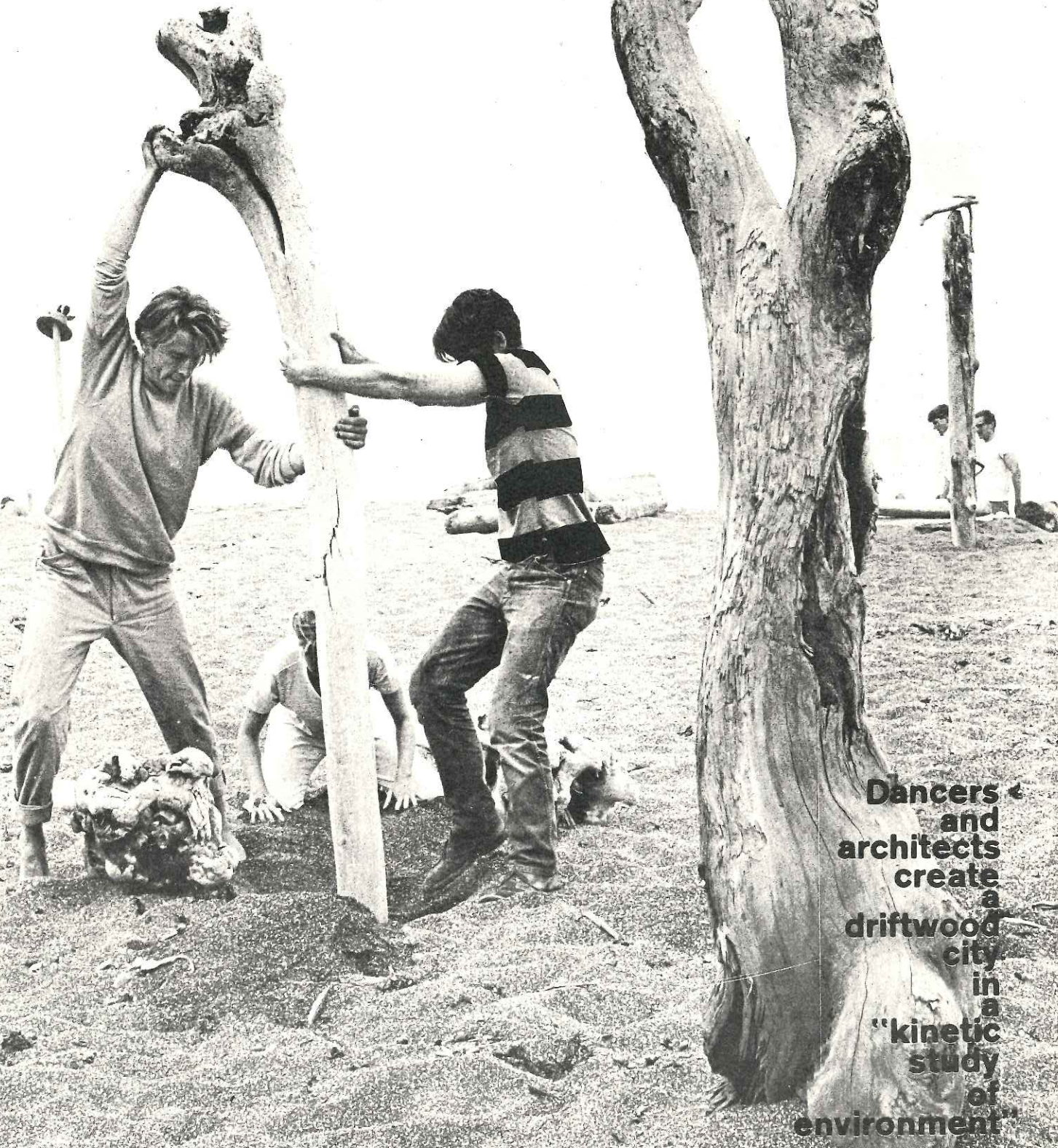


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After Happenings, What? | Excerpt from "Martha Graham: Portrait of the Lady as an Artist" | Bali Revisited | Advice to Arts Centers



