

DIRECTIONS

Deconstructing L'Office

The banality of cubicle life, viewed in a French movie. No, dance. No ...

When is a show that includes movement, songs, speech, objects and film not a dance, not a piece of theater, not a musical comedy, not a movie and not performance art? When it's Grand Magasin's "Fifth International Forum of Corporate Cinema," opening at St. Ann's Warehouse on Thursday night, as part of the citywide Act French Festival through Dec. 15. Two former dancers, François Hiffler and Pascale Murtin — fed up, as Ms. Murtin put it, "with this constant business of virtuosity, of sweat, of daily training" — have tried their best to forget everything they know about choreographed movement and create unidentified theatrical objects. For their first piece, in 1982, they discovered that using speech "offered a wealth of possibilities since we were able to express tons of things without having to budge," Ms. Murtin said.

Since then Mr. Hiffler and Ms. Murtin and their collaborators have expressed many other things, according to the following rules: no unfamiliar references; no props that can't be bought at a supermarket; no stories; no movement that couldn't be done by nondancers.

This may all invoke thoughts of the Judson Church group in the 1960's and the choreographer Yvonne Rainer's manifes-

to, which began: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe."

But Grand Magasin have rather less lofty concerns as they present their latest take on the minutiae of daily life. This time around, they have taken on the conundrums of the modern office.

"I want a plant, but no carpeting," one member of the troupe says during the performance. "I want carpeting, but no air-conditioning," another replies. "I want air-conditioning, but absolutely no music, because then you can't hear when people speak," a third says.

Susan Feldman, the artistic director of St. Ann's Warehouse, said: "They'll take something trivial, like 'bring me the white folder' and turn it into an elaborate negotiation that is very funny. They poke fun at situations that underlie more serious things, like the process of decision making, showing us that obstructionism goes deep into our business and political culture. They're a little like a French Monty Python; they have a 70's retro style, with a wink and a nod."

Mr. Hiffler interjected, "Above all, we want to entertain while trying to define ourselves as little as possible."

ROSLYN SULCAS

