

EROPLAY IS FUN

Frunk Moore does not act like he he is supposed to. Frank is a crippled guy, a spastic. His arms and legs flail about. His head seems too heavy for his neck as it rolls from side to side. But Frank Moore is not helpless. He does not sit quietly in a corner and wait to be third base. Frank is the director of a performance group based in Berkeley, California. He is the creator of "eroplay," a kind of performance art that involves nudity and physical acts. But in eroplay, the emphasis is on play, not on eros. Warm, sexy feelings may accompany eroplay but they are like the prize in the crackerjack box, an extra added attraction, not the main event. Eroplay is about having fun and it is about Frank Moore's desire to communicate with people, "not in a polite way, but in an intimate way."

The first time I saw Frank Moore, I caught him with his pants down. He was perfectly comfortable, lying on the guest bed in Annie Sprinkle's apartment. His friend Linda Mac sat beside him. I am no stranger to exhibitionism or nudity, but I still thought it was a strange way to exchange "how do you do's." My eyes kept drifting from Frank's face to his penis. Linda explained that Frank's doctor had advised him to sit bare-assed whenever possible because the hours he must sit in a wheelchair often result in his groin area getting chafed. Right away, I began to see that with his body, Frank could never, ever relate in a way that could be termed "polite."

Then a funny thing happened. Stripper Yvette Paris arrived to pick up some material from Annie. Yvette has an incredible body, all round voluptuous curves. She had poured herself into an amazingly tight sweater and pair of slacks. Yvette was covered—not a nipple



PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNIE SPRINKLE, LES BARANY, JIM CROSS

Veronica does performance art with Frank Moore, whose "handicaps" are not those of brains or imagination.

31-2

was showing—but she was so firmly packed she looked like a rubber doll blown up to full capacity. Before she entered the bedroom to meet Frank, she asked if he was dressed, so Annie, in an uncharacteristic move, threw a towel across Frank's genitals. I thought it very ironic that Yvette considered her own definitely provocative outfit more modest than Frank's casual nudity. Being around Frank Moore can make you think a lot.

Annie had invited Frank and Linda to stay in her apartment during the week of rehearsals before the performance of *Caves* which would take place on Thursday at the Franklin Furnace Gallery, an avant-garde art space. Annie was to play a retarded girl in the performance. I was supposed to participate but had to back out at the last minute because I did not think I had time for the rehearsals. When I met Frank and Linda, I regretted that I could not be a part of things. But Frank came up with a solution. He needed someone to perform with him on Saturday. There were no rehearsals required. All I had to do was sit on Frank's lap in the wheelchair and rock back and forth. We both would be naked.

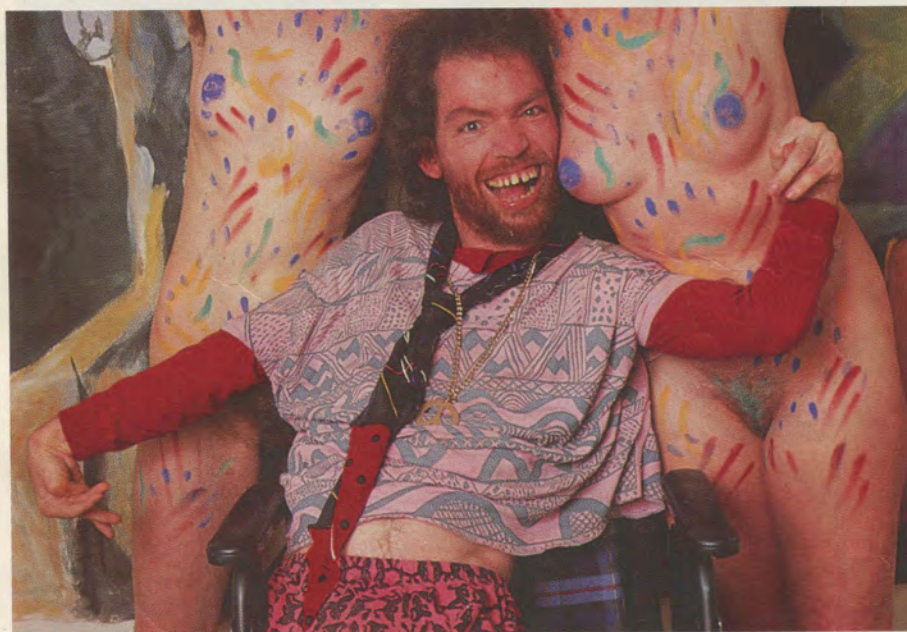
I looked at Frank's seemingly frail body. "But how will I keep from crushing you?" I said. Again Linda explained. "Every once in while, you just shift around in the chair," she said, and demonstrated. In other words all I had to do was to rub my ass against Frank's penis. As Frank likes to say, "Not for sexual purposes, just for bodily comfort." I wondered if Frank ever got a hard-on.