Dancers
and
architects
create
a
driftwood
city
in
a
"kinetic
study
of
environment"

Ann Halprin believes the potency of avant-garde theatre and dance increases when artists learn each other's arts

By Jack Anderson



Choreographer Ann Halprin chats with a man and a pigeon in San Francisco's Union Square (above) and student architects and dancers scramble over automobiles (right) in an attempt to experience the "kinetic environments" typical of a big city. These goings-on were all part of an unusual summer workshop jointly sponsored by Dancers' Workshop of San Francisco and the architectural firm of Lawrence Halprin and Associates.

Flanked by hotels and shops and just around the corner from the big department stores and legitimate theatres, Union Square is a green island in the heart of San Francisco. To it every day come people to stroll, loll, snooze, or sun-bathe. Office workers eat lunch there. Elderly gentlemen swap stories about "the old days" or feed the hundreds of pigeons which congregate there. Students pause to brush up on their homework while eyeing the passing girls. And there are always a few loafers who just sit and sit and sit.

At noon one day this past July, forty young people entered the square. They separated and each person found a place of his own. They ate lunch. Then they looked about them, observing what was going on. A few kept watching. A few took a nap. Others fed pigeons or walked around.

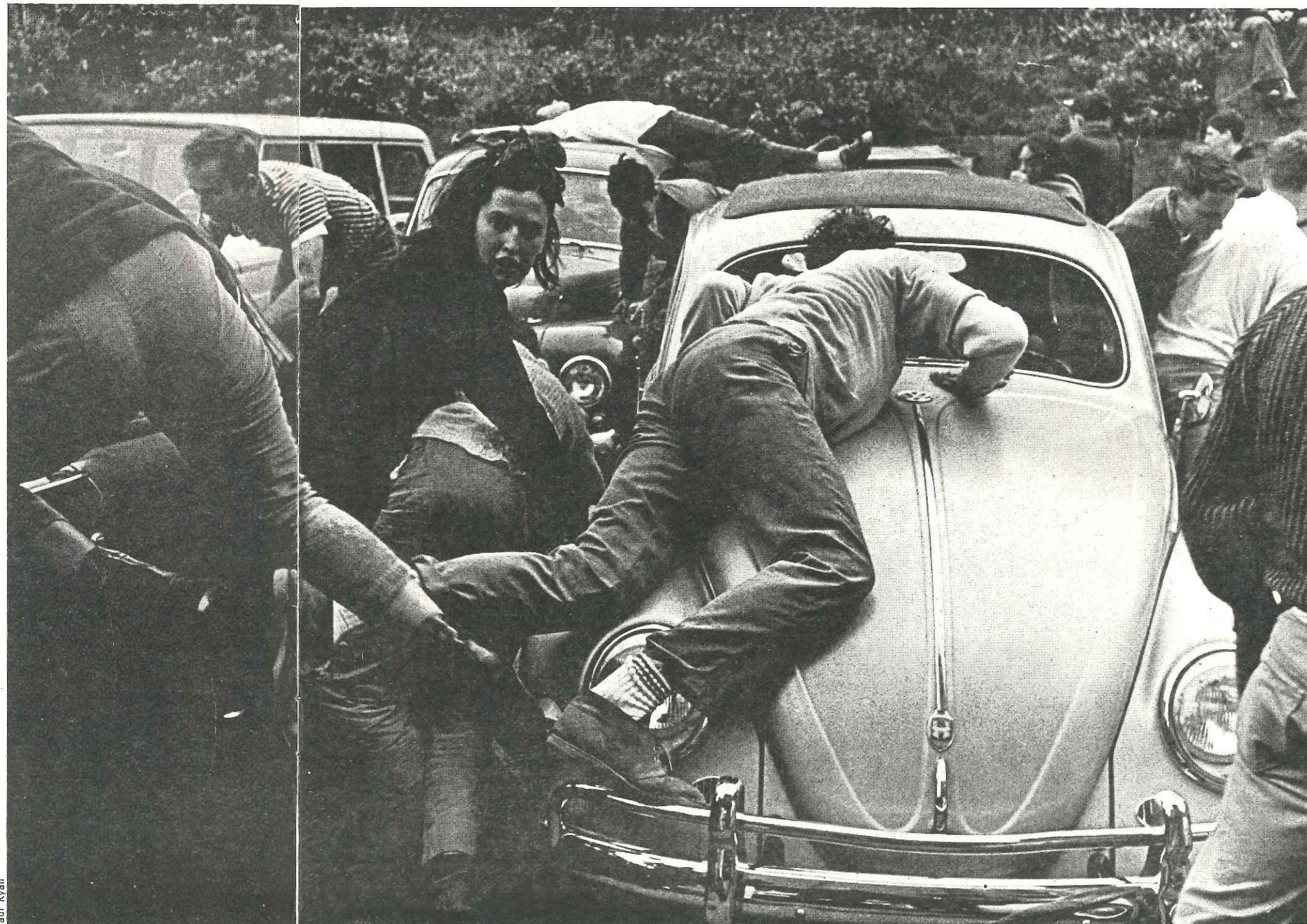
At three o'clock chimes from a nearby office building struck the hour. The forty young people immediately stopped whatever they were doing and solemnly rose to their feet, as though for a ceremony in church. Each person scanned the square, attempting to establish eye contact with at least twenty other people from the group. That done, they slowly began walking to the center of the square.

