Do you have a total stage picture from the audience's perspective as you write, or do you write from the viewpoint of each character, dropping into each voice as you write?

The characters actually do what they want to do. It's their story. I'm like Bynum in *Joe Turner*: walking down a road in this strange landscape. What you confront is part of yourself, your willingness to deal with the small imperial truths you have accumulated over your life. That's your baggage. And it can be very terrifying. You're either wrestling with the devil or Jacob's angel, the whole purpose being that when you walk through that landscape you arrive at something larger than you had when you started. And this larger something should be illuminating and as close to the truth as you can understand. I think if you accomplish that, whether the play works or not, you've been true to yourself and in that sense you're successful. So I write from the center, the core, of myself. You've got that landscape and you've got to enter it, walk down that road and whatever happens, happens. And that's the best you're capable of coming to. The characters do it, and in them, I confront myself.

The characters in your plays are each trying to find their songs, or they receive a gift from someone who perceives what their songs might be. In your 50's play, *Fences*, the father has a beautiful speech that sums up his life, his song. Would you quote that?

"I come in here every Friday. I carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard. You all line up at the door with your hands out. I give you the lint from my pockets. I give you my sweat and blood. I ain't got no tears. I done spent them. We go upstairs to that room at night and I fall down on you and try to blast a hole into forever. I get up Monday morning . . . find my lunch on the table. I go out. Make my way. Find my strength to carry me through to the next Friday. That's all I got. That's all I got to give. I can't give nothing else."

