



Evidence of Floods

Author(s): Janie Geiser

Source: *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1997), pp. 47-63

Published by: The MIT Press on behalf of the Performing Arts Journal, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245862>

Accessed: 11/12/2009 20:13

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=mitpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The MIT Press and *Performing Arts Journal, Inc.* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Performing Arts Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

EVIDENCE OF FLOODS

Janie Geiser

A puppet performance conceived, directed, and designed by Janie Geiser; music by Chip Epstein; lighting by Emily Stork; costumes by Judith Anderson.

Evidence of Floods was first presented in September 1994 at the Arts Festival of Atlanta. It premiered in New York at Dance Theater Workshop in November 1994 and was performed in September 1996 at the International Festival of Puppet Theater.



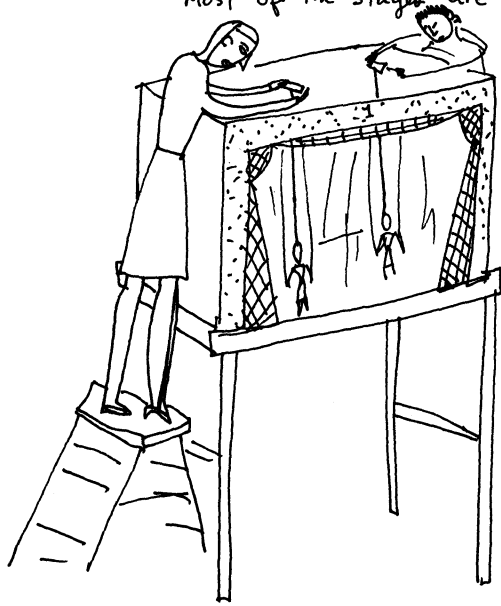
Evidence of Floods, Scene 5. Photo: Courtesy Richard Termue.

JANIE GEISER is a theatre artist and director who has been working with puppets since 1981. Her 1992 piece, *When the Wind Blows*, was presented at the first International Festival of Puppet Theater at the Joseph Papp Public Theater. Since 1990 Geiser has also been making short films, first as an element of her performances, and then as separate works. Her film *The Red Hook* was featured at the 1996 New Directors/New Films series at the Museum of Modern Art. Her most recent animated film, *The Secret Story*, was shown in 1996 at the New York Film Festival. Geiser is also a nationally recognized illustrator, whose work appears frequently in *The New York Times Book Review*.

Evidence of Floods (conceived/ designed/ directed by Janie Geiser) (1994-1996)

There are 8 separate stages in this diorama-performance. Each stage has one or two puppeteers operating the figures (about 9" or 10" high). The audience travels in groups of 8 from scene to scene. Each scene is 4 to 6 minutes long. There are 12 performers.

Most of the stages are small proscenium stages on legs.



The proscenium fronts are made of punched tin - the interior lights shine through the holes. The "curtains" are made of wire mesh.

Stages are placed in a line or a semicircle and the audience travels clockwise

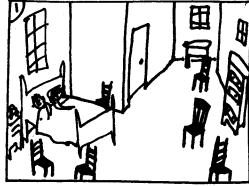


The space is fairly dark (each stage is lit from within) with blue light giving the audience enough light to move in.

The soundtrack is a 25-minute loop created by composer Chip Epstein. Events line up randomly with the music.

Evidence of Floods

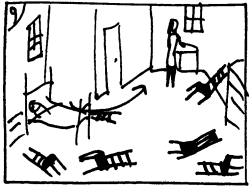
Scene 1



Bedroom at Night- the couple asleep. There are six red chairs in the bedroom. City appears behind back window.



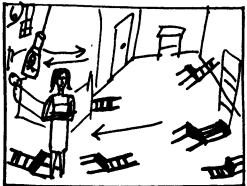
The woman looks at him in bed then begins to pace. She stops to Rub her eye (she has a black eye). She is in a white nightgown/slip.



She walks, to the back of the Room, thinking. She looks out the window for a bit. Then she turns decisively and walks quickly back to the bed.



Large figure of husband appears (twirls in from above). He Leans in toward woman in bed (her dream), then turns and exits Room.



She paces over to bed and looks at him - then turns out to think - A bottle of poison enters and moves back + forth above her head. She is thinking of killing him.



She thinks about using a gun. (Gun enters above her head, sways back and forth twice, then points at husband in bed).



