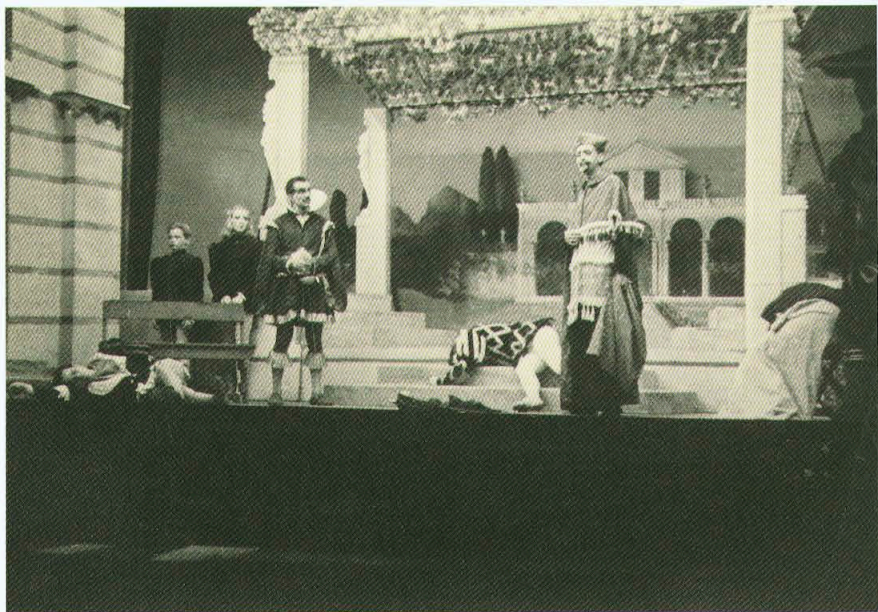


CATHERINE SULLIVAN / MATRIX 149

March 1- April 27, 2003

'Tis Pity  
She's  
a Fluxus  
Whore

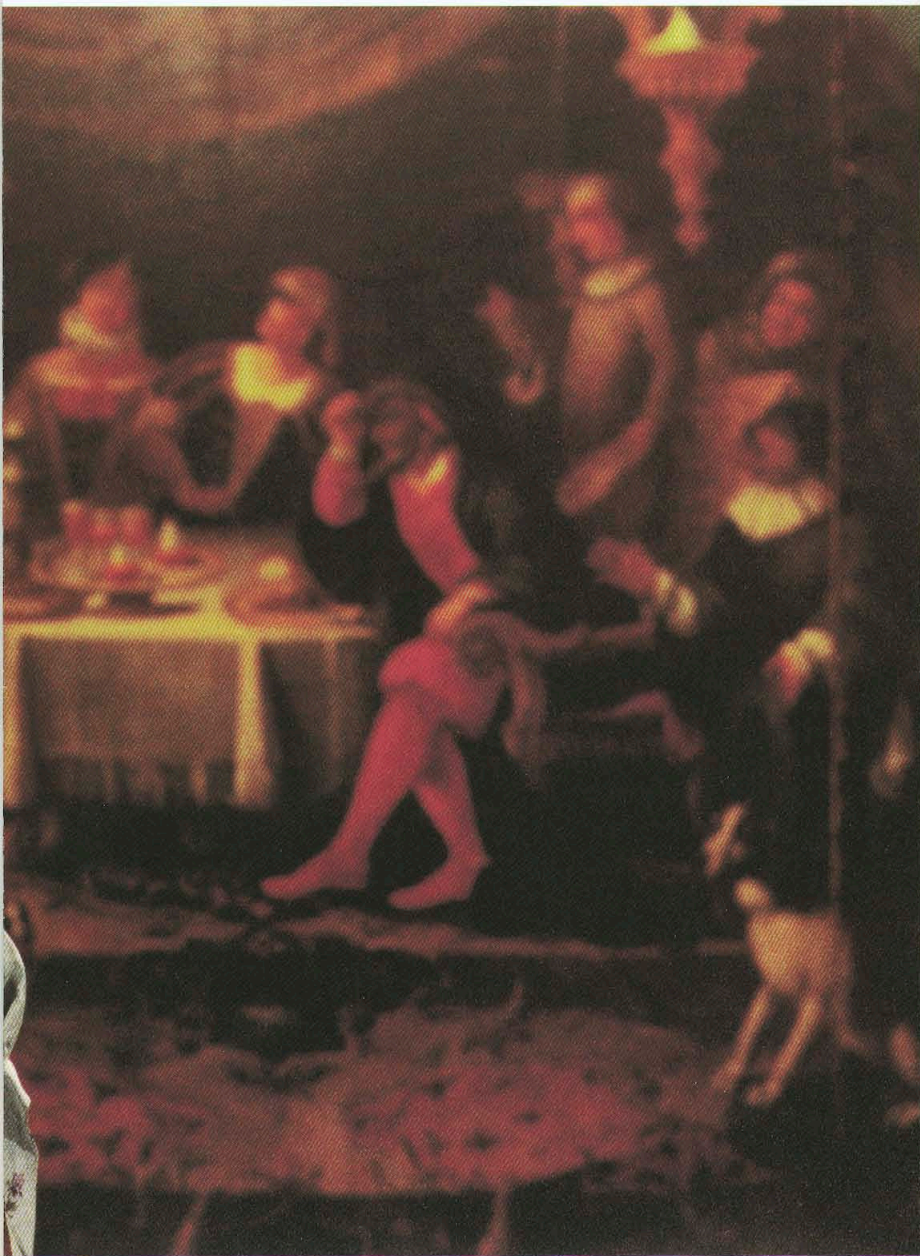
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art  
Hartford, Connecticut