Linda Mac often explained things for Frank because they had worked together for twelve years and she knew many of the answers. But Frank had no problem speaking up for himself. Sometimes he just made sounds, a wonderful laugh in which his whole body moved. Often he used his tongue to make letters and Linda would read the alphabet from his tongue as he spelled out his words. His tongue was the thickest, most powerful tongue I have ever seen. I wondered if he used it for sex. Part of our performance would include an interview

and I already knew some of the questions I would ask.

This was an incredible opportunity. People like Frank Moore are not supposed to express sexual feelings or needs for affection, and certainly not voice any opinions about any of it. I knew about that from first-hand experience. I remember how freaked-out my parents got when my re-

tarded sister decided to explore herself with her toothbrush. When Frank Moore was born, the doctors tried to convince his parents to put him in an institution. They said he had no intellect. But Frank's mother said she could look in his eyes and see that he was intelligent, and Frank's mother was right. For me, Frank was my sister talking and



Top: In *Caves* performance, Annie Sprinkle wraps Veronica and Frank in paper as they rock. Bottom: Frank Moore communicates "just for bodily comfort..."

every other "crip kid" or retarded person or amputee or old person or any of "those people" we gawk at or treat as invisible because they make us uncomfortable. Frank Moore not only refuses to be invisible, he is an exhibitionist. "I have the perfect body for it," he says. He refuses to be silent, he takes it one step further. He becomes the artist, the teacher, the shaman or magic man.

The performance of *Caves* was a magical experience. Each member of the audience was greeted by a scantily clad "mid-priest," Linda Mac in a bright blue wig and a dress with lots of holes cut into it. She kissed my cheek

and caressed my rump, then passed me on to the next part of the ritual. Another one of several male and female midpriests took each of us by the hand and seated us in a "nest" with other people on the floor. This midpriest gave us a magic potion to drink that tasted very much like water. We were assured that it was very safe but that we would definitely feel different for the next four hours, the duration of the performance. The midpriests also washed our feet. There were about sixty people in the room, seated five or six to a "nest."

The midpriests danced slowly around the room offering more "somala," the magic potion, to peo-

ple. Annie entered as the retarded girl and played with the members of the audience. She did not speak. Every once in a while her breasts would spill out from her skimpy top. The performers wore very little clothing, some wore body paint. Only the musicians were dressed, all in black. They sat in their own nest and made strange sounds with their voices like bats in a cave.

If you think this is beginning to sound like the '60's you are right. It felt very '60's, especially when we were all in Frank's tent, playing with his body, rolling on his mattress, rolling on each other about six, sometimes ten people at a time. I tried to get Frank to feel me up, but his hand was real difficult to control. I took the opportunity to brush his genitals with my fingers. "Not for sexual purposes, just for bodily comfort." The deal was that we could all go into the tent to play with Frank, but by doing so we gave Frank permission to play with us.

Some people never entered the tent. Most did and rolled happily over one another. I opened my blouse. One girl in the tent with me was completely naked. Most of the guys seemed to keep their clothes on but they rubbed up to as many warm bodies as they could find.

Back in the large room again, Frank lay on a mattress while a woman dressed as a nurse pulled and poked at his body while he made noises. Then she lay on top of him and humped in a way that looked sexual.