THEATER IN LOUISVILLE

You, The Jury: Emily Mann's *Execution of Justice*

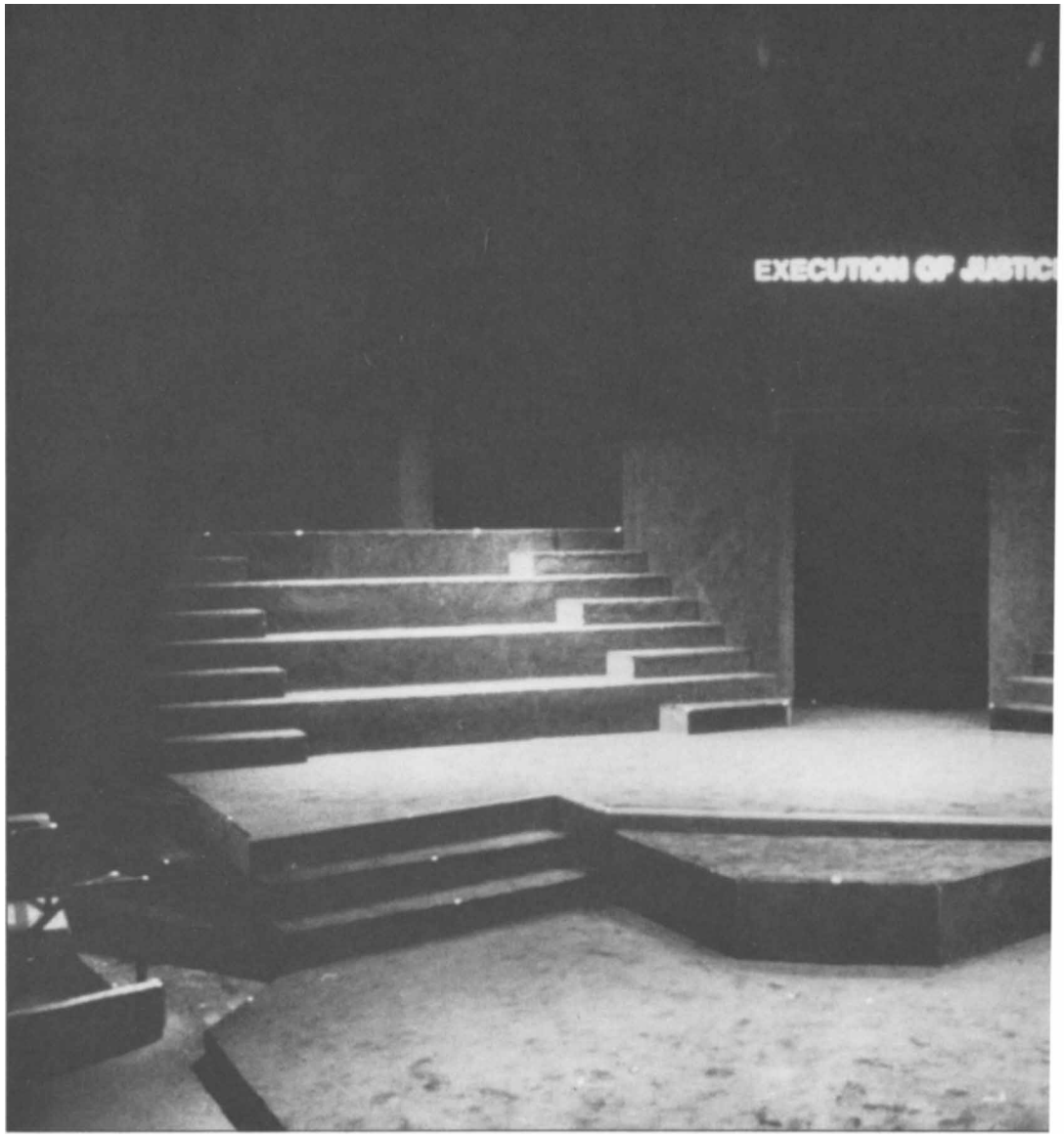
William Kleb

Emily Mann writes political plays based on affective response. *Still Life*, produced in 1980, deals with the Vietnam War not directly but through the "traumatic memories," as Mann puts it, of a marine who served there, his wife and his mistress. "Distilled" from taped interviews conducted by the playwright, these monologues are interwoven in such a way that the play itself becomes Mann's "traumatic memory" of their collective memories. Despite this formalistic structure, the effect is startingly real: the three "survivors" speak their lines directly to the audience, Mann explains, so that it "can hear what I heard, experience what I experienced." This experience is intensified by Mann's setting — either a "conference room," a "trial room," or three contiguous but separate personal spaces. Not only is the audience meant to share the playwright's traumatic response, it actually seems to participate in the testimonial — as confessor, psychiatrist, juror, special friend. Political issues may ultimately be raised by *Still Life*, but Mann's central concerns seem to be psychological rather than analytic or didactic: how do individuals respond to political events, especially political violence, on an emotional level; how can an audience be made to participate emotionally in that response? This affective approach to a political subject is again readily apparent in Emily Mann's new play, *Execution of Justice*, which premered on February 22, 1984, as part of the Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theater of Louisville.

Consider the prologue. First there are bells, running footsteps, mumbled "Hail Marys." Then, in the darkness, a woman's voice, strained to breaking, announces that two men have been shot and killed — Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk. "The suspect," she adds, "is Supervisor Dan White." A man's voice calls out: "This is the matter of the People vs. Daniel James White." A gavel sounds. A white cross is projected on a screen upstage. Downstage a man appears. He seems huge, burly; he jerks open his jacket to reveal a T-shirt printed with the words "FREE DAN WHITE." He speaks directly to the audience; his tone is angry, aggressive. He's a third generation San Francisco cop, a Catholic; he's got a wife and kids; his city has been taken over by "stinkin' degenerates"; the sights he sees every day make him sick and mad. He blames Mayor Moscone and his "Negro-loving, faggot-loving" chief of police. They want him to treat the queers with "lavender