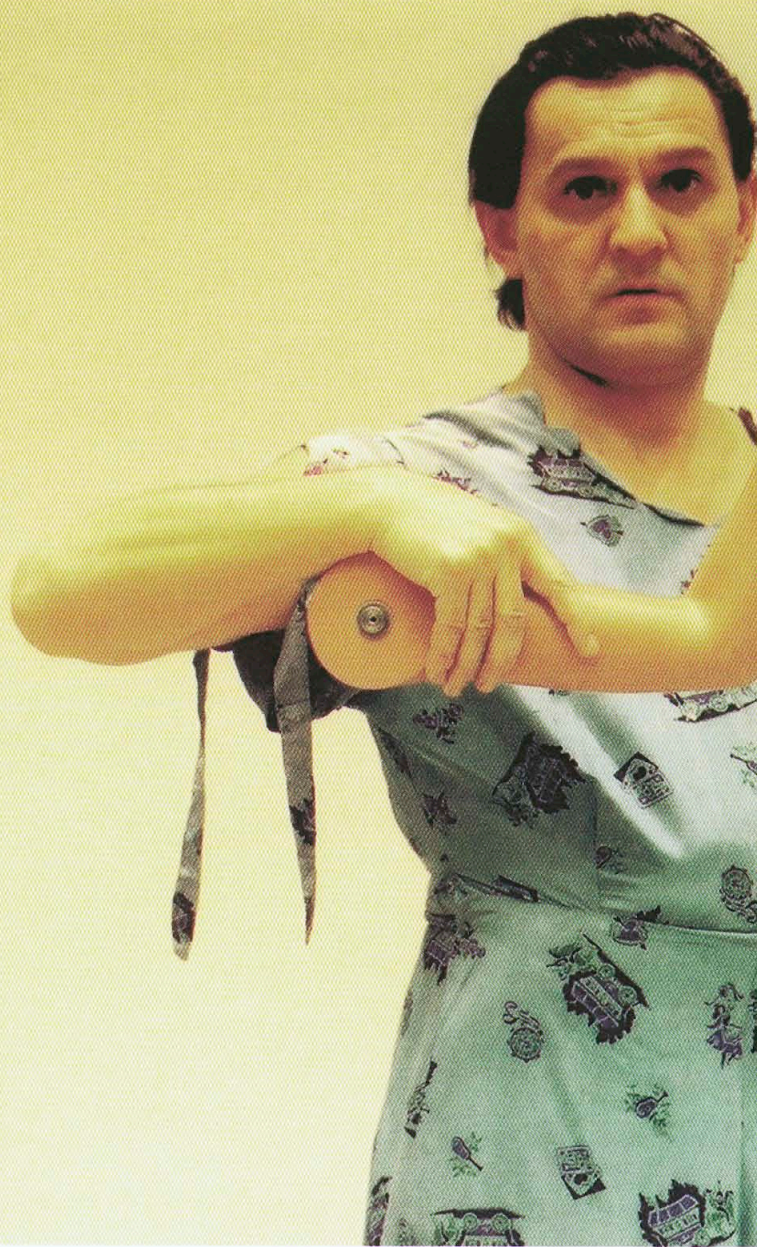
Giovanni's death scene, A. Everett "Chick" Austin's production of John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Avery Memorial Theater, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, 1943.



