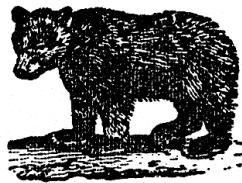


Incomplete
Requiem
for W. C. Fields

by Al Hansen



1966
A Great Bear Pamphlet
New York

INCOMPLETE
REQUIEM FOR
W. C. FIELDS

AL HANSEN

Incomplete Requiem for W. C. Fields
Al Hansen

Originally published in 1966 as a Great Bear Pamphlet by Something Else Press.

ubuclassics

www.ubu.com

Series Editor: Michael Tencer

**This work is dedicated to my daughter
Bibbe Anne Hansen
(who in so many ways is just like me)
as was the original performance
at the E'pit'o'me Coffee House
165 Bleecker St.
Greenwich Village
New York City**

Introduction

I have no idea during what week or day or month of 1958 the original performance of the **Incomplete Requiem for W. C. Fields** occurred. The poem – if you could call it that – was written sometime during the preceding year. The coffee shop boom had peaked and the New York backwash from the San Francisco Poetry Revolution was terrific. Kenneth Rexroth was reciting to jazz at the old Five Spot on Third Avenue, and Corso, Ginsberg, Kerouac and Lamantia were everywhere.

Where are Turk and the rug kids who lived in the sub-basement of the Sullivan Street Playhouse?

Three neo-plastic painters – Don (Max) McAree, Lawrence (Larry) Poons and Howard Smythe – ran the E-pit’o-me Coffee Shop at 165 Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village. They rented it from an old man named Pepe who later killed the owner of the Cafe Rafio. (which is now where the E-pit’o-me used to be) in front of the liquor store across the street.

Whatever became of Jaimee Pugliese?

A large number of young artists were going through all the doorways Dada had posited, though no one had called it Neo-Dada yet. Everyone who Hans Hoffmanned at Provincetown was talking about Red Grooms’ Happening at the Sun Gallery there. Earlier, the rage had been Allan Kaprow’s Happening-environment at the Hansa Gallery on Central Park West. (Ivan Karp and Dick Bellamy worked at the Hansa until it folded, then they landed in Martha Jackson’s.) And the Living Theatre was under construction at 14th Street and Sixth Avenue.

Whatever became of Sharon Hurley?

Kaprow almost drowned that summer. Grooms, Karp, Bellamy and others were making a film at Provincetown. It was full of German shots, Russian shots, Italian shots, French shots, Japanese shots. Allan’s part was to come up out of the bay made up like the creature from the deeps. He had chains wrapped all around him. He shot up out of the water, it was beautiful, then toppled over backwards and the heavy chains bore him under.

When is lovely Hazel Ford coming back to New York?

Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine had taken over the Judson Gallery, under Rev. Howard Moody’s Judson Church. The assistant minister, Bud Scott, was quite sure that Claes, Jim, Kaprow and myself were devils returned to earth. And there was John Cage’s class in composition at the New School, where I met Steve Addiss, George Brecht, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, Dick Higgins, Kaprow, Dick Maxfield, George Segal and many others. Later that year Kaprow and I had a series of intense conversations about a workshop-atelier-cum-Happenings gallery. Somehow these wonderful ideas became the old Reuben Gallery on lower Fourth Avenue, where only the surface of the ideas was scratched. I love to digress.

As I was saying, Max McAree, Larry Poons and Howard Smythe ran the E-pit’o-me. All the coffee shoppes at the peak of the boom were featuring poetry readings, so Don asked me to get some poets. Most of the reading cliques were predominantly male, but since we were straight eclectics I went out and got all the girl poets I could find – Diane Di Prima, Hazel Ford, Diane Wakoski and many others. To further pep things up we used experimental performance pieces. One of these was Dick Higgins’ **Canzona**. Spotlight on a small table. Higgins is announced, enters, sits down at the table, takes a notebook out of a brief-

case, opens book on table, keeps eyes on book, reaches into briefcase, takes out left glove, eyes still fixed on book, fits glove snugly on left hand, takes another glove from briefcase, carefully fits it to right hand, eyes still on book, then takes off left glove, replaces it in briefcase, removes right glove, replaces it, closes notebook, replaces it in briefcase, closes briefcase, stands, exits.

