Clumps of brains, entrails neatly spread on the tables. A meal of liver on the floor. The Austrian takes his time. He has cases and bottles of the liquid which will drench everything in a common bath. He begins just mildly saturating each clump of the staining the white it sits on. I'm losing my taste or patience for a verbal transcription. The oblations are the blood; the man, the bull; the virgin, the paschal lamb. One is to the other as milkweed to milkweed. Yes there is a chorus. The ancient ancestral voice of the dithyramb. A beautiful terrifying noise. All at once of shrill whistles and screams and pots-and-pans of kitchen brass shattering cymbals. Yes the place becomes a holy mess. A holy hurricane of blood. A riot of red. A holocaust of bodies. This is a catechism and a cataclysm. The baptism by the fire. The remembrance of things past. The resurrection and the life. “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins.” This is the eye of insanity of the dissolution of boundary. A consummation devoutly to be wished. Inferno Purgatorio Paradiso.

March 21, 1968

OVER HIS DEAD BODY

I was privileged to be present Friday night, March 21, at Judson Church, at the most unusual manifestation of a performer-audience situation I have witnessed in a decade of attending a theatre in which the performer-audience relationship has been pushed in every conceivable direction. Unusual is a mild word for it. It was a kind of psychological trauma involving two principals and the rest of us in a spontaneous drama expressing the agony and the comedy of the condition called human. The occasion was the Destruction in Art Symposium preceded by Destruction events in Judson's backyard.
The atmosphere in the yard was a bit like a bazaar—the spectators milling around passing from one setup to another: an excerpt from Hermann Nitsch’s Orgy-Mystery theatre; Lil Pink with plastic bags full of feathers set to flaming on a charred knot of wood; Steve Rose standing by a frying pan on a hot plate of fried meat; Bici Hendricks handing out cooking an orange and a banana; Sydney North’s chicken-killing event was the first presentiment of a rumble nobody expected. The two live chickens were strung up from trees several yards apart. John Wilcock calmly cut the chickens down and, assisted by Michael Kirby, made off with them to an adjoining yard to release them over a high fence. Ortiz later said he was delighted the chickens were rescued. He accepted the frustration of his plans as a worthwhile event in itself and reprogrammed himself by subsequently attacking the two trees (he climbed one, Jon Hendricks the other), sawing a limb off each after a preparation (pouring) of the cow’s blood originally to have been part of the chicken scene. The attitude Ortiz assumed about the interference in his thing became relevant to the amazing drama that ensued inside at a scheduled panel of the artists involved. A soapbox orator from the yard, whose hysterical blather was punctuated with a few brilliant remarks, threatened to dominate proceedings in the lecture room. Hendricks, Ortiz, and Hansen accepted him without relinquishing their own purpose and somehow finally integrated him in the total situation.

Hendricks announced a performance by Charlotte Moorman of Nam June Paik’s One for Violin, a piece dating from 1961. I knew the piece from Paik’s performance of it in 1964 at a Fluxus concert. In a rather disorderly atmosphere Miss Moorman assumed the appropriate concentration and a courteous hush fell over the room. The piece entails the destruction of a violin after a long preliminary passage in which the performer raises the instrument in slow motion from a position at right angles to the waist to a position over the head in readiness to smash the thing on impact with the table. Miss Moorman got maybe one minute into the act when a man from the back tried to stop her. She dispatched him with a push and resumed the...
performance. And her more determined spectator approached the table and the war was on. Charlotte was angry. She demanded to know who he was (translated: who the hell do you think you are?). He said he didn’t want her to break the violin, “By breaking a violin,” he said, “you’re doing the same thing as killing people.” And something about giving it to a poor kid who could use it. Attempting to go on with the piece she said, “this is not a vaudeville routine” and “this is not an audience-participation piece.” But he persisted and I think Charlotte slapped his face and suddenly there was a tragedy in the making and shock waves in the air and terrific agitation all around. Someone suggested he give her his coat in exchange for the violin. He removed his coat but she wouldn’t have any of it. I was inspired by this suggestion and found myself hollering in the din: GIVE IT TO HIM. Charlotte accused her intruder of being as bad as the New York police. He announced that “we are sitting down and refusing to allow this violin to be broken.” He forthwith stretched himself out on his back on the table in front of her. As Ortiz said later—she had to over his dead body. It happened very fast and there are probably as many versions of the climax as the number of people who were there. As I saw it, Charlotte’s tormenter sat up and was sitting on the edge of the table and at some moment turned to face her at which point with malice aforethought she bashed him on the head with the violin and the blood was spilled. My description can’t do justice to this extraordinary situation. The ramifications are extensive. It wasn’t so much a question who was right or wrong (I thought, if pressed, both were right and both wrong), but what might have been done to avert the inevitable. That seems the ultimate political question so brilliantly posed by this little war right in the ranks of those so violently opposed to the war at the top.

The victim introduced himself as Saul Gottlieb. Charlotte was contrite and ministered to his wound. She explained the point of the piece is to show that we think nothing of killing people in Vietnam and we place a higher value on a violin. She said she didn’t mean to hit him but he was in her performance area. Speaking of the therapeutic value of such actions Ortiz said Charlotte was trying to displace her hostility onto an inanimate object and Gottlieb wouldn’t let her do that. Our soapbox
PAXTON'S PEOPLE

"Like the famous tree which is uncertain if it will be heard should it fall in a forest without people there is a way of looking at things which renders them performance." That's the first line of Steve Paxton's taped lecture accompanying a piece for man, chair, and dog presented in the gymnasium of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, March 22 and 24, 1968. I asked Paxton what he meant by the line and he wasn't sure but we agreed it