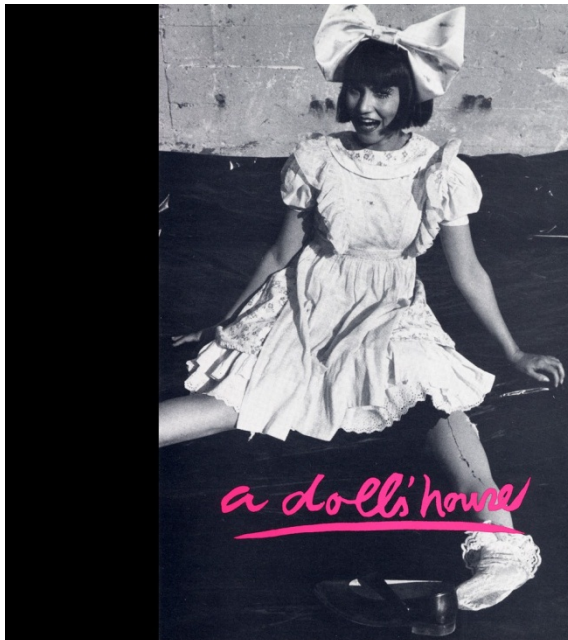


THE FORMER MISS BARSTOW WITH EVERY TOM, DICK AND HARRY IN A DOLL'S HOUSE 1987

Richard Newton

The Former Miss Barstow with every Tom, Dick and Harry in a doll's house was the convergence of a few paths I had been following. The summer olympics returned to Los Angeles in 1984. Adjacent to the games, a large international cultural festival was organized. Among many, it featured choreographer Pina Bausch and the theatre of Jerzy Grotowski. It was a great event and very successful. Three years later, in 1987, Los Angeles wanted to host another international festival.

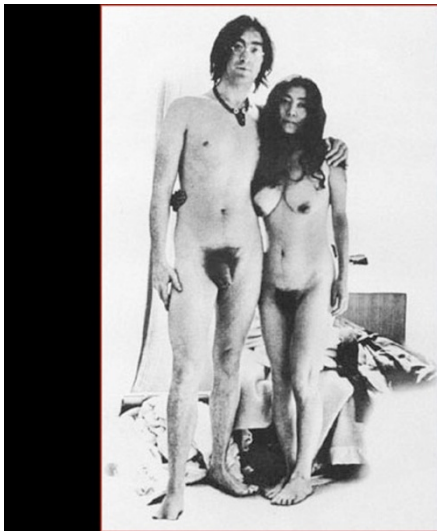


Richard Newton
presents
the Former Miss Barstow
with every Tom, Dick + Harry
in
a doll's house
Saturday September 19. 8.00
Sunday September 20. 8.00^{pm}
315 S. Hewitt St. L.A.
(parking lot next to Al's Bar
in Downtown)
Admission \$9.00
Information + Tickets
213. 680. 4052 - 213. 617. 7501

FRINGE

photo: Rick Castro, design: Ann Field and Clive Percy

Several Los Angeles arts organizations and individual artists had been left out in 1984. They were upset that they were not included, again! The L.A. Festival organization tossed some seed money their way to organize a Fringe Festival, modeled on the famous one in Edinburgh. I rented a parking lot and presented 2 productions. Newton's Outdoor Walk-in Film House, and A Doll's House.



John Lennon and Yoko Ono
front cover "Two Virgins" album, 1968
photo: Michael Ochs/Getty Images



cover photo
"The Yuppie Handbook"
2nd Edition

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* allowed me to explore the values and morals of the free-living hippies as they became upwardly mobile married adults. Having lived through the sexual revolution and the fast times of the late sixties, seventies and early eighties, their moral compasses were being tested by the intimate threat of the HIV virus.



American magazine advertisement, 1950's



Nuclear Family, Pukio © 2010, deviantART

Some viewers have been thrown off by my cast of characters. In my adaptation, Torvald is now Tom, Dr. Rank is Dr. Dick, Christine becomes Harry/Harriet, and Krogstad is The Former Miss Barstow. The new wrinkles and quirks are there to update the play to the relationships of family, friends and community in the mid-eighties. Of course it helps if you lived in West Hollywood or the Castro in San Francisco.



"Dynasty," 1980's American Television show with Joan Collins, John Forsythe, and Linda Evans

My extended title, *The Former Miss Barstow* with every Tom, Dick and Harry is a reference to sexual promiscuity. Looking back, what strikes me, is that I kept Nora as Nora. Despite the Suffragette and Feminist movements, the Nora's in our society were still as confined as Ibsen's Nora.



still, "Through a Glass Darkly," Ingmar Bergman, 1961, with Max Von Sydow and Harriet Anderson

Like many students around the world, I first read Ibsen's plays in high school. I was also discovering the films of Bergman, so the Scandinavian psyche was weighing heavy on my already angst driven life. I moved on to Fellini, Antonioni, and Godard, and honestly did not think about Ibsen, see any of his plays, or movie versions of his plays.