*'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore. Giovanni / Filliou infusion; left: The Aetna Theater (formerly Avery Memorial Theater), Wadsworth*



Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, 2003; right: The Audimax, Technical Academy, Aachen, Germany, 2003.







Audience disruption, *Festival of New Art*, The Audimax, Technical Academy, Aachen, Germany, 1964.

**programm:**

**ERIC ANDERSEN:**  
opus 4,17,20,25,29,30,41,43;(Dick Higgins:"danger music 33",  
George Brecht:"luggage")

**JOSEPH BEUYS:**  
"kukei", "akopee-Nein!", "braunkreuz", "fettecken", "modellfettecken"

**BAZON BROCK:**  
"poem für einen einbeinigen", "ewiger verrat deutscher poesie an  
derselben", "berechnung der schwingungsbreite des krückstocks  
meines großvaters", "es (wie sähe die weltgeschichte heute aus, wenn  
sie nicht stattgefunden hätte)", "die welt auf dem kopfe und philo-  
sophie in den beinen", "agit-pop:voran voran des kaisers bart  
hängt schief", "mein gott, was ist los?"

**STANLEY BROWN:**  
"antenna-eating", "fly-concerto", "super-news", "make the earth  
lighter!"

**HENNING CHRISTIANSEN:**  
"dialectical evolution I", "question & answer", "climb up!", "colour  
pieces"

**ROBERT FILLIOU:**  
"l'autrisme (action manifest)", "la france écartelée", "ban the bomb!"

**LUDWIG GOSEWITZ:**  
"textes postaux", "akustische und projezierte texte"

**ARTHUR KOEPCKE:**  
"12 apostel", "ele mele mink mang ose dose a ka deia eiaweia weck",  
"music while you work no.4", "der mensch", "john hunov & arthur köp-  
cke film"; (Diter Rot: "solo-gramme")

**TOMAS SCHMIT:**  
"sanitas nos.49&151", "anstelle von", "eine folge von aktioken AM  
publikum", "a composition to justify a performance", "zyklus"

**BEN VAUTIER:**  
ben art total

**WOLF VOSTELL:**  
"nie wieder/never/jamais", dé-collagistische ereignisse/gescheh-  
nisse/umgebungen/situationen

**BENNETT WILLIAMS:**  
"o eine oper", "counting song", "voice piece for la monte young"

**GEORGE BRECHT:**  
"motor vehicle sundown (event)"



# Strange Bedfellows

Video art, which began to be made by a few artists in the mid 1960s, has evolved into a dominant medium in contemporary art. Its consonance with the primary forms of popular culture - film, television, digital media - makes it a powerful means of speaking to our culture in a familiar voice. In contrast, performance art, which vied for attention with video and other experimental practices in the sixties and seventies, has become largely moribund. The concurrent emergence of video and performance art was indeed related; video was often a means of documenting artists' actions. While video art has now far exceeded its documentary origins, performance art has remained relatively marginal. This may not be surprising as the ascendance of the moving image in contemporary culture has been matched by a declining interest in live theatre, particularly its more avant-garde varieties.

Enter Catherine Sullivan, whose hybrid artistic practice emerges from a profound engagement with both performance and the moving image. These interests are reflected in her education: Sullivan earned a degree in acting before undertaking a Masters' in Post-Studio Art at Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. She creates theater works that she writes, designs and directs (often combining trained and untrained performers), and video installations that are thematically related. Since graduating in 1997, her performances and video installations have drawn on an unusually wide array of theatrical genres and acting styles. The performance *Dad's Ham* (1992/97) incorporated Greek Tragedy, Medieval Miracle Plays, Commedia Del'Arte, Restoration comedy and television comedy; *Grisly Notes and Tones* (1997/2001) was inspired by the sensationalist television documentary series *When Animals Attack*; an obscure seventeenth century manual on the use of the hand in public address inspired *The Chirologic Remedy* (1999); Oscar-winning performances in Arthur Penn's movie *The Miracle Worker* provide the basis for *Gold Standard (hysterical, melancholic, degraded, refined)* (2001). In these works, and in her new Matrix project, *'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore*, Sullivan marries performance and video, exploring the distinctive attributes of both forms.