I was reminded of a scene which Frank described in one of the letters he had sent as introductory material:

"I always hated physical therapy . . . a waste of my time, trying to become normal. But when I was eighteen, I had pool therapy. The therapist, a good natured woman with a son my age . . . holding me in the warm swimming pool. Letting me move my body against hers, always laughing. It felt good. I think she knew I got physically turned-on during these sessions . . . Not like sexual release . . . but a physical warm glow. I was happy and relaxed after these weekly sessions."

About two thirds of the audience stayed the full four hours. When we were about forty people, we formed two circles. The inner circle was told that they would be active. Those who chose the outer circle would watch, but even their watching was part of the performance. Linda read instructions that she pulled out of a hat. Each of us in the inner circle had a partner. My partner was Frank. Together, we



Frank with helper Linda Mac and the alphabet board and pointer with which he communicates. Opposite page: Some moments from the *Caves* performance piece.

followed the instructions from the hat. "Rub each other's noses" . . . "Put your head under your partner's shirt" . . . (Frank wasn't wearing a shirt or for that matter anything. I wore a big, pink man's shirt and a black lace bra. My shirt wrapped round his head like a tent. Frank looked real happy . . . "Touch one another's genitals, not for sexual purposes, just for bodily comfort." (This was everyone's favorite instruction and drew laughs and giggles each time it was read.)

As I looked around, I saw that Frank and I were not the only ones having a good time. So was everyone else. Sure, some people, especially one guy, looked like they were getting off on something beside bodily comfort, but most people just seemed to be enjoying touching and being touched without the embarrassment or the pressures of sex. Frank says, "What I am doing is taking nudity and acts that are usually considered sexual and giving them a new, nonsexual context. That creates a tension, a conflict, an examining, a leap into something new. That is what I am after."

At one time Frank lived in a community with thirty people. They all decided they would only have sex with the people to whom they were married, and very few were married. But they would eroplay with all the people in the group.

"The eroplay became more intense, more playful," writes Frank. "We as people got wackier, more physical . . . By eroplaying intensely but playfully, it released a certain creativity which we used in many ways. Successful businesses were established. We did several public performances, a stage show (*The Outrageous Beauty Review* that ran for three years in San Francisco), and a wealth of wacky private performances. All of these had the vital energy of eroplay, of unlimited possibility. We were kids playing together even though we were adults . . . The eroplay could become very intimate, physical, soft and sexy but there was no jealousy or possessiveness because it was clear that sex would not be involved. This went on for three years."

The big "But . . ." came when the people in the group decided to have sex. They all felt committed to one another, so they decided to have sex outside of marriage, within the group.

"Almost immediately there were changes. Jealousy and possessiveness appeared." Within three months the group had dissolved.

Frank Moore believes in the creative potential of the energy



released through eroplay. That is what he wants to tap into with his performers and his audience; that is what he wants to share.

At the conclusion of the performance, Annie, Frank and the Nurse sat nude in the middle of the "cave" and rocked together while Linda read a Frank Moore poem entitled "Wrapping and Rocking." The mid-priests wrapped them and all of us together in saran wrap and toilet paper and ribbons and aluminum foil. The movement of the three in the center connected with all of us. Soon we were rocking together. We hooted. We made noises and rocked all wrapped together. I thought of the "healing circle" I had been to earlier in the week. Healing circles have become very popular in New York and California, especially since AIDS. People come together in a room just to talk and meditate and share experiences and sometimes to touch, to massage each other, to be intimate without being sexual. Not everyone who comes to the circle is physically sick; some like me, come just because the vibes are good.

"The three nude fingers,
Using magical passion to melt together,
Rock like the blind,
Like the insane,
Like the holy men,
Like lovers . . .
And the magical melting spreads
out of the cave
And into the world!"*

As I left the Franklin Furnace that night, I had the feeling that the joy, the love and freedom of the '60's were really not so very far away.

*"Wrapping and Rocking," © 1986, Frank Moore.

Two days later, I had the opportunity to perform with Frank. We would re-enact the "wrapping and rocking" part of the *Caves* performance. I was kind of nervous earlier in the week as I thought about it. I had not been nude in public for some time and I was not sure how I felt about my body, or even how I felt about performing on the lap of a crippled guy in a wheelchair. I was nervous, but in a good kind of way. A movie company and a cable magazine had by this time heard about Frank and would also be there to document the event, which meant that whatever I did would be recorded for posterity, in other words, be around to haunt me.