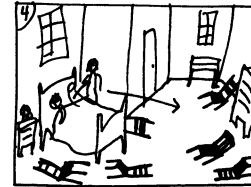
The dream figure passes behind the windows of Room, and stops with a loud noise behind the back window - all of the chairs fall down, one by one. Then he exits from sight.



She turns into the room and paces more. (This is one of her Repeated gestures with her arm as she walks.) Then she goes to the foot of the bed decisively.



She decides not to kill him - or she can't. He is still asleep - she turns and walks away, thinking. (Thinking gesture with hand).



As his footsteps recede, the woman wakes up. She Looks around the Room and sees the fallen red chairs and her husband asleep. She walks out into Room.



She stops at foot of bed and a second thought comes in - A Knife. It moves back + forth above her head 3 times, then it goes out as she turns away.



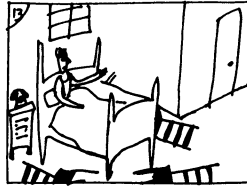
The woman takes a last look at the bed, then exits through the door. The door closes with a bang.

Scene 1

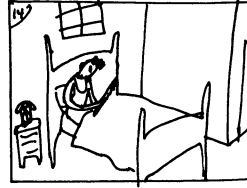
Evidence of Floods

(Scene 1, cont.)

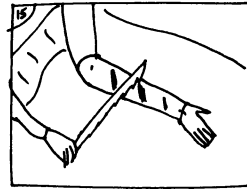
Scene 1,
cont.



The husband wakes up and looks around, he doesn't see her anywhere. He gestures in anger.



He pulls a knife out from under the covers.



He cuts his arm three times (on top of arm - when he turns it over, there are three red streaks.)



He looks toward phone, and then out, Lights fade.

(Audience moves to scene 2. Puppeteer whistles hymn from "Night of the Hunter." The whistling is identified with the policeman who is entering as scene 2 begins)

SCENE 2

Scene 2

(Scene 2)



The city at night. Policeman enters city (with whistling), and walks toward tall, Red apartment building.



Cop knocks on door three times, then steps back.



Husband opens the door. He shows wounded arm to the cop.



Husband then shows policeman a picture of wife - gestures that she did it (slashed his arm). Cop walks over to look at photo.

Evidence of Floods

(Scene 2, cont.)



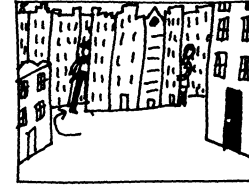
Photo exits up. Husband gestures angrily toward policeman. Cop stomps to get husband in line. He calms down. Cop gestures hand to hat.



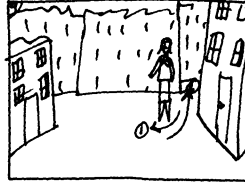
Door closes, then cop turns away.



Red building moves to right (SR) as cop moves in opposite direction, looking behind building for the fugitive wife.



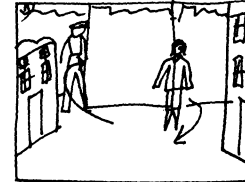
As policeman goes behind central buildings in his search, the woman looks out from behind another. She doesn't know about her husband's scheme, or that the police are looking for her.



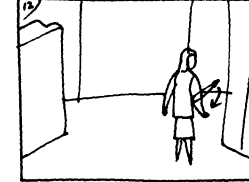
She steps out into open space - we hear the policeman's footsteps as he looks behind buildings. Footsteps and whistling get closer, and woman exits.



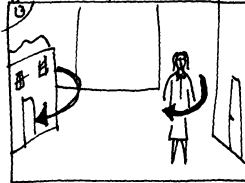
Policeman comes back, thinking he had heard sounds. He scratches head, looks around. She watches surreptitiously.



Seeing no one there, he exits again. She waits a moment, then re-enters the space.



She looks around, looks at her apartment building. She wonders if she's doing the right thing, leaving. She reaches up toward door, then brings hand firmly down instead.



Instead she turns out and around to leave. At the same time, the small building to the left (SR) pivots in the same way.



The building turns and reveals a newsstand with a sleeping man. The newspaper headlines say things like "Woman slashes husband" and "Police search for woman"



She doesn't notice the headlines. She walks toward the stand - he wakes up (lifts his head) She gestures for a paper.



He gives her a paper then puts his head down. (Paper comes from inside stand)

(Scene 2, cont.)

Evidence of Floods

(Scene 2, cont.)