Halloween in West Hollywood, California, 2011, posted on Gossiptool blog by www.shawebdesign.com

I was working in a clothing store in West Hollywood in the late seventies and early eighties. Lunch was usually picked up next door at a deli simply named EATS. One of the owners got sick, very sick, and died. The clothing store morphed into a fashion business. Our sales representatives got sick, very sick, and died. HIV and AIDS became everyday life.



Center for Attitudinal Healing poster, 1987

Keith Haring AIDS poster, 1989

When I was asked by the Fringe Festival to participate, I wanted to do something not so much about living or dying with AIDS, but about the community's and society's judgments and morality regarding sex, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual orientation and identity. Ibsen's *A Doll's House* popped up from the back of my mind.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

I am not a playwright. My background is art and performance art, not theatre. So, why wouldn't I just take Ibsen's play and stage it as written? The key for me was adapting the cast of characters. The husband Tom is a doctor who has just been promoted to head of the hospital. One of Tom's first programs will be to convince the member of the community to be tested for HIV. What Tom does not know, is that Nora has already taken the HIV test and is awaiting the results.



photos: Rick Castro, Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Nora's childhood friend, Harry, who left town as a man has returned as the woman, Harriet. Nora feels compelled to tell Harriet that she must find out if she is HIV positive, because she has been involved in an extramarital affair.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Tom's childhood friend who won the title of Miss Barstow, only to change her sex to masculine, but never to escape her fifteen minutes of fame, is now The Former Miss Barstow. He works as a lab technician at the hospital, and has intercepted Nora's HIV test results to use them to blackmail her.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Oddly, balance is maintained, whereas Harry and Miss Barstow were unable to be together when they were younger, Harriet and The Former Miss Barstow are on their way to making a life together.



photos: Eric Engler, Jan Deen

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012, Jan Deen © 1987

Tom's friend and Nora's confidant, Doctor Dick is not so lucky. On the surface, he is apparently a homosexual. However, he is truly bi-sexual, with an unrequited love for Nora. I believe I kept the core of Ibsen's characters. I simply nudged and adapted their roles to fit a contemporary situation.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Sets: In Act One, I stayed true to my parking lot stage and placed four cars with Tom, Dr. Dick, Harry, and The Former Miss Barstow in each of the cars at the top of the play. In Los Angeles, everyone lives in their cars, so it seemed a natural choice. Harry and the Former Miss Barstow, both have very functional cars, in contrast to their over the top personalities.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Tom has the most business-like car, fitting his position at the hospital. Although, the car Tom is sitting in is his and Nora's "home," she is never seen sitting in the car. In some ways, the car feels more like Tom's study.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Nora keeps her wardrobe and personal belongings in the trunk. She washes the car and circles it while speaking with Tom. But she never enters the car. The car remains Tom's domain, his castle, only to be tended to by Nora.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Dr. Dick sits in a convertible, the sexiest car on the set and the only car Nora is seen sitting inside.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

In Act Two, bathrooms, toilets, bathtubs and sinks take over the stage. Everything is gleaming white, kept that way by the Maid who is constantly cleaning and disinfecting with bleach. When I was a kid, we were all so bored to have to come in the house to take a bath,



photo: Jan Deen

Jan Deen © 1987

that friends used to hang out with each other in the bathroom to keep each other company. As adults, we all love to hang out in the kitchen. The setting for Act Two is a mix of sanitized hospital whites and life and conversations taking place in intimate spaces.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

In Act Three, I simply wanted to give an abstract representation of the famous A Doll's House door. Five door frames with a door representing each of the main characters. Each doorway is lit by an overhead "street" lamp. These are the only stage lights for Act Three. The action takes place with the characters coming and going through the doors.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Nora makes her final exit through each of the five doors. The play ends with *The Former Miss Barstow* reprising her song from Act One, while passing through each of the five doors.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Costumes

Act One

Tom is dressed as the Surgeon General. His crisp whites are adorned with a sash and medals. His hat is crowned with plastic planes and rockets.