"Remember, artists take risks," said Annie.

And Frank has written, "Artists . . . need to be warriors who are willing to go into the areas of taboo, willing to push beyond where it is comfortable and safe to explore and build a larger zone of safeness!"

A curious thing happened. On the actual day of the performance I was not at all nervous. I decorated my hair with flowers, looked at my beautiful body in the mirror and then went out and lay with Frank Moore in the wheelchair. He cradled

continued on page 54



VERONICA VERA'S NEW YORK

continued from page 39

me; I cradled him. I tossed my head and stuck my tongue out and we made noises together. His wheelchair supported me with the strength of King Kong. I stretched my back and relaxed in his flesh and metal embrace. I lifted my buttocks from his lap and rubbed against his penis. "Not for sexual purposes, for bodily comfort." We melted together.

In part two of our performance, I interviewed Frank. Finally I could have my questions answered. Now, you may wonder how we communicated, since it is not likely that I understood Frank's tongue alphabet. Frank has a wonderful board that he invented himself. It looks like a ouija board. The entire alphabet is printed on it and numbers and also some commonly used words. Around his head, he wears a leather band to which is attached a long pointer and with this Frank can "talk." It is fun to talk with Frank on his board. You are forced to slow down a little, which is a pleasant experience.

I quickly learned that Frank's penis does get hard. "Just like anyone's." He laughed at the question. And "sometimes" he uses that strong tongue for sex. Frank also paints by use of a brush attached to a hard hat and he sometimes talks via computer.

"People think that life is hard and so it is hard," says Frank. "I was lucky," he writes, "I was never under pressure to be good at anything . . . so I could focus on having fun, on going into taboo areas where magical change can be evoked."

This "fun" philosophy has enabled Frank to create art, form communities, graduate from film school, hitchhike across the country, have a shortlived career as a "guru." He even married the homecoming queen!

At our final meeting, we are at breakfast in Annie's apartment: Frank, Linda Mac, me, Annie and performance artist Karen Finley, also well known for her outrageous sexual presentations. We are all curious about how Frank got to be the way he is.

"What were your parents like?" asks Karen.

"Did you just decide one day to be strong?" I added. Frank and Linda explain. Says Linda, "I think that the spirit that you describe has always been there in Frank, but I

VERONICA VERA'S NEW YORK

continued from page 54

think in terms of him translating it into something workable, he made a conscious decision about that. At one point, Frank just decided that he was going to stop thinking he was ugly and that no one would ever want him. Those were the ideas he got from his parents. His mother told him that to her and his father he was beautiful, but to other people he was not. She tried to protect him as he got older so that he would not be hurt because he could not have a woman to be with and because no one would want to have sex with him."

Frank, meanwhile, had been bribing his brother to buy him *Playboy* magazines. He had a different future in mind for himself, so he struck out on his own. "On his own," has always for Frank meant involvement with other people.

Eventually, he found the woman he wanted and he pursued her. "How do you pursue a woman?" I ask. He makes it sound so easy. "Like a missile," he says.

"But Frank, you could not exactly call her up on the phone . . . ?"

Frank explains that he got other people to put him in her room, so that when she came home he would be there waiting for her. Then when they lived in a large commune, Frank made sure he got the job of deciding who would live with whom, and he had his future wife, Debby, move in with him.

"If I may say so, you are quite a manipulator, Frank," says Karen Finley, as we all laugh.

Then Debby brought him home to meet her parents. They were aghast. Debby was talented and beautiful. She could have had anybody. She could have married a doctor. Instead, Debby danced joyfully around Frank Moore in his wheelchair. That was a dozen years ago. They have been together ever since.

"Thinking that I was ugly had not worked," said Frank, "So I decided to try something different. I decided that I was beautiful and that I could get what I want. I called it 'faking it.'"

"Within a week of this decision," says Linda, "people started to tell Frank that he looked different and they began to relate to him in a different way."

"After a while," says Frank, "I forgot that I was faking."

The End!