

RECREATION

As theatrical performers we saw installation work as an opportunity to challenge the theatrical “rules” of proscenium architecture in order to offer the spectator another form of engagement. Creating *Recreation* in a moving elevator imposed both a vertically malleable mise-en-scène, as well as an atypical dynamic between ourselves and the spectator.

Recreation consisted of sixteen tableaux, each of which was created to stand on its own as an artistic entity. The spectator could only view the action through the elevator's small, one-foot-square window. The movement of the elevator was also scripted into the piece.

The interior of the space was a modified version of the 1950s rec room but with the axis of the floor and the walls reversed. The choreography incorporated banal indoor recreational activities. Although the actions themselves were simple, their relation to the scene and the spectator were not, and involved much climbing and positioning that seemed to defy gravity. All these elements, coupled with the elevator's movement, created a shifting optical illusion that challenged the spectator's notion of perspective.

However, not all elements here were orchestrated. The performance featured two parallel soundtracks by Darren Copeland which were programmed to play randomly. One playing inside the elevator was heard by the performers and spectators close to the window, while another playing outside the elevator was heard only by the viewing spectator. The interior soundscape consisted of 1950s tunes in a Muzak-like arrangement from an album entitled *Music to Help You Stop Smoking*. The exterior soundscape consisted of industrial sounds from domestic appliances, Hawaiian cowboy music and autopsy data and reports from the JonBenet Ramsay murder case. The two tracks offered a jarring juxtaposition to the choreography unfolding in the room.

Another element that we consciously left to chance was the spectator's own willingness to become involved. In *Recreation*, the unmediated contact with the spectator, so familiar and necessary in theatre, was obliterated. As performers, we (Stacey Christodoulou and Philippe Ducros) were always conscious that our experience of the spatial relationship was far different than that of the spectator. The piece embodied a paradox: by being physically detached from the action, the spectator was actually positioned to participate more fully in the experience. The elevator window was small, the lineups at times long, and the piece time-based. The spectators, therefore, were forced to cooperate in order to allow each other ample viewing time. All recognized that it was only possible to view part of the piece. This invited repeated spectatorship and greater interaction as each person attempted to organize the various fragments into a cohesive whole.

Recreation consciously set out to question the idea of domesticated leisure. As performers, we felt like specimens in a type of anthropological survey – one which examined the abstraction and reduction of suburban sexuality, space and interpersonal relationships. However, in the process of experiencing the piece, the spectators became an unwitting part of this study. In this sense, *Recreation's* ability to blur the line between the observer and observed made all involved a complicit part of the spectacle.