As though they were magnets or modern-day Pied Pipers, their simple act of walking to a common meeting-point drew a crowd of curious followers behind them. Now in the center where all the paths converged, each of the forty inflated a balloon and either let it fly off into the air or gave it to a child. Then the forty mysterious strangers walked away.

This sequence of events simultaneously constituted a dance composition assignment, an architectural investigation, an experiment to demonstrate how environment affects man and man, in turn, affects environment, and a theatre event. The forty participants were members of an unusual summer workshop in "kinetic environments," conducted by Ann Halprin, director of the San Francisco Dancers' Workshop, and her husband, Lawrence Halprin, an architect and authority on city planning. Twenty-nine dancers signed up for the June 27-July 22 session of the Dancers' Workshop, and 15 architects registered for the summer program sponsored by Lawrence Halprin and Associates. Part of the time, the two student bodies pursued their independent disciplines. But on many occasions, assignments overlapped.

Events were staged in a variety of locations, all of them typical of the diverse rural and urban landscapes to be found in the San Francisco area. The students

DANCERS AND ARCHITECTS BUILD KINETIC ENVIRONMENTS

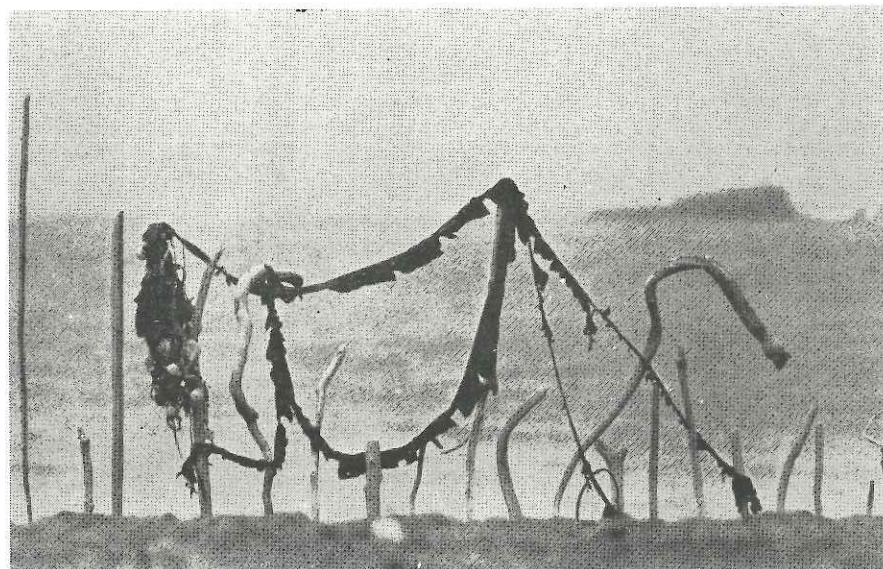


Paul Ryan



Joe Ehreth

At the beach, workshop participants construct both animate and inanimate architecture. Above a human pyramid on a driftwood base, clothes aloft. Below, a construction that includes driftwood and seaweed.



Joe Ehreth

Kinetic Environments (Cont'd)

worked in the mountains and on the sea shore, in dense forests, in crowded city streets, and on the spacious grounds of the Halprin home, which is built on a mountainside and includes sloping lawns a terrace, a gazebo, an outdoor theatre, and an indoor dance studio.