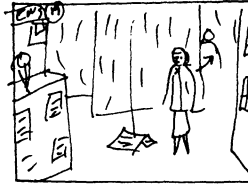
(Scene 2 cont.)



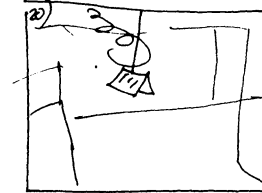
She Reads the paper.



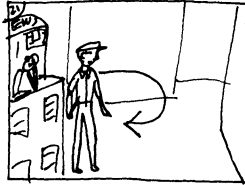
She lets out a gasp (puppeteer makes sound) and drops paper. She has read the story and seen her picture - She knows she is a fugitive now.



She knows also it is a trick to get her back. She backs away from paper and runs away



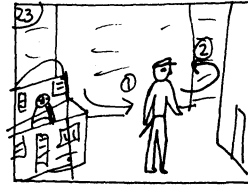
Paper twirls out and over tops of Building



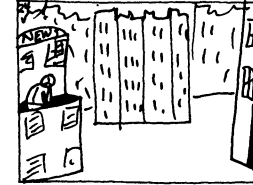
Cop comes back in. (Hear footsteps before we see him. Also we hear whistling)



Man Looks up. Cop gestures to woman's photo on front page of paper. News man points to where she ran.



Cop starts to walk away. He hears footsteps and stops. The footsteps stop. He walks in their direction behind buildings



The footsteps both fade away. The newsman puts his head down and lights fade.

SCENE 3

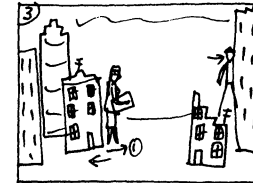
another area of the city. As audience is leaving Scene 2, they hear whistling (cop) from Scene 3, City set includes a moving backdrop.



cop enters, walks around looking behind buildings, whistling.



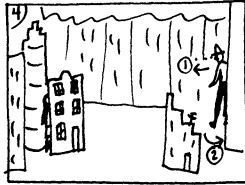
He comes to a stop again, center. He scratches his head. Then he continues his walk right (SL) behind building



As he is exiting (whistling again). She enters - sees him, then backs up, quickly behind building.

Evidence of Floods

Scene 3, cont.



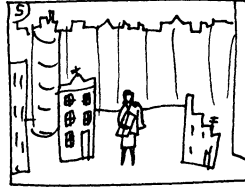
Cop stops whistling, turns to look, doesn't see her. Then he turns back around, continuing on his way, whistling.



She stops, deciding what to do.



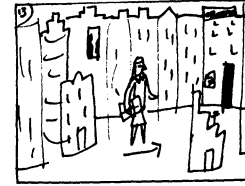
When she reaches the door she stops (backdrop stops). She knocks on the door.



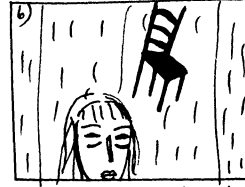
She waits a moment, then comes out from behind, looking around. She is out of breath. She is carrying a package (brown paper wrapping)



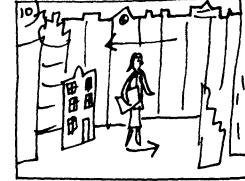
A newspaper blows in and lands at her feet. She kicks it away and starts to run.



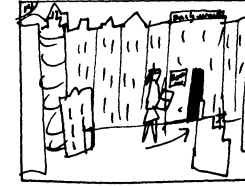
There is no response. She hears whistling faintly in the distance and begins to run again.



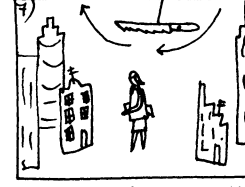
She is overwhelmed and confused. A Red chair, like the Red chairs from Scene 1, floats above her head a few times, then it exits.



She runs to SL. Moving back drop behind her moves in the opposite direction. (She is actually running in place).



She notices ahead a "ROOMS for Rent" sign. When she gets to that building she stops and approaches the door. (Backdrop stops)



She paces (pacing gesture with hands from scene 1) as she paces, a knife floats once in an arc above her head.



She runs for a few seconds. She sees silhouettes in a window ahead.

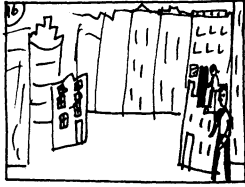


She stops to read the sign. She looks around, seeing no one. She knocks on the door, quietly, but there is no response.

Scene 3, cont.