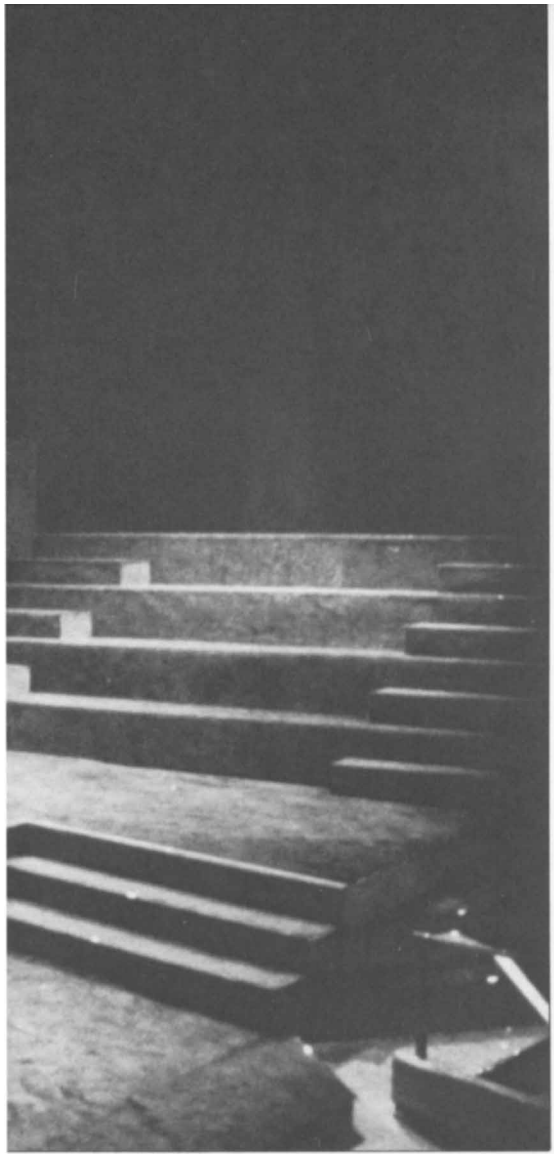
gloves"; even the squad cars have been painted "faggot-blue." Dan White "understood" all this, he says; "Dan White proved you *could* fight City Hall."

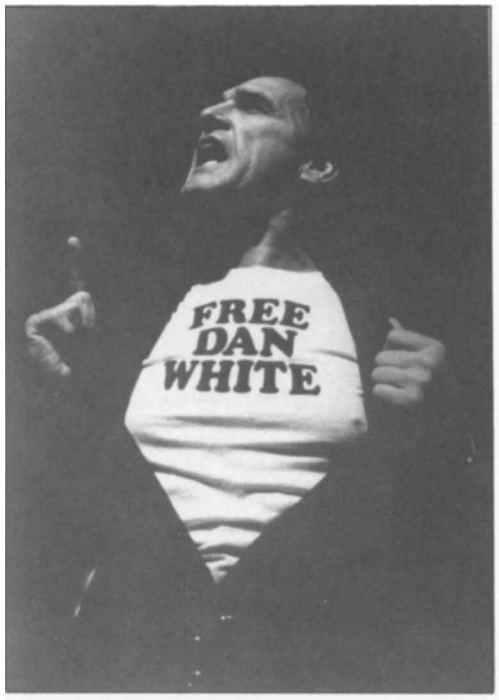
As the cop speaks, another figure appears, dressed in a nun's habit with grotesque white make-up and spike heels. The audience receives an ice-cold blessing. The voice is male. Solemnly it reads a message from the "Book of Dan": "Not life but three to seven with time off for good behavior." A naked leg appears; the black habit splits open, exposing a slender white male body, a jock strap, a garter belt, a red stone in the navel. The pose is defiant. The voice remains cool, ironic: it speculates on the possibility of equal justice for "gay people, and people of color and women" in a culture saturated with violence and brutality. With a mocking tone, the voice begs understanding and forgiveness for the "angry faggot or dyke" who, eventually, in a fit of depression, will "get Dan White." The lights go out.



Above: Kent Broadhurst as Sister Boom-Boom in *Execution of Justice* by Emily Mann. Above right: Set for the play at the Actor's Theater of Louisville, 1984.

The scene lasts no more than five minutes. On a dark grey, nearly circular stage, with stepped tiers flanking a black "skene" at the back, the cop and the drag nun could be two malignant Euripidean gods, come out for a moment to set the scene. Clearly they personify hostile points of view in an intense social struggle, one that has led to an atmosphere of anger, frustration and to acts of violence. Clearly too, the impact of Mann's scene, her attack, is primarily emotional, not expository; facts are given, but objectivity seems out of the question. The costumes alone are ciphers of prejudice, designed to offend and polarize, while the true subject of the scene is one of the most emotionally charged issues of the day — "homophobia," the fear and hatred of homosexuals. The cop defends it; the drag nun deplores it; both appeal directly to the audience for support and agreement. The effect is brutal, riveting. Not only that, the debate seems rigged. The two sides are not equally balanced: Mann humanizes the cop and dehumanizes the gay. If the cop seems ugly and threatening, he also seems more personal, more real — he goes to church, he has a family, he's concerned about their welfare. Also, his manner is direct: he's tough but he's honest; his words are simple, concrete, colloquial. When he





Top: A San Francisco policeman (Bob Burrus) reveals his sympathy for the defense. Bottom: John Spenser and Lori Holt in *Execution of Justice*, Louisville, 1984.

describes gay sex and public behavior, he chooses the most bizarre examples; they throw his "normalcy" into sharp relief.