The Halprins decided to work jointly for both choreographic and architectural reasons. Ann says that she became interested in collaborative activity because of the recent work she has been doing in avant-garde dance and in that hybrid theatrical form known as the "happening." In her experience, she has noted that, although happenings theoretically represent a uniting of elements from such forms as dance, theatre, and painting, the results sometimes tend to be "a mishmash" with surprisingly little theatrical potency.

Ann decided that one reason why this is so is that the artists working on the production may not always be aware of the nature and possibilities of each other's arts. Instead of any real intersection of the component media, the resultant creation is apt to become a painting with movement *added* or a dance with a painting in the *background*. Each artist tends to go his own way and the composition, instead of increasing the potentialities of theatre, grows cluttered and confused.

Lawrence Halprin welcomed the opportunity of having his students work with dancers in specific city and country sites because it would take the young architect from the world of the drawing-board into the real world and force him to deal directly with structures in space.

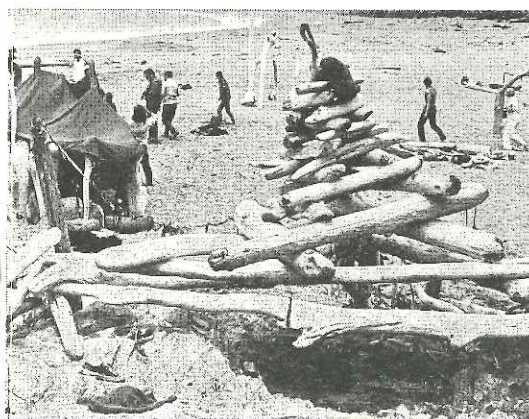
From the union of concert dance (so often a subjective, totally personal art form) and architecture (necessarily the most public of the arts) Ann drew some philosophical conclusions. Looking back over her summer she says, "In the past I have sought to expand our concepts of theatre experience by exploding the old conventions of the dance medium and moving outward in every direction. But just to flood the audience with sensations is not enough. I want to make theatre a shared experience between performer and audience with content which deeply affects our sense of values. I don't yet know the answers to the questions these concerns of mine raise. But I think the workshop has done much to develop my theatrical vision." Perhaps these experiences will be reflected in the productions to be staged by the Dancers' Workshop in its New York debut at Hunter College in April.