Larry Poons used to go to the “John Cage” (the toilet of the E-pit’o-me, painted “Op” in red and green stripes) and dress for his performance: plastic bowl on his head, my Harris tweed overcoat buttoned up to his chin, neckties hanging down and the toilet seat around his neck. (Once in a while some timid uptown type would complain that he couldn’t use the potty while Poons had the seat around his neck.) Poons would then go to a table, place a chair on it, climb up, sit down and read from the Motherwell Dada book for an hour. That book was our Bible, and we had all been caught swiping copies of it and **View** and **transition** from the Gotham art book archive repository on 46th Street. Poons always ended his readings with “Roar,” the Tristan Tzara poem. During one recital, Howard Smythe nailed Poons’ shoes to the table. A big policeman entered and ordered Poons down to the floor. “I can’t,” said Poons. “Why not?” asked the cop. “My feet are nailed to the table.”

And like that...

I did the **Incomplete Requiem for W. C. Fields** without rehearsals, splicing and editing the films that were to be projected on my chest up to the last minute. No time to memorize the text. I was ready. The lights went out. The projector was turned on. I couldn’t read a word of the text, even though it was typed out in capital letters, because it was silhouetted by the movie beam and the light was in my eyes. I kind of held the manuscript overhead, awkwardly twisting my neck and squinting to try to make out the words. Then Poons, with a sense of timing that was beautiful, handed me a flashlight and lowered the projector so that the light was no longer in my eyes, and the **Requiem** began.

— **Al Hansen**
New York
May 1966

INCOMPLETE REQUIEM FOR W. C. FIELDS

WHO DROPPED A BUCKET OF NAILS
 OR MAYBE A SHOVEL
 ON HIS FATHER'S HEAD
 AND LEFT PHILADELPHIA

GOD KNOWS WHAT CRIME BE COMMITTED
 TO GO HIDE OUT
 IN LONG-AGO AUSTRALIA

HE BECAME A CARNY STIFF
 A BEEFY GUY HIP TO MITT CAMPS
 AND NAIL JOINT HURLY-BURLY

JUGGLING CIGAR BOXES DEFTLY

SHARP EYE ON THE MEARZ ID WEARZ AY

IN ALL THOSE GRAPE SUNSET
 AUSTRALIAN SATURDAY AFTERNOONS

YELLOW DESERT OUT BACK DEALS
 ALL HIS HUMOUR

YESTERDAY **BROOKLYN** DIED
 AND WHEN THE BIG MUSHROOM
 CLOUD WENT UP

IT SPELLED **DRINK**
 AND IN LONG-AGO AUSTRALIA WILLY
 READ THE MESSAGE
 DRANK HIS WAY UP THE BINDLESTIFF
 COMICS TRAIL

SAW THE WRITING IN THE SKY
 OVER DEVASTATED FLATBUSH
 AND THE TWISTED WRECKAGE
 OF THE CONEY ISLAND LINE
 WHERE SANDPAPER-SKINNED HANDS
 SCRATCHED THE SITE OF THE LAST **A & P**

PAYING DUES FROM THE JUGGLER BIT
 TO THE CANE-SPLIT CLOTH LAWN
 OF A MILLION BURLY STAGE POOL TABLES

WE LAUGHED OUR UNSURE
PARENT-INDUCED HYSTERIA
OUT AT YOU FROM THOUSANDS
OF NEIGHBORHOOD ITCHES
ON BARROOM SUNTAN SATURDAYS

YOU DISMISSED CHAPLIN AS A
SISSY BALLET DANCER
YOU THE FAT MAN WITH THE LONG
SISSY PHALLUS

CANE
POOL CUE
DANGEROUS LOOKING
LIKE A LONG PENAL DAGGER
WHICH BENT IMPOTENTLY
RUBBERLY
WHEN YOU WANTED THE EIGHT BALL
IN THE SIDE POCKET

MENACING BLACK BELT STRAW HAT
CLOWN
YOU SHOWED US THE IMPOTENT
FATHER FULL OF HATE
WHEN WE WANTED TO SEE HIM MOST
AND **WE** DIDN'T FEEL GUILTY OR ANGRY
YOU WORE THE BELLS IN OUR FAMILY
OF MAN
IF THINGS GOT ROUGH YOU JUST SNEERED
AND PLAYED IT A LITTLE DIRTIER

THEN THE SIPPING SICKNESS WON
BUT YOU TOOK A TURN FOR THE NURSE
BIG BROWN TEATS
FOUR-FIFTHS FULL OF WHISKEY
STEPPED IT UP
USED YOUR SONOROUS KARATE MONOTONE
ON EVERYTHING

THE BODY STARTED TO GO

THE ROUTE
BECAME GOUT

WITH COMPLICATIONS
FEET SWOLLEN LIKE ERUPTING
THUNDERCLOUDS

OF GAUZE TAPE
PAIN ROLLING YOU OUT OF BED AT NIGHT
SCREAMING

AT THE FIRING SQUAD
THEY ASKED YOUR LAST WISH
YOU MURMURED CALMLY
FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE
“I ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE PHILADELPHIA
BEFORE I DIE...”