Acting, as exemplified in the majority of contemporary film and television, aspires to a state of transparency. The demands of narrative realism - today's dominant cultural mode - conspire to disguise the artifice of performance. The desire for a credible experience in television is so strong that "reality TV," a genre of performance that elides its own particular kind of acting, has become the most important recent development. Catherine Sullivan's work takes an antithetical position,

insisting upon the presence of acting, broadly understood, in every kind of performance, from an Yvonne Rainer minimalist dance to a Hollywood audition. Her work is intended, in fact, to reveal acting, to make it impossible not to consider that a performance is taking place. For Sullivan, "acting" is not only the formally codified practices of traditional theater. She is generally interested in the ways that bodily actions and their physical context generate meaning in all manner of performance.

*'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore* brings together two wildly different performance traditions. One is that of seventeenth-century Jacobean drama, the other that of twentieth century Fluxus actions. Published in 1633, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is John Ford's best-known play. This tragic story of an incestuous relationship between brother (Giovanni) and sister (Annabella) was given a controversial production at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1943. It was presented by Atheneum Director, A. Everett "Chick" Austin, who designed the sets and costumes, and played the lead role of Giovanni. Austin's staging of the play during wartime, with its taboo sexual theme, drew harsh criticism from conservatives. For example, under the headline, "Offensive in Many Ways," the *Catholic Transcript* railed against this "elaborate production of a tedious dramatization of degeneracy." Austin's extraordinary period of innovation and provocation as director-impresario, which had begun in 1927, was fast drawing to an end. His departure followed soon after the production closed.

Fluxus refers to an international avant-garde movement active in Europe and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. The term was coined by George Maciunas, an American who moved to Germany in 1961. He maintained contact with artists in New York while developing an artistic network in Europe. Fluxus was characterized by interdisciplinary and multimedia approaches, concerned more with ephemeral events, concerts, actions and publications than with making museum objects or exhibitions. Fluxus shared the earlier Dada movement's sense of whimsy and the absurd as it aspired to bring art and life closer together, all against the anxious backdrop of cold war politics.

Catherine Sullivan became interested in a program of Fluxus actions that was presented as the *Festival of New Art* at the Technical Academy in Aachen, Germany, on July 20, 1964. The twelve artists who performed met with a hostile audience reaction, even to the point of physical confrontation. In different ways,



both the Hartford staging of Ford's drama and the Aachen program of Fluxus actions transgressed the limits of acceptable performance within a specific cultural context. It is this moment of rupture between performer and audience that first fascinated Sullivan and led her to bring them together as the unlikely sources for her *Matrix* exhibition. Here, however, the conflict between performer and audience has been transformed into a staged conflict between the sources themselves, and between their opposing styles of performance.

The 1964 program of Fluxus actions and hostile audience response are poorly documented. Sullivan undertook extensive research in Germany, interviewing several participants and assembling materials to enable her to reconstruct the program. She noticed, for example, that July 20 was Hitler's birthday, and that many of the artists' actions were overlaid with provocative references to Hitler and Nazism. Sullivan chose to focus on the actions of eight of the artists: Ben Vautier, Bazon Brock, Ludwig Gosewitz, Eric Andersen, Arthur Koepke, Robert Filliou, Wolf Vostell and Joseph Beuys. Combining some of the artists' actions, she reconstructed six scenes to be played out for her own production.

In parallel to the Aachen research, Sullivan also investigated the rich history of performance at the Wadsworth Atheneum, which had been fostered by Chick Austin who in 1934 had incorporated a theater into the new Avery Memorial building. With the assistance of Atheneum archivist and Austin biographer Eugene Gaddis, she researched Austin's final theatrical production for the Atheneum and its controversial reception. Austin's character, Giovanni, became for Sullivan the representative figure of the play.

Sullivan's interest in these historical sources is further confirmed by the process of her filming, which took place in the very theaters where the original productions had been mounted, the Audimax in Aachen and the Avery Memorial Theater in Hartford. This extensive research and replication of locations should not, however, imply any attempt to reconstruct either evening's performance faithfully. Sullivan's relation to her subjects is better characterized, in her words, by "a lack of obedience to sources." In fact, *'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore* is a result of the condensation and displacement of two disparate productions from two different moments into an entirely new work.