Evidence of Floods

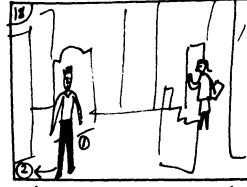
Scene 3
(cont.)



She hears a sound and turns around. She sees her husband - she knows he is looking for her. His arm is bandaged, though there are some bloodstains on bandage.



She watches him walk away, coming back to the door when it seems safe.



She is about to knock when he stops to listen. Hearing nothing, he turns and continues across.



She knocks frantically as he exits. The lights fade down, her knocking continues in the dark.

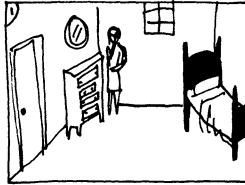
Scene 3

Scene 4 - Slightly different format: Puppeteer stands out front at edge of set, and operates figure by holding it directly with one hand, and rods to the hands with the other hand. There is no proscenium.

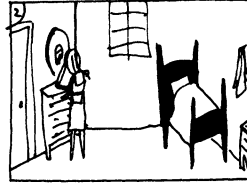


The set itself, while in the same scale basically as the other sets, is divided into 4 identical rooms on a spinning base. There are 4 separate figures of the woman (one for each room). She is dressed differently in each scene, as the story here involves a disguise: she is disguising herself and has a plan to throw her husband (and the cop) off her trail.

Scene 4



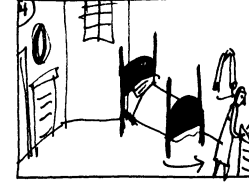
She is in the rooming house. She stands in the corner, her hand on her eye, breathing heavily for about 10 seconds.



Then she steadies herself on the dresser, and turns to look at her black eye in the mirror. Her coat is on a hook on the wall and the brown package is on the nightstand.



She hears a noise and looks toward the door. When she is sure that no one is there, she turns in toward room, pacing

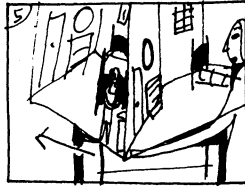


She walks over to package to take black dress out of package. Then puppet is set against bed, and set is turned 1/4, to next room + figure.

Evidence of Floods

Scene 4,
(cont.)

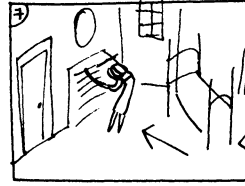
Scene 4



stage is moved to reveal an identical room with figure of woman. She stands at the same spot, holding black dress on her arm



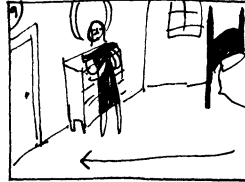
She strokes the fabric of the black dress.



She walks to dresser and looks at her face. She puts hands on dresser top and stretches her back.



Then she holds dress up to herself and looks in mirror - then she turns out and shows the audience the same thing (how the dress will look.)



The puppeteer leans puppet in this position against the dresser, then turns the set again (as in #5) to the third ROOM.



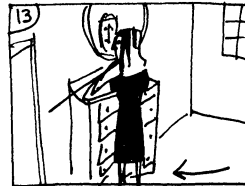
Now she is wearing the black dress (the white nightgown hangs on the bottom of the bed). She brushes dust off the dress and turns.



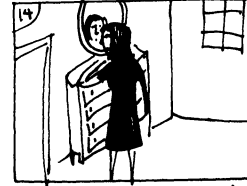
Puppeteer adjusts hem of dress and pulls string to 'zip' up the back of the dress



Now puppeteer uses figure's hand to pick up the paintbrush on dresser, dip it in a small well of paint. She begins to paint the figure's red hair black.



after painting several black streaks, the scene is frozen, and the set is moved another 1/4 turn.



(in 4th identical room) Now she has black hair. She adjusts her hair in the mirror.



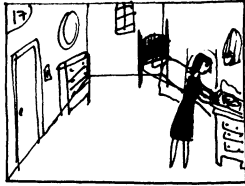
She stands in the middle of the room, arms folded, tapping one hand against arm in thinking gesture.



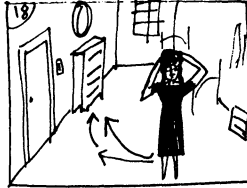
She crosses room and reaches for coat. But she hesitates, as she realizes that this would be recognizable and would blow her cover.

Evidence of Floods

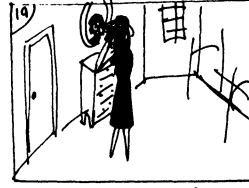
Scene 4,
cont.