In addition to classes in their own arts,

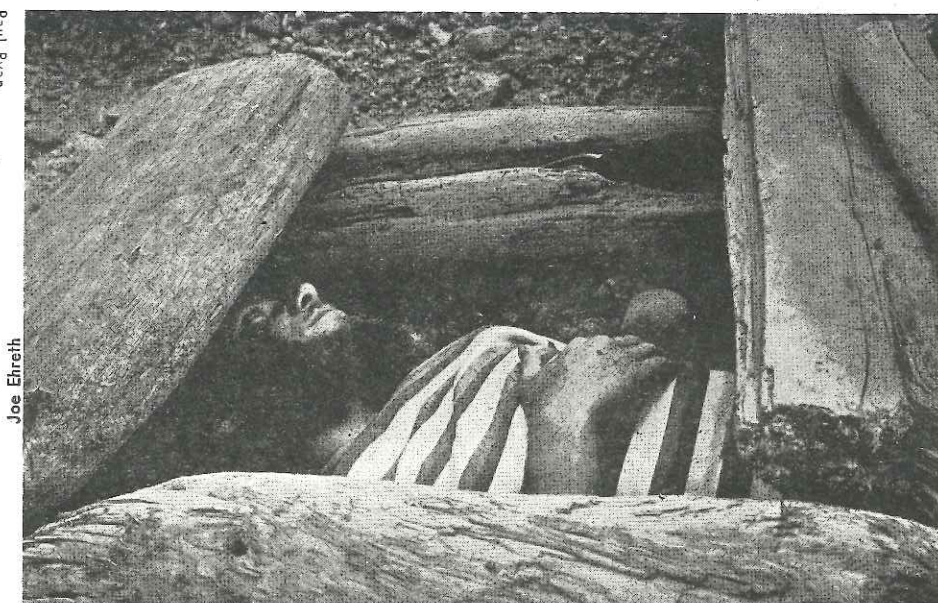


Joe Ehreth

In the most ambitious of the workshop projects, participants build a driftwood village. The result proved to be a microcosm of the ideal human city in which individual needs and desires added up to a collective form. For an example of how the forms that were originally defined by the students at last tended to define the individuality of the student, note the bearded boy in his snug little den, bottom right.



Paul Ryan



Joe Ehreth

workshop participants were given assignments in the other arts as well. The dancers, for example, were given architectural problems, including one involving a wooded slope near the Halprins' home. Told to investigate energy in relation to gravitational pull, they prepared a theatre event, held at dusk, in which people and objects were sent up and down the slope in varying ways. Like falling stars, winking flashlights zipped along on pulleys. Cut-outs of geometrical shapes tumbled down, each bouncing along in its own particular movement pattern. Three large pails of water were overturned, creating small cascades. Six women, holding onto a rope, were slowly pulled up the hill. As an architectural experience, it taught the dancers things about bulk, weight, and leverage. As a theatrical experience, Ann says it was sometimes "hauntingly beautiful," largely through the contrast between the bustling human activity and the elemental, solemn forest which framed it.

The architects, in turn, were given movement classes which also permitted them to make use of their architectural aptitudes. In one class, they used their own bodies as human cantilevers to build groups which choreographers might hesitate to create, but which, thanks to their knowledge of architecture transferred to dance, were anatomically safe and sound. As guides for these exercises, Ann employed the skeletal charts devised by Margaret H'Doubler to explain the structure of the human body.

One assignment for the architects was a kind of choreography without dancers. For a week they were told to "live on Market St." Slashing across the city from the Ferry Building on the Bay until it is stopped by the sides of the Twin Peaks, San Francisco's Market St. is famed as one of the widest downtown streets in America. Along it go streetcars with bells clanging, trolley buses, autos, and crowds of pedestrians. It is a street of extreme contrasts. Here are offices, first-run movie palaces, and elegant hotels, and also cheap dives, pizza parlors and pool halls.

The architects haunted the street day and night. They took slides of it. They filmed it. They sketched it. They recorded its sounds. And then they created a Market St. all their own in the basement of a warehouse. They devised a series of pathways for spectators and surrounded these pathways with movies, film strips, slide projections, silhouettes, and recorded noises. Ann calls this evocation of Market St. "absolutely choreographic" in essence, even though it contained no dancing. In

addition to the movement patterns in the films, the audience created its own choreography as it moved down the paths, thereby uniting live and filmed movement.