Far from being a faithful rendition, Sullivan's production thoroughly estranges her sources. Her process, in this case, has been to codify two distinctive styles of performance, one that represents Fluxus, another invoking Ford's drama. Each style comprises both a method of acting and a *mise-en-scène*, including costume and lighting. *'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore* comprises six scenes that enact moments abstracted from both sources. Each scene includes a transition, where the performance style shifts from Fluxus to Jacobean and vice versa. A single

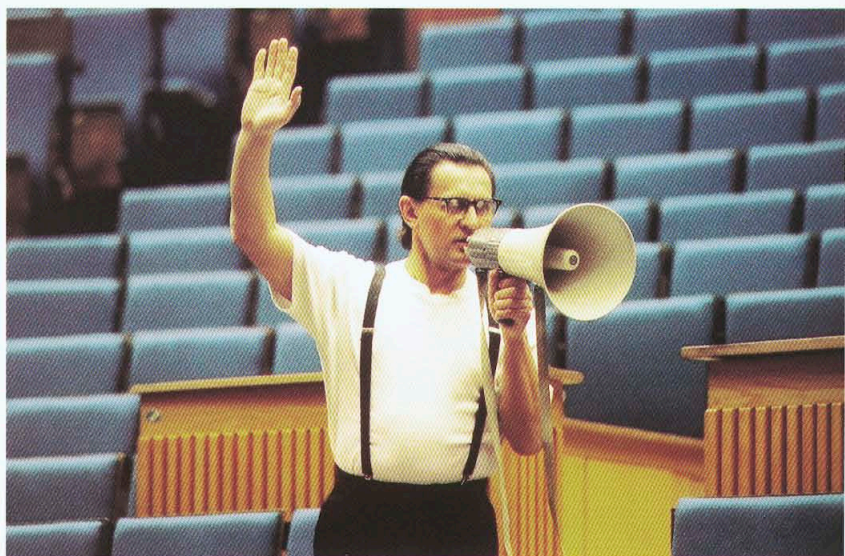
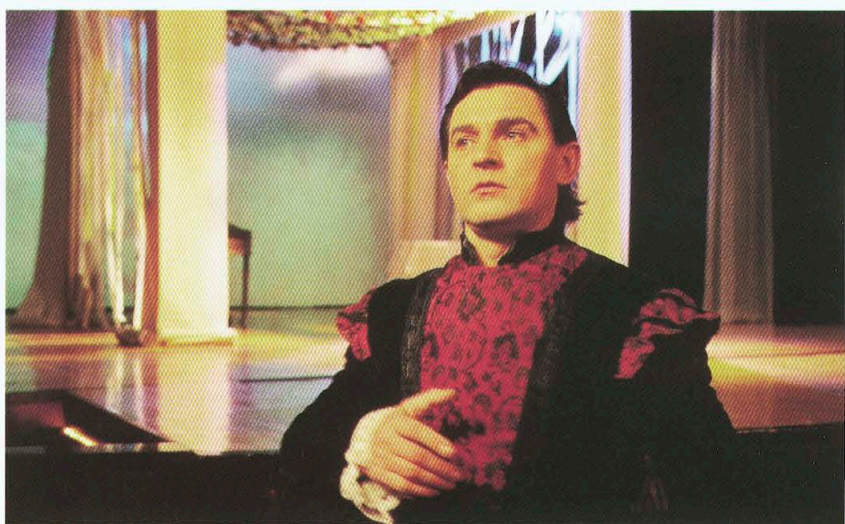
actor, Andrzej Krukowski, plays every role, shifting seamlessly between a purposeful Brechtian directness ("Fluxus style") and a highly mannered theatricality ("Giovanni style"). The resulting confusion of identities and narratives undermines any comprehensible relationship to an "original" source (which has, in any case, been imaginatively reconstructed by the artist). Each scene was shot in both Aachen and Hartford, but in stylistic reverse, with a Fluxus action performed "Fluxus style" in one location, "Giovanni style" in the other. The final edited installation is a two-screen projection presenting the "same" series of actions in contrasting styles. The accompanying audio furthers the contrast, as a mannered female voice and a German-accented male voice deliver lines from *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and Fluxus performance instructions. Not only does Sullivan's treatment and presentation frustrate all narrative sense, the idea of codifying a "Fluxus style" is inimical to the spirit of Fluxus, which took an anti-aesthetic position opposed to the notion of style.