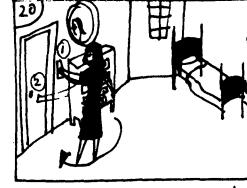
17 Instead, she goes to package on nightstand. There's a hat in there, and she puts it on (Puppeteer places it on figure's head)



18 She adjusts hat to right tilt (it's a black 40's style hat with red net on it). Then she walks toward door, but stops and goes to mirror



19 She checks hat in mirror, then heads back toward door.

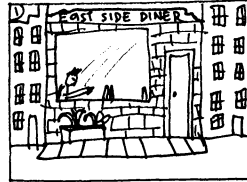


20 She goes to the lightswitch and light goes out (foot pedal for performer) She then reaches for doorknob (end of scene)

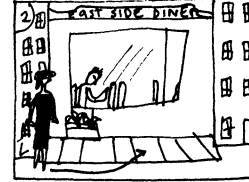
Scene 4

Scene 5

Back outside in the city. We see husband through the window of a diner. We hear footsteps of woman approaching.



1 Husband is sitting in a diner booth - talking to himself and gesticulating. His arm goes up + down as if he is making his point to an invisible listener.



2 Woman walks in, and up onto sidewalk. At first, she doesn't notice him there (although she has been looking for him) She is in her disguise

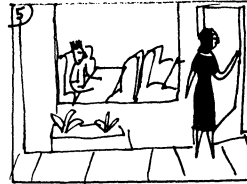


3 She is passing window and stops short. She turns to see if it is really him.

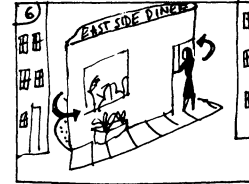
Scene 5



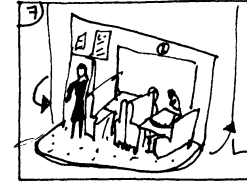
4 She turns to see that it is him. Then she quickly turns back and walks toward the door.



5 As she walks to door to enter diner, he looks up. He notices her, though to him she is an unknown woman, not his wife



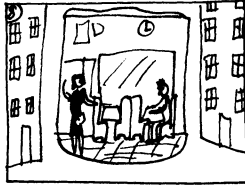
6 As she enters diner, the diner unit swivels - on the other side is the diner inside.



(Diner continues rotating -)

EVIDENCE OF FLOODS

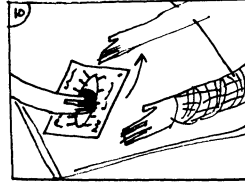
SCENE 5,
(cont.)



she walks into diner (now static). She turns to look at him and he looks up at her. Door closes



she walks toward him. He watches her, curious and somehow expectant



she puts a card down on the table. He picks it up and looks at it

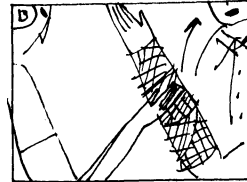


she turns out - as he holds card up to read it, a larger version floats in for the audience: "Private Investigator" and below: "No case too small"

Scene 5, cont



He lays card down and gestures to her. He shows her his bandaged arm. She looks at it.



Then, she reaches out to touch the bandaged arm. He recoils in pain, pulling away from her.



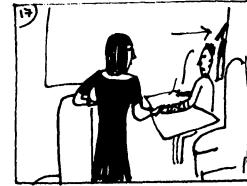
She puts her elbow on top of a booth - she is gesturing to him, indicating that she wants to hear more.



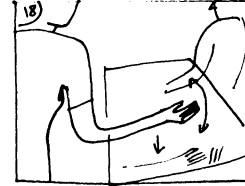
He holds up a picture of his wife, indicating that she is who caused this harm. The now-disguised wife nods.



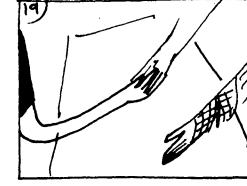
In a minimal way, they gesture back and forth as if in conversation. As they do, a figure of the wife (in jacket as in scene 3) appears on the other side of the window.



The disguised woman catches sight of herself on the other side of the glass. As the man turns to see what she's looking at, she runs away.



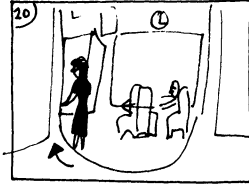
The disguised woman/private eye gestures to get man's attention. She then raps on the table.