The drag nun, on the other hand, is nothing but a grotesque mask. Mann bases the character on a real drag nun — Sister Boom-Boom (aka Jack Fertig), one of the "Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence," a San Francisco media figure and sometime politician. The words come from an actual speech delivered by Fertig a number of times in 1979. Mann's version of the character, however, seems quite different from Fertig's. The original Boom-boom wears an elaborate habit and heels but his manner is less overtly sexual, his tone more comic that satiric; you see the man behind the make-up. Mann's nun, on the other hand, seems principally designed to shock and offend: the image is toxic, malevolent; the speech, already built on irony and indirection, assumes an especially remote and malicious tone. Indeed, the character seems less a challenge to the cop's homophobia than an objectification of it (he appears on stage just as the cop is saying, "Sometimes I sit in church and I think of those disgusting drag queens dressed up as nuns"). In short, Mann's prologue not only arouses a profound subjective response in her audience, it seems intended to shape the nature of that response: specifically, it does more than raise the *issue* of homophobia, it provokes the *feeling* as well.

The significance of this becomes obvious as the first of Mann's three acts begins. Dan White, of course, was the right-wing politician and ex-cop who, in 1978, shot and killed San Francisco's liberal mayor, George Moscone, and its first openly gay elected official, Harvey Milk. The core of *Execution of Justice* is distilled from the manuscript of the notorious trial that followed five months later. It opens with a short scene in which Defense Attorney Douglas Schmidt manages to seat a law-and-order jury whose backgrounds and values closely resemble those of the defendant himself — white, Catholic, blue collar, conservative. In particular, Schmidt excludes all suspected gays from the jury, as well as anyone who indicates a sympathy for gay rights. Thus while homosexual prejudice against the killer of Harvey Milk is probably eliminated, prejudice against homosexuals probably is not. Mann confirms this assumption with one bold stroke. When the scene ends, no jury is actually placed on stage. Instead, as Prosecutor Tom Norman begins his opening remarks, he looks out at the audience: "You," he says, "are the jury now." The emotions provoked by Mann's prologue click firmly into place. The opening moments of *Execution of Justice*, then, depend on an intense responsive transaction. As in *Still Life*, Mann generates a

powerfully affective forcefield around her play and assigns the audience a specific role within it. Moreover, she attempts to make an explicit connection between her audience/jury and the original Dan White jury on a deep psychological level. As a result, Mann encourages her audience not simply to become *a* jury, but rather to assume the role of the *real* jury — to share its point of view, to experience the trial as the original jury *experienced* it. Her methods are complex; the consequences, from a political point of view, disturbing.

