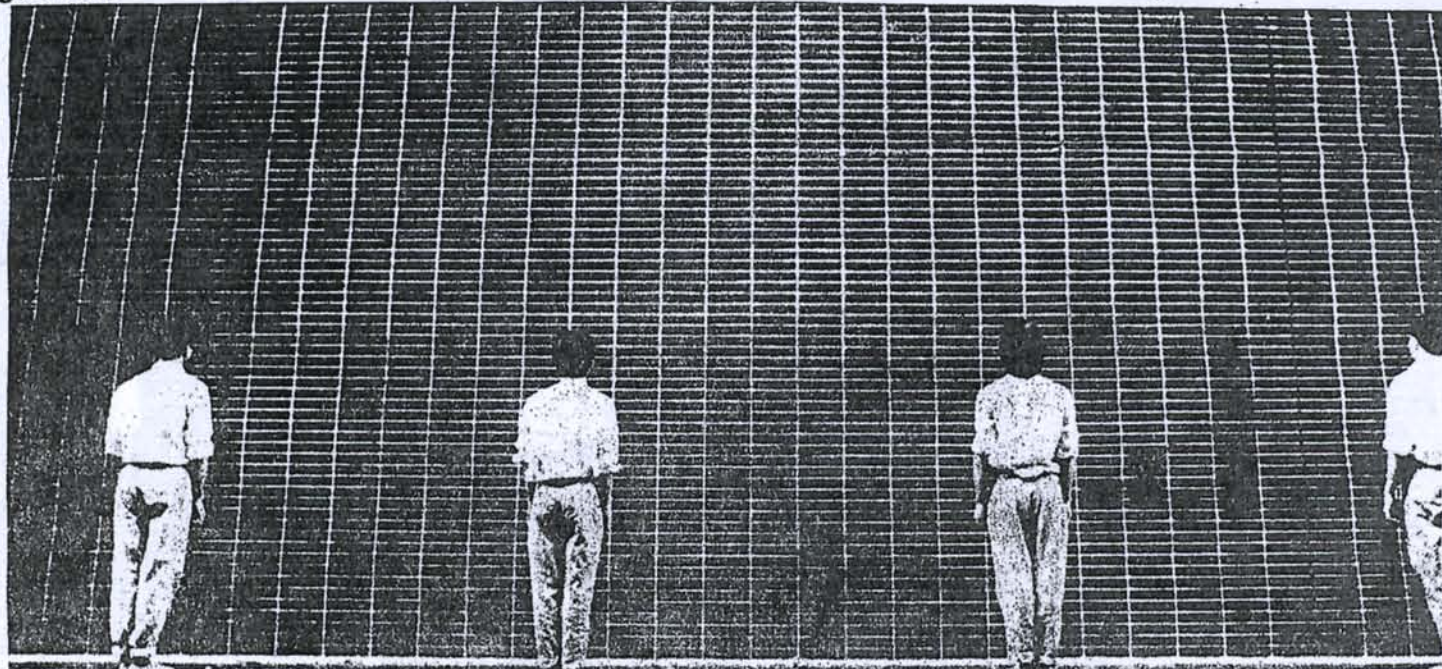


# The New Common Good

August 1990



Deep Structure of Chinese Culture, by the Hong Kong troupe Zuni Icosahedron, at the Tiananmen Square memorial performance at the Triplex.

## Tiananmen Square Memorial Performance featuring Zuni Icosahedron Presented by Asian American Arts Centre at the Triplex Theater

To commemorate, and to protest, last year's massacre at Tiananmen Square, the Asian American Arts Centre organized this all-day marathon of performances, which lasted from four in the afternoon till almost midnight. (I missed a large chunk of the evening show.) A highlight of the program was the first American appearance of Zuni Icosahedron, a pioneering dance-theater troupe from Hong Kong. But there were some 25 acts in all—dancers, singers, poets, musicians, whatever—as well as speeches by David Henry Hwang, the playwright, and by Richard Schechner, the director, who was in Shanghai mounting a play when the crackdown occurred.

The afternoon program featured several dance pieces of interest. Lori Bellove's company of Isadora Duncan specialists led off with Duncan's *Impressions of Revolutionary Russia*, from the '20s, to Scriabin and workers' songs. These dances had a sort of starkness to them not usually associated with Duncan but that seemed to suit them very well. The revolutionaries would grab the red flag, each in turn, and advance, only to be shot and to pass the flag onto the next. This was, of course, appropriate for the occasion, but it was a little ironic too; for those brave revolutionaries and their red flag might be claimed as part of the spiritual lineage of both sides at Tiananmen Square.

This was followed by Marilyn Danitz's *Soundings in Feet...*, a solo for Anne Waisemann featuring a large construction, "The House on the Hill," by Jim Clausnitzer, a sort of huge hobo-like person with a house on his head—I guess he carries his home with him. The dance is accompanied by Lefferts Brown's music and also by readings of journals kept by Chinese students during the demonstrations. There was also an intriguing solo by the late Jack Moore, danced by Rika Burnham. The dance was slow and strange, with gestures of mourning and little hand and eye movements. Everything I have seen of Moore's (which is not much) has had this gravely antic quality; I wish it were possible to see more. Barbara Chang's *Gift of Life* saw her move slowly along the ground from one pool of light to the next as Wadada Leo Smith accompanied her on a wide variety of instruments. Art Bridgman and Myrna Packer showed *Castrato*, a dance to a recording of an aria, by the last living castrato (and the only one ever recorded), Alessandro Moreschi, here taken to symbolize a victim of abusive power. Does the voice sound so eerie only because we know what it is? The dance features Packer in a military uniform and Bridgman posing like Ted Shawn. There were also dances by Pun Siu Fai, Diane Jacobowitz, Mark Dendy, JoAnn Fregal-ette-Jansen, and Yung Yung Tsui, as well as many other performers.

I rushed back at the end of the evening to catch the performance by Zuni Icosahedron, *Deep Structure of Chinese Culture*. Apparently the performing arts (at least Western-oriented ones) in Hong Kong are a pretty Lincoln Center business, and Zuni was something quite new and shocking when it was founded in 1982. ("Zuni" refers both to the New Mexican Indian pueblo and to the name of a color in Chinese—sort of an aqua shade; "icosahedron" refers not to geometry but to a virus—they think of themselves as infectious agents.) Under the leadership of Danny Yung, the artistic director, they put on dance-theater productions in a style that, to judge by this example, bears a bit of a resemblance to that of Robert Wilson. There is much repetition, ordinary movement, and movement that suggests the martial arts; long stretches where not much happens; there is no narrative though there are dead bodies, running, howling. There are several scrimms, one behind another, to delineate several increasingly murky playing spaces. At first I was bored; then I forgot how bored I was and became fascinated. Someone was running, toward the back of the stage, behind a scrim, and there was a sound of wind. For some reason the mysteriousness and power of this moment came through with great force. Toward the end came the rather jarring strains of "Land of Hope and Glory," an anthem about the glories of Great Britain—lest we become so elevated we forget about contemporary politics. The organizers deserve great credit for bringing this company to New York; it is only too bad that the visit was not more widely publicized.