They shake hands. He is hiring her to look for herself. (For her, this is her plan to keep him from looking for her)

Evidence of Floods

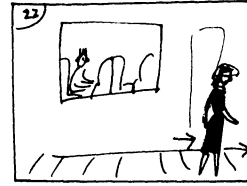
Scene 5,
Cont.



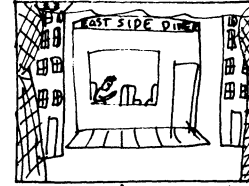
She exits as he watches.
Set turns back
the other direction.



She is again outside
the diner. She stops
for a second to think
He looks at her
through window.



Then she turns and
walks away quickly.
He watches



as she exits behind
edge of proscenium, he
goes back to gesturing
(as he was at beginning of scene -
talking to himself.) Lights
fade - end of scene

Scene 6

The set is a
series of rooftops.
In the back are
taller buildings.
The red apartment
building that the
couple live(d) in is
at Right (SL) (Just
top few floors)



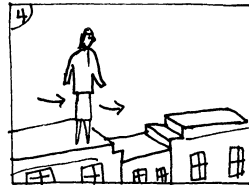
The first woman is
Running along the top
of the building at back
(this is Woman A, the
original figure). These
figures are quite small (8")



The second woman (the
private eye: Woman B)
enters, also on Rooftops,
Chasing woman A.



while Woman-B is still
on Building in back,
Woman-A appears on
the larger rooftop (they
are the same size figures
as in other scenes).



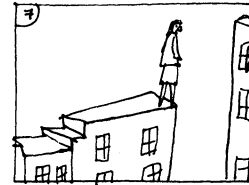
She looks around
as she walks along
the top.



She comes to a stop
and thoughts of poison,
a knife, and a gun
swirl above her head.



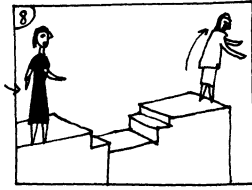
This time, however, she
is not just thinking about
killing her husband. She
walks toward the edge
of the roof.



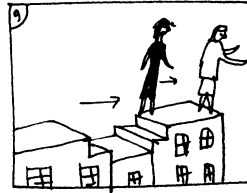
as she stands there, she
sees her apartment building.
A silhouette of her husband
appears in a top window.
Then the light in the window
is turned off, so he disappears.

EVIDENCE of FLOODS

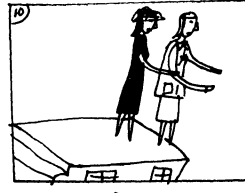
Scene 6
cont.



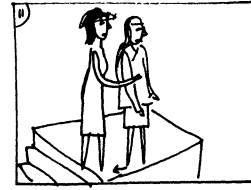
As Woman-B arrives on the rooftop, Woman-A leans out over the edge as if to jump.



As she is poised there, Woman-B walks with care toward her.

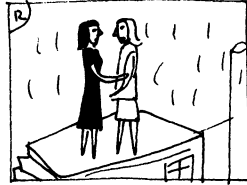


Woman-B puts her arm out and gently touches Woman-A's arm. She pulls her back from the edge.

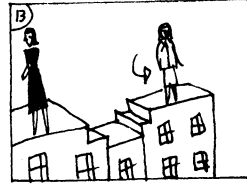


She backs her up three steps (slowly, pausing at each step.)

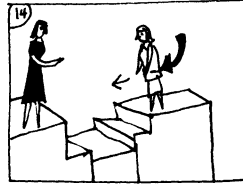
scene 6



Woman-B turns woman-A to face her. They look at each other



Woman-B turns to leave the rooftop. Woman-A stays still for a moment

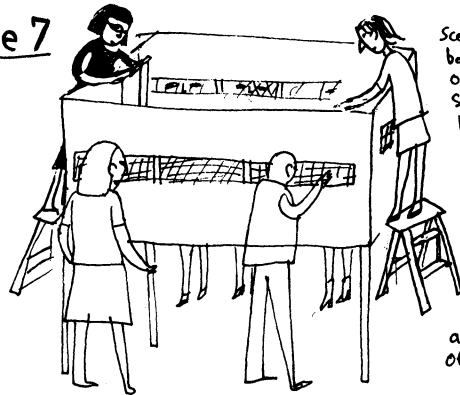


Woman-B gestures to woman-A to follow her. She starts in her direction.



as they walk off, the lights fade. (End of Scene.)