General Hershey Bar and General Wastmoreland
photo: Mark Daughhette, 1970

Tom Dunphy, General Wastmoreland, circa 1970

Tom's costume is inspired by General Wastmoreland, an anti-war activist from the sixties.



still, Twilight Zone TV episode, "Five Characters in Search of an Exit," 1961

There is also a reference to a Twilight Zone episode in which five characters, including a clown, a hobo, a ballet dancer, a major and a bagpiper are trapped in a cylinder. With the help of the others, the major is able to escape. We find out that he and the others are all toys, when the major is found lying on the ground by a little girl. In our play, Tom is the leader of the dolls trapped in the circumstances of a doll's house.



photos: Rick Castro, Eric Engler
Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

credit card images culled from the internet

Nora is dressed as Princessa Ballerina. Nothing bad can happen in her world. She is immune to worries and hardship. She is able to fend off sickness and depression with the flick of her credit card.



photos: Rick Castro, Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Harriet has been a wanderer, a hobo, and has returned to his hometown dressed in a modest suit, ready to work. I originally had Harriet dressed as a Creole Mama, but it was too over the top for an actor who is already over the top.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Former Miss Barstow wears a neutral cat suit. When we first meet her in a flashback during Act 1, she has just won the title of Miss Barstow, having bested Nora, who was runner-up.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Doctor Dick is dressed as Pierrot, the sad clown who desires the love of Nora. Only his heart is ruled by the clown. His wit is sharp and acidic.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Child's costume is part smurf, part troll, with felt fabric, green skin make-up and tall blue hair. She is the one character dressed as a doll outside the human realm, somewhere closer to Oz.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Maid is classic, slightly sexy French, and consistently wearing the same outfit throughout the play. When she is not cleaning, she is punctuating scenes with thrown and dropped teacups and letters taken and delivered on silver trays.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Act Two

Tom and Doctor Dick appear in their doctor coats and surgical gloves. Dr. Dick wears a full leg brace and uses a crutch. He is both doctor and patient.



photos: Rick Castro, Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Former Miss Barstow, The Child and Harriet are dressed in white nurse uniforms.



photo: Gilbert Mercier

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

At the end of Act 2, scene 4, *The Former Miss Barstow* exits the stage carried on a stretcher.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Nora wears a straitjacket. She is working on the dress she will wear for the Tarantella and she asks Harriet to help her. Nora's straitjacket is a comment on her marital confinement, her frantic mental state of mind and her desperate desire to liberate her spirit.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Act Three

Befitting the very sparse set of five doors, Tom, Dr. Dick, Harriet, The Former Miss Barstow, and The Child are all wearing a version of the same costume. A white hoody and a large black hoop petticoat. The costume is both period in its reference to women's undergarments and contemporary in its use of gangsta fashion.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Nora continues to wear the dress in which she danced the tarantella. It has become an outward symbol of her liberation from the materialistic bondage of being the perfect little wife, and the intellectual bondage of being thought to have no mind of her own.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

A few specific comments regarding the macaroons, the Tarantella, the silk stockings and the end of the play. I originally staged "The Former Miss Barstow with every Tom, Dick, and Harry in a doll's house," in 1987. Nora is in her mid-thirties, maybe late-thirties, and Tom is late-thirties, even early-forties. They and their friends are children of the Sixties, and this affects all four moments in question.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Macaroons

The macaroons are present in both acts 1 and 2. In act 1, when confronted by Dr. Dick about the presence of forbidden macaroons, Nora deflects her guilt onto Harriet, declaring falsely that it was Harriet who brought them into the house and offered them. Like the casual drug user, she uses the excuse that she doesn't buy the drugs, she just uses them in social situations, to be polite. At the end of act 2, although Nora is in a straitjacket, she goes into a frenzy at the mere promise of macaroons being served with the champagne. Traditionally, this is seen as another secret she is keeping from Tom, and something that foreshadows Nora's rebellion against Tom's authority within their marriage. I use the macaroons as a reference to addiction, whether it be food, drugs or sex. In act 3, Nora encourages Tom to take drugs with her, and to go smoke a joint. For his part, Tom accuses Nora of being an adulteress slut and a drug crazed hippy who swallowed anything she was handed without asking what it was and slept with anyone who flopped on their floor without asking who they were.