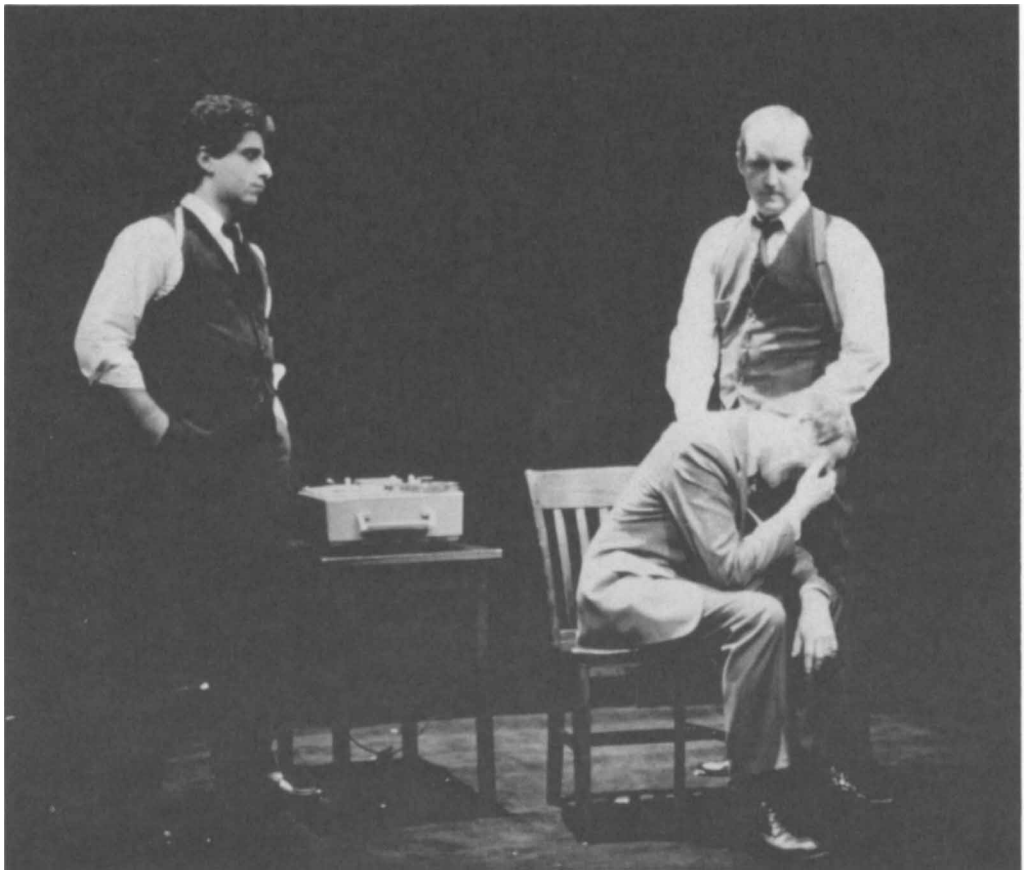
As it happened, the defense almost totally dominated the experience of the Dan White jury. Throughout the trial, White — handsome, youthful, if a little overweight — sat impassive, expressionless, a blank screen upon which Doug Schmidt projected an image carefully wrought to mirror the presumed values of *his* jury and designed to tap into those values at the root. Using this persona, Schmidt then developed a narrative myth to explain White's "tragedy." In Schmidt's masterful telling, White became an All-American Boy, driven to self-destructive acts by two unprincipled politicians (one, at least, a gay). Thus, while the motivational defense seemed to focus on White's "diminished capacity" (depression triggered by a "chemical change"), it was really a *political* argument on a profound *emotional* level.

Execution of Justice not only makes this clear, it seems designed to support and heighten the sympathetic appeal of Schmidt's fabrication. For example, Mann's first act works contrapuntally. Unlike Schmidt, Prosecutor Tom Norman avoids interpretation of any kind, psychological or political, and sticks doggedly to the "facts" of the case. As he questions a series of witnesses about the two murders, Mann intercuts relevant fragments of Schmidt's opening remarks and subsequent cross examination. The technique is ingenious: it maintains, indeed sharpens, the essential thrust of the trial, while laying out a massive amount of factual information simply and concisely. This structural manoeuvre also produces a remarkable effect: prosecution testimony and defense interpretation become one story, with Schmidt as story teller. Not only does his point of view thus seem to carry more weight than it does in the actual transcript, his gradual dominance of the proceedings, and influence over the jury/audience, seems almost preordained; he owns a knowledge of the "truth," the power of an omniscient narrator. Mann's editing does little to subvert this power: occasionally it adds emphasis, a critical accent or stress, but for the most part, gross inconsistencies slip by unnoticed, unchallenged; discordant ironies are muted; crucial evidence remains unexamined — just as in the trial itself. Indeed a number of Mann's cuts, here and elsewhere, actually seem to bolster the defense position.

Moreover, Act I climaxes with the confession of Dan White — a repetition, in White's words, of the story Schmidt has just told. The playing of this intensely dramatic taped narrative was surely a turning point in the trial, a "traumatic" moment for the murderer and then for the jury. As White, choking back sobs, told of the terrible "pressures" that had led him, a moral public servant (not to mention husband and father), to crack, many in the courtroom, and in the jury box, wept openly. To White's peers, at least, the confession was shattering and decisive; premeditation and malice suddenly became impossible, if not irrelevant. Subsequently, White's confession was much criticized: what of the clearly supportive interrogation, or the unusual narrative format; why were the subtle distortions, discrepencies and contradictions not pointed out by the prosecution? *Execution of Justice* confronts none of these issues. Nor is White's tape actually played; it is dramatized, and edited (the only time, with one brief exception, Mann actually stages an event anterior to the trial). The cuts are not major, although they do eliminate several of the most patently friendly questions by Inspector Erdelatz (incidentally a member of a group called "Cops for Christ"). The dramatization, on the other hand, is stunningly overt. Though lacking the authenticity of the original tape, Mann's extended flashback nevertheless deepens audience involvement with White. A less representational style might have had an "alienating effect"; instead, the realistic staging, as in *Still Life*, enhances White's credibility while it turns his confession into one of the most theatrically compelling and emotionally involving scenes in Mann's play.

Another remarkable example of the way in which the structure of *Execution of Justice* seems to promote the defense position occurs at the climax of Act II. White's trial aroused a storm of outrage against the use of psychiatric testimony, and this section of the transcript reads like something out of Ionesco. Mann heightens the absurdity by bringing out four of Schmidt's experts simultaneously and interweaving their edited comments. The result is the play's most satiric scene. Then, in a surprising stylistic shift, a fifth psychiatrist, Dr. Blinder, gives his testimony straight, uninterrupted and virtually uncut. While the others come across as buffoons spouting gibberish, Blinder seems decidedly sane and even deeply compassionate. It is he who formulates the notorious "Twinkie defense" (junk food raises blood sugar leading to depression and murder), but, as presented by Blinder (and Mann), this theory becomes a minor, not wholly unreasonable point in yet another long, emotion-charged reprise of Dan White's pathetic tale. In effect, Blinder completely undercuts Mann's earlier attack on forensic psychistry while reaffirming, from a different angle, the validity of Schmidt's argument. Further, Blinder's monologue is followed by the anguished testimony of White's wife. Strongly reminiscent of *Still Life*, Mary Ann White's tortured revelations about her husband's black moods and sexual inadequacy underscore Blinder's analysis in the strongest way — in deeply personal, human terms.

Other examples might be cited. The point



Interrogation scene from *Execution of Justice* by Emily Mann. Actor's Theater of Louisville, 1984.

is: again and again, in different ways, Mann encourages audience identification with the original Dan White jury by intensifying the sympathetic appeal of the case for the defense. There is, however, more to *Execution of Justice* than a distillation of the trial itself. For instance, halfway through Act I, two men and a woman appear at different places on the flanking tiers. As a witness in the central acting area, now the courtroom, describes White's behavior just prior to shooting George Moscone, they too speak out, separately, their words intercut with trial testimony. None, however, refers to or even acknowledges the trial. Instead, each tells the audience of his or her *traumatic response* to the news of Moscone's death. Minutes later, two others appear — a "gay man" and Gwenn, a black lesbian activist — and they register similar emotional reactions to the death of Harvey Milk. Although strongly differentiated, the five make up what Mann calls a "chorus of uncalled witnesses." Together they attempt to impart a sense of the profound emotional impact caused by the murders on the city as a whole, but especially on the friends and supporters of Milk and Moscone; the result is a kind of montage in which Mann's chorus creates an emotional counterpoint to the affective thrust of the trial.

The uncalled witnesses reassemble as the trial comes to an end, about a third of the way into Act III. This time, however, their function seems more complex. As in Act I, each is spatially disconnected and each speaks a separate monologue, broken up and intercut with the lines of the others, and with the last, sharply edited, sections of the trial. At the end, in different ways, all express their shock and outrage at what has happened in court, particularly at the verdict. Again one senses a communal challenge to the impression of the trial which has dominated Mann's first two acts. At this point, however, the chorus members aggressively assert themselves, fragmenting the dramatic field and shifting the focus to the city streets. Their words are not only played against the trial but against a series of projections showing the riots which erupted after the verdict was announced. Finally they stand, mute, as White comes forward to speak the last, ironic line of the play: "I just wanted to do a good job for the city."

This antiphonal climax, however, is also built from strongly disjunctive voices; each, apparently, based on a real individual, and each with a significant personal message. For example, Gene Marine, a friend and political ally of Moscone, offers a glimpse of the dead man's genial personality, his genuine concern for social justice — a welcome, if fleeting, contrast to the devious politician portrayed throughout the trial. At another point, Craig talks briefly about gay history and describes the brutal police attack on a gay bar following the City Hall riot. Most important, perhaps, and certainly most arresting, are the words of Jim Denman, "Dan White's jailer for the 72 hours after the assassinations." As trial witness Carol Ruth Silver vainly attempts to testify to White's antagonism towards gays, Denman talks about the defendant's close connection to "thuggish" elements in the police department (where there was talk of assassinating the mayor), and he recalls White's behavior in jail: "There were no tears; there was no shame; you got the feeling that he knew exactly what he was doing and there was no remorse." Not only are Denman's remarks extremely provocative — strongly implying premeditation and malice,

even suggesting conspiracy — they confirm the earlier, abortive, discredited testimony of the lone prosecution psychiatrist; they provide one of the few occasions in *Execution of Justice* when the defense characterization of White is cogently challenged. Why Denman was *not* called to testify is also one of the most pointed political questions raised by the play.

Mann's intention at this point seems twofold: to generate an emotional alternative to the affective thrust of the trial, with its apparent bias in favor of the defense, and, using a kind of vocal collage, to raise a number of specific points pertinent not only to a critique of the trial but to a broader social and political context as well. It is a complex and daring manoeuvre, one which, unfortunately, does not succeed. Unquestionably the chorus conveys a general impression of the controversy surrounding the conduct and outcome of the trial, but it finally fails to impart, on any deeper level, a sense of the trauma it describes. Oddly for a writer who specializes in affective response to political events, the choral passages of *Execution of Justice*, not only here but in Act I, seem strangely distanced, indirect, even evasive. Perhaps there are simply too many competing voices in too many disparate registers to create a unified visceral pull; certainly the sharply fragmented structure scatters attention and weakens the impact, both collectively and individually. Or perhaps Mann simply has not experienced this testimony directly or deeply enough herself. Much of it, in fact, has a second-hand ring, and some is easily recognizable from other sources: Craig's monologue, for instance, comes from a speech delivered to the Harvey Milk Gay Democratic Club and later published, while Denman's remarks are quoted almost verbatim from a widely read article by San Francisco journalist Warren Hinckle (*Inquiry*, 10/29/79). Despite vigorous performances, these passages seem to lack the intensity and force, the actuality, of the testimony in *Still Life* or, for that matter, in Mann's version of the trial. Even material which seems unfamiliar, presumably from interviews Mann conducted herself, has a strange, generalized quality to it (the San Franciso mother, for instance, or the gay man).

More disappointing, the issue raised by Denman and others tends to get lost in a kind of theatrical Babel — and so few questions of this kind are raised at all in Mann's play. Clearly the primary intention of *Execution of Justice* is *not* a detailed critique or analysis of the trial of Dan White, and yet there is a critical undertone, implicit in Mann's title, which rises to the surface from time to time and raises at least some expectations along this line. Craig, for example, has an angry aside in Act II challenging White's supposedly irrationality, while a Reporter comes on briefly in Acts I and II with several disturbing comments about the trial and about White's subsequent favorable treatment in prison. Such moments are not only rare, the questions they raise are extremely limited — at least they seem so six years after the fact. It is almost as though Mann would rather avoid such comment and controversy altogether. One waits in vain for any hard evidence of Dan White's homophobia, an issue raised so powerfully in Mann's prologue. None, of course, was produced at the trial — the issue was purposely avoided — but plenty has surfaced since and there are many who believe (Hinckle among them) that this was the chief motivating factor in the murders. In *Execution of Justice*, the question remains oblique, unfocused. Or consider the remarkable monologue of District Attorney Joseph Freitas in Act II. Sandwiched between two extremely sympathetic descriptions of White, Freitas' ghost-like appearance from the future offers an extraordinary opportunity for reaction and analysis. Instead, he simplistically sketches in the political background of the time, attacks the jury for not sticking to the "facts alone," and justifies the prosecution strategy with a stunning evasion: "We thought it was an open and shut case of first degree murder." Although he admits, in retrospect, that the murders were "political," he fails to explain why the prosecution chose to ignore this fact; he simply concedes that "certain issues" probably should have been raised, and concludes that "all of this is just the tip of the iceberg." Freitas' frustrating, equivocal testimony not only symbolizes (rather than explains) the inadequacy of the Dan White prosecution, it typifies Mann's uncritical approach to the trial.

Where, then, does this leave Mann's jury/audience? The convention established in Act I continues to the end of the trial, when a Foreman comes on stage to read the two verdicts — "voluntary manslaughter" in both cases. The court then asks each juror to "say 'yea' or 'nay'"; from different places in the house, the "yeas" ring out. Twelve. Twice. By the end of Act III, however, it is clear that Mann has conceived of two *other* roles for her audience. In addition to sharing the "experience" of the original jury, Mann also seems to want her audience to identify emotionally with the "traumatic" responses of her uncalled witnesses, and at the same time to be intellectually aware of some of the more obvious critical questions raised by the trial itself — to be a kind of super-jury, judging the trial as well as its own subjective response *to* the trial. But this composite counterpoise is never really achieved. Surely Mann accomplishes one thing: *how* the Dan White jury reached its verdict now seems obvious. As Mann develops it, though, this understanding rests principally on an affective identification with the original jury — in other words, it depends on a sympathetic response to the portrait of Dan White created by the defense. Whatever Mann's dialectical intentions may have been, there is little in her play that convincingly challenges, or neutralizes, the power of this portrait. In fact, her treatment of the trial seems calculated to enhance it. In *Execution of Justice*, then, Emily Mann's complex affective strategies have disturbing (and probably to many, disappointing) results: they not only exonerate the Dan White jury, they finally seem to validate the verdict as well.

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Dan White was paroled on January 7, 1984, and disappeared into a secret hideout

somewhere, it is said, in Los Angeles County. As of this writing, *Execution of Justice* has not yet been performed in the city in which his crimes were committed — although the play was originally commissioned by San Francisco's Eureka Theater, and a production there has been promised "sometime soon." Perhaps by then revisions will be made; if so, it should be interesting to compare the two versions — and the audience/-jury response.

THEATER IN BERLIN

Self-Consuming Artifact: Grüber's *Hamlet*

Johannes Birringer

Theater places us right at the heart of what is religious-political: in the heart of absence, in negativity, in nihilism as Nietzsche would say, therefore in the question of power.

Jean-François Lyotard

Hamlet — a play to end all plays; or, rather, a play that has pushed theater to the limits of what is dramaturgically possible. The dying Hamlet's request that Horatio tell "his story" has been taken up, again and again, by Shakespeare's critics as well as by the theater which, Horatio-like, must at least pretend that it can speak again "to the yet unknowing world / How these things came about."

An Italian interpretation of the story, staged in 1982 by the Compagnia del Collettivo at Parma, used a brilliant visual image to illustrate Horatio's heavy burden ("all this can I / Truly deliver"): the actor played a blind man (a blind seer?) with a crutch who, as if to reverse Polonius' tactics of eavesdropping, staggered across the stage "seen unseeing."

In West Germany, the case of *Hamlet* is paradigmatic of the endlessly continuing struggle over the *definition* of Shakespeare production, a struggle that will never be resolved since a very strong central tradition of literary, and aesthetic criticism in the academy has formed its own canon of Shakespeare reception against which all theatrical interpretations are measured, judged, and found wanting. The critical controversy about what constitutes a conventional "werkgetreue Inszenierung" (production "faithful" to the text) or an adaptation is of course often reflected in the choices that are made in a production (e.g. the choice of a particular classic or contemporary translation), but is perhaps more appropriate to say that the German theaters, themselves, over the past three decades, have developed their own attitudes towards Shakespeare's dramatic texts, towards what *can* be represented ("truly delivered") in the specific historical and political context of post-war German culture.

Since the late 1950s, theatrical productions on the West German stages have had their own dynamics and, pervaded by the impact of modern drama and contemporary theory, preferred to explore the extremes of radical experimentation and rigid formalism, swinging wildly back and forth between brooding symbolism and provocative playfulness. Avant-garde directors and their ensembles in the 1960s and 1970s were concerned less with the recreation of the