Both architects and dancers worked together on exercises designed to develop sensory awareness. A basic exercise involved having the students sit across from each other at a table and state aloud everything their senses perceived. When first assigned, it may have sounded elementary, but it proved to be highly demanding as students became aware of countless details around them.

A more elaborate experiment was a day of complete silence in which all speaking, reading, and writing were forbidden in an attempt to remove students from habitual patterns of verbalization and introduce them to fresh sensory experiences. In the morning, the students were allowed to be by themselves. In the afternoon, they hiked together through the redwood groves and ravines of Mt. Tamalpais State Park. They were asked to remain linked during the entire hike. As they proceeded, they discovered many means of linkage other than holding hands. In the silence, the slightest look or touch would be enough to establish deep contact. Everything around them came into unusually sharp focus. Sounds, smells, and tactile feelings were noticed for the first time. Ann says that the day of silence had the effect of clearing the mind and refreshing the spirit.

A theatrical experience which called upon everyone's talents was a "tower and paper event" presented one evening on the Halprins' outdoor stage and adjoining hillside. Each dancer was asked to "tell a story" in some way (physically or verbally) on a scaffolding erected on the stage. Then dancers were to repeat their stories at one other place of their choice away from the scaffolding, either on stage or off. The dancers could repeat their action as often as they wished, provided that they used only the scaffolding and the places they had selected. While this was going on, teams of architects, armed with lighting equipment and rolls of wrapping paper, were told to make light-and-paper constructions connecting the places in which the dancers moved and spoke. These constructions began, of course, at the scaffolding, but as the dancers moved off to other areas of the yard and then returned to the stage, a complex network of paper strips was created. By the end of a few hours, the entire area was cobwebbed with paths, spokes, rays, intersections, walls, and islands of paper, glowing and translucent with lights behind

Kinetic Environments (Cont'd from p. 56)

them. Says Ann, "The visual result was like a portion of Tivoli Gardens — fantastic and dreamlike."

For Ann, the event demonstrated how an artistic form can evolve as it is developed on-the-spot. Although the movement of the dancers determined the visual paper structure, it would have been possible to remove the action and appreciate the visual environment as an art object complete in itself, just as it would have been possible to dismantle the paper constructions to appreciate the dance by itself. Yet both dance and paper constructions enhanced each other and looked best when presented together. Here, then, was a mixed media happening which was a truly interesting mixture and not "a mish-mash."

Of all the summer projects, the one Ann finds perhaps the most inspiring was one in which the dancers and architects were taken to the seashore and asked to build — working alone or in groups — structures made of driftwood. "The results were amazing," Ann says. "For each person revealed some important part of the content or needs of his life in terms of where he lives." Thus, a glamorous, athletic girl built a kind of sun-deck on which she could bask beneath the open sky like a goddess in a house of light. A more retiring boy dug into the sand to build a cave-like place for contemplation. A team of workers built a structure resembling a temple. Other people built a play house, a public forum, a house with water flowing through it, a gate, a lean-to, and a snug husband-and-wife house just big enough for two.

Lawrence Halprin and other architectural consultants who viewed the driftwood village were astonished at the results. For without following any pre-ordained scheme, the participants had constructed a model of the ideal human city, a city which had a place for every human purpose, where each person had a place of his own and a place to share, where individual diversities added up to a collective form.

"This is what I seek in my dance and theatre work," Ann says. "I want art structures which express individual creativity and collective living. I want all the personal responses of my company members to be evident in themselves and also to unite into a communal experience."

In at least one instance — in that driftwood village — artists successfully managed to unite the personal and the communal. For they ate in their village, talked there, slept there overnight, and were so happy living there that not a single one wanted to go home in the morning. (End)



Paul Ryan

Throughout the summer dancers and architects studied each other's disciplines. Here, they collaborate on some human architecture. The usual architectural problem is geared to developing spaces for actions to occur in. In the workshop, the emphasis was on the action itself and the ways in which body movement is generator of both architecture and dance.