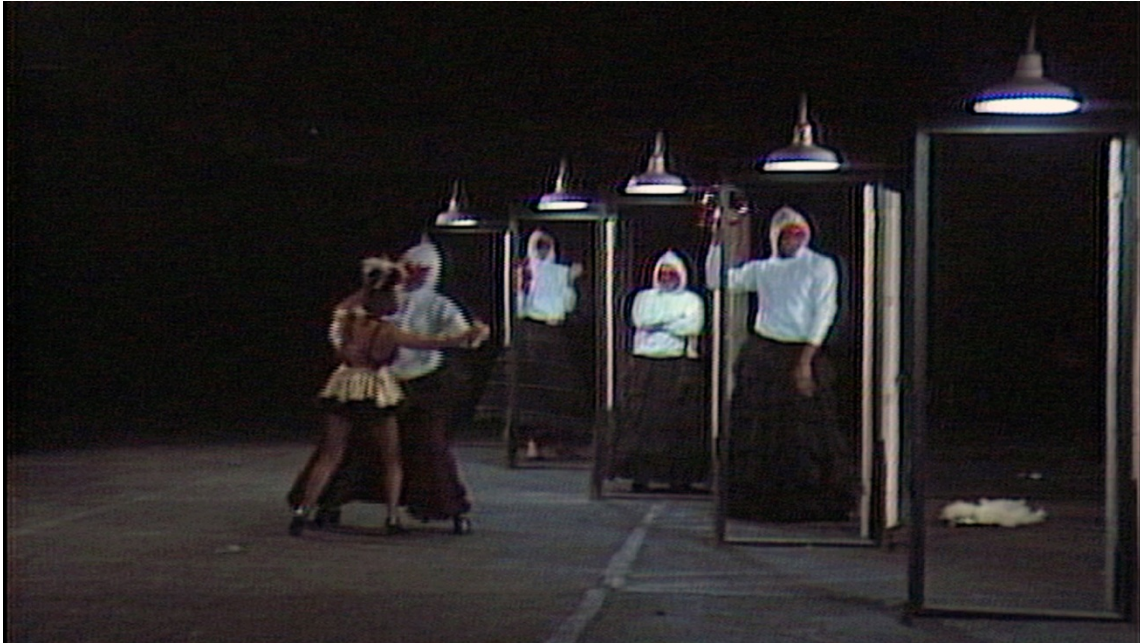


photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The Tarantella

The parking lot venue and sparse doorway staging provided an opportunity to choreograph a big dance number. The Tarantella is one of four places where I stop the play for a musical or dance number. I have always loved the golden era of Hollywood musicals and Bollywood. The opportunity to insert a musical number into the action is a delight.

Both Harriet and The Former Miss Barstow are playing the tambourine. Tom is fuming in doorway number 3. Nora dances her Tarantella with Dr. Dick.



still, "The Masque of the Red Death
with Vincent Price; Roger Corman, 1964

photo: Eric Engler
Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Everyone is wearing a red masque, a reference to Poe's Masque of the Red Death, and the plague (AIDS). Nora dances her Tarantella with Dr. Dick, because in early Tarantella folklore, the dance was meant as a cure for a hysterical disease. In Dr. Dick's case, the hysteria is rooted in his gayness, which in turn has brought on his infection with HIV/AIDS, the "gay disease." Even as we think of ourselves and our society as modern, we succumb to mythologies, poor science, bad religion and urban legend when the plague comes knocking on our door, or lives next door. This brings us around to asking if Nora is dancing the Tarantella to cure her own hysterical disease. In her case, this would be marriage as defined by Tom.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The *Silk Stockings*: Act 2, scene 3 opens with Tom reading while he sits on the toilet (his study). He is expecting Dr. Dick, but Nora finds Dr. Dick and tells him Tom is busy, so that she may talk with him and ask if he'd be willing to do her a favor. Dr. Dick is also sitting on a toilet, one arm in a sling, a neck and leg brace, and his crutch resting nearby. Nora, wrapped in her straitjacket approaches him,



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

then straddles his legs and sits tête-à-tête. The essence of the silk stockings is embedded in the dialog and action, which suggests a lap dance. The wardrobe also elicits a bondage subtext.



stills, "Tom Jones," Tony Richardson, 1963 with Albert Finney and Joyce Redman

I always loved the eating scene in the movie "Tom Jones," and I played out the scene between Dr. Dick and Nora thinking of Tom Jones and Mrs. Waters.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Distraught by Nora's rejection, Dr. Dick sings an abbreviated version of The Beatles "When I'm Sixty-Four." He then addresses the audience with direct references to his affliction, his imminent death and a reminder that we, not he, will be growing old. This is both a reference to AIDS, and the 1960's mantra from the Who, that "I hope I die before I get old."

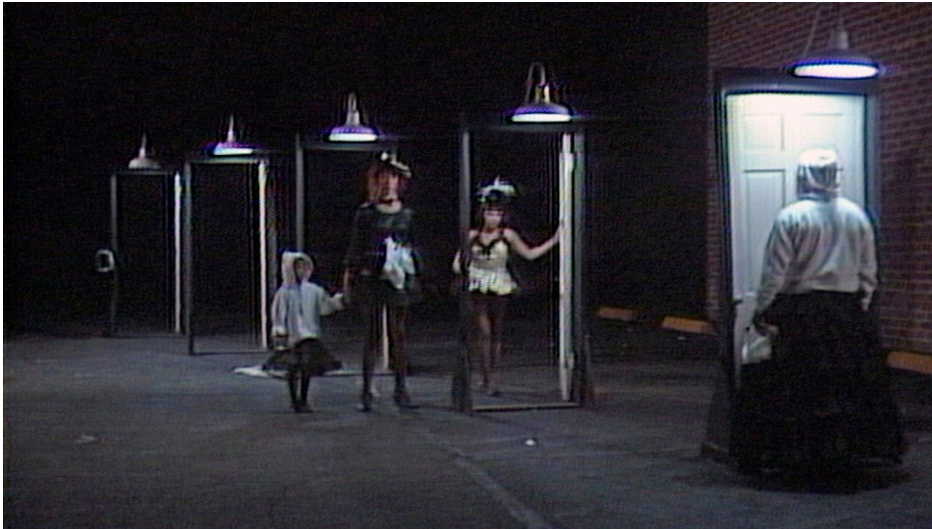


photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

The End: As Tom and Nora's marriage falls apart in Act 3, Nora comes to a realization of something more important than trying to hold together the sham of their marriage. She leaves Tom to make room in her life to take care of her dying best friend, Dr. Dick. Nora passes through each of the five doors as she exits. At each door she turns to face the audience as she closes the door. There is no door slam. Nora is very deliberate and purposeful.



photos: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

Music begins to play and The Former Miss Barstow enters. He reprises his song from Act 1. This song is an adaptation of a song performed by an innocent young girl in the musical HAIR. The Former Miss Barstow sings in a slow laconic voice, recalling her youth as Miss Barstow, when both she and Nora had a crush on Harry. As he sings, he opens and walks through each of the doors that Nora has just closed.



photo: Eric Engler

Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

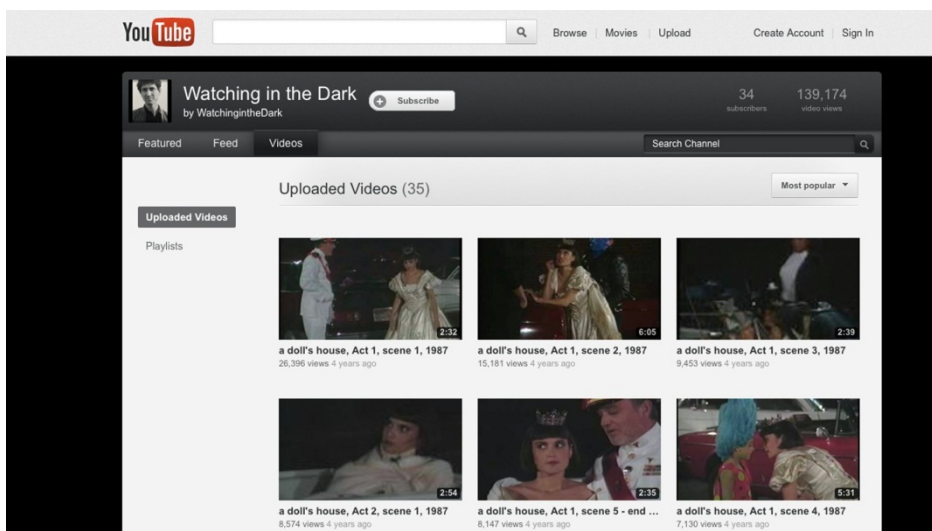
A man who was born a woman, sings a song about a man who became a woman, while he opens the doors closed by a marriage. I cannot quite untangle this transgender conundrum. Simply put, the song serves as an anthem to a time where relationships were more likely to lead to heartbreak, but less likely to end in death.



photo: Eric Engler

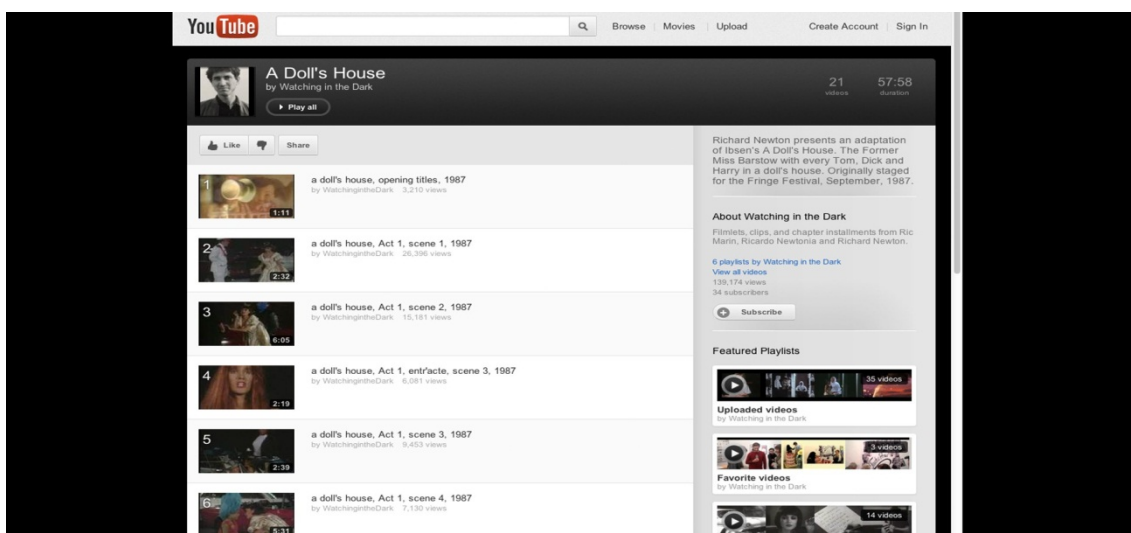
Richard Newton © 1987, 2012

For me, 1987 marked a time when simple notions of relationships and marriage were over. In 2008, we had a woman who is legally a man giving birth to a child, and the fight for gay marriage is in the middle of a long battle. Our cultures continue to expand and contract.



screenshot, my YouTube channel, "Watching in the Dark"

To finish, I'd like to mention YouTube and play one scene for you from *A Doll's House*. I have been showing films at festivals, and in Ciné Clubs, galleries and museums for more than thirty years. However, I wanted to reach people outside those walls. YouTube enables one to reach out to the world.



screenshot, my YouTube channel, "Watching in the Dark"

I decided to upload *Traction Avenue*, a 52 minute film, which naturally broke down into 13 chapters. I put the chapters up one by one, every two to four weeks. It was my idea, that in this way, I could build an audience for my eccentric offerings. I would give them "episodes" and a reason to return to my channel. Next, I began uploading *A Doll's House*, scene by scene.



screenshot, my YouTube channel, "Watching in the Dark"

I started getting comments and notes from school kids who were studying Ibsen. They were either bewildered, or grateful because they were bored with the way *A Doll's House* was presented in the classroom and happy to see what I had done with the play. It gave them a new energy for something they thought was old and written for their grandmothers. I leave you with a hyperlink to *A Doll's House* clip from my YouTube channel, "Watching in the Dark."

<http://youtu.be/NWRVIQ5ENg>

Act 1, scene 2, video clip from YouTube

Reference listImages

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front cover “Two Virgins” album, 1968 photo: Michael Ochs/Getty Images

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Nuclear Family, Pukio © 2010, deviantART

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Biographical note

Richard Newton was born in Oakland, California, 1948. He currently lives in Pasadena, California. He holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of California at Irvine where he studied with Ed Moses, John Mason, Vija Celmins, Phil Leider and Barbara Rose, along with many other brilliant artist-professors.

Richard Newton has shown artworks, artists' books, films & videos and presented live performances and site-specific installations throughout the world. His one-of-a-kind books were shown at DOCUMENTA VI in Kassel, Germany. Some performances by Newton have found him in unusual places. For the PUBLIC SPIRIT FESTIVAL, the audience found him performing behind a chained door in a downtown derelict hotel. Titled, "Get Under The Table, Don't Look at the Windows," this performance dealt with alcoholism, family relationships, the nature of infinity and the threat of nuclear destruction. In another performance, the audience found "The Man Who Could Eat Glass" locked in his hotel room, ruminating on what it means to be American and to be held hostage. The meaning of "hostage" was expanded to include being held by a foreign government, being held with criminal intent, being held by the mental illness of one's own mind, and being held under the addiction to alcohol.

In the Skid Row area of downtown Los Angeles, Richard constructed "The Grotto." It featured a well of beer, which was constantly refilled from The Grotto's seeping walls of beer cans. At New York's P.S. 1, he constructed "Yucca Flat," an isolated desert landscape. The entire landscape, which filled an entire room in the gallery, was manufactured from flattened tin cans, broken beer bottles, and slices of bread. The

only sounds were the intermittent crying of a baby and the persistent yelping of a small dog.

Newton's early art films and videos have shown at museums, galleries, ciné clubs, festivals, and on cable television. Richard's "Flying with the Angels," directed and produced with Nancy Ferguson, won many awards and screened at festivals and independent venues around the world. Another of Newton's short films, "Swift Nudes," won first prize at Certamen Internacional de Cine Ciutat D'Igualada, Barcelona, Spain. Richard Newton's first feature film, "small white house" won the award for Best First Feature and was runner-up as best film in the festival at the 19th Festival Internacional de Cinema, Figueira da Foz, Portugal. "small white house" also won at the ARCO '91, 1st Exhibition of Experimental Cinema, Madrid, Spain.

Summary

Julie Holledge, panel chairperson and member of the International Ibsen Committee, invited myself along with 3 others to participate in the Inaugural Artists' Keynote Panel: Applied Ibsen on Four Continents: The Artists' Intentions.

My presentation focused on "The Former Miss Barstow with every Tom, Dick and Harry in a doll's house." This was an adaptation of Ibsen's "A Doll's House" produced and staged in Los Angeles, California, 1987. For the XIIIth International Ibsen Conference at the University of Tromsø, Norway, I projected images; a few found on the internet, and many from the production itself, as well as a video clip shown streaming live from YouTube.

The article describes the social context of the 80s, analyzes the reinterpretation of Ibsen's characters, and sets out to explain the symbology of the sets and costumes. I also touch on the differences between this production and Ibsen's original in four important aspects. These would be the macaroons, the Tarantella, the silk stockings and the end of the play.

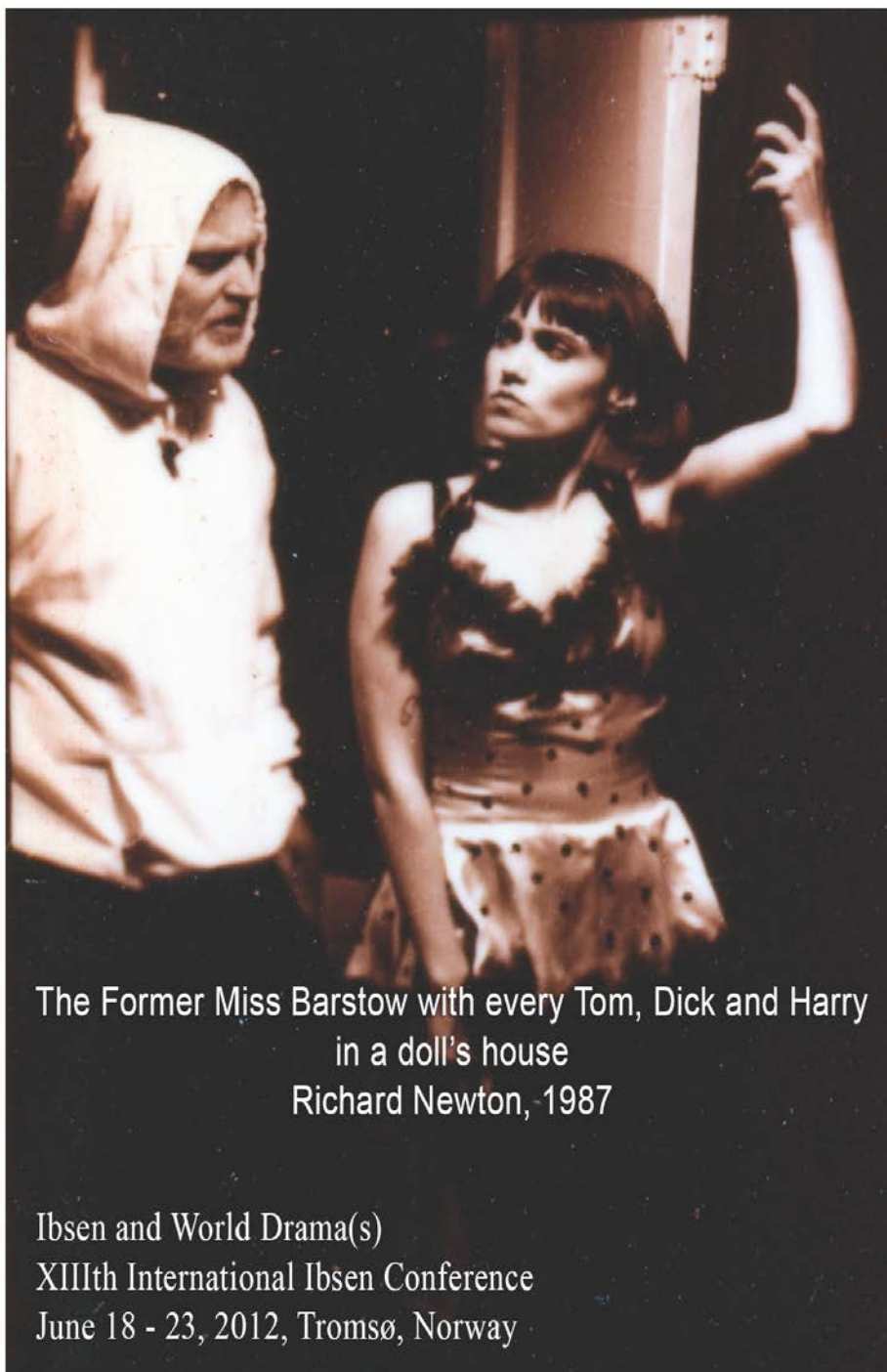
Finally, I explain my decision to upload this version of "A Doll's House," scene by scene, to my page on YouTube. Having shown films and videos for many years at festivals around the globe, I was looking for a way to step outside that box and reach an international audience just beyond my keyboard. In all of these ways, the goal has been to illuminate the ways in which an artist takes Ibsen's text and applies it to the specific social context of their time and culture.

