

Dear Frank:

This is the part
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Christine
Tinsley

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sleight of hand, acrobatics and ventriloquism. Thus, they were charlatans despite the presumed authenticity of their vocation. However, McCarthy seemed to lack the charisma of a shaman during his 1983 performance at Sushi Gallery. Dressed in a pink polyester frock and wearing a Miss Piggy mask, McCarthy drank glasses of ketchup, rode around on a motorized child's tricycle and counted play money in a desultory fashion. Two years later, McCarthy gave up performing, stating that it had become too taxing.

In non-Western cultures, people with physical or mental disabilities were often designated as shamans. According to these criteria, performance artist Frank Moore's shamanistic credentials are impeccable. Moore is a victim of cerebral palsy and brain damage who has no control over any of his muscles except for the ones in his neck. Unable to speak, he communicates by pushing a plaster pointer around an ouijia-like board covered with the letters of the alphabet. He is confined to a wheelchair.

Initially, Moore might seem unsuited to be a performance artist. However, his body actually serves as an extremely powerful performance instrument. Moore has stated that it is fortuitous that he is an exhibitionist, since people are always staring at him anyway. He circumvents conventional expectations in more radical ways than by simply functioning as a performance artist: the performances he presents violate social and sexual taboos.

Moore is an advocate of what he has termed "eroplay." He contends that people have forgotten how to touch one another in an innocent, sensual manner in our repressive culture. Thus, his performances provide opportunities for the audience to engage in eroplay. Moore's performances in the Over the Edge series sponsored by the ASUC Studio in Berkeley from 1983 on often began with his companion, Linda Mac, reading a manifesto he had written about eroplay. Then she would pair people off into same sex or opposite sex

couples to carry out instructions picked randomly from a bowl. These instructions exhorted the couples to hug one another or rub one another's bare breasts. The performance ended with helpers wrapping everyone in a giant circle of cellophane, ribbon, toilet paper and aluminum foil.

The wholesome humanistic rhetoric Moore uses to convey his intentions contrasts markedly with Mark Pauline's nihilistic stance, although Pauline's Survival Research Laboratories performances are equally subversive. Using titles like Delusions of Expediency: How to Avoid Responsibility for Social Disintegration by Acting Without Principle Under the Pretenses of Utility for their pieces, Survival Research Laboratories assaults the status quo by staging battles between radio-controlled robotic machines they have built.

The performance alluded to above took place in a vacant lot in San Francisco in 1987. Four machines, the Inchworm, the Calliope, the Square-Wheeler and the Inspector, demolished one another in a programmed sequence as muzak and industrial sounds blared from speakers. Oil drums in a stack that spelled H-E-L-L exploded when they were ignited by a flame-thrower, producing clouds of smoke. Previous Survival Research Laboratories performances have used animal carcasses mechanized to jerk in a life-like fashion as props. Sometimes the machines have run amok, endangering spectators.

Pauline has cited novelists William Burroughs, J. B. Ballard and Thomas Pynchon as influences. And indeed, the literary and narrative aspects of Survival Research Laboratories' performances prevent them from being banal spectacles of technological violence. The machines model conflicting ideological motives and cultural paradigms clashing in diabolical confrontations. In a March 15, 1987 Image magazine article, Pauline's explanation of Survival Research Laboratories' intentions in their most recent piece was quoted: