Catherine Sullivan  The Little Hunt
Styles from film
“If Big Hunt presents theater that when raised to level of formal visuality becomes reified to the point of becoming dance, then does just the opposite. It attempts to introduce theater into the formal sphere of dance. Little Hunt, in contrast to Big Hunt, is truly cinematic. The mise-en-scene is a tennis court. On each side of the net a dancer is set amongst props from Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables. A scythe, a rifle, a coffin, gallows, lanterns, a busted wagon wheel, a Louis Quatorze style desk and chaise are amongst the many objects with which the dancers interact. The female dancer whose movements are Rainer-esque in their efficacy, is versed in modern training while the male is a ballroom dancer. At one point he elegantly two-steps around the coffin, suggesting a dance with death as opposed to the dance of death. The camera movements are very dramatic. The opening take is a rapid, low level tracking shot that zooms in on the female dancer from below as she stands upon the gallows. Many of the takes are out with close-up detailing the handing of props. There are also takes which dramatically shift in continuity from night to day and from day and night. Sullivan wanted to emphasize continuity as a key feature distinguishing theater from cinema where an actor’s gestures are broken up over takes, further quantifying expression. This heightens the drama of the Little Hunt which comes across as allegory, as if there is symbolic import to the grasping of each and every prop. The gingerly manner the ballroom dancer navigates through his props, stopping occasionally to reflect upon some of the smaller objects, gives his performance an air of nostalgia. This is in stark contrast to the sturm und drang stirred by the female dancer’s assertive engagement with the rifle and the scythe. Yet, the dancer’s ability to engage the props in a manner that successfully qualifies as narrative remains suspect at worst and contingent at best. Both outcomes are perfectly suitable to an artistic practice whose combination of elements produces effects of varying resolution and legibility. There are not guarantees as to the results of a given scenario, e.g. whether a ballroom dancer, could, in a meaningful way, incorporate into their vocabulary of movement, object heavily laden with association to a particular narrative. But if so, to what a scenario may or may not accommodate is equally applicable to the Big Hunt as it pertains to the relationship between its theatrical elements and as it pertains to the deployment of those elements in a manner bordering against other disciplines.

Presented within the context of visual art gallery, both Big Hunt and Little Hunt represent a thread running throughout the history of modernism, namely the attempts to define artistic forms by finding elements unique to each discipline. Sullivan is more interested in learning how acting works not through the reductive means which have tended to characterize such an endeavor, but through juxtaposition of figuration formalized through acting and dance. Contrary to establishing a break with tradition, modernist theater’s greatest triumph perhaps has been the formal codification of expression leading up to the television melodrama. That this is being acknowledged within a gallery is as telling of the visual arts as the discipline of acting. It is not that a critique of acting could not take place within the realm of theater, rather that it is taking place in what had essentially become a vacuum for formal figural with action minus paint.”

extract from “Action, Minus paint” by Hamza Walker
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The Little Hunt, 2002
Video stills from film
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