Scene 7



Scene 7 is a four-walled booth with eye-slots on the 2 long sides. The audience looks in through the slots. The set is another version of the green interior of the Rooming house Rented ROOM.

All set pieces are flat, instead of 3-D



(viewed from front side). Woman-A and B are now merged again. The black dress is on the table.

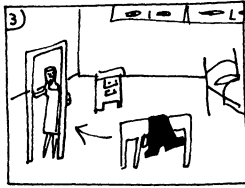


The woman leans against the table, breathing heavily. The eyes of viewers on the other side look in.

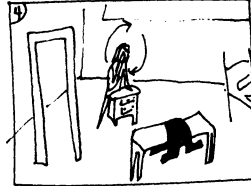
EVIDENCE of FLOODS

Scene 7

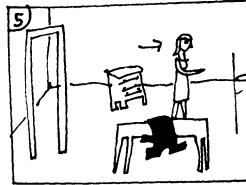
cont.



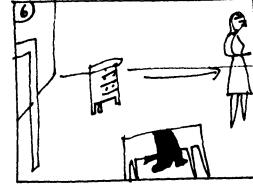
3) She walks toward door and looks out. Then she walks slowly, thinking, to the other side of the room



4) She hears a noise and leans against nightstand, swooning dizzily.



5) When she regains her balance, she continues walking. There is a feeling that she is overwhelmed.

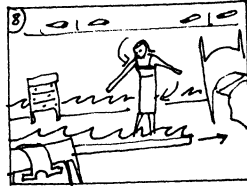


6) Walking and thinking gestures with hand. Suddenly, she hears the whistling of the policeman.

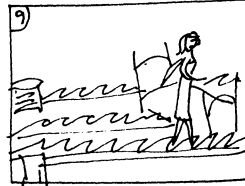
Scene 7 cont.



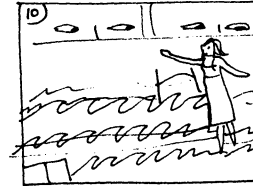
7) She turns to the left, then to the right quickly, then back - trying to determine where he is, and what to do. Feeling of panic.



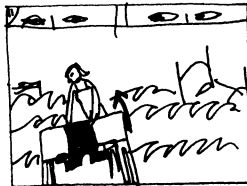
8) as she stands there, paper waves move into the room. She is frantic



9) She runs away from them, but more waves enter, bigger + bigger each time



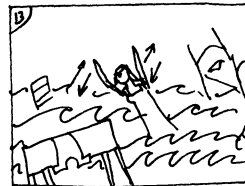
10) A large wave enters and pushes her back. She runs to the table



11) she leans on table for support, breathing heavily. The table moves suddenly up, as if of its own accord



12) all of the furniture begins to move, upending themselves. She looks back + forth frantically.



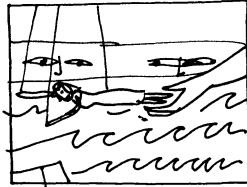
13) She moves her arms up + down, flailing.



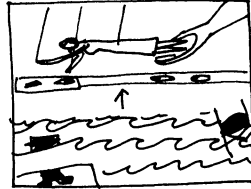
14) This brings her gradually to a horizontal position. She is trying to swim out of the flood.

EVIDENCE OF FLOODS

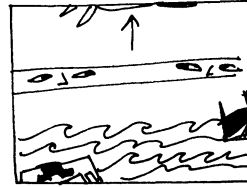
Scene 7,
cont.



A hand comes in to support the legs and assist the swimming



She swims straight up, above the waves

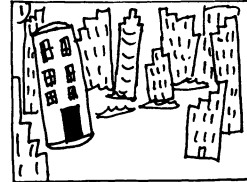


she swims up and out of sight, as the lights fade out

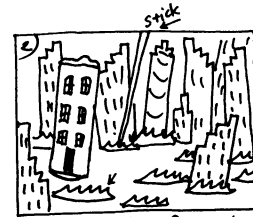
Scene 7,
cont.

end of scene 7.

Scene 8: Back out in the city - the whole city begins to fill with waves. Her Red apartment building is on the left (SR). It is rocking back & forth (foot pedal) during the whole scene, unless specified otherwise. All of the buildings are at a slant, sinking in the flood.

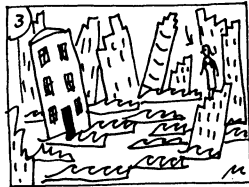


The building is rocking back and forth as the lights come up.