Catherine Sullivan has described her method in producing this work as one of "forced relationality." In other words, the artist has taken two utterly unrelated performances, each with its own strongly articulated logic, and forced them into a new relationship. Clearly, the effect is not a synthesis or narrative resolution of previously unrelated forms. Rather, the result is an impossible excess of meaning, a piling up of significations, an accumulation of gestures. Sullivan offers an intensification of expressive form without recourse to any coherent expression. In this way, the artist invokes the classical modernist resistance to popular culture through the work's unapologetic "difficulty." She has drawn a parallel between her work and the reductive modernist project in painting; in stripping theatrical actions of their contextual and narrative coherence, Sullivan forces us to observe in isolation the most basic tropes of performance. Paradoxically, the result is not a minimalist monochrome but an elaborate, densely layered, precisely detailed polyphony. Amidst this raucous play of conflicting images and associations there remains one constant, the body of a single performer. This multivalent body, which both invites and refuses our identifications, is analogous to the unconscious process through which we arrive at the judgments that underlie our everyday social interactions. It is to this "visceral principle," the psychic operation of identification, that Sullivan's work constantly returns.

**Nicholas Baume**

*Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art*

*All quotations are from conversations with the author, January 2003.*



**CATHERINE SULLIVAN / MATRIX 149**

**'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore**

March 1- April 27, 2003

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art  
Hartford, Connecticut

Catherine Sullivan

Born in Los Angeles, California in 1968.

Lives and works in Los Angeles.

**SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

**2003**

*Five Economies (big hunt/little hunt)*, Metro Pictures, New York; Centre D'Art Contemporain Fri-Art Kunsthalle, Fribourg, Switzerland.

**2002**

*Five Economies (big hunt/little hunt)*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago; UCLA Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California; Rubell Family Foundation, Miami, Florida.

**2001**

*Gestus Maximus (Gold Standard)*, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, Germany.

**GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

**2002**

*Crisp*, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, New York.

**2000**

*L.A.-ex*, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, Germany.

**1998**

*Still and Otherwise*, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles, California.

*Lines of Sight*, Site specific project at the California aqueduct, Lancaster, California.

**1996**

*Video Povera*, California State University, Los Angeles.

*SuperIntellectuals*, Three Day Weekend, Los Angeles, California.

**1995**

*Gander Mountain High*, Room 10, Pasadena, California.

**PERFORMANCES & THEATRE WORKS**

*Gold Standard (Canetti/Gibson Infusion)*, presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Catherine Sullivan: Five Economies (big hunt/little hunt)*, UCLA Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California, and The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 2002.

*Grisly Notes and Tones*, presented by Le Consortium Art Center, Dijon, France as part of the annual festival *Nouvelles Scenes*, 2001.

*Gold Standard (hysterical, melancholic, degraded, refined)*, presented in conjunction with *New Writing From Los Angeles*, organized by Benjamin Weissman, UCLA Armand Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California, 2000.

*The Chironomic Remedy*, presented in conjunction with the *LA Edge Festival*, Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, California, 1999, and as part of *New Music Forum*, University of Southern California, San Diego, 2000.

*Let the Right Be a Vision of the Left*, Trapdoor Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, 1998.

*Dad's Ham*, Trapdoor Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, 1997.

*Grisly Notes and Tones*, McKinley Auditorium, Pasadena, California, 1997.

*Unspoken Evil I*, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, 1995.

*Lights First, Then Water*, Proto Theatre, Tokyo, Japan, 1994.

**SCREENINGS**

*Gold Standard (hysterical, melancholic, degraded, refined)*, *Date Palm Dance*, *Unspoken Evil III - Rites of Ascension and Obscurity*, presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Cosima von Bonin*, Kunstverein Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, 2001.

*Unspoken Evil III - Rites of Ascension and Obscurity*, presented by Catherine Bastide, Brussels, Belgium, 2001.

*The Chirologic Remedy*, presented by Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, Germany and the Secession, Vienna, Austria, 1999.

*Unspoken Evil II*, Three Day Weekend, Los Angeles, California, 1996.

**PUBLICATIONS BY CATHERINE SULLIVAN**

*Catherine Sullivan, Five Economies* (exhibition catalogue). Essay by Hamza Walker; interview with Russell Ferguson, Los Angeles: UCLA Hammer Museum and Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 2002.

"Through the Scattered Glances," *Spring Journal*, Vol. II, Quality Press, 2000.

"A Spectacle of Ruin and Doubt," *Fama & Fortune Bulletin*, Verlag Pakesch & Schlebrugge, December, 1999.

