

The Way "Out There"

"OUT THERE 7," the seventh annual Walker Art Center/Southern Theater January performance extravaganza, brought inspiration and entertaining, thought-provoking art to the Twin Cities, just in time to warm the cold soul of winter.

The four-weekend series began with the provocatively titled *Unsafe, Unsuitd*, a movement/text work by Keith Hennessy, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Patrick Scully, who share years of performance experience and gay activism among them. For this show, they described themselves as citizens, outlaws, and "a trio of men at midlife," though they still move those bones rather well.

The movement in *Unsafe, Unsuitd* looked almost entirely improvisational, and each evening's viewers probably saw very different shows. The improvisation advanced the performers through situations of distilled emotional potential, some of which became intense, others less so. The movement served both as the language of interaction, and as a thumbprint of the performers' very distinct personalities and spirits.

And those distinctions were pivotal: so different were the performers in appearance and style that one might wonder how they ever could suit each other as dance or even conversational partners. Respectively, Hennessy, Houston-Jones,

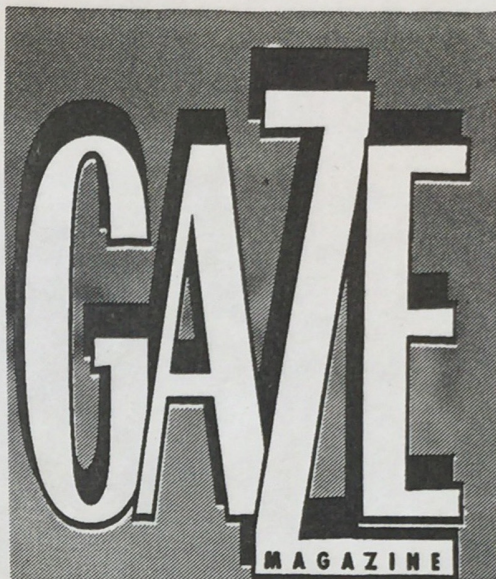
and Scully are wiry, sturdy, and lanky; pale, dark, golden; mischievous, fluid, measured in their good moments, or, under stress, erratic, simmering, and forceful. Without these startling contrasts, the performance would have lost all clarity.

The scenarios the men enacted also varied greatly: a sequence of actions not normally done in suits (thrashing, cradling one another, wearing two jackets at once); a gentle dance accompanying a tenderly erotic text about a lover's unexpected return late in a cold night; life and death rituals, including a role-playing game which turns into a murder, and a man's tale about finding the name of his first German lover inscribed on a memorial to AIDS victims in that country.

Pervading the performance was an atmosphere of calling the shots as they really are, when we stop kidding ourselves, covering up, and fighting for turf. The possible payoffs of honesty are support and intimacy, according to two images: in a human pyramid, Hennessy teetered high in the air, one foot on Scully's head and the other on Houston-Jones' shoulder, the whole structure truly unsafe, but finding, for a few sec-

onds, true balance like a rock amid river turbulence; and later, two men danced a slow waltz, nearly motionless in near dark, skin to skin and sweat to sweat, while the third man's crouched, lunatic dance finally calmed itself into a song: "Which side are you on?"

This performance of three men, so distinctly themselves, was not conventionally political, unless three men—jumping onto each other, rolling, touching, holding, hosting a virus, sucking fingers, violently role-playing, speaking of lost lovers, dancing to the idea of a shared scrub-bath in the snow, smearing upon themselves each other's sweat and spit—are political. And, of course, they are.



Unsafe Unsuitd Review 1995, Gaze Minneapolis