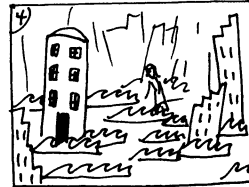


Scene 8

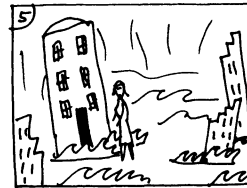
With a stick from above, performer pushes waves further into scenic space - the city is filling up with water.



once the city has filled with waves, the woman enters from back corner.



she skirts through the waves, navigating her way. She stops when she sees her building, swaying.



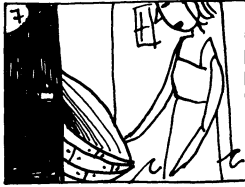
After a pause, she moves toward the building until she is in front of it. The building slows down to a stop.



She gestures toward the door and it opens, slowly.

Evidence of Floods

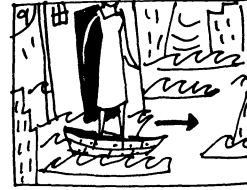
Scene 8,
cont.



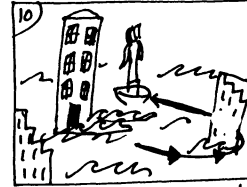
A small boat emerges through the doorway



She watches the boat as it settles into the water - then she steps onto the boat.



She begins to move (st) and, as she does, the house begins to rock again.



She navigates around a downstage building, heading deeper into the space. As she does, we hear footsteps.

Scene 8
cont



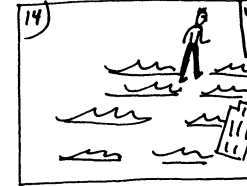
as she gets further back, away from her home, her husband enters. He sees her with a start



He watches as she seems to be getting away.



As she disappears behind a building, he pushes his way through the waves. His footsteps are heavy and rhythmic,

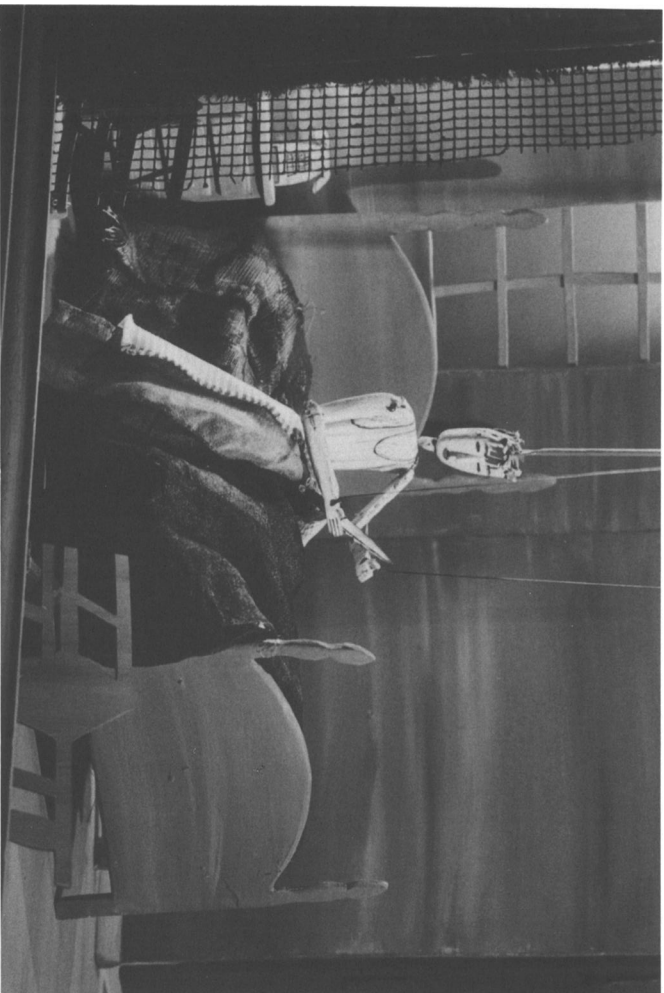


She disappears, he continues behind her.



the building continues to rock as his footsteps fade. Fade to black.

(end of performance)



Evidence of Floods, Scene 1. Photo: Courtesy Richard Termue.



Evidence of Floods, Scene 8. Photo: Courtesy Richard Termue.

PERFORMING ARTS JOURNAL, NO. 56 (1997) PP. 47-63; © 1997
The Johns Hopkins University Press