YOU FOUGHT BACK FROM A KING-SIZE CRIB
AND BOUNCED AGAINST THE BARS
YELLING
“ELECTROCUTE THE LANDLORDS!”

BIG DRINKING FUNNY BABY CRYING
WHISKEY TEARS
AND GIN-SOAKED SOBS
WHITE CAP AND NIGHTGOWN
QUEEN VICTORIA IN THE PAIN SCENE

GREAT COMIC GOD OF THE CENTERLESS
UNIVERSE
IN THE GALAXY OF ALL-NIGHT
LAFFMOVIE WILDNESS
IN FORTY-SECOND STREET MOVIE JOHNS
AND KETCHUP BOTTLES
ON SALMON-TOPPED WALDORF
MIDNIGHT TABLES

THE FATHER OF JACKIE GLEASON
AND WILLY MULLINS
BELLIES THE BAR
AND SPINS A QUARTER

“CHICKENS DO HAVE PRETTY LEGS
IN KANSAS –
YASSS...”

EVERYBODY’S HAD IT
THEY PUT THE WHOLE FREE LUNCH
ON HIM –
FIND OUT HE’S **NOT** THE MAYOR
OF LONDON
CHASE HIM DOWN THE STREET
THE BARTENDER’S GORGEOUS WIFE
MEETS HIM ON THE CORNER
ALL THE MONEY FROM THE TILL
PINCHING OUT OF HER BOSOM
W. C. FIELDS GRABS THE DOUGH
KNOCKS HER DOWN
FACE TWITCHING
HE HOPS A STREETCAR
TO SOME ROCKAWAY IRISHTOWN BAR

BIG WILL LEFT HIS MONEY IN EIGHTY
GOD KNOWS HOW MANY
U. S. BANKS AND ELSEWHERE
UNDER FALSE NAMES
SO NO RELATIVES COULD GET THEIR
HANDS ON IT

SAID IF HE COULD BUT KNOW THE HOUR
DEATH WOULD ARRIVE
HE’D STACK HIS DOUGH IN BIG BILLS
ASSEMBLE HIS KIN
AND TEAR IT TO CONFETTI

ALTERNATING RHYTHMS
BY GLENN MILLER AND HAL KEMP

W. C. FIELDS ON A LADDER OF LOVE
CLIMBING UP A LADDER OF LOVE
("GOT A DATE WITH AN ANGEL")
TO FIND AN ANGEL'S **ASS** TO PINCH

OR A KID TO KICK

W.C. FIELDS SITS UP IN A FUSTY
DRUMMERS HOTEL BRASS BED
LOOKS AROUND FOR HIS SOCK

DIG IT, HE CAN ONLY FIND ONE SOCK

SO DIG IT: HE SAYS

"THAT DAMN ONE-LEGGED MAN
HAS BEEN THROUGH HERE AGAIN"

Al Hansen

was born in 1927 in Queens, New York, and educated publicly from an early age in the ways of filling stations, Norwegian sea-families and heavy machinery. From 1946 to 1948 he served in the U. S. Army, during which period Sam Turnbull, artist and bohemian extraordinaire, recalls the pioneer of Happenings pushing pianos off third stories of open-walled buildings in bombed-out Frankfurt.

After he left the Army in 1948 he attended as many schools as possible on the GI Bill, including Brooklyn College, the Art Students' League, New York University, University of Miami at Coral Gables, Tulane and the Hans Hoffman School of Art. When his taste for education slaked in 1951, he joined the Air Force and became a special communications parachutist.

In 1955 he was back in New York, working in commercial art and graphic design. In 1958 he founded, with Dick Higgins, the Audio-Visual Group, and launched his first happenings, multiscreen projections and pre-pop constructions.

In 1962 Hansen founded the Third Rail Gallery of Current Art.

A one-man show at the Judson Gallery in the winter of 1964 and a second at the New York Six (which first featured his Hershey Bar wrapper collages) established his reputation as a pop artist. His work hangs in the Chrysler Museum and in many private collections. Hansen is the author of *A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art* (Something Else Press), a chatty, copiously illustrated document that has been called a "journal by the chieftain of the art underground." He is currently at work on a new book, *New Trends in Art Today*, manages a New York gallery, and remains the most active practitioner of Happenings in America.

