

Laurie Beth Clark

"ACCEPT THE NEXT JOB OFFER YOU GET"

Franklin Furnace

New York City

February 19-20, 1987

Laurie Beth Clark's performance, *Accept the Next Job Offer You Get*, looked at "identity," and was part three of the four-part *The Unemployment Projects*, which consider facets of the institutions of working and not working.

Filling the entire space, Clark created an installation of metal, wood and high-tech com-



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Accept the Next Job . . .

ponents. For 20 minutes the audience climbed through this industrial maze to sit along a wall and peer at a bank of 12 monitors, all with an image of a hamster running on a treadmill. About ten performers were interviewed one at a time by a middle management type who asked inane questions, like how to spell esoteric words. The only older person on the set played a "janitor" who spoke about being a secretary, a waitress and other female service occupations.

A loud factory bell sounded and the performance officially started. Simultaneously the ten workers (whom I thought were blue-collar, but was later told by Clark were "cor-

porate management on a treadmill"), stepped up behind the monitors and began doing repetitive work—sewing, drilling, etc. All but two of the "video machines" imaged table-saws cutting wood. Two cameras were live, reflecting aspects of the set. A man and a woman continually changed uniforms.

For the next 40 minutes so many things happened in this dense performance collage, it was impossible to catch it all. Eventually a loud factory bell rang again, and lights darkened, the monitors imaged static, and everything became still except for the quiet hum of the two live cameras and sound equipment, run by the only Latin woman. A press release that was passed around the audience stated that more people are paid to watch other people in our culture than in any other occupation—a particularly interesting fact in view of the escalating spy scandals, and a potent statement about the values manifested in our contemporary work ethic.

Clark presented a dismal picture of working and/or not working, which I didn't immediately equate with a search for "identity." The piece lacked focus and clarity and I missed seeing more of a representation of workers. Most were young and white. Clark herself posed the question: "What about an art one must see several times to understand?" This may be valid, but then it may be wiser for Clark to stick with installation that includes ongoing performance, thus allowing the public to roam around the impressive factory set for as long as they like.

Even with the problems, Clark presented an ambitious endeavor. She worked with most of the performers in Wisconsin for several months in a collaborative group effort. There was an overall structure with Clark acting as "director," but many aspects were improvised, and all those involved found their own relationships to their identity as "cultural workers."

In terms of content, Clark is working in largely uncharted territory. The history of art is curiously void of images of labor until the last 150 years. Even with the discourse on the "nature of art" still a lively topic, few have tackled "labor." I look forward to future "work" by Clark.

Jerri Allyn

HIGH PERFORMANCE

#38, Volume Ten, Number 2, 1987