"Grisly Notes and Tones (A Strawman's Excerpt)," *Spring Journal*, Vol. I, Quality Press, 1998.

"The Red Perils of Voluminous Green." *Asteroid Impaired: Righteous American Fiction*, Vol. I, Art Center College of Design, 1998. Co-edited with Benjamin Weissman and Alexis Hall.

*'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore:*

1. Giovanni action, The Aetna Theater (formerly Avery Memorial Theater), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, 2003.
2. Keopke action, The Audimax, Technical Academy, Aachen, Germany, 2003.
3. Keopke/Giovanni infusion, The Aetna Theater (formerly Avery Memorial Theater), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, 2003.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

James Yood, "Catherine Sullivan/Renaissance Society," *Artforum International* (September 2002).

Stephane Pichelin, "L'ours montre qui montre," *L'Humanite* (Paris) (10 December 2001).

Sebastian Egenhofer, "Theater und Gewalt Oder: Was wird hier eigentlich gespielt?" *Text zur Kunst* (Cologne), no. 43 (September 2001).

Albert Williams, "Alien Hand or Let the Right be a Vision of the Left," *Chicago Reader*, no.38 (12 June 1998).

Justin Hayford, "Dad's Ham," *Chicago Reader*, no.34 (May 1997).

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

*'Tis Pity She's a Fluxus Whore*, 2003

Double channel video projection, transferred from 16mm film, color, sound, 20 minutes.

*The Potential Interlocutor (18 desk surfaces from the Audimax, Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen, Germany)*, 2003. Eighteen color photographs, 8 x 10 inches each

*Classic Stance*, 2003

Two color photographs, 20 x 24 inches each

*Political Stance*, 2003

Two color photographs, 20 x 24 inches each

*Points of Clarification (a series of questions posed to Eugene Gaddis, William G. DeLana Archivist, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut)*, 2003. Single channel video, color, sound, 30 minutes

## MATRIX PERFORMANCE & LECTURE 2 p.m., Sunday, March 2, 2003

Catherine Sullivan presents a live theater performance followed by an informal artist's talk in The Aetna Theater.

## GALLERY TALK

12 noon, Tuesday, March 4, 2003

"Performance Anxiety: The Art of Catherine Sullivan"

Nicholas Baume, Emily Hall Tremaine  
Curator of Contemporary Art

## Artist's acknowledgements:

In Hartford, I would like to express my gratitude to Nicholas Baume, Joanna Marsh, Gene Gaddis, Ann Brandwein, Tom Ratelle, and Robin and Philip Schonberger; in Aachen to Ingrid Franz, Susanne Titz, Mr. Zimmerman, and Joerg Pfeiffer; and in Chicago to Beata Pilch, Juliusz Dobiesz and Ewalina Dobiesz. Special thanks also go to Patricia Dunham, Catherine Bastide, Richard Telles, and Christian Nagel. I would also like to thank Andrzej Krukowski for extending his support of the project far beyond his participation as a performer.

## Cast

Andrzej Krukowski -  
Giovanni/Vautier/Filliou/Buys/Wostell/Keopke/  
Andersen/Gosewitz/Brock  
Mathias Poedna - Male Voice  
Sarah Taylor - Female Voice

## Aachen Crew:

Production Manager - Joerg Pfeiffer  
Director of Photography - Raoul J. Germain Jr.  
Steadicam - Phillip Guye  
Camera Assistant - Evin Bilmen  
Chief Lighting Technician - Thomas Kyriasis  
Lighting Assistant - Rebekka Schindle  
Make-up - Annina Muller  
Costume Design - Stacey Ellen Rich and  
Catherine Sullivan  
Propmaster - Joerg Pfeiffer, Wolf Lemcke  
Still Photography - Vanessa Reif  
Production Assistants - Thomas Dapper,  
Olaf Frey, Jan Appenzeller

## Hartford Crew:

Production - Motion, Inc.  
Director of Photography - Glenn Orkin  
Steadicam Operator - Erik Anderson  
Assistant Camera - Dick Williams  
Grip - Orson Robbins-Pianka  
Sound - Michael Daly  
Costume Design - Stacey Ellen Rich and  
Catherine Sullivan  
Propmaster - Merje Veski  
Still Photography - John Groo  
Production Assistants - Marc Longenecker  
and Terese Samara

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Robin and Philip Schonberger, and Walter  
Wick and Linda Cheverton Wick.