Keywords

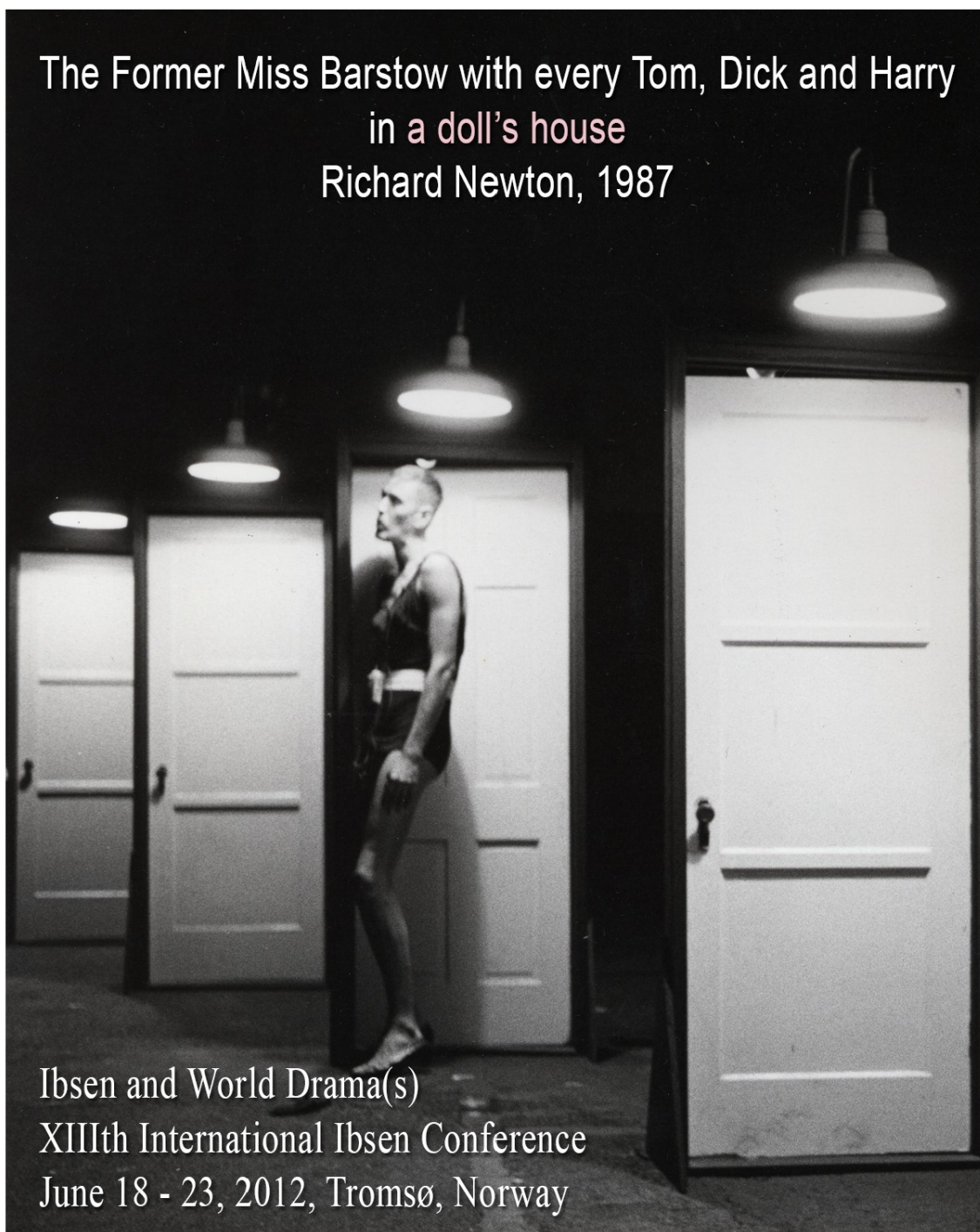
HIV, AIDS, parking lot, Los Angeles, performance art, dada, 1980s, Richard Newton, hospital, bathroom

Appendix

I sent out 2 announcements referencing the XIIIth International Ibsen Conference.



The Former Miss Barstow with every Tom, Dick and Harry
in a doll's house
Richard Newton, 1987



Ibsen and World Drama(s)
XIIIth International Ibsen Conference
June 18 - 23, 2012, Tromsø, Norway